

Simple exposure brings lifetime of cruel and unusual treatment for disabled son, family

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By Lenore Skenazy....

The woman who looked to be about 60 walked up to the podium and spoke in a quiet voice. She was at a St. Louis synagogue that was hosting an evening of presentations about the sex offender registry. I spoke, too. But this mom's story has haunted me in the weeks since. I asked for a copy of her speech, which is below. She prefers to remain anonymous. – L.

I am a mother, advocate and caretaker of a 30 year old young man with IDD. That is an intellectual and developmental disability, formally called Mentally Retarded. I am also the co-founder of a national group called [Legal Reform for the Intellectually and Developmentally Disabled](#).

My son has been on the [sex offender] registry since 2012. But the story really begins on December 5, 1986. A baby boy was born. Everything seemed fine. A healthy, happy baby. The first few milestones were met. Crawling, walking and making cute baby sounds. At age 2 there were very few words. At age 3, no progress was made in speech and the seizures started. Testing began.

In the Spring of 1991 we sat across the desk of the doctor at Children's Memorial Hospital and received the difficult results of all the testing. We were told our son had deficits, cognitively and developmentally. Most importantly, we would need to prepare for Adam's future because he would need to be cared for for the rest of his life.

This conversation changed the course of our lives. I gave up a career so I could devote my life to my son's education and care. The decision was made to not have any more children so we would have the time for both our children and also more resources for their future.

I spent many years learning all about my son's rights for an education and volunteering and working in all his schools so I could keep watch. All this was to integrate our son in the community and try to establish a happy life for him.

His love was competing in Special Olympics. He played softball, soccer, boccie ball, bowling and golfing. He swam and competed in power lifting. He has many gold medals that he is so proud of. His social life was spending supervised time with his peers in special recreation activities, such as a movie or a dinner out or a game night. He learned to scuba diving through the Diveheart Organization, who teach diving to the disabled. He was so happy when he did his scuba diving. Due to registry rules and regulations, Adam is no longer able to participate in any of the above.

My son does not date. He will never marry or have children.

He will never have a career. His life is with us, his parents. He cannot cook for himself or pay bills or even take a phone call. He has sensory issues. He cannot wear certain fabrics of clothes. He wet the bed until the age of 16 when he finally gained control. He needs help with his daily living. He had a small part-time job for 5 years hosting and cleaning tables at a restaurant. He was let go because of his conviction.

When our nightmare began in 2012, we had a risk assessment done on Adam. The assessment showed that Adam had very little sexual knowledge and had no sexual perversions. He is a polite, compassionate and naive young man who functions at about the age of ten years old. My son cannot distinguish when someone is lying to him. He is extremely susceptible to persuasion. Teachers, aides and psychologists wrote reports fearing that he would someday be taken advantage of.

That someday came in 2012. A 22-year-old neighbor coerced my son to expose himself to an underage female. We also found out that this neighbor had been sexually molesting my son for a period of time. My child was arrested along with his OWN MOLESTER and charged with the same 19 felonies. We fought this travesty for a year in court.

Our attorneys feared if we went to trial the prosecutor would manipulate my son into saying whatever he wanted him to say. Years of documents were submitted to the court showing evidence of his disabilities. Medical reports, school reports, psychologists reports, risk assessments, letters from neighbors, friends and family.

The prosecutor offered a plea deal. One misdemeanor charge of exploitation of a minor, 2 years probation with an ankle bracelet and ten years on the registry. Our son could not survive in prison. We took the plea. On the day we accepted the plea, our attorneys whispered in his ear what he had to say to the judge, because he did not understand.

My son was fitted with an ankle bracelet that he was so scared of he slept for 2 years with his leg on a pile of blankets because he was afraid that if he moved it would go off and they would come to get him. My son had to leave our home since the victim lived next door. He is incapable of surviving on his own. My husband moved out with my son so he could care for him. We all had to follow the curfews for 2 years and get him where he needed to be. I cut work hours to take him to probation check in. We have to take him to register. We are responsible for all the rules and regulations because my son is incapable of understanding the requirements.

The registry restrictions drag families into fear, instability and emotional distress. For me, it led to a road of anxiety meds, antidepressants, sleeping pills and therapy. My husband now has high blood pressure and depression. My son has health problems, depression and the last 2 psychologist reports done in 2015 and 2016 show his IQ falling.

This is due to isolation and no stimulation. No more Special Olympics. He was let go from his small part time job cleaning tables. This was the source of his independence. No one will hire him now. He sits at home all day isolated and lonely.

The financial toll on our family has been devastating. We have spent over \$150,000 of our retirement money and money we saved for our son's future care on attorneys, court costs, probation fees, registration fees and relocating my son and husband. (I have remained in our nearby home for the time being.)

We are a good, law-abiding Christian family brought to our knees by a system that makes no attempt to look at people as individuals and recognize their needs, their supports and their vulnerabilities.

We recently learned that when the ten years my son received

on the registry are up in 2023, at which time my husband and I will be in our 70s, we will still all be bound by the other rules and regulations for the rest of our lives. Where will my child go when my husband and I are no longer here to care for him? No group home will take him. No nursing home will have him. His sister loves him dearly and will take care of him, BUT... how will she be able to?

I provided a life for my son so he could receive the support, socialization, and services he needs to survive and flourish for the rest of his life. Instead we all live with in isolation, fear and the stigma that we are "scum of the earth."

If any of you have or know someone with a special needs child, you all know that when the child is young everyone – the schools, the community – try to do what they can for the child. When that little special needs child grows up their disabilities don't go away, but society doesn't care any more. That person who still has a child's mind gets thrown aside in the name of the criminal justice system.

Lenore again: This mom ended by asking listeners to work to reverse the laws that turn the intellectually disabled into lifetime pariahs. She also urged us to go to Change.org and sign the petition for ["Abolish the Sex Offender Registry."](#) And she invited us to visit the [very spare LIRR site](#) where it says:

Currently, the criminal justice system makes little or no attempt to understand this population or to recognize their unique needs, supports and challenges. Criminal prosecutions of these individuals often lead to disastrous consequences for children and their families without any benefit to the public.

Our goal is to make changes that will save these children from the unnecessary cruelty that the criminal justice system

is putting them through. Implementing this goal will require educating legislators, prosecutors and judges about this population and their need to be understood, rather than prosecuted, by the legal system.

Free-Range Kids believes that Adam's ordeal is not making children any safer. At the same time, people with intellectual disabilities are at grave risk of being branded as "sex offenders" when they are actually innocent in so many senses of the word. These laws must change. – L

[Source: Free Range Kids](#)

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