

Becoming a Mom of an Autistic Boy Helped Me Grow

My name is Brooklynn June. I am humbled and honored to share my story in hopes that it will give a mother, father or caretaker a glimpse of hope and a sense of knowing there is help out there.

When I was 25 years old, I gave birth to a bountiful healthy baby boy on Dec 2, 2018. Being so blessed to have a child also came with its challenges. I was in labor for days and the birth of my son was difficult, but I would do it all over again just for him. I knew from the day he was born I was blessed.

Shakeur started walking and talking a little bit at the age of 1. But I noticed some instances where Shakeur was stimming (also known as self-stimulating repetitive movements and behavior). For example, he liked to cross his index finger over his middle finger repetitively. I also noticed that his eye contact was very minimal. These were some early signs of autism.

I noticed his speech started to regress when he was about 2 years old. We would go to his annual scheduled doctor's appointments and the doctor would say everything seemed to be going well. At the age of 3 during his annual checkup, the doctor asked me if Shakeur was saying more than 50 words. When I mentioned he was not, the doctor said it was probably time to get him in school. During this appointment, Shakeur was also evaluated by a behavioral health specialist who informed me he may be showing signs of autism.

Shakeur was officially diagnosed with level three high functioning autism. Children on this end of the spectrum tend to have immense difficulty socializing, speaking, and are often nonverbal. I was told my child would likely be greatly distressed in situations outside of his comfort zone. When I heard this, I did not necessarily get scared, but rather it was more of an "ah-ha" moment. It explained some of his other behaviors that I had noticed early on. I was told Shakeur would need help for the remainder of his life, including the need for multiple therapies.

Shakeur is now 5 years old, and we live in Los Angeles. Prior to moving back to California, where he was originally born, we lived in Phoenix where he was first diagnosed. At that point, I knew I had to start doing more for my son to ensure he received the proper care and help to gain the skills he needed to adapt to the world just like anyone else. Although I knew it would look a little differently for him. I was able to find him a specialized school in Arizona after having him attend a private preschool where he struggled in tremendously. The specialized school was a perfect fit, it provided him with speech therapy and ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis) therapy.

Shakeur's speech was my biggest concern. I struggled with sending him to school not knowing if he was truly going to be ok because he was not able to communicate with me about how he was feeling. When Shakeur started to attend the specialized school, I noticed major progress and improvements in his behavior, like his emotional regulations, motor skills and socialization.

Since deciding to move back to California I was very anxious. I knew there was the possibility that he would regress because change can be very difficult for a child with autism. Although, he has been doing well, we have had some challenges. I wasn't sure where exactly to start when a friend told me about Help Me Grow LA. I felt an instant relief.

They have been able to connect me to many resources such as my local regional center, who helped provide services in my area. Help Me Grow LA connected me with a Family Partner who showed me how to apply for MediCal and social security, and assisted in finding resources for housing and food. She checked on us frequently while we waited for his insurance to be available.

Shakeur's name means thankfulness. I'm extremely thankful for my little boy soon to be teenager, and then an adult. I was told autism isn't something Shakeur would grow out of, although, many people around me may think that. I know with the proper help and tools he will be successful. With the resources provided by Help Me Grow LA I have been able to find a school in our area that supplies all the therapies he needs in one location. We are excited to continue his progress and growth.

Help Me Grow LA is imperative for parents like me looking for a community that not only provides support but understands what we need. Sometimes that's just a little help to continue growth on our journey. I now truly understand what it means when we say it takes a village to raise a child.