

## **WHAT IS YOUR CONNECTION TO AUTISM AND WE?**

My name is Waleia Larkin and I am a core member. I helped start Autism and We, I actually came up with the name. So, the “We” part is talking about the children that had ADHD and Down syndrome. And so, it's just letting everyone know that we're not just focused on Autism. We're also focused on their delays and disabilities, and we wanted everyone to feel included, because there was really no space for that. It started because Karen Burkett was doing a study, and she followed us around for almost a year and a half, and then towards the end of the project she asked us to do a big dinner, and so we met all the other families that were involved. And we just exchanged information and then next thing I know we're having meetings and then the meeting just kept going, Hey, this is how we got started. It seems like it was like it was meant to happen, like it was, it had to happen. It had.

## **WHAT WERE SOME OF THE REASONS FOR FORMING AUTISM AND WE?**

We all notice that the system has flaws. Y'all notice that we weren't getting the same information. We noticed that our kids were getting diagnosed later in life, almost to the point to where some of them had aged out of certain programs. So, we figured that if we continue meeting and continue sharing resources with each other because basically that's what this started off as like, “oh wait a minute you need this let me tell you who to call, and where to go” to, or “oh no this program. You can get this this and this.”

So, basically it just kind of started out with everyone sharing resources and trying to tell everyone about different doctors, different specialists, what your rights are. How to go through IEP meetings, how to let your doctors know that “this is what I want, and this is what we're going to do” that you're not just want to tell me what to do with my kid I'm going to tell you what I'm going to do with my kid because I know my kid. Yeah, you have to continuously speak up for yourself.

And, unfortunately, the black community, we just don't get the resources we just don't get the information, and it leaves us with having to not be able to coddle, our kids. That was one thing that Karen noticed the difference in our culture in white culture

## **WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE A MEMBER OF AUTISM AND WE?**

I feel like I have a place where I can even have a place where they understand where I'm coming from and I don't have to sit down and explain it for 15 minutes, and then go back to the problem that I had after I explained to you why this is going on. It's nice to sometimes be able to get that up and look out into a crowd and see yourself. Yeah, and not just be a chocolate chip cookie in a sea of milk is not just baby, falling away. It's nice to see other parents and hear the different things that they've gone through, how they fought the system, how they get different services for their children.