



Special Needs

Meet the People We Help...

Problem

Leah was bright, articulate and a fast learner. But her early-onset bipolar disorder (manic depression) made the 12-year-old as unpredictable as a tornado. She had been suspended from her religious day school several times for acting out and had a string of “needs improvement” comments in all areas of behavior. Her mother, Carol, called the special needs resource coordinators at JF&CS because she didn’t believe the teachers were being attentive to her daughter’s needs—but she didn’t know how to raise her questions with the school or what rights Leah had as a child with a mental health disability.

Solution

It was not until JF&CS’s special needs resource coordinators came into Leah’s life—and began acting as her advocate at school—that the young girl began to receive the support she needed to excel there in all areas. The special needs resource coordinators helped to educate her teachers about bipolar disorder so they knew what steps to take to bolster her self-esteem and help her form friendships with classmates. They also convened several meetings with her parents and teachers to evaluate Leah’s education plan and make sure it was being implemented.

Outcome

Leah is now making friends at school, and her teachers are more understanding of her frequent mood swings, hyperactivity and social anxiety. They know to give her added encouragement when she is feeling overwhelmed and how best to include her in class activities. “Sometimes all it takes is someone from outside the system to come in and look at a plan objectively to really make a difference,” according to the JF&CS special needs resource coordinators.