

Tim Jin Testimony

Hello, my name is Tim and I am a person being served from my Regional Center in Orange County. I am a Korean American man who has cerebral palsy. I am using a communication device at the base of my wheelchair, by typing with my toes.

I am here to tell you how much the Self-Determination Program has changed my life.

Before I speak about my Self Determination, I like to tell you the history of my family. As you already heard, I'm Korean American. I have two younger brothers who are also Korean American and we were born in the States. I'm an uncle of 7 nieces and our primary language is English, but we all know how to speak and understand Korean.

My parents and aunts have been living in the United States for over 50 years. We are a multicultural family because my cousins and nieces are all mixed races. When we all get together for a potluck party, our buffet table consists of Korean food, like Korean Miso Soup, to meatloaf and potato salad, but no matter what we are eating, we always drinking 7-up and eating Kim chee.

That was a Korean joke, if anyone is Korean out there in this meeting.

My family has always included me in whatever they do. I can remember when I was a child, my aunts and uncles used to take all of us shopping and take us to dinner. My mom and dad always made sure that I had accessibility whenever we went on vacation. When both of my brothers got married, they asked me to be their best man. Even now, some of my nieces ask me if I can go pick them up from school and I always have to feed them dinner after, and usually, they want something like in and out, but when they ask if I can make them rice, I send them back to their grandparents' house.

I'm fully included in my family.

I started Self Determination a year ago and it's been a total game-changer. When I was in the traditional system with many different agencies, I had well over 200 staff helping me. My front door felt like it had a big flashing open sign, where my house became a Costco food court, and everyone wanted a hot dog and a drink from their change from a laundromat. It was horrible and this lasted over 20 years, ever since I moved out from my parents when I was in college.

When I was with an agency, it was always like a jigsaw puzzle having to deal with managers because I was not in control of my life.

Imagine if you are at a birthday party for a friend and you are always looking at the clock because the staff that came with you to the party, has to leave soon because the agency doesn't want to pay overtime. I had no way to go back home because I came with the staff, so many times I left the party early.

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This was my life under an agency and I felt like I had less freedom in supported living than when I was living with my family. My parents never restricted me in what I wanted to do because we didn't have a company policy to follow or regulations.

I used to think that I had a self-determined life because even though I was in SLS, the agency allowed me to pick who I wanted to help me. Even the executive director at my Regional Center kept saying that I was in charge of my life because I was doing activities that most consumers weren't able to do. I just accepted that my life was good because the agency was working with me and had no problems.

Everything went bad when my coordinator from the agency quit his job. I'm good friends with him. Before I started coaching services to transition over to SDP, I felt bad for my friend who was my coordinator that I was in the process of leaving the agency.

When he told me, three months later, that he was thinking about leaving the agency, I immediately felt relieved because I had a plan to transition over to SDP. He was also encouraging me to follow my dreams because he even said there were too many barriers from the agency.

After my friend left the agency, my case went into the toilet. I had no more control over who I wanted to help me and for the next three months, my life could not be gotten even worse. I even needed to report an incident to DDS that they were neglecting me.

The process of getting me into Self Determination took about six months even though I was working with the best independent facilitator in the industry. My service coordinator from my Regional Center was discouraging me at first because they thought that my case was way too complicated, but I proceeded forward regardless of the obstacles that were ahead of me.

I'm the vice-chairperson of the local advisory committee at my Regional Center and I've been a member of that committee ever since it got started 8 years ago. It became a mission and almost an obsession to get into Self Determination.

My particular Regional Center makes it difficult for families to get into Self Determination. There are huge disparities issue between cultures, regarding services and budgets.

For example, the Hispanic community and people of color that has similar disabilities get fewer services than White families and this problem is Statewide with all 21 Regional Centers.

Even if you think that you have control of who you want to help you, it can all go away without expressing your concerns. Don't be misled that you are living in self-determined life just because you can go to bed after midnight.

I would like to give you this example.

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When I was in the traditional system or what I like to call the broken system, I would have told you that I was happy with my life under the broken system because I didn't know that I was eating meatloaf every night with ketchup.

I felt this way for pretty much all of my life. The agencies that hired the people to support me never asked what they could do better. Everyone just assumed that I was doing fine.

If you switch the last two letters in my name, it spells T, M, I. So I'm going to be very honest.

Under the traditional system, I suffered from neglect. My staff came to my job only once during the day to help me go to the bathroom and feed me lunch. This led to many toilet accidents because I didn't have support when I needed it. I missed numerous lunches because the agencies couldn't find reliable people to help me.

The agencies would send random staff who didn't know or respect me. If I wanted to go out to dinner with friends or family, I had to be home by 8 pm because that is when the shift change happened. I needed to ask permission to live my life.

I haven't been this excited about my future in a long time. In the months that I've been in the Self-Determination Program, my stress levels are lower, I exercise almost every day, I've gotten a job, and I've seen friends I haven't seen in years. Life is good when I'm in charge.

Since I have no natural support in the program, I wanted my facilitators to feel comfortable enough to push and pull me when needed, but also give me a chance to think things through, figure out my options, and together we can execute a plan. I did not want someone hovering over me and telling me what to do and always agreeing with me. That is a bad Independent Facilitator.

The workforce is a big issue and it will correct itself as people need to work and paying a higher wage will almost certainly bring better people.

Now that I am in Self Determination, I only have 9 employees that I like and choose to hire and be on my team. I create their monthly schedules and always know who is working which shifts. If I need to have them stay longer, they can because my Independent Facilitator along with my FMS, budgeted overtime every month in my spending plan.

A few months ago, I went on vacation with my friends for almost a week. I chose not to take staff with me because my friends are my natural support. Meaning that they know how to assist me with my physical needs, but they are not my paid employees. I gave all of my employees time off and made sure to schedule staff to be there at my house when I came back. It worked like clockwork and no mishaps at all.

I'm planning my next vacation this winter and once again, I'm choosing not to take staff with me.

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Many of us are fully capable of handling our lives and in some ways, we are running a small business because we are interviewing, hiring, and firing who we want to help us in our lives. In most cases, we are budgeting every month and making sure taxes are being paid and insurance for workmen comp with our FMS.

Other participants who are already in the program, had warned me that Regional Centers are the largest barrier to getting into SDP and I believe them now.

It wasn't challenging for me to recruit and hire people to help me and just last week, I increases my team with two new staff members. But, trying to get the services that I need and getting an antique budget to maintain my livelihood, is what most families face.