Ella Burns

“You made SUCH a big difference in our lives. Thank You.”

That was the message sent from Beth Burns, mother of six-year old Ella, to one of the Association’s Legal Advocates. Ella’s parents had enrolled her in a Snohomish School District (Washington) program, held once per week for home-schooled children. Ella has type 1 diabetes and needs to take insulin on a regular basis to stay well. The school needed to confirm that someone would be available to help Ella with insulin and/or glucagon, if she had a medical emergency. The school assured Ella’s parents that a school nurse, who worked half-days at the program, would be available.

Ella was all set for the program, but the weekend before her first day, the school nurse called and said that the school could not care for Ella and was not required to do so.

The school’s position was that because the program was a “choice” program, it did not have to provide any school services or modifications above those that were already in place for the students.

*The school had withdrawn its promise for Ella’s care, and that meant that she would not be able to attend the program. So, Beth contacted the American Diabetes Association for help.*

Beth learned that Ella had rights. Under federal law (the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act), the school was required to meet Ella’s medical needs and allow her to attend the program. With the help of the Association’s Legal Advocate, Beth wrote a letter to the head of the school district’s Special Education Program. After a meeting to discuss the issue, they were able to work things out.

“What you do truly changes lives--Ella LOVES her program. Instead of her first lesson in the ‘real world’ being that ‘diabetes holds you back from doing what you want to do,’ it’s been one of inclusion and support by her community.”—Beth Burns