

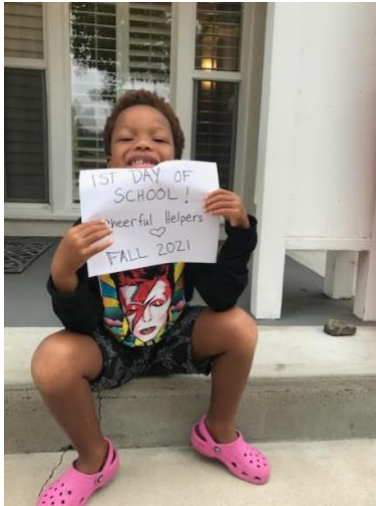
November 13, 2025

Of all the things I value in my life, it's hard to say how much Cheerful Helpers is "worth" to me. It's a difficult question that often comes up around this time of year. How much should we donate to the causes we care about? And for that matter, how much should we be spending on other things in our life? Nice meals? Bad meals? Overpriced theme parks? Clothes? Okay clothes is easy—I spend as little as possible on clothes. But it's a consideration for other people.

The question gets harder around Cheerful Helpers, a place at the center of my family's identity. And although we do come up with a dollar amount when it's time to donate each year, I still wonder if it comes close to truly representing how much we value it.

Our son, Maddox, graduated from Cheerful Helpers in 2023 and despite the fact that we had gone all-in on the C.H. approach to his disability, gotten him as many services as he needed and generally felt like he was ready for a new school, the hardest time we ever had with him was the tumultuous months after he graduated.

We had found a LAUSD school with a class specifically for children on the spectrum. We had toured



it and met the staff and worked all summer (Cheerful Helpers style) to prepare Maddox and his new team for the coming school year. Yet, within the first week it was already a mess. LAUSD failed us in all the ways one might suspect and even found some innovative ways to screw things up as well. After just two weeks we were in crisis, and the situation at school was not safe. We were heartbroken and demoralized. He had learned so much during his three years at Cheerful Helpers, and our family had made so much progress. Life at home was nothing like the chaotic, unsafe mess that it was before we started in the BEIG program and then transitioned to the C.H. school. And yet, here we were, watching Maddox crumble in the new environment in a terrifying way he had never fallen apart before. Despite our best efforts, we pulled Maddox from the unsafe school environment after five weeks and started his homeschooling.

That was when everyone at Cheerful Helpers stepped in to help get Maddox back on track. Jaclyn had already been following Maddox's progress at the new school and asked us to call her every night with updates. We immediately started family play therapy, had one-on-one sessions with Richard and enrolled in Saturday social skills. We were the first family to sign up for that session, so there were actually no other kids in the group with Maddox. It's funny to think of a social skills class with only one child. But in truth, those days Maddox was so dysregulated, conversations with caring adults about the idea of other kids was about all he could handle.

Slowly he managed to reconstitute himself, and this was actually when all his (and our) skills learned at Cheerful Helpers truly came into practice. Nothing had worked to save us from a disastrous valley, but these skills were instrumental in allowing us all to climb out, and at a wonderful pace. Just a few months later, he was able to start attending Frostig West, where he thrives today.

Of all the supports he had during the rebuilding of his self-confidence none were as essential as his own ability to look honestly at what had happened, and why. "The real thing" as we all know it to be called. The





tools Maddox learned at Cheerful Helpers may have gone dormant under the pressure of this chaotic new school experience, but they were not lost. Once he remembered who he really was—a kid who could do hard things—he was ready.

Just this past summer he aged out of that social skills program he had been with for years, which means we took our last drive out to Jefferson and said a big goodbye to everyone's favorite alley. I do my best to be a part of the alumni support group each month on zoom, and Richard and Sam want to make a plan for Maddox to visit social skills again as a mentor to the younger kids.

How do we begin to assign a value to all of this? How can any of the parents who were equally touched by Cheerful Helpers? Of course, it's different for every family. So, with humility, my wife and I ask you to consider a tax-deductible donation to place that relies on these donations to help other kids like ours who would have a

much harder time navigating the world without the foundation of Cheerful Helpers.

With love
Andrew, Gigi and Maddox