

These Moms Are Real-Life Superheroes

They'll inspire you to give back in ways you never even thought of.

By Jessica Press
May 2, 2017

Camille Proctor had a gut feeling. “The doctor kept telling me things were fine,” she says of her instinct in 2007 that her son, Ari, then 1, had more than a developmental delay. It wasn’t until she pushed to see a developmental pediatrician that he received the diagnosis she suspected: autism. Camille threw herself into tending to Ari—shuttling him to different therapies, regularly rushing out of work to retrieve him from preschool when he became overwhelmed. “I was crying in my car in the parking lot of Ari’s school one day when I knew I had to quit my job to care for him,” says the 50-year-old Birmingham, MI, mom, who now lives off her retirement savings.

She also wanted time to help parents of color who didn’t have the resources she did. Children of color from low-income households are often diagnosed later than their white peers, Camille has learned from child development researchers she’s spoken with. That delay can lead to less successful outcomes. She found there were other cultural factors the mainstream community wasn’t prepared to address, from the stigma around autism in the African-American community to her concerns about law enforcement. “I went to a lot of good support groups, but I was usually the only African-American face there. At the time, Ari was nonverbal, so I’d ask, ‘When he’s 13 and can’t respond to a question, will he get shot? Will they understand that he’s not being defiant? How do I teach him what to do?’ There are many autistic children of color in the criminal justice system because they were perceived as having behavioral problems.”

In 2009, Camille founded the Color of Autism Foundation, a nonprofit that focuses on the kinds of issues Ari faces. It has taken on everything from educating families about early diagnosis to gearing up children with autism to find meaningful work by introducing them to STEM programs. George C. Weaver, a Detroit widower and single dad to a teenage daughter who wanders (a common trait of many with autism), says Camille’s support has been invaluable. “Each time she’s run off, Camille used her connections at news stations to spread the word. She also helped me get a device my daughter keeps in her pocket so I can track her,” George says. Not all of the families Camille assists are local, but they get the same



Camille (middle), with Ari (now 11), says her new aim is to build bonds between children with autism and their typical peers.

personal attention. “People contact me from around the U.S. and the world asking for advice,” she says. “I’ve grown a network of therapeutic partners, so often I can refer them to good local services, and also parent advocates willing to lend a hand like I would.”

Advertisement - Continue Reading Below

See thecolorofautism.org for autism resources and to donate.



“I’m a mom who is also from Michigan, so Camille’s story hit close to home. Her devotion to her son and to so many other people’s children will help change the face of autism.

Leaving her career was so brave, and now this movement could have lasting effects on families forever.

—Ginger Zee