

How My Journey Through Life Is **HELPING KIDS** with ADHD

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The founding of the CSAHM Foundation for ADHD Educational Services and Support in 2020 was the culmination of obstacles overcome, mysteries solved, and dreams realized in my life.

The foundation represents an exciting new chapter in a remarkable journey that has come full circle, both personally and professionally. From decades of frustration to relief and fulfillment, I've transformed my life and helped countless others who have faced similar challenges.



A pattern of troubling childhood behavior

During a recent move, I found myself going through paperwork that had accumulated over the years. I stumbled across report cards that my father had saved.

In third grade, the comments were glowing. “Candace is such a delight to have in class. She’s very helpful.”

In fourth grade, the light started to dim. I didn’t do as well in school with my grades or behavior. I became impulsive and was constantly talking. I struggled to focus.

I remember misreading directions for an assignment. As a result, my presentation was also incorrect. I was reprimanded in front of the class and completely embarrassed. After this experience, I felt uncomfortable speaking in front of groups for a long time.

In sixth grade, I was caught shoplifting. I still remember the humiliation of being fingerprinted and the heart-break of seeing my father and mother, who was in a wheelchair due to multiple sclerosis, arrive to pick me up at the police station.

That’s how it was through high school as my academic struggles worsened.

However, my dream of becoming a teacher was one constant during my childhood. From the time I played school with neighborhood friends as a young girl, I knew my future was in teaching.

Despite the challenges I faced, I earned a degree in elementary and special education from the University of Maryland. I went on to teach Special Education while completing my master’s in special vocational education from George Washington University.

A life-changing double diagnosis

One of my children experienced difficulties similar to mine. As an eleven-year-old, they excelled in math and reading but couldn’t sit still or remember to hand in their assignments. They had trouble focusing in less structured classes like art and gym. They were diagnosed with ADHD.





As an adult, I still struggled with organization, waiting in line, and sitting during a movie or a seminar. Because of the similarities with my child, I also decided to be tested.

I was diagnosed with ADHD and dyslexia at age thirty-seven by Kathleen Nadeau, PhD, the founder of the Chesapeake Center for ADHD, Learning, and Behavioral Health.

Finally, I was getting answers.

Driven by education and advocacy

I started reading extensively about ADHD to help my child while receiving treatment myself for the first time. Right after I started medication for my ADHD symptoms, I could sit through a long play without squirming or feeling the urge to get up and move around. For the first time, I felt like I could focus.

I started attending CHADD conferences and meetings to learn as much as possible. I discovered how exercise, nutrition, supplements, adequate sleep, and even twelve-step programs could help people with ADHD.

The more I learned, the more passionate I became about helping and advocating for children with ADHD. I founded Positive Learning Experiences, LLC and ADHD Coaching for LIFE, LLC in suburban Maryland in 1992 and 2008, respectively, offering ADHD coaching, tutoring, and support groups for teens and adults.

While working as a learning specialist at a treatment center, I realized that a large percentage of children with substance use disorders have ADHD. This was also prevalent in under-resourced communities. ADHD symptoms are often dismissed and attributed to a lack of patience or intelligence, and many people simply can't afford the services needed to manage ADHD.

This experience sparked the idea to create a nonprofit offering specialized educational services to financially disadvantaged youth. With the help of friends and col-

leagues, I founded the CSAHM Foundation for ADHD Educational Services and Support.

Completing the circle

Essentially, I'm the coach, and kids diagnosed with ADHD are the players. Children are referred by well-known psychiatrists, counselors, other clinicians, and past clients. For the approximately one in four children in the DC area living below the poverty line, one-on-one coaching is now accessible.

The mission of the CSAHM Foundation is to support under-resourced students with ADHD in a variety of ways. They learn to stay organized and improve their time management and daily living skills. Clients learn how to manage their schedules and keep up with their schoolwork. They're matched with a tutor if they need help in a certain subject.

Most people don't realize that the ADHD brain is brilliant. Students are often extremely creative and talented in music, art, and problem-solving. Difficulty with focus, organization, impulsiveness, and self-control simply make it difficult for people to take full advantage of the gifts they have.

By learning strategies and techniques to manage their ADHD symptoms, students become better equipped to reach their full potential.

Today, I'm grateful to have become a successful ADHD coach and learning specialist who touches lives every day. My own child learned to excel in school and life and became a successful engineer. Young people facing the same challenges as me are no longer left wondering what's wrong with them.

As awareness and understanding of ADHD and effective treatment methodologies continue to increase, and services and technology are made accessible to all populations, more people will have the opportunity to live happy, fulfilling lives.

Their journey may have bumps similar to those I faced, but they'll have the support and guidance to pursue their passions, achieve their goals, and enjoy life on their terms.

For me, that is the ultimate reward. **A**



Candace Sahm, MAEd, is an ADHD coach, advocate, speaker, and educator who has firsthand experience with ADHD. She was also a coach and study strategies teacher for the Lab School of DC, the Norwood School, and the Bullis School, to name a few. She has a special interest in helping clients with ADHD successfully navigate the transition into and through college. She is the founder of ADHD Coaching for LIFE and the CSAHM Foundation for ADHD Educational Services and Support. Learn more about her work at <https://www.csahmfoundation.org>. Sahm has also served on CHADD's board of directors.