

GROWING Self-Advocacy

by Raquel Castaneda

Samantha and her mother, Tammy, came in contact with Families Helping Families of Jefferson (FHF) through our Interagency Transition Team meetings held every semester at all the high schools in Jefferson Parish. Since our first meeting at East Jefferson High School, Samantha has grown to be a great example for others. When we first crossed paths, she was very shy and did not talk a lot about her disability and her everyday life, but as time progressed, she blossomed into a great self-advocate.

FHF holds a popular event for high school students annually titled, "Transition Mission: Exploring Avenues."

Samantha attended this event for the past two years, but at this year's event, she actually presented as a part of the self-advocacy panel. This was a huge step for her and she did a fantastic job. Samantha was able to share with her peers how she advocates daily at school, home, and other locations. Prior to the event, she shared how nervous she was but really wanted to help her peers understand the importance of self-advocacy. That statement alone means she truly understands the worth of what she did.

Since the first time Samantha and her mom met us at the transition meetings, they began attending many of our workshops to learn about transition, local services, and education. They also have never missed an Interagency Transition Team meeting. This is so important because there are changes that happen every year and staying in contact with the team ensured they were up-to-date with the most current information. Through these workshops and meetings, they have learned a lot about community support and services, and options for post-secondary education and employment opportunities. They also assisted Samantha in exploring her choices and provided her with the aid she needed to achieve her transition goals.

Samantha is now an East Jefferson High School graduate and is very proud to be so. Congrats Samantha! We are so proud of you!



Samantha