



Cheerful Helpers Child and Family Study Center  
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[www.cheerfulhelpers.org](http://www.cheerfulhelpers.org)

To the Cheerful Helpers Community,

We are so honored to be writing this letter to you.

Our story is similar to many of yours. In preschool, our son was prone to hit, yelled at loud noises, broke other kids' constructions. We sought supports like OT, PT, and speech, and so many evaluations to better understand his needs. After finding that our neighborhood kindergarten was an even more disastrous place for Cy (he was unable to separate from us or act safely in the classroom, and spent most of his time the principal), Joanna and I felt lost. We searched for another school that could support our son, and juggled OT and other appointments, not sure what would help. We had heard the name Cheerful Helpers in passing from a therapist. Hoping this was not another dead end, Joanna called one day from work. Keeping her voice low, she described some of the challenges Cy was having. Then something unfamiliar happened: the voice on the other end of the line said, "it sounds like your son is having trouble finding an anchor in the classroom." Indeed! We will never forget those words. This empathic woman on the other end of the line *got it*, got us. At Cy's intake meeting several days later, when we sheepishly shared that he had eloped several times from kindergarten, sure this would be disqualifying information, Jinous grinned and said "YES!"



And so Cheerful Helpers became an anchor for all of us. We felt incredible relief at being held by a team of magical, caring experts and other families who understood the full picture. No longer were we alone in navigating totally unfamiliar systems, or trying to decode what was going on. We still feel held by the Cheerful Helpers community – it is a force that has lifted our family, given us invaluable tools of observation, understanding, and constructive language.

We quickly learned that "Cy worked very hard today" meant that it was a rough day – that *everyone* worked hard! The 3.5 years our family was at Cheerful Helpers were really hard years, but we also knew we were being held together with expert care, and in the company of other wonderful families. We saw significant improvements, and also new challenges. We grew as parents and people. Like many Cheerful Helpers parents, we feared that our kid

would never be ready to give a speech (!) at graduation. But then, all of the sudden, there he was, dressed in a grey suit and a hat, proudly talking about his bird: “the most loved flamingo.”

We moved to Seattle in 2021, the summer after Cy graduated from Cheerful Helpers, as we all were coming out from the pandemic. It seemed impossible for a kid who struggles with transitions that we were changing everything at once. But we successfully navigated that big change and the big feelings that went with it by using tools we learned from Cheerful Helpers. After three successful years in a supported elementary school (APL in Seattle), Cy is now a 6th grader in another new school (Morningside) in a classroom with only one teacher. Cy has become a real schoolboy. On the cusp of teendom, he is challenging his dyslexia and working hard to develop his reading, rather than working hard just to be in a classroom. Cy would like us to tell you that he does parkour now – jumping and balancing and stretching and moving through unusual spaces. Not unlike how our family navigates life together.



We recognize the immense privilege of attending Cheerful Helpers and wish that more families could access this life-changing place. Whenever we talk about someone who has done something hurtful, Cy says “they should have gone to Cheerful Helpers!”. He knows that’s the place to learn about feelings and do hard things and care about yourself and others. And we say yes, YES, everyone should go to Cheerful Helpers.

Cheerful Helpers is a foundational place and will always be a significant part of our lives - the experience grounded us, and the skills continue to sturdy us. Please join us in supporting this wonderful anchor in all our lives. Invite your loved ones to contribute too. We can’t think of a better investment than supporting Cheerful Helpers. The world needs more of this, and our incredible kids do too.

Bianca Siegl and Joanna Hankamer