

From the beginning, Ms. Long routinely forgot to send spare clothes for Bryan (and his other foster sibling in my classroom). He came to school in obvious hand-me-down clothing that rarely matched or fit well, in shoes that were too big or too small, and with a constant odor of stale urine. His backside was frequently broken out in a rash (which we had the nurse examine on several occasions and mentioned to his case workers). Ms. Long never responded to invitations to school programs or scheduled parent conference nights, only came into the classroom if she was picking a student up early, and rarely read notes that I wrote in his communication binder unless I repeatedly highlighted them or attached a big note to the outside of his backpack.

Midway through Bryan's first year at John Green, I felt that a conference with Ms. Long was crucial to continuing positive changes in Bryan's life. We had Bryan on a consistent toileting schedule and felt he was ready to stop wearing diapers. We wanted to promote his emerging speech and sign language at home, and I wanted to share information about special summer camp programs for which Bryan would be eligible. With other students in my class, this type of information is exchanged through notes home, phone calls, and frequent in-person conversations with parents; however, Ms. Long always seemed annoyed and hung up quickly on phone calls, disregarded many notes home, and never came by to talk to me in the classroom.

When we met for our first conference, Ms. Long began by asking me how many years I had been teaching and then reminding me, again, of how many years she had been a foster parent (I think she said at least twenty-five). She asked me why I was always so concerned about students' attendance, when the teachers of her students at the middle and high schools never asked so many questions... I shared with Ms. Long that regular school attendance is a critical part of developing routines and building skills for students with special needs. Choosing my battles and not feeling that it was the most critical issue, I never mentioned Bryan's clothing, but Ms. Long said anyway that she knew people thought that she "dressed the kids funny" but that it was just her personal style preference. (Ms. Long, herself, however always

seemed to have nice clothes that matched and were appropriate to her gender). I asked about her not responding to notes in the backpack, and she claimed that one of the children in her home was constantly going through the backpacks and losing things. I suggested that she try what we do in every classroom – having a place (out of the children's reach) for backpacks to stay during the day so that we could check them and exchange notes with parents.

After a discussion about toilet training, Ms. Long agreed to start sending Bryan in underwear, instead of diapers, but did not commit to any reinforcement of toileting skills at home. Finally, we also talked about two special needs summer camps (for which I provided her contact information and applications). Ms. Long was upset that her two students in my classroom did not qualify for John Green's summer school. She had said in an earlier meeting, "It's not an option; my kids have to go to summer school" (despite the school district's firm insistence that they did not qualify for Extended School Year services). I later found out that Ms. Long did not send either student to summer camp because she felt that Bryan was not toilet trained as required by one camp (even though he stopped having accidents at school by the end of the school year) and because there was a cost associated with the other camp.

As the '07-'08 school progressed, Bryan was doing so well! We had purchased some Spider Man underwear to help motivate his toilet training (Bryan loves comic book heroes). Bryan was usually sent to school in very large men's underwear, sometimes with stains and/or holes, and so we knew he would appreciate and be more motivated by the kid-friendly, well-fitting clothing. Then we received a terse note from Ms. Long stating that she "did not appreciate" our providing him with underwear, that she could buy underwear, and she sent all of the Spider Man underwear back. We had to write another note explaining our motivations and that if she did not want us to give the brand new underwear to Bryan, then she needed to be more consistent about sending spare changes of clothes.