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Crossed Roads: A Youth's Journey with Autism and Mental Health Diagnosis

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Disclaimer

This is Nidia Heston's personal experience and it does not reflect the views or opinions of the Texas Health and Human Services system, its agencies, or staff.



Heston Family



- Adrian V, Self Advocate
- Nidia and Adrian IV, Parents



Objectives

Increase understanding:

- Mental health and intellectual developmental disability (IDD) supports in Texas are typically separate providers and systems.
- The importance of practicing self-awareness and advocacy to assist in identifying a child's or youth's strengths and goals and how to express them to providers and systems.
- The importance of engaging in support for both parents, family members and youth.
- Transition is constant throughout the lifetime of the youth and family.



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Dreams are Born!



- Like many young couples, we were elated to be blessed with a bouncing baby boy weighing in at 10 pounds 4 ounces!
- The first six months were a mixture of the anxiety of being new parents and the joys of baby milestones!

In the Beginning

- I was familiar with disabilities and supports because of growing up with a younger sibling who has medical and developmental needs.
- At nine months, my son was no longer engaging with me.
- My son was connected with local Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) organization. After two years, Adrian was found eligible for services.



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Therapies, Systems, and Community Supports



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Speech



Occupational



Physical



Art



Counseling

- ***YES Waiver***
- ***CLASS Waiver***
- ***MDCP Waiver***
- ***ECI***
- ***Public School Individual Education Plan (IEP)***
- ***Private providers***
- ***Community based***



Therapeutic
Horseback
Riding



Music

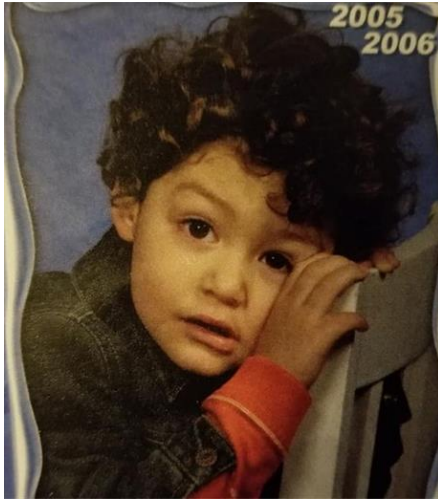


Recreational

Public School and Special Education



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- Adrian moved to public school preschool program for children with disabilities at three years old.
- Adrian began education journey with supports from special education and an individualized education plan.

Life Skills as Important as Academics



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- Explore youth's interests



- Group activities



- Volunteer





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Graduation

- Special education supports were in place until leaving public school in eighth grade, December 2016.
- Ultimately, homeschooling with the support of a tutoring program and the homeschool community was the right fit.
- After discussing options, Adrian chose GED and completed it in October 2020.



Preparing for Transitions



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- Understanding family strengths and goals is the foundation.
- Engaged with Texas Workforce Center at 14 years old. Through a vocational assessment, we learned that Adrian is very capable.
- Family could build on his strengths by helping him with frustration level and tolerance for transition.
- Practicing skills for work and independence through Goodwill job skills services and various internships.



The Crossed Roads Marathon

Key things that worked for our family to help my son meet his goals:

- **YOUTH GUIDED** - Ask **your child or youth** about their dreams and work toward those goals.
- **FAMILY DRIVEN** - Remember that IDD and mental health systems may not have experience working together, youth and family voice are imperative.
- Learn what your youth's strengths are and help providers know how they can be helpful to attain goals.
- Remember who you are as a parent! Practice self-care and be sure that family members do the same. This includes healthy communication, boundaries, and support groups.
- Be familiar with your child's emotional developmental stage. Support them where they are.





Community Based

IDD

- CLASS Waiver (12-year wait)
- Bloom Consulting
- Speech, occupational and physical therapy
- Community social groups
- Art and music therapy
- Homeschool groups
- Greenleaf Neurodiverse Community Center

Mental Health

- YES Waiver
- Psychiatry (multiple)
- Counseling (multiple)
- Community Resource and Coordination Group
- Private school

Combined

- Local Mental Health Authority and Local Intellectual Developmental Disability Authority
- Goodwill Industries
- Austin Community College
- Special education supports in public school
- Equine therapy
- Texas Workforce Center
- Summer youth programs



Navigating systems is more complex than “just a phone call or email”!

Support Your Youth, Yourself, and Your Family



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This journey is a marathon!

Building and supporting resiliency and hopefulness is an essential part of this long-term journey.

- Autism Society of Texas
- Texas Family Voice Network
- Texas Parent to Parent
- Greenleaf Neurodiverse Community Center - Easterseals of Central Texas
- Special education coalition group
- Social gaming groups
- NAMI Central Texas/NAMI Texas
- Various adult hobby groups

*This is a list of community resources we engaged with as a family, but is not a comprehensive list for every family.

Talking About Challenges

Talking about diagnosis, testing, medications
and emotional wellbeing



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Final Point – CELEBRATE ALL THINGS!

Big or small, we celebrate them all!

- Seeking help when he feels hopeless
- Completing educational goals, including first steps of researching programs
- Driving (YIKES!)
- Self initiative to clean his room





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Thank You

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