



Advocates for Justice and Education, Inc.
The Parent Training and Information Center for the District of Columbia

AJE UPDATE

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Sterling's Mom

Ms. Karen Wills-Henry learned that her baby boy, Sterling, would need early intervention and most likely special education services when he was 6 months. Sterling was born premature and was monitored from birth for developmental milestones. She and the family's doctors noticed several developmental delays. She was told by her obstetrician and her son's pediatrician that she should leave DC and move to a city with a stronger system of support and services for children with disabilities. Leaving the District was not an option, but she "had to figure out a way to make it work, and that became my job," said Ms. Wills-Henry. Ms. Wills-Henry was determined to learn everything she needed to know to ensure that Sterling would be able to fully develop and participate in society as the peers in her son's age group

"It's a blur..." said Ms. Wills-Henry as she tried to recall the first steps she took to get Sterling the services he needed. First, she picked up the phone and started contacting individuals and organizations. She attended trainings for providers, which was the beginning of her journey of self-education. At the trainings, she learned about the Individuals with Disability Education Improvement Act (IDEA), transition, the District of Columbia's regulations, and her son's



heart wrenching battles, but she has never given up. In the 8th grade, her son scored below level on the math portion of the DC-CAS; he also entered the grade level that year on a 2nd grade

Today, Sterling is a graduating senior who is in the top 5% of his class. He scored proficient on the reading and math sections of the DC-CAS. Ms. Wills-Henry also proudly shared with us that once Sterling earns his diploma, he will be going to college in the fall.

We hope that Ms. Wills-Henry's journey is one of encouragement and empowerment to you and other parents advocating for their children. Ms. Wills-Henry offered advice to other parents. She said, "If we keep it positive, everyone around us will keep it positive." Ms. Wills-Henry would sit in Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings, and all she heard was what her son could not do. She always focused on what Sterling was able to do and encouraged others (his teachers and related service providers) to do the same. She also stresses that it is very important to know your child in terms of their disability and how it impacts him or her. "Each child has different needs," said Ms. Wills-Henry, "and the resources to accommodate him or her must be found. There isn't a treasure box of resources, but the school is obligated to educate."

In this story, Ms. Wills-Henry mentioned that she received training on advocating for her son,

Early intervention is the process of providing services, education and support to young children (0-2) who are deemed to have a disability that may result in a developmental delay, an existing delay or a child who is at-risk of developing a delay or special need that may affect their development or impede their education.

disability. She did a lot of research to gain all of the information and to be able to effectively advocate for Sterling. "It was tough," she recalled.

Figuring out a way to "make it work" as Ms. Wills-Henry put it has been her job for the last 17 years. There have been several distressing and

reading level and was promoted to the next grade while at the same reading level. The worst part was that Sterling had never been taught the information on the test. Ms. Wills-Henry advocated that Sterling receive all of the accommodations and services he needed to perform at his grade level.

and understanding the special education process. As the Parent Training and Information Center of the District of Columbia, AJE offers training on your rights as a parent, how to effectively advocate, and much more! Call our office today to find out about the next training or visit our website @ www.aje-dc.org to access the schedule.

Tip #1: Talk to Other Parents

Talking to other parents allows you the opportunity to gain, learn, and share information. In talking to other parents, we are also able to support each other.