



*Statewide Parent
Advocacy Network*

STATEWIDE PARENT ADVOCACY NETWORK (SPAN) SUPERSTORM SANDY FAMILY RESILIENCY PROJECT PROJECT SUMMARY

The Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN), New Jersey's one-stop for families, has been funded for the next two years by the New Jersey Department of Health to provide intensive assistance to families of children with special needs in the counties hit hardest by Superstorm Sandy. The counties include Atlantic, Bergen, Cape May, Cumberland, Essex, Hudson, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean, and Union.

SPAN Family Resource Specialists (FRSs) will work closely with the county Special Child Health Services Case Management units to address the multiple needs of families, including military families.

New Jersey's families faced many challenges due to Sandy. In addition to the trauma of displacement or sheltering in place, families faced closed schools, economic hardship, and emotional trauma. But families of children with special needs were disproportionately impacted by the storm and its aftermath. They had to deal with finding a place to refill critical prescriptions, a shelter that was accessible for their child with disabilities, and new doctors and specialists; getting new schools to implement special education services; accessing transportation for their children; and helping their children with disabilities understand and cope with unanticipated and far-reaching changes. Because of our knowledge of the multiple systems that impact families, SPAN helped families across all of these issues - education, health care, mental health, transportation – and provided parent-to-parent emotional support.

There are almost 300,000 children with special healthcare needs birth to age 17 in New Jersey. They are disproportionately low-income. Over 40% do not have adequate insurance to pay for all needed services. 25% of families have children whose conditions cause at least one family member to have to cut back on or stop working. On top of these ongoing challenges, families of children with special needs in the Sandy-impacted counties are struggling to rebuild their lives and support systems and networks.

For almost 25 years, SPAN has been funded by the New Jersey Department of Health to provide services to families under Family WRAP (Wisdom, Resources, Advocacy, and Parent to Parent Support). With this funding, we house trained parents, Family Resource Specialists, at the county Special Child Health Services Case Management Units. 100% of assisted families report that we help them partner with professionals, find community services, and gain confidence in getting needed services. The supplemental funding will enable SPAN to place additional staff in the Sandy-impacted counties to provide our high-quality, parent-to-parent, wrap-around supports to the families who need it most.

The Statewide Parent Advocacy Network houses New Jersey's Parent Training and Information Center (PTI), Family to Family Health Information Center (F2F), Statewide Parent to Parent (P2P), National Family Voices State Affiliate, and a chapter of the National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, as well as the Military Family 360 Support Project. SPAN is funded by the US Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Centers for Disease Control, as well as the NJ Departments of Health (Division of Family Health Services), Human Services (Division of Family Development and Division of Developmental Disabilities), and Education. Its 55 staff are housed in every county and represent the diversity of our state, including speaking 9 languages.