

JOE R CANNON, MD

In 1989, my wife and I adopted Jay, a beautiful baby boy. That same year, I was asked to be the consulting dermatologist at Abilene State School. Dermatology clinic was held one afternoon a month on the State School campus. I was the consulting dermatologist for about 20 years. During that time, I met and interacted with other State School physicians, RNs, LVNs, support staff, transport personnel, pharmacists, etc. I saw about 10 clients per session. If you do that for 20 years, that's more than 2000 encounters. The clients had various needs, and various degrees of disability. Over time, I was increasingly impressed with the professionalism, capability, teamwork, and dedication that the staff showed to the clients. I was impressed with the personal nature of the care. These characteristics were consistent. It became obvious to me that these high standards of professionalism were EXPECTED. The staff expected this professionalism from themselves and their peers.

During those years, it became apparent that our son had learning disabilities and severe behavioral problems. He saw a variety of psychiatric and developmental professionals. His mother and I became less able to care for him at our home. Eventually we had to seek a residential placement for him.

About 10 years ago, after a 3 month stay at Wichita Falls State Hospital, Jay came back home to us, and we began searching for residential placement for Jay. We went to the local MHMR, the Betty Hardwick Center, for assistance. We were provided with the names of several group homes that had space available. Jay moved to a group home in Abilene. He was a resident there for a few years. After continuing and recurring inability of staff to appropriately deal with our son, we removed him from that group home. We tried having him live at home again, splitting time between our home and his sister's home. After just a few weeks, we realized that would not work. We again turned to the Betty Hardwick Center for guidance. They gave us more names of more group homes. We moved Jay to another group home. After about one week, the director of that group home called us and said "Come get him, or I'm calling the police". We contacted the Betty Hardwick Center about the situation, and were told "The group home can't do that". We returned Jay to the group home, and they then sent him to Acadia, a local psychiatric facility. All of Jay's medicines were discontinued immediately, and he wound up in the local hospital with a severe gastrointestinal reaction. When he was dismissed from Hendrick Hospital, we once again brought him home, with the intention of finding the right placement for him.

We realized that, based on my experience and observations, the most capable and appropriate care for Jay would be available at Abilene State Supported Living Center.

After having our son as a resident there for over three years now, we continue to hold that opinion.

Closing ABSSLC would be a terrible disservice to many residents, and a tragedy for others who safely live there.