

Why I Volunteer

I JOINED CHADD BECAUSE I WAS STRUGGLING.

My son, who'd been overwhelmed with sensory and developmental challenges since birth, had just been diagnosed with ADHD. Unbeknownst to me at the time, my own diagnosis was a few years away. Looking back, it's no wonder I was struggling.

My son's doctors did that thing they do, where they drop the diagnosis bomb, offer medication, and then kind of shoo you out the door. I was overwhelmed by a mix of grief and relief.

I became utterly hyperfocused on ADHD research. I was desperate to find ways to better understand, support, and advocate for my son.

All roads of research led me to CHADD. I joined quickly because to be honest, being a member made me feel like I was doing something productive for my son. I was desperate for information I could trust, so I spent all my free time doing research and reading articles on CHADD's website.

The worst part of it all was how alone and scared I felt. At that point, as far as I knew, there was no one in my life who had knowledge or experience with ADHD.

A few weeks after joining CHADD, I got an email from Sheila Gilbert—our current board member, who at the time was our chapter coordinator. We arranged a call and she introduced herself, invited me to an upcoming meeting, and held space after asking me what brought me to CHADD. Bless her heart, I think she held space for like an hour

while I purged my soul about my son's diagnosis, his challenges, and my fears.

Let's all imagine a choir of angels singing here, because that one phone call changed my life forever.

It changed my son's life.

Honestly, it changed the life of every person currently involved in our chapter. All for the better. Suddenly, in that moment, I was no longer carrying my grief and our family's struggle alone.

That's why I volunteer.

Sheila was a volunteer, freely giving her time and heart to help me while she was still struggling as a parent of ADHD children herself. That—to me—is the very heart and soul of CHADD. We may be struggling ourselves, but we reach out our hand to others who need help and pull them up. We change lives... one person at a time.

I wanted to give back where I could, so I started helping the chapter with their marketing and promotion. As I learned more about ADHD through our chapter's speaker meetings and my continued research, I realized my own lifelong struggles had a name. After a full evaluation, I was diagnosed with ADHD myself and began treatment.

A year later, when I became the chapter's coordinator, I realized I needed more support for my own ADHD—not just support as the parent of a child with ADHD. So along with Yulia Rafailova (my friend, fellow board member, and fellow adult with ADHD), we

launched the ADHD Empowerment adult peer support group. We're also forever grateful to Jessica McCabe of How to ADHD, who volunteered to help us and was an early member of our group.

We met monthly for a few years until another volunteer and current board member, Scott Seward, offered to help us take the meetings weekly. Several years later, that group sustains me and thirty other adults on a weekly basis.

As volunteers, our own passion for being of service ignites the spark in others in our community.

Over the last few years our chapter's community has grown from about twenty people to almost 1,800. It is thanks to our volunteers that we can offer fourteen meetings per month, including peer support groups for parents, adults, and young women; a weekly coworking group; and our monthly Understanding ADHD speaker series. We also have an active Discord server and Facebook groups, and have developed and nurtured strong relationships with local schools, educators, and ADHD professionals. So, my biggest "thank you" goes to my fellow CHADD of San Fernando Valley—Los Angeles board members, all our chapter volunteers, and all our chapter members.

One of my favorite quotes is from Brene Brown who says, "We don't have to do all of it alone. We were never meant to."

That quote is so special to me because none of our chapter's awesome accomplishments are mine alone. In fact, none of the victories I've had, or

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my son has had, are ours alone. Not since that first phone call to Sheila.

I am forever grateful to the CHADD community for empowering and supporting my own ADHD family and honored to be able to give my time and my heart to such a life-changing organization. 🗣️



Suzanne Sophos, CHADD's 2022 Volunteer Leader of the Year, is a social-emotional learning specialist, parent educator, writer, and family coach who has been engaged in family and child work since 2010. She manages the ADHD Empowerment Community, curates the Understanding ADHD speaker series, and

serves as the chapter coordinator and executive director of CHADD of San Fernando Valley—Los Angeles, the 2022 CHADD Chapter of the Year. Sophos also serves on CHADD's chapter advisory committee, helping to unite and support CHADD chapters across the country. This article was adapted from the speech she gave during the awards ceremony at the Annual International Conference on ADHD in Dallas, Texas.