Meet 2 1/2 year old Meredith

*Meredith's Story, written by her mother, Tina Carney*

"Meredith is a joyful, tenacious, curious 2 ½ year old. When I expressed concern about Meredith’s lack of speech, some said, 'She’ll talk when she wants to, her brother’s talk for her.' I disagreed. She speaks in gibberish or jargon and it is very challenging, time consuming, frustrating, and sometimes exhausting to try to figure out what she is trying to say.

Tantrums are a developmentally appropriate behavior for toddlers. However, not having the ability to use words to communicate her wants and needs has increased Meredith’s frustration and led to more tantrums than usual. I can tell she has stories to share, opinions to express, and questions to ask. But she’s locked in her mind and gets mad at us because we have a hard time understanding her."
I applied for Early Intervention Services for Meredith in January 2019. The initial evaluation, completed in March 2019, showed that she met the eligibility criteria to receive services in the area of communication. However, Meredith would have to be waitlisted to receive the recommended speech therapy due to no providers being available to provide the service. I recall, hearing the exasperation in the Early Intervention service coordinators voice as she had to inform me that Meredith would have to wait to receive services. I could tell that she was bracing herself thinking I would be angry at her. She must get berated often. I told her that I knew about the current early intervention crisis and that I wasn’t angry with her and she exhaled a sigh of relief. They are doing absolutely everything they can to get our children what they need, and yet many children are going without.

It’s infuriating to see Meredith continue to struggle because of the lack of early intervention providers. She’s furious too but doesn’t have the words to articulate her anger. I owe it to her to use my words to advocate for her rights as well as the rights of all the children in NYS who want to communicate but CAN’T. Meredith can’t wait."

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**Our View: Early Victory Helps Build Momentum for Kids Can’t Wait Initiative**

We are extremely thankful for the Health Foundation for Western and Central New York for their support of the Kids Can’t Wait Initiative.

[Click Here](https://thechildrensagenda.salsalabs.org/KidsCantWaitJuly20190_copy1) to read why the Health Foundation for Western and Central New York believes in this campaign and the impact it is already having on children in need of Early Intervention (EI) and Preschool Special Education (PSE) programs.

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**Interfaith Advocacy for Children!**
In October, diverse congregations from throughout Monroe County will honor children with special worship and education activities based on their respective faith traditions.

They will also invite congregants to sign a letter urging Gov. Cuomo to take action to address the crisis in EI and PSE.

The letter will include the following request to Governor Cuomo -"I urge you to take action to ensure that New Yorkers ages birth to 5 with developmental delays and disabilities are receiving services to which they are entitled, such as evaluations, speech/language therapy, physical and occupational therapy, and other services. These vital services help children grow to their full potential and save a great deal of money by reducing the need for special education and other services later in life. Specifically, I ask you to: 1) Improve the system serving these vulnerable young children by aligning and better coordinating Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education programs, and 2) Increase payment rates to Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education professionals in the New York State 2020-21 budget, to retain providers and reduce waiting lists."

We’ll also be collecting signatures in non-profit organizations, colleges, medical and therapy practices and businesses. Our goal is to collect 2,000 letters!

Want to help? Contact Brigit at bhurley@thechildrensagenda.org or (585) 256-2620 ext. 2602.

Parents Taking Action!
Three Rochester area parents who are deeply concerned about the current issues plaguing the Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education Systems decided to join together and establish the Parents Helping Parents Coalition of Monroe County. In mid-July they created a Facebook group which currently has sixty-five members.

The group of Rochester area parents aims to help other parents navigate Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education services. “We are working together to make these services more accessible to all. Your child has a LEGAL RIGHT to these services and we are all working together to make it happen.”

The group’s vision and mission are as follows:

**VISION:** All children ages 0-5 in Monroe County with suspected or identified developmental concerns and/or disabilities will be receiving the support services they need to reach their highest potential. In addition, these children and their families will be supported and included within and throughout our community.

**MISSION:**
1) Implement changes necessary to save the Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education programs servicing the 0-5 age group.

2) Identify, inform and support families needing or already qualifying for the services of Monroe County’s Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education programs.

3) Advocate for immediate and necessary changes to these programs at the County and State level including but not limited to: rate increases, hiring of
We've been busy! Check out our latest happenings.

Provider Shortages Continue to Grow

The shortage crisis of Early Intervention providers available to service children birth to 2 is continually increasing. Agencies in Monroe County have reported that approximately 20+ providers left the Early Intervention field during the summer of 2019, of which the majority transferred to school district settings where they can make a significantly higher income. This doesn't bode well for the number of children who remain waitlisted to receive services.

County Legislative Candidate Forum

On Wednesday, October 16 at 7:00 pm, there will be a nonpartisan candidate forum focused on issues that impact children and families in Monroe County. All candidates for the 29 County Legislature districts will be invited. Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education will be on the agenda for discussion! Location TBD. Please plan to join us on October 16 and then VOTE on November 5th!