

## A Family Story at a National Conference

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“Can you see yourself in my shoes?” “No ma’am.”

In the beginning of November, FAVOR, Inc. presented at the National Federation of Families’ virtual conference on *Building Community-Based Advisory through Innovative Research and Family Engagement Technical Assistance*. The presentation team (made up of Maguena Deslandes, Taylor Ford, Lisa Girard and Jenny Bridges-Hightower) spoke about the work they have done to date to promote the National CLAS (Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services) Standards, the benefits of facilitating community conversations and focus groups and highlighted their Support Group Facilitation Guide. To close out the presentation, Lisa Girard shared her family’s story and how she embarked on the journey from a parent struggling with her child’s school to working as a change agent in the Eastern region.

Her family story started when her son was diagnosed with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) at the age of 5 and her journey of looking for supports began. She was struggling. Lisa shared that it was a friend who invited her to a support group and after declining for months, she finally decided to attend. While there, she was wrapped with love and support from other parents. It was also at that support group that she met Lorna Grivois, the Family System Manager of the Eastern region at that time. Lorna asked her “what do you and the school have in common?” It wasn’t until sometime later that she had an epiphany – they both wanted what was best for her son. And that’s where it seems the fire started. Lisa started being supported, connected and empowered to be an advocate for her son. Lorna provided the handholding Lisa wanted, for a short while before she pushed (sometimes shoved) Lisa along the way. She was beginning to attend System of Care meetings and navigating that space as a parent who was being equipped with what she needed. A little over a year before Lorna retired, she asked Lisa that opening question – “can you see yourself in my shoes?” Lisa’s response was “No ma’am.” But at some point, that “no” turned into an “I’ll try,” and we have been lucky to have Lisa fill the Eastern region Family System Manager’s position. Lisa’s journey started in a support group and now she is helping to equip other families with what they need. In her words, “it came full circle.”

To her friend that never stopped inviting her to that initial support group, FAVOR, Inc. thanks you for your persistence! And we are grateful for Lorna’s support and occasional push (or shove) along the way.