

fAMILY

MEET

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Parent Advocate of the Month

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WHAT MADE YOU ADVOCATE FOR YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATION?

Every child deserves an equal opportunity to receive proper education, and knowing that I have a child with special needs, he is going to be facing a lifetime worth of obstacles. It is my job as his mother to make sure I am providing him with the tools he will need to face them. One of those tools is using my voice and knowledge to ensure he is consistently getting the care he needs within the school system. I became an advocate for my child's education the moment I saw that decisions about his services were being influenced by factors other than his actual needs and documented evaluations. When choices are made based on anything other than the child's best interest, it becomes a parent's duty to speak up. My son deserves decisions driven by data, compassion, and the law- not by convenience or personal bias- and I intend to ensure that's exactly what happens.

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO EDUCATE YOURSELF ABOUT SPECIAL EDUCATION AND RELATED SERVICES?

Being my child best advocate means everything to me. As a child, I was my only advocate in an extremely challenging and frustrating world. The battles I tried to face alone affected my mental health significantly, and I still battle with those struggles today. When I look at my son and I see that adorable little grin, its a reminder that I will always be his voice when he needs me.



WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE OTHER FAMILIES ADVOCATING FOR THEIR CHILD'S RIGHTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION?

For me, the biggest challenge was understanding a lot of the medical vocabulary used within the IEP and the testing. Not to mention the paperwork can be lengthy, so it is easy to get lost within it all. Don't be afraid to comb through those documents and research what it all means, and contact your local advocacy group! The amount of assistance I was able to receive from Adara has been incredible, not only at guiding me through the mediation process but better understanding the IEP and providing numerous amounts of resources for other therapy services. And never stop fighting for your child, as you are the foundation of what their voice will look like.

WHAT DOES BEING YOUR CHILD'S BEST ADVOCATE MEAN TO YOU?

Research anything you can think of, even if it seems silly. Once I was able to do that, I was able to use what I know about my child and what I have observed to determine whether he was receiving enough resources to succeed this upcoming school year. I started keeping journals of different progresses I see at home, such as if he attempted a new food or if he had difficulty writing, so that I could keep track of areas that he is making strides in. That way, if there is anything happening that needs to be addressed within the IEP meeting, you have a log of data to make the best decision.