

Kristie's Story

I am the proud mom of a daughter with special needs. She was born the year Congress gave the children with special needs the right to attend public school. Her story isn't unique for the times, but medical professionals told me to put her in an institution and forget about her. She would never amount to anything. Of course, I didn't do that and she grew up.

She is a success story in so many ways. She walked when they told me she wouldn't. She grew up and became a leader in with the Treasures program. She had learned to do many of the household chores as the two of us faced life together. Her first job was in retail, then a day care center where they were sad to see her leave so she could become my accounting assistant. And she flourished in her small group of friends as they learned to cook, to listen, to study, and to hang out together.

As Kristie grew up, I began to see what she could do and, more importantly, what she couldn't do. I wanted to picture her living on her own and being so proud of her. I wanted her to feel like she could face life head on with confidence and deal with much of what came her way. Of course, I understood that she would need some help. In fact, I wanted to help her. That way I could hover a bit and make sure everything was ok.

Her first attempt taught us so much. We spent days and evenings together, helping her to overcome so many barriers. She had done enough cooking prior to moving out that she could do the basics. She had to learn to vacuum, and clean the bathroom. She was good at keeping the kitchen clean and putting the dishes in the dishwasher. Of course, there was more to be done.

The one of first major challenges was to learn to do everything and do it in an organized and timely manner. It was easy for her to become overwhelmed and get tired. The dishes seemed to get done every night, but by that time she was pretty tired. She tried to pick up after herself, but it didn't necessarily happen all the time.

She tried to work for me part of the time as well. She just didn't have any energy left to focus on her job. She had worked for me for several years, but

could not manage living on her own and working. All she could do was to try to learn to live on her own.

I thought I had prepared her for independence. I knew I was ready for her to leave home, but was she? There was so much for her to learn and do to be prepared. Due to unforeseen circumstances, she had to come back home and I had another chance to teach her and help her be more prepared.

Eight years later I am confident now that she can manage a household on her own. Kristie has been living in her apartment for 3 years. She works part time for Pathways as well. She has the skills, habits, attitudes, and social connections to have a full life. Of course, there will always be more to learn and experiences from which to build new habits and skills, but I can rest in peace knowing that I have prepared her for living independently. The rest of the things she will have to learn on her own, perhaps the hard way. Hopefully, the consequences won't be too great. These are the lessons of life; in this she is not unique.

