



# NEIL AND RAMA

## LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR RAMA TO BE THE BEST HE CAN BE

Neil has flown in the military, is a Veteran, attended an Ivy League school and is now a contract Project Manager for the Air Force. But his main accomplishment, he says, is being a father.

Like many families, Neil finds it hard to balance work and home as a single parent to two young daughters, Nadia, 13, and Veda 8, from his first marriage. They are proud big sisters to their stepbrother, Rama, who's 3 and has been diagnosed on the autism spectrum.

"I have a lot of plates spinning, but you have to figure out how to make it work for the welfare and well-being of the children. I'm not a lone warrior. Rama's mother and I each contribute our half for Rama to grow and succeed."

As Rama grew, he was showing all the signs of being on the autism spectrum—repetitive behaviors, decreased social cues, and others.

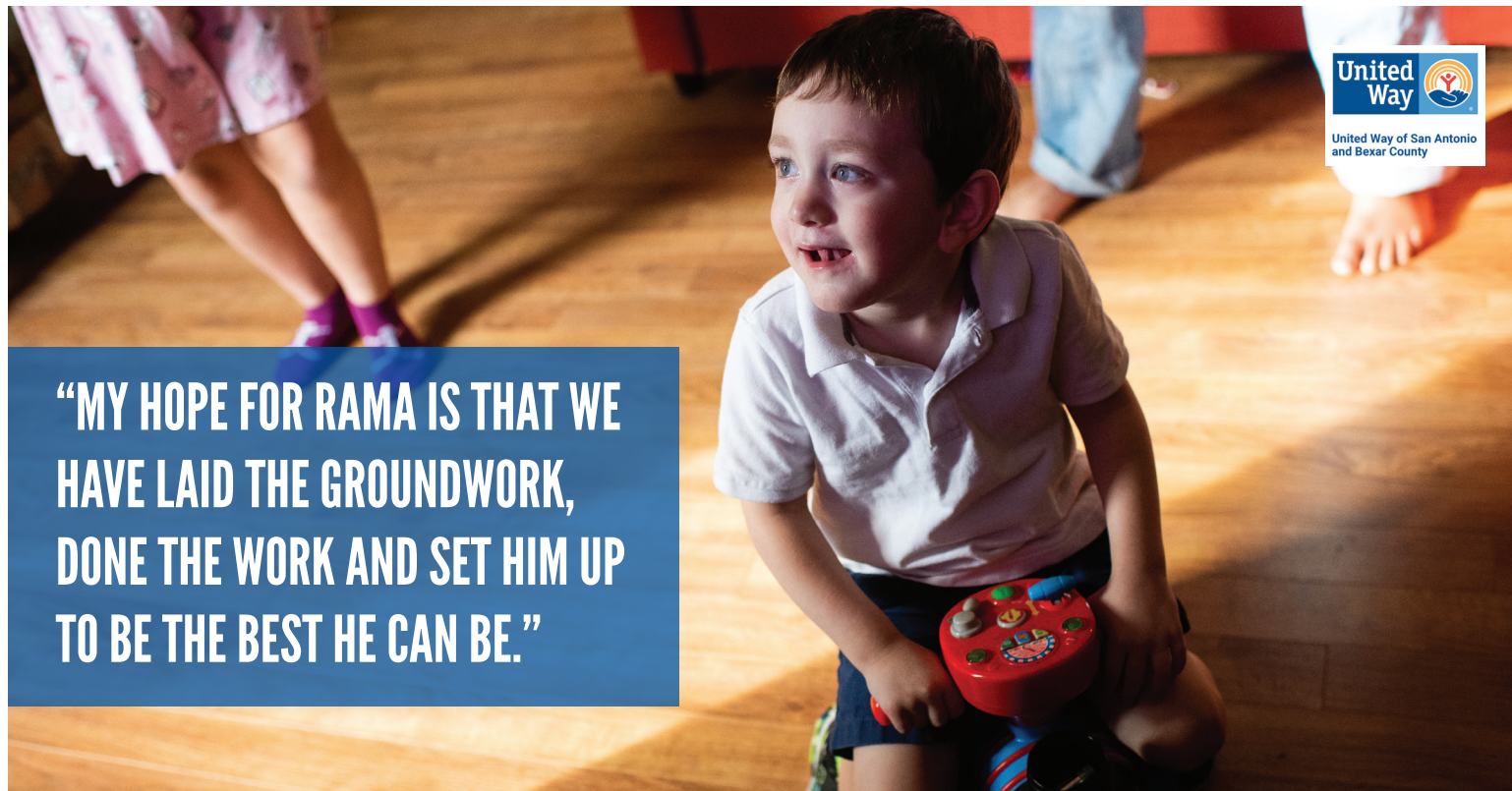
They knew to be vigilant. Brothers are more genetically predisposed to autism, and Rama has two stepbrothers who have it.

Early regiments and therapies are critical.

"Don't put on blinders. Respond early. Prepare. Participate. My heart goes out to families starting from scratch. I had two stepsons on the spectrum, so we were familiar with the indicators, treatment and the United Way-funded program through Autism Community Network to support us."

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Rama’s formal autism diagnosis was half completed when COVID-19 swept the globe.

Pandemic or not, parents and children work together guided by a certified behavior analyst to ensure that autistic young children are happy, healthy and ready for school and life.

This is the goal for all children across Bexar County, and United Way’s Ready Children Impact Council supports families’ abilities to nurture, protect and prepare their children to reach their full potential.

“You don’t feel so desperate and out of control. It’s easy to feel alone and isolated, but there is a robust network to help guide you.

Being caring and loving matters in the type of people our children turn into. The care you show them and what they’ll show others is very important to me.

My hope for Rama is that we have laid the groundwork, done the work and set him up to be the best he can be.

We have rich assets: a family support system that works, community assets, and a school

system that harmoniously contribute to find the place he fits in the world.”

Neil is committed to being an advocate and sharing his story with others. He says if he can help another family, another dad, to know there are solutions, then it’s definitely worthwhile. Waiting until the school system addresses the behaviors--to find support and therapy--he feels you’re missing out. Just reach out, he says.

“If you have children with special needs, if you’re struggling, you don’t have to go it alone. You can pull from a full breadth of services out there. And if donors don’t support these programs, if they don’t exist, if they are not funded, if the lights are out, help wouldn’t be possible.

If you’re supporting a charity, or an organization like United Way, you’re supporting me, and I am very grateful. I want Rama to be happy, healthy and successful—even though it may take a different path and support for that chance.”

*To learn more about United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County’s work and to read more stories, visit [uwsatx.org](https://uwsatx.org).*