

## Mission

One Child at a Time Advocacy Project provides financial assistance for families who would otherwise be unable to access special education advocacy due to socioeconomic status.

## Vision

All children with disabilities receive placement in the least restrictive environment and appropriate services as guaranteed by law.

## Why

Too many children with both visible and invisible disabilities are lost and alone at school because they are without the support to access the education their typically abled peers are given. Lower income families are treated differently by the system, and their outcomes are far below those of their more privileged peers. Early intervention can change the trajectory of these children's lives, but their families are alone and confused by the special education process. To best create an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for their child, they need to be informed of their rights and of what supports and services are guaranteed to them by law. Many districts are collaborative and want the best for all students, but many take advantage of parents and guardians who don't know the process. An advocate to guide them is essential, but many cannot afford the assistance. ALL children deserve the same access to the appropriate services and accommodations to thrive and reach their fullest potential.

## History

The story of One Child at a Time Advocacy Project began with Melinda Davis-Gillinger and her daughter, Krysta, who was born profoundly deaf at a time when their family was not able to get the support they needed. Melinda was thus forced to forge her own path through special education where none had existed. She returned to school, achieved her Master's in Special Education, and founded Melinda Gillinger & Consultants (MG&C) with a team of advocates as passionate as she. Since beginning her work, Melinda has seen so many children whose families cannot afford the services of an advocate, as well as families who fall on hard times and are not able to continue with professional help. To help these children and families, Melinda founded One Child at a Time Advocacy Project in the summer of 2022, so that children of all socioeconomic backgrounds will have the same opportunities to thrive..

This fund was founded in the summer of 2022 and incorporated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in July of 2023, Tax EIN: 93-2527838.

## Goals

One Child at a Time Advocacy Project's goals:

- Ensure that more families will have someone to fight for them within the special education system
- Raise awareness of the necessity of special education consultancy for impacting children's lives
- Improve the outcomes of these children with special needs who want to learn
- Increase parents' confidence in participating in their children's education

## Who We Serve

One Child at a Time Advocacy Project serves children with disabilities from families of lower income and from each of the thirteen special education eligibilities. Many children and their families are dual-language, whether spoken or American Sign Language (ASL), which creates additional challenges for them in school and for their parents within the IEP system. Some helped by One Child are from single-parent families who are unable to pay for special education consultancy or who have fallen on hard times and are unable to continue with assistance already begun. One Child Advocacy Project assists families who earn 80% or below the median income of their area, and depending on factors such as family size and/or other expenses, are eligible for either free or reduced-rate consultancy service. Our program's recipients are from diverse backgrounds and abilities, but they share one thing: a desire to learn and reach their fullest potential.

## Case Study

Alex\*, a child who is profoundly deaf, moved with his mom from China to the US to get Cochlear Implants (CIs) and a better access to special education programs. In addition to his hearing loss, Alex is a dual language learner, with English at school and Mandarin exclusively at home. The district took advantage of his mom's lack of fluency in English and neither provided translated documents nor explained her rights in the IEP process. Mom was desperate for help and knew she was being mistreated.

Alex is smart – possibly gifted – so the school repeatedly insisted that he had no needs. They tried to get his mom to agree to take his IEP away and transition to a 504 plan, disregarding the many needs related to his hearing loss and use of his CIs. Thankfully, mom reached out to MG&C, and with the help of an interpreter and generous donations made to One Child Advocacy Project, We are working toward securing appropriate goals and services. Due to our amazing donors, Alex can continue to develop his self-advocacy skills and access his education through his accommodations.

\*name changed

## How

Assistance from One Child at a Time Advocacy Project provides each struggling family with a special education consultant, who will perform all necessary services to achieve appropriate education in the least restrictive setting for their child. This includes: evaluating assessment reports; ensuring that the family is fully prepared for all upcoming IEP meetings; communicating with the district and/or any service providers on their behalf; reviewing all reports and drafting responses; and attending all meetings.

## Budget

We intend to serve 30-50 families this year, and to do so, we've set an initial goal of raising \$200,000 for the 2023-2024 season. With nominal overhead costs, approximately 75-80% of total donations will go toward helping advocate for children with disabilities and their families.