

Linda Henderson
Special Children's Friends
LD 2120

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78 Union Street
Ellsworth, Maine 04605

Good afternoon, Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of LD 2120.

My name is Linda Henderson, Executive Director of Special Children's Friends, a Special Purpose Preschool program. I have been at SCF for 35 years. and our program has been supporting children 35 plus years. The children we support are in Hancock and Washington counties. SCF is a nonprofit program for children with special needs. It is a fulltime program which meets from 8-2 daily Monday through Friday. We are open year round and are well established in the community.

Because children have specialized diagnoses their programs are individualized for their special needs. Here is what a typical day for a child in our program would look like. He arrives and greets his individual BHP (behavioral health professional) who is responsible for ensuring that he has a successful day. He participates in guided play which involves BHP supporting him while interacting with his peers (in the classroom setting). Then there is circle time which requires him to sit and attend to the teacher who is leading the circle (reading a book, singing songs, doing finger plays, learning about the weather, taking turns, sharing ideas/objects with peers). After circle it is time for individualized work and the child will go with the BHP to a quiet room with no distractions. He will work on his goals such as sitting and attending, learning one and two step directions, responding to questions, etc. They then take a walk in the neighborhood which involves learning to follow directions like STOP, WAIT, hold hands, not dropping onto the ground or pulling away from BHP and general safety strategies. Next is playground time where he is learning to remain in the proximity of a peer in parallel and interactive play. The BHP will ensure that he remains in the area of his peers to encourage the child to play with friends. Being outside is a preferred activity and transitioning into school is a non preferred activity. The BHP will support him in learning how to transition without refusals. Once inside he will participate in art which requires scissors, gluing, etc. This is difficult for him and if left to his own he would avoid fine motor activities. Next he goes to speech therapy with his BHP in a room with no distractions. His BHP supports him and helps him listen to the speech teacher who does therapy on the computer. Here he learns to improve his communication. The BHP uses language such as "first/ then, time for, wait one minute". Simple language is used because too much talking "crowds their brains". After speech are sensory activities. His BHP supports him in learning about different textures, smells, and sounds. He is resistant to these items so his BHP helps him to desensitize. Then he has lunch which is where he had to sit and socialize with his peers who all sit together at a table. He gets concerned that others are going to take his food or get in his space. After lunch there is a second circle where the focus is on music and movement. This requires the child to participate in a small group setting and follow directions from the teacher. After second circle playground is repeated to reinforce social skills that he is learning (following directions, safety issues, et) Before he goes home he has occupational therapy where he is learning to go independently with his therapist down the hall to the treatment room with little support. Here he practices his fine motor skills where he is learning, for example, how to hold eating utensils correctly, cut with scissors and self regulate. He ends his day with playing turn taking outside games with his BHP reinforcing his goals.

Children who have attended SCF in the past and have had similar intense programming have gone on to become productive members of the community. Some have come back to work here, some work in retail, restaurant work and others enjoy group home living.

Due to insufficient funds our building is in need of repair. We are unable to attract additional staff with competitive wages to be able to expand our programs. We once had thirty children and now we have fourteen. We could accommodate 30% more children at this time if we were able to hire additional staff. There are fourteen children on the waitlist. There is a concern that this program will not survive if we do not get financial help and the sooner the better. Without more funding we would have to remain underserving the community. With adequate funding we could increase it that 30%.

We have not received intermediate payments for this school year. With more money we would like to take five kids off the waitlist now.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.