



Infant Development Association of California

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HIGHLIGHT

FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER HIGHLIGHT: Highlight: ParentsCAN Family Resource Center, Napa, CA

ParentsCAN is a nonprofit (501c3) Family Resource Center dedicated to empowering families of children with disabilities in Napa County, birth through adult. ParentsCAN offers a drop-in Center, comprehensive disability library, a family support phone line, several support groups and workshop offerings, a quarterly newsletter, and an educational web site all available to families both in English and Spanish.

ParentsCAN is proud to partner with the Napa County Office of Education to provide Early Intervention services for families of infants and toddlers, birth to three years of age. The Napa County Early Start educational program is the Napa Infant and Preschool Program (NIPP), which provides family-centered intervention to families of children with disabilities. Early Start services at NIPP include home visiting, individual therapy, parent education classes on language facilitation and sensory integration, and team consultations. Through a contract with the Napa County Office of Education, families in Napa County also receive unique parent-to-parent services from ParentsCAN.

When a child is referred to NIPP for early intervention services ParentsCAN staff is the first to meet the new family in their home. "Parent Community Liaisons" from ParentsCAN, who are parents of children with disabilities themselves, reach out to the new parents to arrange an initial home visit. Parent-led home visiting is a unique opportunity for parents to speak to another parent or family member who has "experienced" the system first hand, truly providing an insiders view. Honest peer perspectives build trust and investment in the services being offered. Parent Liaisons listen to the parents concerns regarding their child, explain the process of early intervention, and gather the needed information and paperwork to move the family to the next step. New parents learn why it is important for them to participate in early intervention services, hear what to expect in the assessment process, learn the importance of sharing with professionals their own experiences with their infant, and how important it is to ask questions. Parents entering the system report that they feel free to ask another parent the questions that they would not necessarily want to ask a professional. The professionals find that because of the parent-led home visiting service, their assessments are more thorough and complete taking less time. This partnership

between ParentsCAN and NIPP is a win-win situation. ParentsCAN Parent Community Liaisons not only listen actively to parents story of the hope and heartache of learning your child has significant needs, but also assists the family with the initial paper work for assessment, and are able to develop long-term relationships as a new parent becomes actively involved in the program and is invited to participate in other parent activities. One such activity is "Family Connections," a weekly play date and support group that is co-facilitated by ParentsCAN liaisons and the NIPP staff. The group provides parents with opportunities to experience play time with their child and other infants with special needs, it allows parents to interact with other parents whose children are also receiving services, and from time to time to hear from other local community resources. This Family Connections group emphasizes the goals and philosophy of the NIPP program: That parents learn from other parents, children learn through play, and supportive relationships are a long-lasting effective type of intervention.

"It has always been the culture of our community to value the parent voice, to move on parent concerns, and to assure that families have their needs met," says Andrea Knowlton, the Director for Early Childhood Services. Ms Knowlton understands the need for Parent-to-Parent support. She feels strongly that families need to understand how to navigate systems, and access local resources. "What better way to learn it than from someone who has been there! ParentsCAN provides that key link for parents."

Besides the direct service, doing initial home visits and the weekly parent support, the ParentsCAN Family Community Liaisons participate in weekly roundtables with the Napa Infant Program's Early Intervention teachers, staff from North Bay Regional Center's Early Intervention Department, the Medical Therapy Unit of California Children Services and Public Health. ParentsCAN Community Liaisons provide the parent voice, and are key participants in the interagency team that plans interventions and provides a significant part of the strong base of Early Start Services in Napa County.

For more information about ParentsCAN Family Resource Center go to www.parentscan.org or call 707-253-7444. Parents CAN is located at 3299 Claremont Way, Suite 3, Napa CA 94558