

Navigating the System is No Easy Task

By: J. Lopez

I have been connected with the best agency ever. I was told this is who you need to call to guide you with all your current needs.

You see my son was just diagnosed with autism, a disability I know nothing about. I was told it was crucial that my child go to school as soon as possible. We just moved to this parish and have no family or friends with children in the area.

So I did some research and went to the nearest school to get my child enrolled in the preschool setting, however the classes were full. But there was an opening at a school in another district but transportation was not provided. I enrolled my child out of district and of course my car finally decided to retire, which meant no transportation, no school.

I remember Children's Hospital Autism Clinic gave me a contact name and number to call for resources, support and guidance. I made the call to Laura Nata with Families Helping Families of Jefferson and right away we were so encouraged by the end of the call. She provided us with all resources that can be helpful to my child with autism.

Because of language barrier, she quickly did referrals, made appointments and did follow ups. She began with the task of getting my child back at his district school, and did accomplish the task with transportation.

Because of his new diagnoses she requested on my behalf for an interim IEP for services at school, while they began an evaluation at no cost to me. Second, she made a referral at the local OCDD office and gave me the information of purpose of agency, available services and prepared me with all the necessary documents to bring to my appointment. Next she informed me of other state and federal resources for children with disabilities, where to apply via internet/in-person. It was music to my ears to find out there is an autism support group in the area. She shared several websites on autism and provided us with reading materials and books in our native language.

What seemed so confusing to navigate, so distant to reach is all falling in place. Thanks to Ms. Nata for her advocacy efforts, her knowledge and the personal time given to us. We are very thankful for Families Helping Families of Jefferson.



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