

The Access Point Project

A Voice for Special Needs Families

By Camille Dawson

When a child or loved one has special needs, the last thing you want to worry about is being able to afford the resources to help them lead the best life possible. But for many families, that's exactly what it comes down to. But now, this is where the Access Point Project comes in.

Just established in November 2016, The Access Point Project (TAPP) is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing needs and services to individuals with disabilities and their family members. Among TAPP's extensive list of resources, are schools, advocacy, residential, educational, therapeutic and vocational programs, as well as life coaching, adult day programs, therapies, respite, and entrepreneurial opportunities, just to name a few.

Founders Annette Lizardo and Kim Arteaga are parents of special needs children and have lived the frustration of seeking proper education, medical, advocacy and so much more. Founders Robin Jones and Belkis Aguilar-Coupet had serviced the population for over a decade through education and intervention. Their experiences and the shortcomings of many local opportunities for their clients, over time began to design in their minds what one day would sum up the vision of TAPP. Together, these two moms and two clinicians formulated a team with the initiative, drive and sincere desire to tackle the many aspects affecting a special needs family. Through their comprehensive campus network consisting of services through the lifespan, they set out to bridge the gaps of funding, transitional services and recreational opportunities for families. The TAPP team and its vision has slowly taken shape from 2016 to now and they look forward to continued growth and partnerships as their vision continues to become a reality.

"Our services span from intensive early intervention, to schools, and adult day training. TAPP was created as an umbrella of programs to cover the entire lifespan of a client," explained Denise Negron, Development and Outreach Coordinator at TAPP.

These programs are separated into four categories, including Blossoming Minds and Developmental Intervention Specialists, Inc. (from diagnosis to 5 years old, Early Intervention), Rock Point Academy (K through 22), A.C.C.E.S.S. Academy (ages 14 to 22, Transition High School), and lastly A.C.C.E.S.S. Career Center (ages 18 and over, Vocational Based Adult Day Training).

Despite still being in their very first year, TAPP is already serving over 60 individuals, and growing every day. "Our vision is to develop a center with all the services included in one place, like a 'one-stop-shop' for families. We will bring professionals, service providers, and specialists to join us in our mission. We look forward to a great collaboration that will serve our community with the best quality of services."

Having previously worked for the local chapter of Autism Speaks, Denise joined TAPP in March of this year. "I have



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been involved in this community for over 10 years. Now, I am so thrilled to be part of this team and, more than anything, to be able to serve our local community that is so much in need of services and resources," shared Denise.

"As a parent of a child with special needs, it is so challenging not only emotionally, but economically. When our son was diagnosed with autism there was nothing available, not even a lot of information about autism. Also, at that time, the therapies were not covered by any insurance and we had to pay out of pocket. Consequently, we ended up losing our home, because we had to decide between the mortgage or the therapies."

"Changing lives is our motto, and our biggest satisfaction is when you see how much our students improve in all areas. We don't look at their disability, we look at what their abilities are, so we can maximize their capabilities to their fullest potential."

In addition to their own efforts, TAPP also works with other organizations, like Love Serving Autism, Inc., and The Town of Lake Clarke Shores. As the organization grows, TAPP would like to continue expanding their services throughout the county. Once they are able to do so, TAPP will be the first center in Palm Beach County with all services and resources in one place.

Denise and the rest of the team at TAPP are excited to continue their mission, and improving families' lives. While they recognize there is still much more work to be done, they are ready to accept all challenges through, their own, Access Point.

To learn more about TAPP, or find out how you can assist their mission, you can visit TheAccessPoint.org, or call 866-537-2253 (TAPP).

