



THE BIRTH OF ZANIEZ

Longtime autism researcher Laurent Mottron wrote a recent scientific editorial in which he points out that the current approach to treating a child with autism is based on changing them, making them conform, suppressing repetitive behaviors, intervening with any “obsessive” interests. Our family experienced this firsthand. Some of our early behavioral therapists would see Gio lie on the ground to play, his face level with the cars and trucks he was rolling into long rows, and they would tell us, “Make him sit up. No lying down. Let’s rearrange the cars. Tell him, they don’t always have to be in a straight line, Gio!”

To me, this approach seemed rigid. We don’t all have to act in the exact same way. These kids need to function, not robotically imitate “normal”.

- Harvard Health Publishing, Harvard Medical School, Monique Tello, MD, MPH

As a parent of a child diagnosed as autistic, reading the words above was the very moment that I realized that every thought and feeling that I had been experiencing with regard to the failed education and treatment of my child was validated. I wasn't an educator despite my achieved level of education but I inherently knew that the plethora of education available to my child was not what he needed. It was then that I realized that I was put on this earth to tackle this issue. It was up to me to create a learning environment and program that didn't strive to “normalize” my child but rather to honor my child. It was up to me to make sure that children like my son had a comfortable environment in which to reveal their greatness and foster it to create a pathway for long-term success. Zaniez was born on this day with a commitment to revolutionize education for kiddos on the autism spectrum.

- Dana Leigh Shafman, Zaniez Creator and Executive Director