

Ivanova Smith

I was born as a premature baby in Latvia in 1988. I was given up at birth and sent to a soviet institutional orphanage where I lived until I was adopted by the Anderson family in 1994. I was raised most of my life in Bonney Lake, Washington where I lived with my loving mother, father and older sister. Growing up, the world had a hard time understanding me and I had a hard time understanding the world. This made certain parts of my childhood and youth rough. I was bullied a lot. People did not see value in me, which in turn caused me to devalue myself. But the Lord put people in my life who help me see my value and my skills.

I am a proud DD citizen, who wants all people of my community to be treated as equals. Despite a lack of support from my high school counselor, I graduated with honors from community college. An abusive work situation I did not know how to get out of inspired me to go back to school. I applied to and was accepted at Central Washington University as a history major. This was a time of healing for me that helped me regain my passion. I started getting heavily involved with fellow students with disabilities around disability social justice. I worked as a student programmer for their center for diversity and social justice and was the vice president in a student disability advocacy organization. For my senior thesis I wrote about the history of the American eugenics movement and how it criminalized people with intellectual/developmental disabilities. When I graduated with my bachelor of art in history I realized I wanted to be a disability civil rights activist and try to stop the abuse of people with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities (I/DD).

I am also involved in the autistic pride movement and want to spread autistic acceptance. I became involved with the Arc of King County which gave me an internship and helped me connect with the UW Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) program. I became the first autistic Advocate LEND fellow and am now in my second year. I testified in Olympia on different issues that affect people with I/DD. I love what I do and I am going to keep doing it. I am a member of People First of Washington, Self-Advocates in Leadership (SAIL), the South Sound Autism Partnership and Allies in Advocacy.