

TASK

TEAM OF ADVOCATES FOR SPECIAL KIDS

www.taskca.org

“TASK helped me feel empowered. They taught me how to advocate for my daughter.” - Rita Meza

Dear TASK Friend,

We'd like to tell you a story about Rita Meza, the parent of a child with special needs who came to TASK for help 20 years ago. Her story is important, because it's a testament to the valuable work TASK does and our impact on children throughout Southern California.

By the time her daughter, Samantha, was entering kindergarten, Rita was desperate and out of answers. Samantha hadn't reached the developmental milestones she should have. Time and again, professionals reassured her that her daughter was fine. But, they didn't spend as much time with Sam as Rita did. Rita knew otherwise. A family member suggested she call TASK, the nation's second-largest *Parent Training and Information Center*. It was a pivotal step that empowered her to get the help she needed.

When Samantha was born, Rita was young and inexperienced. She watched Sam alongside her nieces and nephews and saw that she was developing slower than they were - wasn't crawling, walking, or talking. The pediatrician told her not to worry, but Rita had lingering doubts.

By age three, Sam still wasn't speaking, just grunting and pointing. She seemed uninterested in the phonics program Rita often played, so she put it away. Then, one day a friend showed Sam some flash cards. To Rita's surprise, Sam understood what the words meant. She was three and could read! Clearly, she was smart. But, something was still wrong. At preschool Sam played alone in the sandbox. In public places, she often had major meltdowns. Concerned, Rita had her formally assessed, but was told she was fine and didn't qualify for services.

Before enrolling in kindergarten, Sam's preschool provided a school readiness report. “They described Sam as a loner who didn't participate,” recalls Rita. The letter only reinforced what she already suspected. “I was heartbroken. Why hadn't the teachers talked to me sooner?” She'd been looking to the teachers for guidance. She needed answers.

Eventually, Rita called TASK. The Family Support Specialist she spoke to really listened. She too had a child with special needs and understood the need for intervention before another year passed. TASK provided validation, emotional support, information and a step-by-step strategy for getting Sam the support she needed.

“TASK was so helpful that first year!” Rita recalls. “Staff was always available, giving me literature, offering free workshops, and providing referrals.”

Over the years, Rita returned to TASK for help. Staff told her what wording to include in letters and said, “don't take ‘no’ for an answer.”



ALMOST 40 YEARS

Empowering people with disabilities and their families

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It was the boost Rita needed.

Like a sponge, Rita absorbed everything TASK offered - workshops, referrals, and one-on-one consults.

“As I hit roadblocks or new challenges with Sam, I came back to TASK. They were always there. I didn’t have much money and TASK’s services were free. It was so helpful.”

TASK taught Rita that Sam needed a transition plan - a plan that outlines the life skills or vocational training a child needs to prepare for adulthood. Rita studied Sam’s interests and saw a persistent love for animals. She fostered this by adding an animal “angle” to whatever Sam did for school, helping her develop expertise in a subject she naturally gravitated toward.

It worked! This spring, Sam graduated from Cal Poly Pomona with a BS in Animal Health Science. She passed her licensing exams and plans to become a Veterinary Technician!

And Rita? She came to work for TASK! This spring, she was promoted to Project Manager.

“I’m following my passion now, helping others like me. I listen to parents and hear their frustration, desperation, concern... I know this parent has probably called ten different agencies and we’re their last hope. That was me 20 years ago!”

If you’ve benefitted from TASK’s services, you know what a difference it makes in the life of a child. Invest in parent empowerment. It’s the best gift you can make this holiday season.



Won’t you join us in supporting TASK with a tax-deductible donation?

Thank you!

Mario Haug
Executive Director

John Hess
President, Board of Trustees

P.S. Your tax-deductible gift will support parent empowerment workshops, the most effective way to maximize dollars for the benefit of kids with special needs. Please make your gift today, or make an online donation at www.taskca.org.

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