

November 20, 2003

To Whom It May Concern:

The purpose of this note is to provide a parent's insight into the benefits of the Conductive Learning Center. Over 9 years ago, we had our first child, a son named Johnny, who was born prematurely at 29 weeks. He spent over 2 months in the Neo-natal Intensive Care Unit. While in the NICU, John was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy. His doctors were not sure exactly to what extent he would be affected and how it might hinder his development, but they were fairly certain he would be impacted by it later in life. We were told it was not necessary to do anything for him until he was 6 months old. At that point the "state" would intervene and if needed we would be able to obtain a 1/2-1 hour of physical or occupational therapy a week. When Johnny turned 6 months we did just that. The hour consisted of stretching Johnny and teaching us how to stretch him. We were thankful we had this intervention but felt that he really needed more. We had some of the best healthcare benefits through my husband's employer, the Ford Motor Company, but insurance only covered one hour a week and that just didn't seem like it was enough.

When Johnny was four years old, we happened to talk to a friend whose daughter also had CP. She brought to our attention a program that was just getting started in Grand Rapids. It was called Conductive Education. We took Johnny there and had him evaluated. In the hour and a half he was there, we learned more than we ever had about CP's impact on Johnny and what his potential could be to make improvements. We have watched as he developed himself into a more independent and confident little boy. The Conductors are the trained personnel providing the conductive education therapy. They have taught him through repetition, hard work, perseverance, and by rewarding him with constant praise.

He has been able to accomplish things that for us would seem small, but for Johnny are huge. For example, drinking from a cup is something most of us take for granted, however, Johnny could never get the fine motor skills in his wrist coordinated with the bending of his elbow to maintain that delicate balance of not spilling as one raises a cup. Now he is able to drink and eat on his own, using a cup and utensils. Just not having to be fed by someone else is a huge accomplishment for him. He has learned that he can do things for himself. I watched as he would daily have to hold onto a small wooden rod and struggle to put it over his head and back down again, all the while singing songs with the conductors. I didn't understand the importance of this activity until at home one morning I was getting Johnny dressed. He proceeded to use that exact same motion he'd been working on with the dowel rod to reach the bottom of his shirt and pull it over his head!

Through significant amounts of repetition, he had learned to do something that will change his life and enable even more independence. This was just the beginning of what he was to learn. Since then, John has learned to crawl, ride a bike, use the bathroom by himself (something vitally important if he is to be able to have a job some day), sit independently in a chair and on the floor and is for the first time able to take steps with a walker. Through the efforts of the

conductors and staff at Conductive Education, he is starting to believe that he can do anything with enough hard work and the right help.

We are so blessed that Johnny was able to get into this program when he did, but we can't help but think about how well he would be doing had he started in the program as an infant. Had someone with Conductive Education experience been available to us at these early stages, it would have been a tremendous help in mapping out an aggressive plan to start working on a program to help our son. There are so many children with muscle disorders who could benefit from this program. For these children to reach their potential, it can't be done in one hour of therapy a week, even if supplemented by activities with well-intentioned parents.

I equate it to trying to learn how to play golf very well. If I took a one hour lesson from a golf-pro and then hit some balls a few times a week, I'd see some improvement. However, if I could spend 4-5 hours a day, 5 days a week with a world-class golf instructor, I'd become the best golfer that I could possibly be. That is the huge difference that Conductive Education can make in someone's life. For these children with muscle disorders, it may not be the difference in being good or great at golf, it is the difference in being able to get a job and have an independent life compared with having to be cared for by others for the rest of their lives. If needed, I'd be more than happy to share even more of Johnny's successes due to Conductive Education.

Sincerely,

Becki A. Agar