

# September 2017 Success Story VENECIA GONZALEZ

Translated by: Minerva Flores

In February of this year, I felt I was in a low place and desperate for some help. I just wanted someone to hear me out. Although I understand English well, I cannot speak it, and this made me feel isolated. I had a lot of questions about my son, he had been previously diagnosed with ADHD, but I always suspected he had something else due to his behaviors. My suspicions were validated when he received a new diagnosis of Autism from the Children's Hospital Autism Clinic. My son had many challenges and I wanted to get him the help he needed, but I needed information and guidance.

Like many of us I heard of autism but really did not know too much about it. Through a parent liaison of JPPSS, I learned about a free conference on autism being provided in Spanish by Families Helping Families of Jefferson. I quickly called and registered to attend. It was refreshing to speak to someone in my native language and enlighten me on autism.

I learned a lot of information about autism, support groups, the local Autism Chapter, and the proper terminology to things that helped me understand and have a name for the behaviors my son exhibits. I wanted to know and learn how to help my son, but I simply didn't know where to begin. Therefore, I called the office and made an appointment to speak with someone. I met with Ms. Laura Nata and Ms. Minerva Flores I was enlightened, they truly guided me through the entire special education process and rights. Because of their help and understanding of our



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rights, I was able to request a reevaluation for my son due to his new diagnosis. We had an IEP meeting and it felt good to participate and be part of the meeting addressing my concerns. The communication went well and I learned a lot about my son's school activities, progress in his classes, and was able to address his need for occupational therapy and other supports.

For the first time, I really felt my words mattered. I was truly advocating for my son, you need the tools and the knowledge to be successful. As Ms. Laura Nata says, "An informed parent will never experience a child left behind." I am thankful for Families Helping Families of Jefferson.

I was fortunate to learn Ms. Flores has a child with autism. I really learned a lot about the disability and know when in doubt who to call for information. To my surprise and her knowledge, I found out that there were other services for individuals with autism available. She provided a very thorough explanation of the services provided by Jefferson Parish Human Services Authority for individuals with developmental disabilities and the waiver programs. With her assistance, I applied for and found eligible to receive services through JPHSA.

Ms. Flores also provided me with a list of ABA Therapists in my area and my son is being evaluated for these services as well. I no longer feel stuck or alone.

Since my learning about FHF and meeting them, I have attended their workshops and found they have been super useful. I am truly thankful to them for helping me advocate for my son and educating me. I now feel stronger and I know that no matter what, I'll get through it. It was very comforting to speak to someone that also has a child with autism, knew how I felt and understood what I was talking about. I would refer anyone with any disability in need of help to give them a call. They are absolutely great.



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