

#ThinkABILITY

MEGAN ANDERSON

We weren't sure if it would ever happen. I'll never forget the day my daughter sat down next to me and was able to blend words. She then could actually string words together and read a sentence. This was a long day coming but it finally arrived. She was already 8 years old and behind most kids in developing reading skills – but it finally happened. I remember sitting there crying like a baby because one teacher said she'd probably never learn how to read and even gave her permission to stop trying. I was told I was being unrealistic and causing unnecessary pressure on Megan. Thankfully, one teacher changed her life forever and taught her how to read; many others followed suit and didn't give up on this precious little girl. Yes, there was the occasional teacher that turned into a speed bump along the way, but for the most part, there was always a caring one right behind that speed bump to remind us we were still on course.

As a Mama Bear, I didn't always make nice with teachers that weren't on the same agenda as I was for my children. From the first day they started school, there were very specific expectations which included graduating from high school and becoming a productive member of society. This included a job, homeownership, tax paying citizen and hopefully marriage and children.



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Because of our fortitude, we never let naysayers change the course of our ship. Sometimes it felt like we were building the ship while steering it and several times we felt like the ship was sinking – but we just doubled up on buckets to get the water out of the boat and kept going.

Megan was born and appeared to be a typically developing child. She met all of her milestones on time. She did start developing a stutter not long after she started talking in sentences. She was evaluated and started receiving speech services at 3 years old. She would later be evaluated for additional services once we realized she wasn't learning how to read. After much debating with school evaluators and a private evaluator, it was determined that Megan had a severe case of dyslexia which included visual and auditory perception deficits, dysgraphia, and ADD.

After her diagnosis and a change of schools, her elementary years went by without too many speed bumps; however, the middle school years presented more challenges. I contributed a lot of this to the age of middle schoolers in general. These hormonal creatures often take on a new life and for the first time, she experienced teasing, isolation and in some cases pure meanness. Inclusion seemed to be a foreign place to the staff and I must have heard one hundred times how that wasn't going to prepare her for high school. The reality was her best teachers were general education teachers and the whole inclusion project, which is what I called it, proved to be successful when she passed her LEAP test and was able to move onto 9th grade. Indeed, inclusion was the exact thing that prepared her for high school.

Megan survived high school and was pretty sure the teachers threw a party on the last day celebrating never having to deal with me again at one of her IEP meetings. A big part of the high school experience is deciding what you want to do when you leave high school. For students receiving special education services, a transition plan is put in place to guide the process smoothly. Unfortunately, not everyone on the team was on the same page. One of her teachers suggested she could get a job at Ochsner in dietary delivering hospital trays. Megan loved to talk and this would give her the opportunity to walk around the hospital, talking to all kinds of people – plus Ochsner would be a great place to work. Megan looked at them and in a not so happy tone informed them that she was not interested in delivering hospital trays ANYWHERE. Instead, she followed her passion of loving children and started working in a child care center doing aftercare, earned

her American Red Cross Life Guard Certification and worked as a lifeguard during the summer and earned her American Red Cross Swim Instructor Certification and still teaches swimming lessons today.

After high school, Megan would eventually go work for Ochsner Hospital. Instead of delivering hospital trays she worked on a data team that analyzed hospital data on patients receiving critical care and things like code blue services. Because of the strong advocacy role model I provided and taught her; our tenacity and resilience, she would find her place in the world.

Fast forward – Today Megan is a very successful young woman. She married her high school sweetheart in 2010, purchased their first home in 2011 and became a mother in 2012. In addition to Ochsner, she previously worked as an office manager in the EarlySteps program and currently works as a development associate with a local charter school.

Megan is living proof that you can indeed be successful even when others have very limited expectations for you. All she needed was a mother that wouldn't give up on her and determination to dock the ship.



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#Think**ABILITY** is a month long social media campaign to celebrate the accomplishments of individuals with disabilities. The campaign is coordinated by Families Helping Families of Jefferson and held annually during the month of **March**. Learn more about it at <http://fhfjefferson.org/whats-going-on/special-events/thinkability>

Changing Lives. Every Day.