

Name: En Heo
Gender: Male
Date of Birth: March 19, 2000 (24 years old)
Parents: Tae Heo & Mi Soon Lee
Address: 3197 Sonia Trail, Ellicott City, MD 21043
Email: Lmsinpeace@gmail.com
Phone: 301-633-9580
Diagnosis: Autism, Epilepsy
Service: DDA Self-Directed Services (SDS)

Background & Challenges Before SDS (Traditional Services):

For years, En and his family struggled with a **system that failed to provide appropriate support**, leaving them feeling unheard and without options:

- **Diagnosed with autism in third grade** after an evaluation at Kennedy Krieger Institute.
 - **Epilepsy diagnosis at 11 months old**, requiring lifelong medication.
 - **At age 21, the transition to a group home failed** due to an unhelpful and unclear agency process, leaving the family frustrated and unsupported.
 - Attempted a **traditional day program**, but En **struggled with behavioral issues and emotional distress**, making it an unsuitable environment.
 - **Lack of structure and understanding of his needs** led to increased anxiety and a lower quality of life.
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Improvements After SDS (Personalized 1:1 Support):

Through **Self-Directed Services (SDS)**, En's life has improved significantly:

- **Established a personalized schedule**, reducing behavioral incidents and increasing confidence.
- **Became more expressive**, sharing thoughts and feelings more effectively.
- **Successfully participates in small group activities** through a **CDS Vendor program**, improving his social skills and community integration.
- **Gained independence**, now engaging in activities that were previously difficult for him, such as:
 - **Riding in vans to field trips.**

- **Ordering meals at restaurants.**
 - **Experiences personal pride** in his progress, often telling his mother, *“Mom, I had a good day!”*
 - **Emotional relief for his family**—his older brother was moved to tears seeing En thrive.
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Why SDS Matters:

Despite **SDS being the most cost-efficient model** within DDA services, it faces potential budget cuts, which would severely impact individuals like En:

- **Fewer Service Hours** – En **already receives fewer hours (35 instead of 40 per week)**. Further cuts would **limit his care and progress**.
 - **Impact on Staff** – Recruiting and retaining qualified staff would be nearly impossible due to **low wages and lack of benefits**.
 - **Quality of Life** – Community-based services like **SDS and CDS Vendor programs** are **critical** for En’s development and social inclusion.
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Call to Action:

To ensure that individuals like En continue to **thrive in a safe and supportive environment**, we urge legislators to:

1. **Protect and prioritize funding** for community-based **DDA services**.
2. **Maintain or increase service hours** to ensure proper care and stability.
3. **Ensure fair wages for caregivers** to attract and retain **qualified support staff**.
4. **Support families relying on these programs**, allowing them to provide **safe, personalized, and effective care** for their loved ones.