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### *Peter Pan Syndrome*

My name is Nicki Vander Meulen, I'm 41 years old and I want individuals with disabilities to have the right to be treated as adults, not permanent children!

I want society to realize that adults with disabilities have their own needs, wishes and desires. Yet society continues to treat those with developmental disabilities as permanent children who need to be treated and cared for rather than, educated individuals who can express their own mind through a variety of communication styles.

After all, if we can read emojis why can't we learn to sign? I was at a hearing recently where a segregated environment was described as an ideal environment for students with severe disabilities. At one point the comment was made by a member that we must treat these kids, or we are going to lose them. A disability diagnosis isn't part of a zero-sum game.

Individual with disabilities don't need to be cured we need to be respected. We don't just want a seat at the table we want the whole meal. The rights of individuals with disabilities must be respected whether it's the right to vote for an individual living in a group home or the right of an individual to marry. Each one of us should be able to participate meaningfully in our own lives by making our own educated decisions with allies and staff willing to assist when needed.

I write this post as the beloved IRIS (I Respect I self-direct) program is again up for review. Yet again individuals with disabilities will have to fight for the right to have a say in their own lives. It's our lives so why then should decisions about us be made without us. They shouldn't! It's time to let Peter Pan grow up and it's time to treat people with disabilities as thriving functional adults.