



MEET THE NATALIE PROJECT

The Natalie Project (*#ustoo*) is a family-driven sexual assault prevention advocacy organization who champions healing and systemic change for individuals with disabilities and their families experiencing the trauma of sexual abuse.

The levels of abuse are epidemic due to a vulnerable and failing system. The Project empowers families, guardians, and caregivers with the practical planning tools to manage suspected abuse and build a community of systemic change advocates.

The work revolves around bringing about awareness of the issue through strategic partnerships and social media, empowering families with a toolkit to manage suspected abuse, building a community of support for survivors, and advocating with key partners for critical systems change.



Click here or scan QR
to see this video.

*sexually
assaulted at a
rate 7x higher*



These crimes go

**unrecognized
unprosecuted
unpunished.**

JOE SHAPIRO, NPR

DONATE



The Natalie Project is
fiscally sponsored by
the Social Good Fund.

OUR STORY

The Natalie Project (#ustoo) was founded in 2021 by Julie Payne-Neward, the older sister of Natalie Payne, to champion healing and systemic change for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families experiencing the trauma of sexual abuse.

In early 2012, Natalie's family noticed drastic behavioral and communicative changes in her. Natalie is nonspeaking and communicates her wants and needs through body mannerisms and vocalizations. For months prior, her medical team mistakenly diagnosed her with female illnesses. Then, in April 2012, Julie received a call from a medical professional stating that Natalie had been diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection (STI). Natalie can not consent to sexual activity. Immediately, Julie knew that her sister had been sexually assaulted.

For months, no one had considered that someone had sexually violated Natalie. Upon learning of her assault, neither the hospital nor the Regional Center filed the required and lawful mandatory report. Community Licensing was never triggered to investigate the facility. Julie called the police, and they quickly investigated. The report is still open. The facility promptly settled in exchange for an amount now long gone and the family's "silence."

The family immediately removed Natalie from the day program to ensure her safety. Natalie's mother committed to full-time caregiving without respite or support for four years. In addition, the family had to have an Administrative Hearing to have a judge determine and approve Natalie's younger sister as her respite support staff.

The system has not changed, and the perpetrator is still out in the community. The perpetrator violated Natalie's right to health, safety, and quality of life. And indirectly, the perpetrator eliminated opportunities for respite for Natalie's mother and younger sister, forcing an entire family dynamic to change drastically. Instilling a thickly layered sense of fear, hopelessness, and defeat from the reality that Natalie had become a victim.

At the time, Natalie's family needed assurance that the support systems would compassionately manage the trauma and address the problem on a case and systemic level. Instead, they were forced to sign a "secret settlement," which prevented the family from seeking justice and reprieve.

And while Julie and her mother never fathomed this nightmare would become their reality; they now channel their pain into power, as Natalie is a SURVIVOR.

Julie quickly discovered they were not the only family living through this experience. NPR covered Natalie's story in a series called **"Abused and Betrayed,"** which covers the prevalence of abuse of people with disabilities and their families.

Julie recognized the demand for advocacy for individuals and their families to know the prevalence of abuse and to reduce the risk of abuse. In addition to supporting families to identify abuse and create a plan in the event other families face this traumatic reality with their loved ones with disabilities. She aims to create systemic change to encourage transparency and accountability.








Senator Connie Leyva (D-Chino)
"Me Too" #SB820









Julie Payne-Neward (center) speaking with Tarana Burke (founder of the #metoo movement) and her younger sister, Patricia Payne (left), at Saint Mary's College of California. She is accompanied by Natalie Payne and Rosemary Payne (Julie's mother, far right).




PODCASTS

-  Julie Neward is a Champion for Change, She-Eo Lead Podcast , 5.16.22
-  Autism SPA Sits Down with Julie Payne Neward & Marisol Rubio, Special Needs Advocates Fighting Back
-  CALL TO ACTION, Advocate Like A Mother, 3.21.21
-  Real Talk, All Things Inclusive, Natalie's Voice, 4.7.20
- Disabilities & #metoo 4.20.20
-  LOMAH, Advocating Against the Sexual Assault Epidemic, 2.18.19


NATIONAL ARTICLES

-  "Individuals with Disabilities at High Risk for Sexual Assault," Alex Thornburg, April 9, 2021, The Well News
-  "A Sister's Quest to End the Sexual Abuse of the Severely Disabled", Jill Escher, May 6, 2019, National Council on Severe Autism
-  "What to Expect When You Become a Sibling's Sole Caregiver," Sofia Barrett-Ibarra, April 9, 2018, VICE News
-  "Predators Hone-In on Developmentally Disabled Women" Geri Spieler, February 18, 2019, Truth Dig
-  "Letter: Public Deserves Better As April Is Sexual Assault Awareness Month," Julie Neward, April 18, 2018, East County Today
-  "Abused and Betrayed, She Can't Tell Us What's Wrong," Joseph Shapiro, January 10, 2018, National Public Radio (NPR)



NETWORKING

-  Alumni Spotlight, Carondeletter, Fall 2018, Page 42-43
-  "Taking Charge" November 15-19, 2021, Los Angeles, Disability Voices United p.13
-  "BOLD Moves 2018," August 29-31, 2018, Anaheim, National Sexual Assault Conference, CALCASA p.23

VIDEOS

-  The Natalie Project, 4 minutes
-  Member Spotlight Speech State Council on Developmental Disabilities, Councilwoman Neward , SCDD 3.23.21

OTHER

-  Reappointment by Governor Newsom to SCDD, March 2022
-  Appointment by Governor Brown to SCDD, December 2018

Who We Are ...



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REPRESENTATION

Councilwoman, Governor Appointed
California State Council on
Developmental Disabilities

Advisory Board Member

Disability Without Abuse Project

Advisory Board Member

Right Care Now Project

Founder & Board Member

The California Sibling
Leadership Network "CASibs"

Advocate

Marisol & Julie Advocate



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