**Importance of Private Assessment**

Assessments and evaluations are a critical part of treatment - it identifies the nature and extent of your child’s disability. Before your child can begin receiving special education services, the child must be deemed “eligible” for an IEP or IPP. The first step is an assessment in all areas of known or suspected needs by the Regional Center and the school district. Evaluations are conducted by trained professional(s) utilizing a combination of standardized testing, observation, parent questionnaires, and review of previous reports. The findings are made available for the use by the IEP /IPP team. The evaluation should identify areas of strength and weakness, and will serve as the starting place/ baseline of your child’s functioning from which the progress towards annual goals is measured. The evaluation should also determine the type of services to be offered and the intensity of therapy which your child will receive over the coming year. If done on an annual basis, it should reveal how far your child has progressed over the past year.

So, why should parents spend money and time for the child to be assessed by an independent evaluator? For good reasons as listed below:

(1) You may not agree with the results of the evaluation conducted by the school or the Regional Center – it may it be the diagnosis itself, or the service recommended. For example, you really believe intensive ABA program is the most appropriate education for your child while your school district’s FAPE (Free appropriate public education) offer is their special autism class. While no one knows your child better than you, you cannot ask for services for your child just because “you believe so”, or “your neighbor’s child gets them”- remember, as a layperson and a parent, your opinions do not carry much weight. By the same token, it is completely inappropriate for the IEP team to tell you just that- “we cannot offer your child an intensive ABA because no other child in the district is receiving such service.” The strongest justification for an intensive ABA program will be what an informed professional is recommending as the appropriate program based on your child’s unique needs in your private assessment;

(2) you want an honest, professional opinion and recommendation for treatment that is based on the needs of the child from someone financially neutral – one who is not tied to any funding parties, or in the employee of the funding entity;

(3) you can be assured that an independent assessor won’t have to adhere to any unwritten policy against the ABA program. The parent-secured evaluation conducted by qualified persons serves as a second opinion in determining the child’s capabilities and present levels. It must be given the same credence as their district/ Regional Center counterparts.

In obtaining private assessments, it is important to find a doctor (psychologist, neurologist) who has a keen understanding of autism and ABA treatment. Call them and ask questions first. Don’t be afraid to express your interest in seeing intensive ABA treatment in his/her recommendation. Ask to specify the hours of treatment (30-40 hours a week) in his/her recommendation. (Don’t be shy. You are the one paying for the evaluation.) Talk to other parent support groups for referring reliable evaluators. (see LAFEAT.org) or if you are already in contact with an attorney who specialize In special education law, ask for referral. Once you decide on the evaluator, have him/her observe your child in as many places as possible to provide a complete picture of your child for the assessment; at minimum, the assessment should include observation at school to determine whether it is an appropriate setting for your child, and at home to better understand your child’s deficits. It is very important that your evaluator is able, willing, and ready to testify at the hearing should it become necessary in the future.

Once the private assessment and the recommendations are obtained, study it carefully as it will help you identify the core components that should be a part of your child’s educational program and program and placement. You should provide your school district with the assessment 4-5 days prior to the IEP meeting to give them sufficient time to review it before the meeting. (The same goes for IPP meeting with the Regional Center.) Make sure everyone on the team has a copy of the reports and ask that all members of the IEP team to “meaningfully” consider the recommendation. Use the recommendations on the reports and assessment to guide not only your objectives, but also your questions at the IEP meeting. Your ultimate goal is to have your private assessment (especially the recommendation section) adopted by the IEP team and be written into your child’s IEP.