



STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Patricia Lanaspá **Director of Support** **Services - Database**

As the parent of a child with a disability, Patricia Lanaspá believes that autism changes lives in unexpected ways and takes you to places you could never imagine. Patricia acknowledges there were many signs of the disorder that were missed when her son was a toddler. Instead, the pediatrician noted that he was a cute baby who smiled and cuddled with his mom so autism went undetected. Although there is a pattern, no two persons with autism are the same and by age four, her son's diagnosis was all too apparent. Once the diagnosis was confirmed, Patricia began to search for answers. She was determined that autism was not going to deter her son or the rest of the family from enjoying life to the fullest.

After contacting the P2P office for resources and support, Patricia accepted an invitation to become a bilingual Supporting Parent volunteer. Shortly thereafter, a job opening came up which was first shared with P2P volunteers. So in July of 2007, Patricia was hired as a Regional Coordinator, opening up multiple lines of communication and support for Hispanic families throughout Georgia. Ten years later, Patricia gets to wear many hats in her role as the Director of Support Services Database.

“I like that there’s always something new to learn and always hope to achieve better outcomes for families. Having the opportunity to serve Hispanic families across the entire state is also a heart-warming source of satisfaction for me.”

~ Patricia Lanaspá

Patricia says that what she loves most about working for P2P is that she has the opportunity to make a significant impact in the lives of families she serves. She clarifies “significant” meaning the difference between a child remaining at school versus being sent to an alternative school or a juvenile detention center due to actions related to their disability.

Working at Parent to Parent has also opened doors to opportunities which have helped her grow both personally and professionally. She enjoys working with a network of agencies serving the disability community in Georgia and nationwide. For example, she joined the Center for Leadership in Disability (CLD) and served as Chairperson of their Community Advisory Council for two years. During that time, the CLD received several awards from the University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD). Patricia is particularly proud of an award for the CLD's outreach to the Hispanic community in Metro Atlanta. More recently, Patricia has helped support families from Puerto Rico who were displaced due to both Hurricane Irma and Maria. As an emigrant from Uruguay, Patricia can relate to the stress of relocating with one or more children with a disability. She feels uniquely equipped to help them navigate the transition and to provide empathetic one-on-one emotional support as well as critical resources to these families. She adds that technology, such as smartphones with internet access, has also played a growing role in helping reach these families.

When she's not working, Patricia loves spending time with her family at their farm. She describes the farm with its sheep, goats, cows, ducks, dogs and a donkey as giving her a "magical feeling" whenever she's there to witness the cycle of life with the newborn animals. Her son, "Nacho", now 20 years old, also has a special relationship with the animals and truly enjoys caring for them. The farm offers Nacho and the rest of the family a place to relax and escape from the stress of city life. More than anything, Patricia is grateful and as noted in the beginning of her story, she enjoys each day to its fullest.

