

Vijette Profile

Vijette says “God gave me the heart of a servant and I enjoy serving other people.”
(Her statement above sums up the profile well)

Vijette Saari is passionate about supporting individuals with I/DD and their families. She considers herself an advocate and has spent a lifetime supporting individuals with disabilities both personally and professionally. Vijette grew up with an older sister who has I/DD and remembers being a part of the therapy and school visits for her sister, but never had any intention of making that part of her career, but through her undergraduate years at Arizona State University Vijette worked with children who have autism and loved it. This love of working with children led to a career as a Developmental Special Instructions (DSI) and Service Coordinator under the Arizona Early Intervention Program (AzEIP) and the Division of Developmental Disabilities in La Paz and Mohave Counties. Later, she became a First Things First Regional Director and then a Director of Family Support and Education with Candelen. She is now the Grants Manager for Lake Havasu City, where she lives.

Through this time, Vijette and her husband, Damon, had three amazing children, two boys, (Raiden, 14 yrs., Kaito 12 yrs.), and a girl (Jade 10 yrs.). During Vijette’s pregnancy with her third child, they discovered that their daughter was suffering from Fifth Disease in-utero. This virus is suspected to be the cause of her daughter’s bilateral hearing loss, hypotonic cerebral palsy, and global developmental delays. Treatment for the infection marked the beginning of her daughter’s lifetime of visits with specialists. Since then, Vijette has surrounded herself with a village of family, friends, and professionals who deeply care about the well-being of her daughter. She is confident that her daughter is a testament to the miracles of God. Recently, Jade qualified for nationals in the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) Artistic Gymnastics Special Stars. The AAU Special Stars program allows Jade to learn, perform, and compete with a team of gymnasts under the direction of amazing coaches.

Vijette believes that one of the best ways to support the community is to volunteer her time. Vijette was introduced to the Council by staff member Jason Snead during a presentation he was giving to the Mohave Special Needs Advocacy Council (SNAC), which is one of the many groups she volunteers for. During that meeting Jason and Vijette got into a healthy debate about services for those with disabilities and before the meeting was over, she had submitted her application to be part of the Council. Some of the other groups she is a part of are Arizona Rural Health Association, Mohave Health Coalition, and the middle school Parent Teacher Advisory Council. She volunteers as a Raising Special Kids Parent-to-Parent Volunteer, a Girl Scout Troop Co-Leader, and an elementary special education classroom parent. She has earned her master’s degree in early childhood education, is a Fellow of the National Leadership Academy for the Public’s Health, and a member of the Infant Toddler Mental Health Coalition of Arizona. Vijette has focused her work on the Social Determinants of Health in varying roles in government and non-profit sectors across Arizona and Nevada. Her contributions to increasing childhood immunization rates in Mohave County have been honored with a 2022 Big Shots Award by The Arizona Partnerships for Immunization (TAPI).

Vijette loves to spend time with her family and their three dogs. They enjoy the outdoors, especially boating, camping, and off-roading. Vijette often rereads *The Chronicles of Narnia* series by British author C. S. Lewis and the *Harry Potter* series by British author J. K. Rowling. Vijette wants other children

and families to have access to the same system of supports that she has been blessed with and believes that we must give people the tools needed to be their own voice. She believes that one of the key things that the Council should do is provide information about the disability community while also helping individuals use the information effectively.