

HOMETOWN HERO:

Sonja Bradley

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Not long ago, Sonja began talking with a small group of other moms who were also dropping their children off each morning at Point Pleasant Elementary School for the Infants and Toddlers Program classes. Each of them began to realize how powerfully healing it was to share their child’s trials and triumphs with another parent who understood what they were experiencing. This group grew closer and met nearly every day to listen to each other and to offer and receive advice about how to overcome the challenges of being a parent of a child with an autism spectrum disorder and how to support the teachers in their children’s classrooms. Over time, they began discussing that someone should form a parent and teacher’s organization for parents of children with special needs who require services from the school district, but who aren’t yet in kindergarten.

This group of women reached out to other parents, like me, who were totally overwhelmed by our son’s recent ASD diagnosis and the events that followed. Through their experience and guidance, they helped other parents, like me, realize that we were not alone and that this did not have to be a hopeless journey. It wasn’t long before Sonja and the original members of her support group decided that if no such parent teacher organization existed, then they were going to do whatever it took to form one. These moms researched, wrote letters, made phone calls, set up meetings, posted flyers all over the county, and took every single, difficult, time-consuming, necessary step to create a formal organization to help the parents and teachers of children with special needs from birth to five years of age support one another.

These brave, visionary, dedicated women formed the organization that is now called the Friends of Early Childhood Intervention. This organization supports thousands of families across the county and the educators who teach their young children with special needs. This organization is a vital resource for parents and teachers to share and to learn from one another. I am incredibly thankful for the tireless efforts of Sonja Bradley in the formation of this incredible organization. For all of these reasons, she is a Hometown Hero to so many parents, teachers and children in Anne Arundel County.