

Overcoming Educational and Health Disparities for African American Children with Autism: How Parent Resource Coordinators Connect Families to Services

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Introduction

Parent Resource Coordinators (PRCs) play a pivotal role in reducing the healthcare disparities for children with disabilities. This is especially true for African American and Latino children. Research has found that African American children are less likely to receive a diagnosis of autism at an early age thus reducing access to early intervention^(1, 2). Additionally, access to care and services has proven to be a significant factor to early intervention. PRCs work with families to address the barriers to intervention. Thus far, significant increases in interventions and supports are shown for African American families working with PRCs in Omaha, Nebraska. The outcomes reveal that families that are connected to services, trainings, and supports can overcome the obstacles that prevented access to early intervention services and community resources.

Vignettes of Families Prior to Working with PRCs

LaToya is a 17 year-old girl diagnosed with autism, profound speech and language impairment, significant developmental disabilities, self-injurious behaviors, and aggressive behaviors. She has had multiple school placements, numerous suspensions, and multiple referrals (at no fault to the family) to child protective services due to truancy. LaToya's family does not have transportation and her mother is unable to work more than 20 hours a week due LaToya's behaviors. Due to the intensity of LaToya's behaviors, the family was unable to utilize public transportation or respite. Out of home placement was strongly considered.

Chris is a 5 year-old boy diagnosed with autism and severe speech and language impairment. They did not have transportation and were at risk of eviction due to Chris's behavior. Although Chris is nonverbal, he had never been evaluated for augmentative communication despite repeated parental requests for support. Due to transportation issues, the family was denied access to early intervention services. Additionally, the family was not receiving respite services despite eligibility.

Marcus is a 2 year-old boy diagnosed with autism, asthma, and epilepsy, and his family are refugees from Sierra Leone. Due to language and transportation barriers that posed complications acquiring medications, Marcus has had multiple emergency room visits and hospitalizations. Child Protective Services had been notified of possible neglect. Additionally, he was not receiving any early intervention or respite services. Out of home placement was being considered.

Vignettes of Families After Working with PRCs

LaToya

- Receiving intensive therapy for severe behaviors
- Behavioral health services
- Transportation services provided to provide community engagement and transition planning
- After nine months of not leaving her home, now attending school daily. Her mother is working with the local American Job Center on career skills and preparing for a certificate program.
- Out of home placement is no longer being considered.

Chris

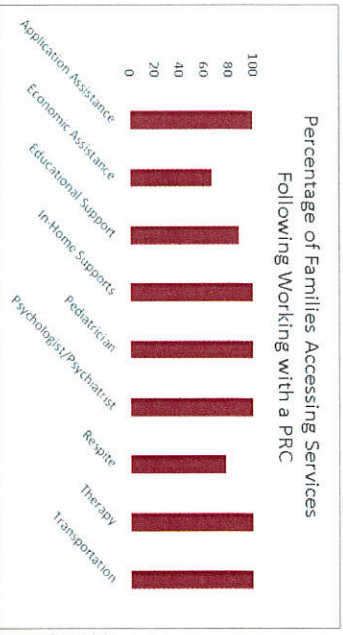
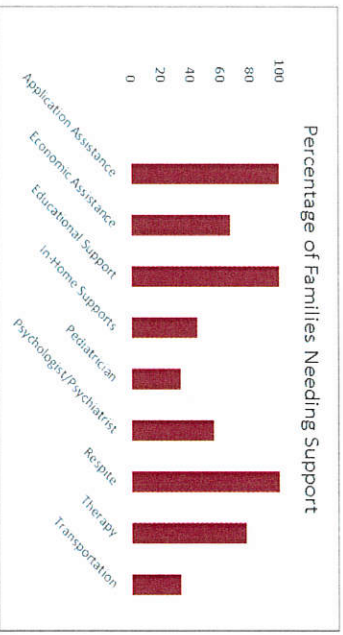
- Has a augmentative communication device
- Functionally communicating with his mother for the first time.
- Connected to a local pharmacy that delivers prescriptions to the home.
- Attending early intervention services twenty-five hours per week.
- A respite center was identified, and family is receiving respite services for 2 1/2 hours every Sunday.

Marcus

- Connected to a faith-based agency that supports refugee families.
- Transition attending all appointments and coordinating transportation.
- Connected to a local pharmacy that delivers prescriptions to the home.
- Received durable medical equipment for his asthma and seizures
- Receiving early intervention services within the home.
- Declined respite at this time as they no longer feel overwhelmed with Marcus's care.
- Out of home placement is no longer being considered.

Conclusion

Disparities in access to supports and services were found for African American children diagnosed with autism. Evidence demonstrates that although rates of diagnosis for autism occur at the same rates in all racial groups, diagnosis and intervention for African American children occurs later than other ethnic groups. As a result, African American children may require longer and more intensive interventions. Working with Parent Resource Coordinators can help eliminate disparities in access to the necessary care and early intervention thus decreasing significant familial stress.



Works Cited
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