

American Dreaming: Linda Griffin

May, 1999



Amber Griffin, 17, (third from right) with friends at school

School years

At the time of this conversation, Linda Griffin's daughter Amber was 17 and in her third year of high school in Columbus. Her school career has been a history of ups and downs, of awful years alternating with excellent teachers.

"We ended up with people who were willing to try or at least open to learn. Over time they came from being a parent-teacher kind of collaborative relationship to being our friends, and Amber's friends.

"It confirmed that if people give it a chance and get to know her, they like her. They see the positives, not just the negatives. They see that she can do things. They see that she has this really neat, funny, quirky sense of humor, and that she wants to be helpful, wants to do things, wants to learn things, instead of someone who is just a bundle of deficits.

We recognize that she will need support.

"It keeps me holding out hope. In a really crummy little rundown school building in the inner city, here was a handful of wonderful people who really cared about kids and reached out to them. If those teachers were there, somebody is out there in an employment setting who could have that attitude too.

A future for Amber

"Amber doesn't say much. I don't know what she's got going around in her head. I think she does have thoughts about the future, but she doesn't verbalize them. If she doesn't want to do something, she will definitely let you know that. But to expect her to say, 'I want to do that job,' that is probably not going to happen. She is more definitive about what she wants to do recreationally than employment-wise.

"To find something she does want to do, I think it's going to take time. It's going to be a matter of letting her try different things over a long enough period of time to see, and to convince people that a week is not long enough. We need real time.

"Our vision has always been that Amber will work in the community in a community setting, not an enclave but an actual job an individual might have in the community. We recognize that she will need support.

"We have a vision that she will live in the community in a place where she really wants to live, hopefully with a friend or a couple of friends. Obviously she will need support for that."

Finding support

"I still hold on to that vision for her, but the older she gets, the more I wonder and worry about how it will come together. For one thing, I don't know a friend or a couple of friends who I could say would probably be part of that. I also need somebody to help advocate for employment, somebody who finds the services and has the money to buy the services and who will listen.

"It is kind of an open vision. I don't have a lot of details to it. We've gone through the process of getting her name on the lists for supported living, supported employment, community services.

"I've had a couple of general conversations with employment services, and it's pretty clear to me that once they take a look, they're going to be trying to direct her to a workshop. I don't think they are going to listen, because that's not the way they see things. It's going to be tough to convince them to put their dollars into services to support her in a community setting. Rehab is going to see her and say, 'No employment outcome here.' I am starting to get concerned about how we are going to pull it off. But trust me, she can be employed, so help me.

"One of the reasons I started my business was the hope that eventually we could afford to hire somebody and make an employment opportunity for Amber. I don't know if we will get there or not, but that was part of the impetus for trying.

"I know that some people have managed to totally stay out of systems. Philosophically, I think that's a great idea. I don't think we are going to be able to do it, though. We don't have a money tree in the back yard, and I also don't have those kinds of connections.

"Through the educational years, we have spent a lot, a lot, a lot of time and energy getting to know people within our school district. But I don't have a connection with anybody in the MR/DD system, with the people who actually have the power to make something happen, or a way to get to them. I could call and make an appointment, and they might sit down and listen very politely and then just blow me off. I worry about that.

"Getting support might mean finding one person at a time at first, but hopefully that will grow. Right now we draw a lot on experiences we had with school and figure that they will generalize to other things."

Who holds the money and the power to help me realize my vision of the future?

How can I enlist their help?

How can I gain more control of money and power to make my dreams come true?

American Dreaming is published by a Self-Determination Project: Removing the Mask and developed through a Grant from the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council. Contact us at: Removing the Mask, Ohio Association of County Boards of MR/DD, 73 East Wilson Bridge Road #B-1, Worthington, OH 43085. All opinions are those of Removing the Mask and do not necessarily reflect those of the Council.

