

New website aims to streamline services for those with autism in San Antonio

EN expressnews.com/news/local/article/New-website-aims-to-streamline-services-for-those-9981750.php

By Brittney Martin, Staff Writer

•



Photo: William Luther /San Antonio Express-News

Image 1 of 6

Joseph Sanchez looks out toward the playground Oct. 18, 2016, at Any Baby Can after he decided he had had enough of an Express-News photographer taking his picture. Joseph is one of the many children with ... [more](#)

Joseph Sanchez was 18 months old when his mom noticed a problem. He wasn't speaking yet or responding to directions.

His pediatrician brushed off the concern, saying it was normal for boys to develop slower than girls. But just before he turned 3, he was referred to the Autism Community Network, where he was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

Over the next two years, Joseph received occupational and speech therapy from the Brighton Center, referral services from The Arc of San Antonio and treatment through the Autism Treatment Center. His mother, Linda Fierro, attends a family support group at Any Baby Can.

Those five agencies and four others are part of a new coalition called Autism Lifeline Links, and on Tuesday, they launched a website that's meant to help those on the autism spectrum and their families connect to services.

Tullos Wells, managing director of the [Kronkosky Charitable Foundation](#), which funds the new nonprofit coalition, said the website — [autismlifelinelinks.org](#) — will serve as a single point of entry for families once their loved one receives an autism diagnosis.

"They can fill out those forms one time, and not have to go chasing around the city trying to find each of those different services," Wells said.

The website was created in response to a report released in May that said [more than 30,000 people](#) in the San Antonio area were on the autism spectrum. One of the biggest problems identified in the study was the dearth of qualified providers in the area that treat autism, resulting in long wait times.

[HealthGrove | Graphiq](#)

"The key to really treating autism is early diagnosis and intervention, and in San Antonio and across the nation we know that there are really long wait times and not enough services to effectively treat autism," said Berenice de la Cruz, chief operating officer at Autism Community Network.

[Applied Behavioral Analysis](#), or ABA therapy, is considered the "gold standard" of treatment for autism, but it's most effective when children start early. Joseph was on a wait list for a year before starting ABA in July. His mother says she's already seen progress, and Joseph is now speaking in five-word sentences.

The goal of Autism Lifeline Links is to eventually eliminate wait times in the San Antonio area.

In addition to connecting families with services, the website will collect data that the coalition hopes will help service providers make treatment more efficient.

"We're gathering data to determine how we can collectively work to create a community that is able to provide timely and effective treatment for all people impacted by autism," de la Cruz said.

Dr. James Rubin, whose team at TAVHealth created the online platform, said the system will capture information about lifestyles, support networks and barriers that will give "professionals the insight needed to achieve the best possible outcomes for every person."

[HealthGrove | Graphiq](#)

Fierro said her son might have progressed further at this point if he hadn't spent a year waiting to enter treatment.

"My son could've been doing more within that year if there were enough programs and availability for other children," Fierro said.

bmartin@express-news.net