



A remarkable email led to my recent conversation with Paula*, a parent who has relied on Gender Spectrum for resources, referrals and other support over the past 18 months. In response to our announcement of an upcoming daylong workshop for parents in Houston, Paula wrote that she and her husband would attend. “We are VERY interested in this workshop,” she said.

What made this remarkable is that Paula and her family live several states away from Texas. I was intrigued: I called Paula to hear about her family and find out why she was so eager to travel across four states to our workshop for parents. It turned out it wasn’t just the low post-holiday airfares – Paula had a very important motive for attending our parents workshop.

Paula and her husband have three kids. Their youngest, Sam, is about to turn five. Sam was assigned female at birth, but Paula says he has “always presented as a boy.” As part of her Brazilian heritage, it is common for girls to have pierced ears as babies, and Sam’s were pierced at three months. But Sam never wanted earrings that marked his gender as a girl. “Even after we switched to more gender-neutral earrings, he wanted them out,” Paula remembers.

When Sam refused to wear the “girl” clothes that were packed for him at a family event about a year and a half ago, Paula knew something was up. “This was more than being a tomboy,” she says. “This was different.”

A close friend of Paula’s has an older daughter who is Transgender. When her friend recommended Gender Spectrum Board Member Diane Ehrensaft’s book *The Gender Creative Child*, Paula read about Gender Spectrum and looked us up online. “I’d download the resources from the Gender Spectrum website and read through them late at night,” she recalls. Paula began to recognize Sam for who he is.

But challenges remained. An older pediatrician dismissed her concerns. “But we just saw a new doctor who was very supportive, and at our last doctor’s visit Sam came out, and he just said, “I am Sam,’ clear as day.” A recent visit to a psychiatrist also brought out her fears. “I realized I was going into the appointment with a lot of anxiety, because I’ve read so much

about the potential for mental health issues and self-harm.” Paula was also alarmed when she recalled a friend who had a transgender cousin who committed suicide, after complete family rejection.

But the psychiatrist and a pediatric endocrinologist recommended by Gender Spectrum both agreed: by supporting Sam, Paula was taking the most important step a parent can to avoid mental health issues. “When a child can’t be who they are, that’s when the health issues come up,” they told her. In fact, one study found that transgender youth who have strong parental support are 93% less likely to attempt suicide.

Armed with the knowledge and resources provided by Gender Spectrum, Paula is committed to supporting Sam in his journey. So why the long trip to our workshop? It turns out that, like many parents, Paula and her husband are at different stages in their journey of understanding and appreciating what’s ahead for Sam. “I’m only just realizing this as I’m saying it,” she told me. She was hoping that a full day away would help them concentrate on their concerns for Sam, and help her husband to fully understand that “Sam is going to need his support.”

In the meantime, like so many families, Paula continues to rely on Gender Spectrum for support and resources. “The holiday videos and resources are amazing, we couldn’t have made it through without them.” Her family has also found helpful books on our book lists, and she’s looking forward to joining our online Support Group calls. Paula also visits The Lounge to find support and share stories. “It’s nice to know there is this community of people with similar concerns where I can always go to find others’ perspectives.”

As our online programs and services, annual Conference, and other activities show, there are thousands of families like Paula’s who benefit from Gender Spectrum’s work. To learn more and get involved, visit [our website](#) and check out [The Lounge](#).

(*Paula and Sam’s names have been changed to insure their privacy)