

# A Transformative Time

## An Essay by Sara & John Brownson

*Transformative: Causing or able to cause an important and lasting change in someone or something*

Attending the National Down Syndrome Congress in 2010 was an extraordinary experience for our family. The sense of community and camaraderie was powerful, with thousands of people we didn't yet know but many of whom we would forge easy friendships and have meaningful conversations with by the event's end. When you are the parent of a child with Down syndrome, you get used to people staring at you and your child everywhere that you go. You can feel 'othered'. But there we felt none of that – we felt just like everybody else.

John continued, "During one of the sessions, our son Kaleb was having a meltdown and I was in the hallway trying to soothe and calm him down. Usually, we would be alone in this circumstance and feel judged. But this time there were other parents and kids doing the exact same thing. So there was no judgment, and I was able to parent and support Kaleb without the additional burdens that normally accompany these situations. Looking back, I am glad I was able to experience that when our son was only 8 years old. Kaleb is now 20 and the past

12 years of parenting have been changed for the better due to those experiences."

"At the conference I had the opportunity to meet Chris Burke, actor and singer who played Charles "Corky" Thatcher on the television series 'Life Goes On.' I am generally not someone to get starstruck, but it was so impactful to meet and be in the presence of someone



who so well represented our community in such a public and positive way. Burke took time with each attendee vying for his attention -- it was a beautiful thing to witness. There was an extraordinary sense of joy in his simple act of kindness and encouragement." John noted.

The Brownsons agreed, "Beyond the mere comfort

of being 'with our tribe,' we gleaned so much incredible education and resources in workshops and most certainly the trade show. Attendees are presented with the latest technologies, resources, techniques, and connections. For example, we left the conference with the knowledge and ability to acquire an adaptive bike for Kaleb. Oh, how that piece of equipment delivered skills, independence, and joy to our son for years to come!"

**Sara cheerfully added, "The information, relationships, and empowerment one leaves with are truly transformative. We are proud CRDSS is once again offering financial support to those in our community and hope many consider the opportunity to attend the conference!"**

"CRDSS requests those given financial support return with resources to share with the community. If you are anything like our family," Sara continued, "we returned brimming with inspiration and resources eager to share! I assembled a binder of all the materials we gained at conference so I could bring those resources back to Central PA. That was our honor." ■