

My name is Michael Simoneaux. My wife Shila and I created a nonprofit organization, the E. Brooks Simoneaux Foundation Inc, and our Employer Identification Number is 99-0613162. Our foundation is named after our disabled son Eli.

Our foundation's goal is to provide low-income transitional living and recreational space for children and families with disabled and/or neuro divergent children. Disabled children of Natrona County in Casper, Wyoming have limited opportunities for community engagement. Safe spaces are needed for disabled children to interact, facilitating opportunities for them to build self-esteem through interactions with others facing similar challenges. Our vision of cooperative living would give families and caregivers a social network of support. Families can help one another through the day-to-day challenges faced with raising a disabled and neurodivergent child.

Our son Eli Brooks was born in 2018. He had a hypospadias surgery at six months of age along with the recurrent upper respiratory illnesses and diagnosis of asthma at age one. Despite his surgery and asthma, Eli developed with neurotypical or "normal" infant and toddler communication milestones. At approximately twenty months of age, he stopped making eye contact with us and stopped using words to communicate. Eli was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder along with "Unspecified Developmental Delays" at approximately two years old. The majority of people around us couldn't or wouldn't try to understand the challenges Eli was facing. We were also operating with little, to no sleep because Eli only slept several hours at a time for his first 3 years of life.

We did not anticipate the isolation and loneliness associated with parenting Eli. He did not behave or play like other children his own age. Our pediatrician and child psychiatrist gave us his diagnoses without providing us with emotional support and empathy. Shila and I worked tirelessly, usually with little to no sleep to ensure Eli received speech and occupational therapy services. All of our early efforts aimed to maximize the likelihood of Eli living a somewhat independent adult life. Parents and caregivers of neurodivergent and disabled children celebrate wins and suffer in silence. Other parents aren't quick to praise a three-year-old saying something that sounds like "milk" for the first time. Many neurodivergent children have sleep disturbances, increased activity and a higher propensity for personal injury. Our social network wanted to help, but did not have the training or understanding of the care required for raising a neurodivergent child. Eli says less than ten words consistently and cannot tell people his name. He does not express or verbalize pain like others. We could safely leave him alone with anyone other than his therapist and teachers.

The support of parents with children like Eli, teachers, and therapists were our lifesaver. These remarkable people praised our son and parenting, told us to cut ourselves some slack, while offering ongoing support. They helped us to see the beauty in diversity emphasizing that disability does not mean "less than". These people helped us work towards acceptance and celebrating even the small day-to-day wins like getting a good night's sleep. Shila and I are working to pay this love and kindness forward. We reach out to parents when they are sleep-deprived and isolated. Shila and I help direct them toward resources and assistance.

Our foundation plans on leasing/renting a building on the Life Steps Campus, owned by the City of Casper, in Casper, Wyoming. Life Steps will rent us an entire building providing maintenance, utilities, security, and access to a large dining/gathering room, an indoor gym, and plenty of safe outdoor space for children. The building has several kitchens, tons of bedrooms, and bathrooms along with ample living space. Shila, Eli, and I will be able to be onsite to oversee the project and help the families (likely within the next couple of months). Life Steps is willing to help us with directions towards background checks and the application process for transitional housing.

The recreational area provides a safe and caring venue for community arts, music, and dance events for disabled and neurodivergent children with their families. People that do not understand neurodivergent people can make community events a negative experience. Shila and I attempted to take Eli to dance programs at our local college. Some people made comments complaining of Eli's behaviors even prior to the show starting. There is a lack of understanding regarding the disabled and neurodivergent. Some people require constant movement and vocalizations to remain calm. Their movements of joy and excitement make people uncomfortable. We have come to love Eli's stemming.

Shila and I feel that we are the perfect people to take on this endeavor. We have become experts on Autism and therapies to maximize communication skills. Along with continuous learning, we actively support the Child Development Center by updating equipment, donating supplies, and providing updated learning toys. I have been a nurse for almost eighteen years. I am currently a flight nurse specializing in emergency and critical care. I have specialized training and certifications for injured and critically ill children. These specializations require an in-depth understanding of childhood growth and development along with wellness and nutrition. Shila has worked for Wyoming Medical Center for over a decade, dispatching ambulances and facilitating doctor-to-doctor referrals. My wife also worked for people with disabilities in the past understanding the barriers associated with caring for under-served populations. She understands case management aspects of coordinating care with different providers. Shila actively seeks out families struggling with sleep, child care, and financial assistance. She provides them love, support, kindness, and food or medicine when parents cannot make it to the store.

Shila and I are looking for grants and funding to put towards the \$3,300 per month rent and the \$3,300 security deposit. We appreciate anything that could be put towards the rent and the deposit. Life Steps has some furniture and we will begin to determine what would be needed to furnish the living spaces. The building currently has all the appliances including washers and dryers.

We understand that your organization/department may not fund programs or requests similar to what we have described. We would appreciate any guidance or directions towards acquiring funding to begin helping our community.

Thank you for your time.