



Dr. David Steiman, Wolf Prado & Laura Prado

# Advocating Rights for Disabled

by Debbie Nyman

As champions for human rights, David Steiman, MD and Laura Prado have faced many interesting road bumps on their life's journey. In 2003, the Weston couple founded a non-profit organization called LIFE (Living Inclusively for Everyone), after many years of volunteer efforts to help parents navigate the system to advocate for children with developmental disabilities.

The couple originally met and married in Washington, DC, while David was in the United States Army as a medical student specializing in cardiology, and Laura was beginning her legal career as an attorney for prisoners' rights in 1985.

Their charity work was born out of their own experience advocating for son. The couple and their two children, Marina and Wolf, were stationed in Germany when Laura sensed her young son was not developing as his older sister had. She received an astonishing diagnosis of autism and was told to forget about this child and be satisfied with her so-called normal child. This was not acceptable.

Laura wasn't about to let her son become a statistic. She returned to the United States with her toddler son and started research and learned how to navigate the system.

As an attorney, she was able to comprehend the complexities of the special education laws in the country, while David remained in Germany to complete his military obligation.

"I knew that my child was entitled to a public education, but it was not easy to have him placed in a timely manner," Laura explained.

This was the eye opener for the family of how difficult it is to find the proper education and placement for the developmentally disabled.

Moving to Weston meant the family was back to square one trying to maneuver through red tape and bureaucracy.

Ironically, at one point Laura was involved with a class action legal case against the state of Florida and Governor Jeb Bush, and after the case was decided in the favor of the disabled, she later received an award from the governor honoring her work. David was honored by Broward County for his efforts to hire young developmentally disabled adults at his Plantation cardiology practice.

The mission of David and Laura's organization is to promote the inclusion of all able people into all aspects of their natural community. They focus on the areas concerning employment, education, residential options and enjoyment.

The organization offers training and assistance to parents, provides support systems and teaches parents how to get through the twists and turns. Another goal is to find living facilities for older children able to live in group homes.

Laura has advocated for many Weston families, often joining parents in their meetings with school officials. Volunteers are always welcome as well as donations.

To become involved, contact Laura Prado at 954-817-4742 or visit the website at [www.life-florida.org](http://www.life-florida.org). **WL**