

## My Story

*Jenny Hatch*

My name is Jenny Hatch. I have Down syndrome. I have always been very independent. I volunteered on many Republican campaigns. I went to Menchville High School and I graduated in 2004. I was a Global Messenger (for Special Olympics International) and was involved with the Smart Ones. I applied for and got my job at Village Thrift. I loved it! I rode my bike to work, to visit friends, and even to my church. I did this by myself. I was very proud of my independence. I worked for almost 5 years at my thrift store.

In March of 2012, I had an accident. I was hit by a car and was in the hospital. I had an operation on my back. It was scary and I had to wear a brace. No one wanted me when I was getting out of the hospital. I had nowhere to go. I was so happy when Jim and Kelly (friends) let me come and stay with them.

Kelly and Jim helped me get services, but I could not get a waiver if I lived with them. I had to leave them in order to get a waiver. I did not want to leave. I was moved from one group home to another. I was hit in one group home and did not feel safe there. I was treated like a child. No one listened. No one cared.

I told my case worker I did not like it and I want to go back to live with Jim and Kelly. But she told me I couldn't and I should just get used to living in a group home. I told her NO!

In the group home, they wouldn't let me talk to my friends or let them come to visit me. They did not let me work at my job. I kept telling them that I love my job, but they didn't let me. They took my phone and my computer away. I felt like a prisoner but I didn't do anything wrong.

A service provider was my temporary guardian by the court. I didn't want it. They took me to another group home where I did not feel safe. The

case worker was mean to me. She yelled at me and even hit me. They would not let me talk to my friends or work at my thrift store. They told me I had to work at Eggleston (a sheltered workshop). I snapped snaps together and it was boring. I did not like it. I wanted my life back but they told me to forget about Jim and Kelly and move on with my new life. I cried every night at the group home.

I was told I had rights at the group homes but that wasn't true. They took them away. They took away all my rights, my choices, and my independence.

A guardian should help me reach my goals. Instead I was kept away from my friends, my job, my church, and my community. I lost a year of my life being forced to stay in group homes and forced to work at a job I did not want.

How do we make sure that a person's rights are not taken away like my rights were? Who will make sure that no one has to go through what I went through? Who will make sure that people do the right thing? Just because a person has a disability does not mean they need a guardian. Many times they just need support and a little help.

My life is much different now. I go to work and have my friends again. I go to the mall and to the park with my friends. I have my cell phone and computer. Jim and Kelly help me and support me. They help me make good decisions. I am very happy and I feel safe with Jim and Kelly. I love them very much!

I hope my story will help others. I hope that changes are made to respect all people with a disability and their rights. We all have the right to live a life that makes us happy!!!!

Supported decision-making has helped me and it can help many others.

Thank you!