Autism Awareness Month

By Margarita Spataro
Children’s Council Child Care Business Coach

April is Autism Awareness Month and I would like to share why this month is so important to me.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention reports that 1 in 44 eight-year-old children have been identified with autism spectrum disorder. There is no known cure or treatment for autism and that is why acceptance and awareness are so key.

I am the mother of a beautiful six-year-old girl, Angelina, who has autism, a severe speech delay and other global delays. I had a very smooth pregnancy with my daughter Angelina. She met most of her developmental milestones up until 18 months. She was able to say “mama” when she was six months old.
As she hit the two-year mark I noticed she had a very limited vocabulary. She would point to things she wanted and exclaim, “ya, ya, ya, ya!” Her vocabulary was very limited, less than ten words, but she was still able to communicate by using hand gestures and pointing. I wasn’t too worried; my nephew had grown out of his speech delay, and you can’t get him to stop talking now.

Through my experience working in after school programs, I knew I could find support for her speech delay through Golden Gate Regional Center (GGRC). I scheduled an evaluation to see if she qualified for early intervention services and speech therapy.

On the day of her evaluation, the speech pathologist said to me, “She will definitely qualify for speech services, but you may also want to get her evaluated for autism.”

I was not prepared to hear that, and my heart sank. I had so many questions and thoughts racing through my mind.

After further evaluations, it was determined that my daughter had other global delays and a severe speech delay. I asked the caseworker, “What do you mean by global delays?” He replied, “Angelina might need more support doing things for herself and she may have an intellectual disability, but she is too young to determine that now. The good news is she does qualify for services through the Lanternman Act.”

Being the parent of a child with special needs comes with many challenges, and it is critical to get support as soon as you can, but there are resources for families. If you suspect your child has a developmental delay, consult your pediatrician as early as possible.
Children’s Council Child Care Business Coach Margarita Spataro’s daughter, Angelina.

My daughter is now six years old and has the cognitive development of a one-and-a-half-year-old. She requires special support to thrive in this world. Navigating services for a child with special needs can feel like a full-time job, but there is help and support through community-based organizations such as GGRC and Support for Families.

Here at Children’s Council, our Family Support Navigators provide coaching to all families through their child care search process, including families with children like my daughter. We are committed to helping families remove barriers to accessing quality child care that meets their unique needs. Additionally, our navigators support families by connecting parents to other resources in the community such as food, parenting classes and much more. To learn more, call 415.343.3300 or email us at rr@childrenscouncil.org.

Autism is not an obvious disability. As a parent of child with autism and special needs, I can tell you that some days are overwhelming. However, there are organizations to get support and that’s the most important thing you can do. If you would like to learn more about local resources for autism, UCSF has an excellent list of Advocacy and Support Services.
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