

# Steps to Success...

Volume 1, Issue 2

MAR-APR 2004

Executive Board:

Ms. Kathy Schlenz,  
President

Mr. Chris Perrotti,  
Vice President

Ms. Andrea Krupp,  
Secretary

Mr. John Quinn,  
Treasurer

Mr. Cary Coen

Ms. Joan Colwell

Ms. Carol Costa

Ms. Nancy Merrill

Mr. Ken Pariseau

Ms. Beth Pinto

Dr. Anthony Regine

Advisory Board:

Ms. Cheryl Cotter

Ms. Barbara Dubois

Ms. Kat Felkner

Ms. Melissa Ferreira

Ms. Lore Gray

Ms. Melinda Jackson

Ms. Susan Morsilli

Ms. Connie Rinehart

Ms. Susan Sposato

Ms. Joanne Weaver

## Imagine Walk 2004 Takes Center Stage

**O**n April 25th the second annual Imagine Walk and Family Fun Day will be at Goddard State Park. Registration is scheduled for 9:00 am with pre-registration available online at [www.theautismproject.org](http://www.theautismproject.org).

The walk itself will start out at 10:00 am and will wind for 2 1/2 miles through the park's beautiful grounds. After that there will be games, food and snacks, pony rides, a bounce house and much more.

Last year's Walk was a great success and many pictures are available on our website.



*Executive Director Joanne Quinn accepts a donation from the Verizon Pioneers volunteer group.*

## Please Support Our Corporate Sponsors...

**N**o fundraiser can be a success without the solid support of our local business community. We would like to say a very special thank you to the following firms for supporting our cause as **Walk Partners** and we would ask you to remember them when your future needs require a service they provide.



## From the Executive Director's Desk...

---

**D**ear friends,  
Is it April already? As many of you know, April is Autism Awareness Month and to bring awareness to the disability and raise needed funds we are once again hosting our Imagine Walk and Family Fun Day. We were overwhelmed by the outcome last year and look forward to another great event for 2004!

First, I'd like to thank our Honorary Chairs for 2004, Mark and Susan Weiner. We truly appreciate their generosity. Their support is helping us to meet our goals of increasing awareness and support for children with autism and their families.

In addition, a big thank you to our Corporate Sponsors for this year's Walk beginning with the great folks at NBC-10 who are working hard to increase awareness about the Imagine Walk and Family Fun Day. You'll be seeing information about the Walk on their website and station. Remember, from now on *Turn to 10!*, Neighborhood Health Plan, Advanced Financial Services and Gem Plumbing and Heating are our Partners for the Walk. Listen for radio ads generously donated by the good smelling employees of Gem Plumbing and Heating!

There's so much energy around this year's Walk! None of this would be happening without the invaluable donation of endless hours of hard work and planning by our Walk Committee volunteers led by co-chairs Susan Sposato and Roberta Zimmerly. For the *second* year in a row they have committed their efforts to creating a uniquely autism-friendly event that is family centered and fun! If you need additional information, or would like to register, you can go to our website at [www.theautismproject.org](http://www.theautismproject.org).

Just in... we received a Declaration from the Governor's Office that states April is Autism Awareness Month in RI. We are also working with area news media to increase the understanding of Autism Spectrum Disorders, the multiple services required, what we are doing in RI and what areas still need to be addressed.

Enjoy the newsletter. This month's *Lessons in Learning* introduces a tool for teaching children with Asperger's Syndrome the impact of choices, both good and bad.

I look forward to seeing you April 25, 2004. Pray for sun!

Fondly,  
Joanne G. Quinn

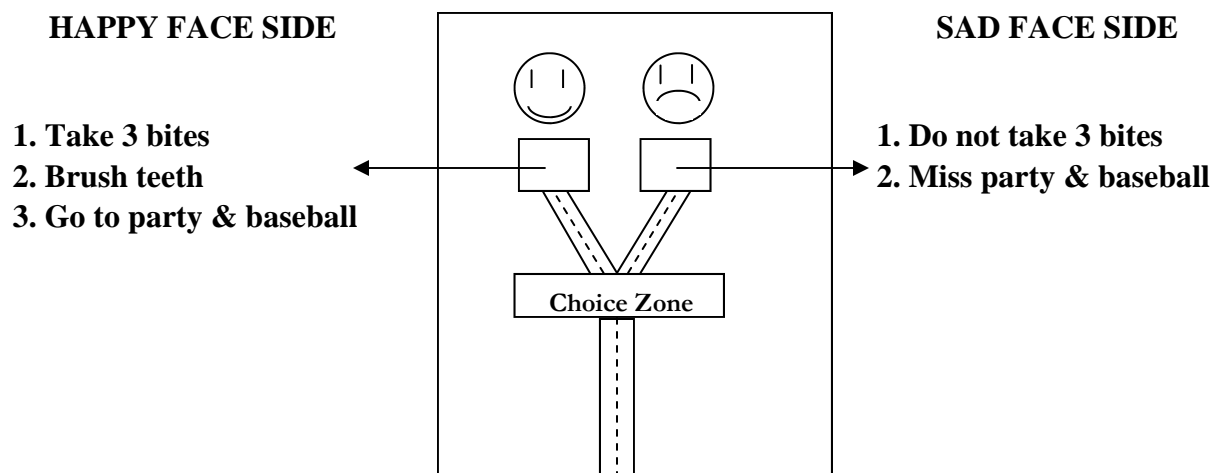
## Lessons in Learning...The Choice Zone

---

**M**y son is 7 and has Asperger Syndrome (AS). I have explored many strategies and interventions that can benefit him. I read about the "Mind the Gap" strategy in Catherine Faherty's book, *"Asperger's...What Does It Mean To Me?"* Jack Wall, Charlotte TEACCH Center, noticed children with AS and autism were confused by their reactions to stress and anxiety. Mr. Wall used the phrase, "mind the gap" to refer to the period of time during which a child faced with a situation can choose a response or course of action. Mind the gap uses visual structures to accomplish the following: help a child be aware of their internal state; give the child control over their response to an event; teach positive behaviors. This strategy results in the child's increased self-awareness of anxiety; improved awareness of external causes of anxiety or stress; increased knowledge of positive choices.

## Lessons in Learning continued...

I have modified this strategy into what I call “the choice zone”. I use it consistently with my son with great success. For example, one day John would not finish his breakfast. He was going to a birthday party and I knew his special foods wouldn’t be available. I also knew he could finish “3 more bites” but was resisting. I repeated “3 more bites then all done” and John repeated “I don’t want it.” I responded, “You’re choosing to miss the party if you don’t eat 3 more bites.” I was getting nowhere and he was getting more upset. So I took out our choice zone sheet, which he had become familiar with over time. I wrote the following:



I gave John the sheet and said nothing; it is important to reduce stimulation when my son is upset. He read it, drew a line following the happy face side, took 3 bites of his food and walked away. I had given John a visual explanation of the situation, reduced the stimulation by not talking, and empowered him to choose. I was removed from the situation and a meltdown was avoided because it was John’s choice.

This method works beautifully if you consistently follow through. I have to honor my son’s choice. Even if he chooses the less desirable option-missing the party-I follow through. This can be the most challenging part of the strategy but you have to mean what you say and say what you mean. Over time, I modified happy face and sad face to the Red Sox and the Yankees because my son loves baseball and is a huge Red Sox fan. With practice, I have been able to either simply show John his “Choice Zone” card or tell him, “John, you’re in the choice zone”, and he pauses to choose an appropriate behavior most of the time. It is important that school and home follow the same “choice zone” protocol in order for the child to have the consistency that is so important to our children on the autism spectrum.

As I have watched John learn to manage stress and anxiety more effectively, I am reminded of a quote from David Spicer in *“Asperger’s...What Does It Mean To Me?”*, “Stress alters everything for me, including sensory stuff, my ability to think, to function, to analyze things...There can be so much happening beneath the surface that a single event which seems from the outside like one little thing, no bid deal, is a trigger for losing everything...”

## An Interview with the Imagine Walk Co-Chairs

**S**usan Baylis Sposato and Roberta Zimmerly were the 2003 co-chairs for the Imagine Walk and Family Fun Day. They have returned to co-chair the 2004 Imagine Walk, and recently they sat down to share their thoughts on the Imagine Walk and Family Fun Day, and the Autism Project of Rhode Island.

Both Sue and Roberta came to the Autism Project of Rhode Island through their network of friends and their search for information about effective strategies for children with autism. As the parents of children with autism, they both found their way to the Autism Project's 9 week training series, *A Starting Point*. *A Starting Point* also proved to be an opportunity to network with other families effected by autism, and Roberta's casual comment to Joanne Quinn, "Gee, a walk or a run could be a good fundraiser for the Project" led to the 2003 Imagine Walk and Family Fun Day.

The Imagine Walk was a wonderful success and truly a fun day for all of the families who participated. Sue, Roberta and the many people who contributed to that success were stunned at the turnout; close to 1000 people participated in the Imagine Walk. The Imagine Walk was the key fundraiser that allowed the Autism Project to move to its current space and expand its programs. Beyond the money raised, the Imagine Walk was an extraordinary day for the families who joined together to help support the Autism Project. Looking out at a sea of people gathered together for the sake of our children with autism was a powerful moment. Watching our children with autism enjoy the sensory tables and the bounce house, staffed by volunteers who brought their pro-

fessional understanding to the event, was heartwarming. As Sue said, "The Imagine Walk was a judgment-free day where our kids were accepted."

We're delighted that Sue and Roberta have returned to co-chair this year's Imagine Walk, and they have a strong team helping to guarantee the 2004 Imagine Walk is also a great success. Susan Morsilli has signed on as the Logistics Chairperson and she has dedicated hours to making sure the day runs smoothly. She has enlisted Jennifer Marton to serve as the Volunteer Coordinator for the day. Jennifer learned of the Autism Project through her work as a paraprofessional with the Newport School Department and the training they offered through the Autism Project. Mary Farhoumand, Development Director, has been a great resource with the fundraising component of the Imagine Walk.

The Imagine Walk 2004 promises to be as much fun as last year. Roberta is the Activities Chair, and she has worked hard to assemble a variety of fun activities for the children. Sue is the Team Recruitment Chair, and she continues to share her enthusiasm for the Autism Project and the Imagine Walk with people as she signs teams up from agencies and school districts throughout RI. Susan and Jennifer will be on hand at the Imagine Walk to supervise the event from beginning to end. So why do these women give so much of their time to this event and the Autism Project? To help the Autism Project continue parent scholarships for *A Starting Point* and the *Annual National Speaker Conference*, to help support the growing programs offered by the Autism Project, including the Discussion Groups and the camp, *Move, Think, Create, Communicate*. Simply stated, "It's for the kids."

## Activities List for Walk 2004

- Pony Rides
- Face Painting
- Removable Tattoos
- Make & Take: Bead Necklaces
- Make & Take: Picture Frames
- Sand and Rice Sensory Treasure Hunts
- Moon Bounce Houses
- Popcorn
- Cotton candy
- URI football players-pass the football with the best!
- Warwick Police fingerprinting;
- Sparky's Puppets;
- SpongeBob Squarepants character
- "Samboni", mascot of the Providence Bruins
- Refreshments
- Community Partners-information tables
- Back to Basics-product and information tables



## Future Events...Save the Dates!

---

**April 8, 2004:** Our Wine, Dine and Help Autism Event is sold out! Many thanks to Michael Andoscia of Waddell & Reed, Inc. of Warwick for all his hard work.

**April 25, 2004:** Imagine Walk and Family Fun Day, Goddard Memorial State Park, Warwick RI. Registration 9:00AM. Walk begins at 10:00 followed by a day of family fun. Preregistration is suggested.

**June 14, 2004:** Take me out to the Ballgame-The Project is sponsoring its first Pawtucket Red Sox Night on Monday, June 14, 2004 at McCoy Stadium. Tickets are \$6.00 and will be sold at the walk. For more information please contact Mary Farhoumand at 785-2666 or [mary@theautismproject.org](mailto:mary@theautismproject.org)

**July 17, 2004:** "Drive for Autism"-Waddell & Reed, Inc. is hosting a golf tournament at the Cranston Country Club at 1:00PM. For ticket information please contact Michael Andoscia or Cathy Easop at 736-8843



Check out our website for more info at:

[www.theautismproject.org](http://www.theautismproject.org)

United Way #8410



51 Sockanosset Crossroad, Suite A  
Cranston, RI, 02920

<p>Non Profit Org US Postage paid Providence, RI Permit #114</p>
--

*Future Newsletters will be sent via e-mail so please go to our website and sign up with your e-mail address today!*