Crittenton Women's Union
live work thrive

OUR VOICES essay

"We have a whole new life."

By Pattiann Donovan

Becoming part of the Career Family Opportunity program has changed my life and my son's life. When I joined CFO, I had been laid off from a dead-end job and didn't have the skills to get a good one. I was frustrated and unhappy and didn't know how to make my life better.

At CFO, I work closely with my mobility mentor. She helps me set goals for myself. And she coaches me through the steps I need to take to achieve them. One of my long-term goals is a career that pays enough to support Brendon and me without needing government support or financial help from anyone.

With my mentor's guidance, I developed a plan to become a medical sonographer. It's a career that will offer me a secure future. I completed a college prep class, and I'm now finishing my first semester at Bunker Hill Community College. I'm on track to graduate in 2013.

What I didn't know when I started CFO two years ago was that it's not just about getting me on a career path. It's about helping me build the support I need to succeed in every area of my life.

As a single mom, the most important part of my life is Brendon. Making sure Brendon is happy, secure and doing the best he can means everything to me.

Last year he began to have problems in first grade. His teacher and school administrators assumed he had attention deficit disorder. They recommended that he take medication. I didn't agree with that. With my mentor supporting me, I kept asking for the school to formally evaluate Brendon and create a IEP plan for him.

Finally they did the evaluation. It came back that Brendon has a learning disability. I felt so relieved that we had the right diagnosis. What he needs is occupational therapy, not medication.

At school, though, he gets just a half hour a week of OT. But, through a CFO workshop, I met a counselor who told me an occupational therapist could come to my home to work with Brendon and with me.

The therapist has given us tools and strategies to manage the things that Brendon has a hard time with…like being organized and paying attention. We use charts to help him remember what he needs to do next. And we do homework for 15 minutes at a time and then take a break. He even sets the microwave timer himself.

It used to be a power struggle to get him to do homework…not anymore. Not only that, his teacher started writing notes home about how organized he is and how well he's doing. In February, he received his school's "Doing the Right Thing" award. I'm so proud of him.

Before CFO, I would have been too intimidated to advocate for my son or for myself. Now, I have the confidence and the support. As Brendon says, "We have a whole new life." ■

Copyright © 2011 Crittenton Women's Union. All rights reserved.