>>: Okay. I think we are going to start with the introduction.

How's everybody doing? Are you all enjoying the conference? We are. We're very excited to be here for the first time presenting. We have never done this before, so please understand that. Also I am still learning English and my pronunciation it is not great. If you do not understand something, please raise your hand and asked me to repeat again. I want to make sure that you understand what I am saying. I am not going to get upset for that.

Thank you.

My name is Keila Armas-Velasquez and this is my son David. And we are here today to tell you our story. The title of our presentation is Will My Son Be Able to Speak Spanish? Our Multilingual Journey to Becoming Family Leaders.

With the learning objectives our audience will understand how different cultures can influence decision-making. The audience will recognize how the region of a person can make a difference. Responding to a situation although we all share the same feelings. The audience will apply their knowledge about the families culture during the moment of interaction with them.

After saying that I want to say a little bit about myself before we start talking about my son. About my background, I was born and raised in a very small town up in the mountains in Guatemala. I finished high school in Guatemala and I took some college classes in the USA. The main source of income is Guatemala's coffee. So I grew up drinking coffee. I don't remember when I started drinking it, but I was probably two years old. That is why I'm short break that is what people say. (Laughs). For my own sake I put a picture of my tamales and in some when somebody invites me to eat tamales and I was expecting these tamales and I was like those are not tamales. Our tamales are big. They have a whole piece of chicken inside and those are Guatemalan tamales.

I also like all the tamales of course. (Laughs). In Guatemala it is important to mention that there are 25 different groups of people that speak a native language. And also make it their own clothes. They have very unique clothes that they wear. Many of those families live here in the USA. And their native language is not Spanish. Even though they are coming from a Spanish country. That is the reason. Spanish is the official most spoken liquids in Guatemala but there are 22 different Mayan languages as well as two other indigenous languages sis, Garifuna and Xinca.

Now we will start with David's story. Hopefully, will have enough time at the end because I want a lot of questions from you so please write them down. We will try to answer all of them.

When David was born he did not pass the hearing test. And the nurse told me that he had liquid in his ear, so they said that they were going to do the test the next day or before I leave the hospital. They did the test again the next day and also he did not pass the test and she told me and in that moment I asked her how common that is that children have liquid and their heirs or babies and she said that it was very, very frequent that children are born with liquid and sometimes a month or two months later they were going to be fine. So I was like let's go home and everything will be fine and there is nothing to worry about.

Then they call me about a month later I guess and they called me to do an appointment with the clinic to do another test to make sure that he was going to be okay. I did the test and took him there and the date they did in more detail test and he needed to be asleep. That test was, he also failed that test. In that moment he told me that he has hearing loss, but they did not know what the cause of the problem or what type of hearing loss. So they started sending me to do more tests to find out what the reason was.

After those tests, they gave me the diagnosis and they say that he was profound sensorineural hearing loss. That is one of the words I still don't know how to pronounce. Since her own neural. That it was genetic. I was not expecting that at all. I did not have anybody in my family with a hearing loss. I never heard about hearing loss, this type of hearing loss totally deaf and he was not able to hear anything. Genetic, nobody in my family told me that someone has hearing loss before. We never heard a story from my mom. She always told stories about our ancestors and she never said that your Gran Gran was staff. They never say that. I was so surprised and not accepting that at all. I was thinking it was liquid that was going to come out and one or two months and come out. He will be okay. I was like no, they are wrong. It is genetic, it can be possible. So I was like that not accepting what they were telling me a little bit. I am not sure when was that but that day they gave me the diagnosis they also gave me a big package of a lot of information. They explained it to me about the type of hearing loss he has and I also talked with a surgeon that day and he explained to me, he talked to me about cochlear implants, that was something that I never pronounced cochlear implants in my life before and he said what is that but I had a translator explain everything that was happening and everything they were saying, but for me I was not there, I was there, but I was understanding anything he said. It also in that moment I did not speak English. I don't speak very good English, but at that moment I did not speak any English. The person who was translating his translation how I speak. It was somebody from Puerto Rico and he was using words that I did not hear before and I did not understand what he was saying. That was a very overwhelming afternoon.

I went home with no hope. I will home thinking that my son was never going to be able to speak. And I'm still thinking that it was liquid and coming out of his ears. A notice liquid it will come out. Not the reason that it was genetic.

Sometime that afternoon, they also talked to me about organizations that would be supporting me and helping me and my son. In that moment I only remember that they talked about early intervention and Beginnings those were the ones in my head for very long time now I know that they are a lot more to support families.

After some time, I started feeling depressed. I started feeling like there was no hope for my son or for me. I was alone. My relationship with my dad did not work. He left us when he was very little. I think he was in the hospital when that happened. It was a hard situation for me. All of my family was in Guatemala and are still in Guatemala. My parents, siblings, especially my mom, the person you want to talk with when something is happening like that. I talked to them by phone, but how people see things in a different country is different. We are all going to prey and we will pray in the church and everything will be okay and, yes, the prayer has helped me, too. To figure out what it I was going to do. I was praying for a miracle they were praying for a miracle. It was a different way to see it. Sometimes, when I talk to my mom I feel like that she did not understand me. She loves me, but she does not understand what I'm trying to tell her. She does not understand my feelings even though she is a mom, too, but she does not understand how I am feeling. And then I started thinking it would be really nice to know another family that is having the same situation like me and has a child with a hearing loss that is a little older so I know how he is doing. The teacher from early intervention was already coming to the house. One day I asked her if there was another family that speak Spanish around me and she said no, there is no one else. But she said there is somebody who speaks English that has a boy who is three years older than your son and he already has cochlear implants. That was the way we were going to go was cochlear implants because that was the only thing that was going to help him. He started using hearing aids, but they were not helpful.

Cochlear implant was the option that the doctors told me. It for me as his mom, that was not something that I wanted to put him through. I did not what happen to have surgery on his head at two or three months old. I don't like that. I needed to make a big decision, but I did not know how to think about how to help him if I do not take position now what will happen after that we how will his life be? In the middle of all that, I decided that I needed therapy first. I was like okay,, I need to go to talk with someone. I need to take therapy because I need to understand everything; that is, happening around me. Everything; that is, happening with him. I wanted to help him, but I started feeling depressed and I did not want to get up and take him to his appointments. I did not want to learn anything about hearing loss. I did not even want to see the hearing aids. I need help I need to go somewhere, and I went to a therapist. I started having sessions with her, and that help me a lot. She gave me some exercises to relax. I was also taking him with me and he was in the therapy, too. She started helping me to accept and how to help him because every time that I see him I would cry and cry because I felt like it was my fault that he was like that. I held him and remember many nights holding him and saying I'm sorry baby I am sorry for what I'm doing to you not knowing that it was not my fault. In that moment I was thinking it was my fault because maybe I just maybe or maybe I did something during my pregnancy even though I stopped drinking coffee even though I grew up and drink coffee, but I found out when I was pregnant I stopped drinking coffee because I wanted to be as healthy as I can for my baby. For bar and then hearing loss. With no reason. What did I what I did? That is help me in that. She was really good therapy help me understand you have a clear idea in my head about everything that was happening, and I also started doing some fun things, getting out of the house, taking him to parks, to places where there were more children to help us a little bit.

Also the teacher from early intervention took me to see the mom that has the older child. When I went to her house and so that kid talking with his sibling and with his mom, that was like a relief. I cried a little bit and she knew what was happening and she understood that I understood everything and then she talked to me for like 20 minutes and let me see her son to be a normal kid. That was something that was in my head for my son that he was not going to be able to speak. When I saw that kid with cochlear implants and having a normal life, I was like okay. Everything will be okay. The therapy and seeing the little kid help me to feel better to start seeing like that I just need to work with him. I need to work with him and he will be okay.

Then I started researching information about cochlear implants because that was the option for him. Sadly, I did not might find much information in Spanish. Everything was in English. There was some information but out of the country, and I was not going to move out of the country to help him. I thought that there was not information here, but we had a lot of information but just in English, but for me that did not -- I did not speak English at the moment.

So I researched some information and I asked the person from beginnings to explain cochlear implants to come to the house and explain it to me because at the moment I did not understand it at the hospital so I had the big package in the corner because I just, it was an English. There were some information in Spanish, but I just put it in the corner and it stayed there. The person from Beginnings came to the house and she explained to me the type of hearing loss that he has and how the process was forgetting cochlear implants.

I was still scared about the surgery after all the things that I did to feel better, I was feeling like okay cochlear implants will be okay for him and he will be okay and we will pray for him and he will get out of surgery and be okay and be fine.

I took the position to the cochlear implant surgery. When he was 14 months old he received his first cochlear implant. And then sometime later he got the activator. That day when you got the activator was when the miracle that I was praying for before happened. He was able to hear immediately when the audiology activated him, she talked and he started looking around for the sound. I was behind him. I started crying and he started looking for my voice and I started talking to him and he started crying, too. I hugged him and started crying and I was crying and crying. I could not believe what was happening. You can hear, he is going to be able to speak. I was like oh wow, this is the miracle that my mom prayed for it and my mom prayed for and everybody prayed for. That was wonderful.

Before that the teacher from early intervention told me that it was important to read to him and talk to him, but I was a little discouraged for me to do it knowing that he was not able to hear me. So I was reading to him because I needed to do it, but I was like what is the point to be reading to be talking and singing and dancing and doing everything the teacher tells me if he is not receiving any sound? But then she told me something very important that I always tell the parents she said you need to talk to him because you will keep his auditory nerve active and that will help after he has of the surgery. That made sense for me and I was like okay at least he won't hear the loud sounds of the drum sounds and he will be able to here.

Okay 10 minutes. Okay and then he got the second implant and that came to clarify and complement the cochlear implant. They gave me some much energy that day when I came back home with us cochlear implant and then when he received the second cloak cochlear implant, they gave me so much energy to read the teacher told me to read one book a day and one to 10 I was reading five to eight and then I started reading 10 to 15 bucks a day. He needs to speak and learn how to speak and I started going everywhere to parks to musics to any type of music, the life music that they always had in Chapel Hill so I was taking him everywhere to be exposed to although sounds.

And he learned to speak Spanish. I was teaching Spanish to him at home and then the time came when the early intervention came had to leave us and had to go to school, but beginnings helped us with the transition and this is his first day of school and has first self-portrait. You can see that he was very proud of his cochlear implants. That was something that I feel proud of him so he started feeling also proud of himself and teaching everyone about his hearing aids and cochlear implants. He always tells everyone even if they were not asking him they would say look look what I have, these are my magic heirs. He was so proud of them. When you went to 4th grade he got out of the IEP plan and his English level was already good.

I taught him home and continue to speak Spanish at home. Everything in Spanish when you started going to school, he started learning English and he started 4th grade he was already at the level that he needed to be so he started in a 504 plan and now he is bilingual. I will let him talk a little bit about himself right now.

>>: Hello, my name is David I am 13 years old. I go to apex friendship middle and I speak Spanish and English and I am in the process of learning sign language and Russian. I plan to be a computer engineer in the future and I want to help children with hearing loss and to have better access to resources and ways to hear again.

The first picture was when I read a book in Spanish to a group of kids with hearing loss. The second picture is when I was in front of my school. There is this rock they paint every year. The third picture is me with my reward when I got the all a honorable.

>>:

(Applause)

>>: They all a honor roll from when you started middle school this is a picture of the first day that he was born and the second day and then when he was a month old. All I see when I see these pictures is the hearing loss that they told me that he had and the second thing that I think about when I see this is the liquid in his ears. I wish that they had never mentioned that to me. I was upset about my acceptance process and my feelings. There are some pictures of our family. David being very successful took we have I would was able to get married and I have Morse he has more siblings and his David is a very sweet big brother. In 2015 because of my experience of it being alone in this country with no family and not knowing the language, I decided to open a support group in Spanish for families is in Spanish with hearing loss just to know that there are people who understand and can have a relationship and let them know that all the children with the same situation or the same things -- they feel like they have a friend pair.

I also started volunteering with the children's cochlear implant Center at UNC. I know some of the people here that work at UNC. And Duke hearing Center for children and families., beginnings, and the CARE Project.

Then it became I became a trainer for the NCD HHS children and youth branch parent as collaborative leader trainings for parents by parents. And in April of 2022, I was hired to work part time with NC DHHS, division of Child and family well-being as a parent consultant. Apart this came to be a blessing for me and the families that I am working with and supporting because I now can give them more resources and more support than I was before and thanks to their support to EHDI support, I have been able to open more groups, more support groups. We have for support groups in North Carolina right now. What we do it in those groups is get together to have a picnic or get in a park and the goal of those groups is to let the families know that they are not alone. They know all the families close to them and if they need to talk to someone else when they are starting at this process, they will find somebody next to them. If they don't know when they can call me I will find one that to talk to them and support them. Many families also face because I think a different language a native-language, so that is why I am here. This is what I'm used to do. This is not my cup of comfort zone, but I am here for those families because I know they need me. And I feel very thankful for the support that EHDI has given me in the community of North Carolina. There are awesome.

We also join all the organization's that organize activities like the walk for hearing, that they do in North Carolina every year. We also go to those activities and we also do our own activities. Apart this is my information. If anybody wants to know something else about our culture, or about how people feel being here in a country that is not their country and they want to know what to do, text me or e-mail me. I will be happy to provide you some information. I think I have a lot in my head after talking with those families and they are very honest with me. We are honest with each other when we get together. We say what is our experience. We have a good group if you need some information from us and I will be available for you all.

I don't know. Do we have time for questions. We have two minutes. Two minutes for questions. For me or David.

(Applause)

>>: There is a question.

>>: We will probably only have time for one question. Is your support group online.

>>: The support group is on Facebook and I can give you the link so you can get to them and share those links to anyone. I can send you an e-mail with the links.

>>: Just to follow up is it limited to only those in North Carolina.

>>: Yes, right now we only have a four North Carolina. Hopefully, someday we will be extending an all U.S. site.

No more questions? One.

>>: This is not a question. I just wanted to comment and thank you for sharing your story. It was wonderful and I love to hear parent stories and just for your bravery. Most people who are native English speakers don't want to get up on stage and talked to a group so I think that is wonderful and I appreciate your story.

(Applause)

>>: Thank you. English was hard but not impossible.

(Laughter)

Thank you, everyone.