

To: Joint Committee on Veterans' and Military Affairs

Senator Barbara Bailey	Representative Tami Green
Senator Randi Becker	Representative Dave Hayes
Senator John Braun	Representative Brad Klippert
Senator Steve Conway	Representative Drew MacEwen
Senator Steve Hobbs	Representative John McCoy
Senator Pam Roach	Representative Dawn Morrell
Senator Christine Rolfes	Representative Dick Muri
Senator Paull Shinn	Representative Tina Orwall

October 16, 2013

Dear Joint Committee on Veterans' and Military Affairs:

My son, Cadet Neese, is currently attending the Washington Youth Academy 2013-2 session. I am writing to give you a glimpse of the life changing impact my son and other young men and women are experiencing by participating in the NGYCP.

My son is a good young man who lost his way after middle school and, experienced multiple failures at navigating high school. Last June, at the age of 18, he was facing another year or more of high school to graduate. His spirit, endurance and confidence were broken. His despair overwhelmed every choice he was making and his future was uncertain. Graduation from high school was no longer a possibility from his vantage point. And then, a trusted teacher asked him to apply to Washington Youth Academy.

I can speak with complete confidence when I tell you this single decision will change his life forever.

He voluntarily arrived at the academy on July 20, 2013 desperate to learn a different way to succeed yet skeptical at his ability to do so. He gave up his phone, his electronics, his friends, his family and his bad attitude, got out of the car and entered the Challenge.

I will share a few quotes from his letters, in order of their arrival. His own words speak strongest to the progressive impact. The letters start July 21, 2013 with the last letter October 10, 2013.

- "What I know is you two want me to be here to see the change in me as a person."
- "No matter how hard this gets, I keep telling myself, they can't kill me or hurt me, maybe make me feel uncomfortable and I might think I am going to die, but I won't."
- "We have mostly been learning to march but also pushups and training. I wake up every day wanting to leave so bad, I feel like quitting."
- "It's the little things I miss the most, like TV and music, your food, the dog and the view out my bedroom window, deciding what shirt to wear."
- "Mom, I want to leave really bad, but I'm not going to. I miss home."
- I have never in my life wanted to start school as much as I do today."
- Mom, I realized this week how hard you work to make our family happy and I know now how I behaved, I am sorry."

- “Dad, I realized all the times you asked me to do something, and I refused, I should have done it without question, I am honored to call you my father.”
- “Sorry, I did not get to write much this week, our platoon is finding out how our actions affect each other and we are responsible to each other, not just what is in it for me.”
- “This is the hardest thing I have ever done. It is not only difficult physically but mentally. I bet you are surprised, that I love school. it is going well, I am up for academic achievement in my classes!”
- “It’s not that it is getting easier, it is that I am getting better, they really want me to succeed.”

On his first home pass, instead of X-box, he discussed Syria and other current events. Instead of sleeping all day, he was out running before dawn. He stood straight, looked everyone in the eye and carried an assurance and confidence we have never seen in his lifetime. This young man asked to stop at his high school to thank the teacher that encouraged him to apply and respectfully answered his principal when asked, “What are they doing there that we don’t do here?” by answering, “Well ma’am, I don’t remember ever being ordered to the floor here!” He is a picture of his potential, not his past.

It is without question his insight, motivation and determination have changed. He is seeing something inside, he could not find in other ways, and I assure you, we tried everything we could.

He writes letters to his friends and family to encourage each of us to improve our lives, our confidence and our belief in our ability. A few weeks ago, we received a lumpy letter with two long braided pieces of cord inside. The following letter was included:

“I did not think I would make it through Ranger PT today, we were running and my legs gave out. My fellow Rangers were yelling at me, “Get up” and I knew I had to get up. I finally got up, with my sweaty shirt caked in sand and I kept going. The pain did not stop, when I reached my team, they were yelling and clapping for me, “Good Job”. When I took off the knee wrap you sent me that night, I hit the ground like a ton of bricks. I realized the wrap you sent me made it possible for me to get up. Then I thought about you and dad and how much you are doing. You are pushing yourself to exercise and be healthier. When I fell, I never wanted to quit anything in my life. I pushed myself to a limit I did not know I had, until the wrap you sent was the only thing keeping me up. But now I know I can push myself to that limit and I am striving to see how much farther I can go. It’s not easy to wake up each day, knowing you are going to be pushed to a point physically and mentally where you want to quit and you think you can’t keep going, but it is the only true way to reveal our potential, our unlimited potential. I was told by a Cadre today, “We CAN all run a marathon, but it is up to us if we want to. If you know that feeling where you need to breathe, like when someone is holding you under water, where all you want is to breathe, then you know you can’t truly want something or be successful unless you want it as bad as you want to breathe. That is how bad I want this. All I am saying is I realize I could do something I never thought I’d be able to do and I know you can too.

So, Mom and Dad, I made you these two bracelets from the same wrap that kept me up in the first Ranger PT and I want you to wear them, when you feel like you’re done or you can’t go on, look at them and go harder. I love you. Keep pushing like a Ranger, Love, Cadet Neese.

The bracelets, carefully crafted by my son, for us to wear, to remind us of our potential, will remain a priceless piece of jewelry to me throughout my lifetime.

You do know my son. You did not watch him self-destruct or see the fast spiral of deterioration his life was on before walking through the doors of the Washington Youth Academy. However, you will recognize him and the other cadets in our community as they finish this program.

They are the future leaders, those that learned through hard work, sweat and finding strength, they did not know they had inside. They are the students returning to school, graduating, standing straight looking administrators and authority in the eye with a respect unknown to them before this experience. They are making a difference in the lives of their families, their friends, and the community. Their own vision of who they are and their potential is forever changed as they enter a new future, equipped with the skills and confidence they need to succeed.

There are not words strong enough to use to express my gratitude and how humbled I am as a mother, a parent, and community member, for this program and the redirection it has provided my son.

The impact in the lives of the Cadets is only the start of the ripple they will make as they positively head into the world after completing the Challenge at the Washington Youth Academy. The ever widening circle will affect change we can't yet measure as they "Reveal their potential, their unlimited potential."

Respectfully,

Tammy R Neese

Tammy R Neese  
8423 127<sup>th</sup> Ave SE  
Newcastle WA 98056