



*Iowa's Department of Transportation (DOT) recently announced 19 rest stops across I-80 will have height adjustable adult changing tables available in their Accessible Bathrooms that also include traditional spaces for changing infants. A huge step towards building accessible communities for everyone across the lifespan.*

Paula yells back at the house; "Honey, can you grab the bathroom bag?" as she locks Aaron's wheel chair down in the van. The physical barriers to be out in the community have increased as both our son, with complex medical and mental disabilities, and we as family caregivers age. Yet, we continue to challenge ourselves to leave the comfort and convenience of home to be out in the community.

Why? It is because of the importance for everyone's overall health and well-being to step outside our house. As a family, it means road trips, too! Four of Aaron's siblings live in states other than Iowa. Family visits and celebrations have always been a large part of our culture. One of our more memorable trips was traveling to Harvard to celebrate the law school graduation of Aaron's sister-in-law several years ago. The accessibility of the Harvard community was beyond our expectations. However, the road to get there was challenged even by my parent obsessive planning tendencies! The detailed planning was a solution focused outcome. Over the years, like many parents, I had to learn how to accommodate Aaron's personal cares in a world that is not always friendly when you have physical and mental disabilities.

By the time we reached Iowa's eastern border on the first day, we had our drill down for changing his briefs. We would find a rest stop and one of us would scout out a private secluded outside spot. Why not use a bathroom? Considering the typical option is to change your child on the floor of a public restroom we sought an alternative because of his immune system. Once a spot was identified, we grabbed the "bathroom bag". Out would come the plastic tarp, folded in two, followed by a heavy old quilt. Once that was laid out on the ground, a clean changing pad topped the pile. We would lay Aaron down and change his briefs. Meanwhile, dad would stand with his back to us, watching to make sure no one ventured onto this spot. It worked well till the long rainy day and a half on the Turnpike. Challenged but determined, a golf size umbrella was added to our routine, and we stayed dry for the most part. Have I mentioned my obsession for having a laundry facility available every night when we travel? Smelly laundry piles up quickly! We will save that for another story.

For this Iowa family, the recent announcement from the Iowa Department of Transportation (IA DOT) to build "Adult Changing Rooms" in all of the public rest stops brought tears of gratitude. Thank you to the advocates and policy decision makers who worked so hard to make accessible changing spaces a reality. This is a huge step towards building accessible communities and we hope other locations in our communities quickly follow the example, leadership, and commitment of IA's DOT.