

IN SUPPORT OF CONTINUING THE OHIO SSP/CO-NAVIGATOR PROGRAM DEBORAH KENDRICK, CINCINNATI, OHIO

I became blind just before entering the first grade. The reason was my second round of retinoblastoma, a rare childhood cancer. That was almost 70 years ago now, so you might say I'm pretty good at being blind. Once you learn alternative ways of doing things, blindness is not so hard. But the radiation used to try to save my second eye wreaked a bit of havoc on my hearing. I started losing my hearing in high school, and got my first hearing aids when I was 29.

When you can't see, you learn to use your ears for sight. And when you can't hear, you learn to use your eyes for sound. But when both essential senses are compromised, some situations are simply not possible without another human being, a person to support or co-navigate the world.

I live alone. My nearest relative is 30 minutes away and has three children in diapers, and thus has no time. I am uncomfortable asking others for help.

Before learning about the SSP/CoNavigator program and being accepted into it, I was drowning in a sea of incomplete and incompletable errands and tasks. It is not hyperbole when I say that the SSP/Co-Navigator program has saved my life.

Lisa reads mail to me, shows me the way to navigate stores and purchase anything from sweaters to cauliflower; she has walked unfamiliar neighborhoods with me when I am contemplating a move and describes the accompanying pictures I can't see. Getting to the doctor or buying a pair of shoes are simple needs, for sure, but when you aren't sure how you will know what the staff members there are saying to you, when a garbage truck is coming up behind you, or determine that it is your name that is being called, having a trusted human to conavigate/facilitate can transform despair and depression into freedom and sometimes fun.

Not everyone can be a conavigator. Lisa is perfect for the job. She always does things WITH me, not FOR me. She speaks TO me, not THROUGH me. She is funny and kind and smart. She has become a valued friend and yet, because she is a paid conavigator, I can ask for her help without guilt or shame.

Please continue this program.

Deborah Kendrick

Cincinnati, OH