



Steps to Success...

Volume 4, Issue 2



MAR-APR 2007

5th Annual Imagine Walk and Family Fun Day Slated for April 29, 2007

Mark your calendar for April 29, 2007 for our *5th Annual Imagine Walk and Family Fun Day* at Goddard Memorial State Park in Warwick. Registration begins at 9:00AM. Please join us for this unique interactive experience to increase awareness of autism. The Walk is followed by a Family Fun Day where we will host activities for all children and feature events appropriate for children, teens and adults with autism and their family members.

What better way to show your support and create awareness of autism than to participate in this event. Last year we were more than 3,500 strong! Your patronage of this event brought many new programs to both children and their families this year including the expansion of social skills groups, the Parent Resource Center and additional slots at camp!

We need your help again. Medicaid cuts and changes in certification standards directly impact our budget. Funds from our Walk support our efforts to offer more programs to more individuals with autism, schools, community agencies and families.

You can participate in this event by organizing a team (See information on Autism Awareness Program page 9), volunteering or just bring your family and enjoy the day. *Join us on March 26th. to learn how to build your team.*



Also, to solicit donations via email you can use our online service, *Firstgiving*. The service is very easy to use. Go to www.firstgiving.com/autismproject and follow the prompts. To volunteer for the event please contact Mary Farhoumand at Mary@theautismproject.org or call 785-2666, ext. 104. We look forward to seeing all of you again this year.

Renowned Fairy Godmother to Enchant Bittersweet Attendees



Don't miss this spectacular event at Newport's beautiful Rosecliff Mansion on Friday, March 16th at 7:00pm. There'll be chocolates, hors d'oeuvres, chocolates, an open bar, chocolates, dancing to the Fat City Band, chocolates, a silent auction and did we mention chocolates? This year Bittersweet is a celebration to commemorate ten years of service to children with Autism and their families. Tickets are still available and can be purchased online at

www.theautismproject.org/bittersweet or you can call 401-785-2666. Honorary Chairperson, Ms. Jennifer Kirk and her family will lend their magic to the APRI annual fund raising event *Bittersweet*. Ms. Kirk will present a Puzzle Piece Pin to all attendees. In addition, there will be several surprises and added touches to enchant all who attend the event.



From the Executive Director

Dear Friends and Colleagues:



One of the great attributes of the Autism Project of RI is the collaboration of parents and professionals working to improve the lives of individuals with autism. So much is accomplished when we team up to tackle an issue and produce solutions.

This is especially true each year at the *Imagine Walk and Family Fun Day*. I remember the excitement of the first year as therapists and teachers bumped into past students and their families. Accomplishments and progress were celebrated and old times reminisced. We all look forward to the annual reunion at this popular event.

The success of the first year launched the Autism Project into the areas of direct services and family support. Unfortunately, Medicaid cuts and changes in rules are directly impacting our budget in these areas.

This year, more than ever we are in need of team work.

We rely on the success of the *Imagine Walk and Family Fun Day* to support the operational costs of doing business. I ask each of you to put a team together of friends, family members, therapists, doctors and teachers. Enjoy a great day with old and new friends knowing you are supporting the many children, teens and adults living with autism in RI. Every donation makes a difference.

When we finished our first Walk, the incidence rate was 1:1500. Today it's 1:150. There is so much to do and we are grateful for each and every donation we receive to fulfill our mission.

Check out our website for help on creating a team, soliciting donations and volunteering for the Walk. Join us on March 26th for an informational evening on putting together a team.

Thank you for your continued support,

Joanne Quinn

Executive Director

The Autism Project of RI

Executive Director

Ms. Joanne Quinn

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Newsletter Editor:

Mr. James Golden

In The News...

The following press release deals with the results of the data released recently by the Center for Disease Control.

Bethesda, MD (February 8, 2007) The Autism Society of America (ASA) welcomed the new CDC studies on the prevalence numbers of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in the United States as tremendously significant data that will help the cause of improving the lives of all those affected by autism. In data collected from its Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network (ADDM), a population-based, multi-state surveillance network that surveyed 8 year olds in 2000 and 2002, the CDC found that the data confirm that ASD prevalence affects approximately an average of 1 child in every 150. The data represents 10 percent of the U.S. population of 8 year old children.

ASA believes the CDC numbers are tremendously significant. "Finally, we can end the debate on the prevalence of autism in our nation and focus on getting the services and supports the families need," said Lee Grossman, ASA president and CEO. "Autism is a treatable lifelong condition that affects tens of millions of Americans today. It is time to aggressively address this national health crisis." The CDC is recommending public health actions to improve early identification of ASD.

The CDC study includes children with behaviors consistent with autism, Asperger's and pervasive developmental delays not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS). The data came from 14 sites in five states (Arizona, Georgia, Maryland, New Jersey, South Carolina and West Virginia). The study also found higher prevalence in boys than girls (a range of 2.8 6 boys to girls, depending on the state) and no statistically significant difference among non-Hispanic whites and non-Hispanic black children.

Colleen Boyle of the CDC noted that the study showed the age of diagnosis (at between 4-5 years of age) was much later than the age at which developmental concern was registered (before 24

months), underscoring the need for earlier identification of autism.

To read the study in full, please visit www.cdc.gov/autism. For information on support, services and identification, please visit <http://www.autism-society.org/>.

ASA is the oldest and largest member organization dedicated to autism in the world. ASA's mission is to improve the lives of all affected by autism—individuals with autism, their families and the professionals with whom they interact. For more information on autism or ASA, visit <http://www.autism-society.org/> or call 1.800.3AUTISM (1.800.328.8476).

CVS Partners with APRI

In 2006, CVS/pharmacy and the CVS/pharmacy Charitable Trust introduced a new program targeting children with disabilities, called CVS All Kids Can. The goal was to develop and support a national, regional and local network of agencies serving children and their families. As part of the effort, the CVS/pharmacy Charitable Trust earmarked \$25K to APRI as a means of matching new pledges made by CVS associates during the 2006 United Way Campaign. Members of the Autism Project and family members presented to CVS employees.

Joanne and Tracy Allard, spoke of what the social skills groups, camp and the resource center mean to their family. As a result \$23,000 in new pledges to the APRI were made by individuals, with a grand total of \$48,000 raised to support programs, services and the mission of APRI. Named the CVS All Kids Can Autism Project Partnership, funds will support social skills groups and camp programs in the coming year.

"Our new initiative CVS *All Kids Can* reflects our commitment to children with disabilities by focusing on the theme of inclusion with the goal of ensuring that all children are able to learn, play and succeed in life" said Jennifer Veilleux, Director of Community Relations. "We wanted to give our support center employees an opportunity to connect with a local charity that works to integrate children into their community. The Autism Project is a great fit."

Calendar of Trainings

The Autism Project of RI offers training and support to school districts, education professionals and parents through a variety of mediums including a parent training series, a state-wide conference with national speakers for all who work, support or live with an individual with ASD.

In the last five years the Project has expanded to offer three levels of parent and teacher training, multiple levels of social skills groups, training/mentoring for teachers in public schools, a summer camp, parent support, a Resource Center, advocacy, consultation, workshops and public awareness and education. Listed below are the next series of training classes to be given. Detailed descriptions of these training classes are available on our website or call us at 785-2666 for more information.

For Adults:

A Starting Point- 9 week training series 6:30-8:30

Dates

Tuesdays, March 20, 27, April 3,10,17,24, May 1,8,15

Parent To Parent –English

5 week training series 6:30-8:00

Dates

March 13,20,27, April 3,10



Thank you Verizon for supporting our A Starting Point series with a grant.

For Children:

Social Skills Programs

Rat-A-Tat-Tat- A pre-school music and language program designed for children ages 3-5, to teach foundation social skills. Children will enhance their vocabulary, comprehension of the spoken word, promote

imitation skills, be introduced to concepts of waiting, change, and turn taking all through movement and music. Children are placed in groups based on age and abilities.

Leaps and Bounds Foundations- A play group designed to teach children the fundamental skills of play: how to play, the function of toys, how to transition, follow schedules, wait, and reciprocal social interactions. This group is designed for children who require intense structure, a small group, and 1:1 attention to promote participation. Children learn how to participate effectively in pairs and small groups before becoming integral participants in Leaps and Bounds. Children are 5-15. and they are placed in groups based on age and abilities.

Leaps and Bounds- A play group instructed by trained professionals to teach group dynamics, social rules/expectations, how to engage in shared experiences, and how to foster positive peer relations. The group is visually supported using social stories, schedules, cue cards, physical boundaries and more. Play routines and social interactions will be facilitated and promoted by adults. This group is designed for children ages 5-10.

Club Jr. – This pre-teen group is designed for children who can effectively communicate basic wants/needs, call attention to others, protest appropriately, and initiate simple conversations. Children will learn to expand their leisure interests and therefore expand their topic interests during conversations. Schedules and various visual supports will enhance the children's' abilities to share thoughts and respond to others conversations. This group is for children ages 10-13. Children are grouped depending on age and abilities.

Club – The Club is a safe and engaging place for teens to hang out. They become integral members of a group as they discuss and participate in community trips. Participants learn to foster friendships, and learn appropriate social rules for appropriate interactions (interrupting, compromising, negotiating and listening). The participants guide the focus in the groups. For one group it may be restaurant manners, for others it may be dating. Conversations and leisure interests are enhanced

and promoted by facilitators. Participants range in age from 13-19 and will be grouped according to age and abilities.

Karate – Therapeutic recreation through Martial Arts. Children ages 4-21 will learn non-violent Shotokan moves in a visually structured format. Sessions will focus on self-regulation tools and the art of karate.

Art – Therapeutic Recreation through visual arts. For ages 5-21. Spring session is photography. Groups will be made based on age and abilities.

Due to limited space we regret that all children may not be able to attend a particular session. The APRI will establish wait lists for groups exceeding capacity. Please call Susan Fisher at APRI for current schedules of classes.



Sibkids and Sibnet Listservs

Announcing the SibKids and SibNet Listservs (please share this with families and service providers in the disability, health, and mental health communities!)

The Sibling Support Project of the Arc of the United States is pleased to announce SibNet and SibKids.

SibNet and SibKids are the Internet's only listservs for and about brothers and sisters of people with special health, developmental, and emotional needs. Both SibKids (for younger brothers and sisters) and SibNet (for older siblings) allow brothers and sisters an opportunity to connect with their peers from around the world. Both listservs have members from the US,

Canada, Australia, England, Japan and elsewhere. SibNet (started in 1996) and SibKids (started in 1997) are remarkably warm, thoughtful, and informative communities where young and adult brothers and sisters share information and discuss issues of common interest.

Anyone who has email can subscribe to SibKids and SibNet. For a no-cost subscription and to learn more about SibKids and SibNet, please visit the Sibling Support Project's Web Page (see address below). Finally, if you have further questions about SibKids, SibNet, our Sibshops, or the work of the Director, Don Meyer.

Sibling Support Project
6512 23rd Ave NW, #213
Seattle, WA 98117
(206) 297-6368
www.siblingsupport.org

APRI Awarded Multiple Grants

The Autism Project of RI was awarded several grants in support of key programs.

Hasbro, Inc. for the development of an Autism Awareness Program for School Age Children; Representative Hannah Gallo for professional consultation; RI Foundation for professional consultation; Andrade-Faxon Foundation for camperships; First Fed to support Parent to Parent trainings.

Join us at Bittersweet...Mar 16 @ 7:00PM

For tickets call (401) 785-2666



From the Development Corner

KUDOS:

Once again the Autism Project of RI would like to express our sincere appreciation to The Moms Club of South County for hosting a holiday raffle and donating an additional \$600.00 to our organization.

The Autism Project would also like to thank the students of Father John Doyle School in Coventry, who recently donated \$250.00 in honor of Principal's Appreciation Day to recognize the amazing work that Mrs. Vivian Ryan, vice principal of the school has accomplished.

The Autism Project of Rhode Island would like to express our sincere appreciation to Kirks Folly, and our very own fairy-godmother; Jenniefer Kirk and the entire Kirk family for a recent auction they held on eBay which raised an amazing \$15,000 for our organization.



(l to r) The Kirk siblings: Helen, George, Jenniefer and Elizabeth

The auction consisted of a weekend get-away to the High Bidder and a Guest to Providence, RI, during the weekend of their famous Factory Sale, November 2-4, 2007. The High Bidder Will Receive a Once-In-A-Lifetime Experience! This Extravagant Package Included: Round Trip Airfare, 2 Nights Lodging at an Elegant Bed & Breakfast, Factory Sale (Plus a \$500 Gift Certificate to Shop to Your Heart's Content!), A Private Dinner Party at Seaview, Deluxe Gift Package, Transportation, and More!

Upcoming Events...

March 1st-March 17th

We are happy to announce that **Sweet Twist**, 5707 Post Road in East Greenwich is selling chocolate Claddagh coins in honor of St. Patrick's Day from March 1st to March 17th. 100% of all proceeds will directly benefit The Autism Project of Rhode Island. What a wonderful way to spread some St. Patrick's Day cheer and make a difference for our kids.



Friday, March 16, 2007

The Autism Project of RI is hosting "**Bittersweet**" on Friday, March 17, 2007 in Newport at historic Rosecliff Mansion. The event will be a celebration to commemorate our 10th year of service and support to children with autism and their families.

The Kirk family of Kirk's Folly fame will serve as Honorary Chairpersons of the event. Some of the highlights of the evening include a silent auction; chocolate sampling created by Johnson & Wales School of Culinary Arts, Sweenor's, Chocolate Delicacy, Newport Chocolate, hor d'oeuvres, open bar, and music by The Fat City Band. The event begins at 7:00PM and tickets are \$75.00 and can be purchased on line at www.theautismproject.org/events_bittersweet.php or by contacting The Autism Project at 401-785-2666. Tickets are on a first serve basis only and will not be available at the door.

Please join us for this very special evening, and enjoy an enchanted experience, inspired by our friends at Kirks Folly.

Each guest will receive a Kirks Folly awareness pin, courtesy of Kirks Folly created for this very special evening.

Saturday, April 21, 2007

Imagine Gift Store, at #5 Miller Street in Warren, Rhode Island will host a sale to benefit the Autism Project of Rhode Island. All customers who bring in our coupon will receive a **25% discount** on all purchases. To download the coupon, please visit www.theautismproject.org/events.



Visit *Imagine* in the Lyric Theatre and you'll be treated to a journey back in time. When you enter, you'll be greeted by Bartholomew Lyric. Bring your camera and take a photo with Mr. Lyric! Notice the original ticket windows, behind Bartholomew, as well as the tin ceilings, restored to their original condition 100 years ago. Venture to the 3rd floor balcony, look down and visualize a packed theatre watching "101 Dalmatians" at a Sunday afternoon matinee.



April 29, 2007

Mark your calendar for **April 29, 2007** for our **5th Annual Imagine Walk and Family Fun Day** at Goddard Memorial State Park in Warwick. Registration begins at 9:00a.m.. Please join us for this unique interactive experience where we utilize red flags to communicate awareness of autism. The walk is followed by a family fun day where we will host activities for all children and feature events appropriate for autism and special needs children.

What better way to show your support and create

awareness of autism than to participate in this event. Last year we were more than 3,500 strong! Your patronage of this event brought many new programs to both children and their families this year. You can participate in this event by organizing a team, volunteering or just bring your family and enjoy the day. To pre-register, please visit info@theautismproject.org. To solicit donations via email you can use our online service, Firstgiving. The service is very easy to use. Go to www.firstgiving.com/autismproject and follow the prompts. To volunteer for the event please contact Mary Farhoumand at mary@theautismproject.org or call 785-2666.

We look forward to seeing all of you again this year.

May 19, 2007

Touch-a-Truck Event

The Mom's Club of South County is hosting a **Touch a Truck** Event at the Wakefield Mall parking lot, 160 Old Tower Hill Road, Wakefield, RI.



The event runs from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m..

School News:

The Robertson Elementary School is hosting a variety of autism awareness events to educate their staff and students on Autism. They are creating a school team to compete in our walk contest and hosting their own walk in April to raise funds for the Project. Last year, the Warwick district won the school contest and received free training for 3 professionals. Why not organize a school team and receive free training for your child's teachers. For more information on the 5th Annual Imagine walk and Family Fun Day and the School Challenge contact mary@theautismproject.org if your school

Alice Oster Award Recipients Announced

The Advisory Board announced the 2007 recipients of the Alice Oster Autism Service Award at their February meeting. Barbara Whalen, parent and Asperger Association of RI president was selected as the parent choice. Rowland Barrett, PhD of Bradley Hospital was selected as the professional choice. The annual award is presented in recognition of a parent and/or professional who have done exceptional work to improve the lives of children, teens and adults with autism.

“Barbara has been advocating for children with Asperger Syndrome long before anyone else,” commented Roberta Zimmerly, board member. “She worked hard to increase awareness and improve children’s experiences in the classroom.”

Barbara is the President of the RI Chapter of the Asperger Association of New England. She runs support groups for family members and social events for older individuals with autism. You may run into her at the state house during rallies and to testify as she’s the advocate with Post-It Notes on her body. “I told the Governor it was all that my budget allowed for,” said Barbara.

Regardless of methodology, Barbara’s advocacy and work for individuals with Asperger Syndrome has improved the lives of many individuals in our state.

Rowland Barrett is the recipient of the professional award. Rowland Barrett, PhD, is the chief psychologist at Bradley Hospital and chief-of-service for The Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities. He is also an associate professor of psychiatry and human behavior at Brown Medical School.

Dr. Barrett came to Bradley Hospital and Brown Medical School in 1984 to further develop an existing 6-bed inpatient program for children and adolescents with serious psychiatric disorders who also were autistic. Under Dr. Barrett’s leadership, the autism program at Bradley has since grown substantially.

Bradley’s Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities is now a nationally recognized program that provides inpatient services, day patient services, community based living arrangements, and home based programs to an average of 123 children and adolescents with autism and developmental disabilities on a

daily basis.

In addition, outpatient specialty clinics that focus on diagnostic evaluations, individual and group social and life skills training, communication skills training, occupational therapy, family therapy, and medication management annually reach another 500 families from Rhode Island and southeastern New England.

“Children from across the country come to Bradley Hospital and Dr. Barrett’s program,” commented Dr. Stephen Sheinkopf, board member. “For many, it’s the only place they have to receive the level of care they require.”

The awards will be presented March 16 at the *Bittersweet* event at Rosecliff Mansion in Newport.

QVC, Kirks Folly Family Team Up to Support Autism

Jennifer Kirk, the ‘Fairy Godmother of Jewelry Collectors’, and her family embarked on a “Dreams Come True” effort and raised \$15,000 on cable television’s QVC network for the Autism Project of Rhode Island (APRI).



Ms. Jennifer Kirk

The QVC auction raised the funds from the Kirk’s offer of two round trip tickets to Providence from anywhere for a weekend of shopping at Kirks Folly Annual sale.

The prize included a special dinner for two at Seaview Restaurant and accommodation at a romantic Rhode Island bed & breakfast inn. Proceeds were donated to the Autism Project of Rhode.

Kirk’s next initiative came out of a creative session with Autism Project staff. Drawing on her experience in the jewelry industry, she set out to design a unique pin to be sold on QVC in April during ‘Autism Awareness Month’. Based on the autism motto “Putting the Pieces Together” Kirk designed a puzzle piece pin that has been bought by QVC. Partial proceeds from the sale of the pin in April will go to the APRI.

Warwick Mom Spearheads Awareness Program

Jeanne Connery developed a plan to raise awareness of autism spectrum disorders in area schools, build a resource library and walk in support of The Autism Project of RI. She encourages other parents to consider doing a school walk or other fund raiser to raise money in support of APRI.

“I created an Awareness Program to thank the staff of Robertson School (Warwick) for their support of my daughter and our family,” said Jeanne Connery. “I want to give them a library of books and resources to help them in their jobs and to help future parents. We are also doing a school walk to raise money for APRI. My daughter enjoys their social groups and camp.”

Awareness Program Warwick Schools and APRI

Objective

- To raise Autism Awareness in schools
- Raise funds to create a AUTISM/ADHD Resource Library for Staff, parents, and students at each school
- School Walk to support the Autism Project of RI

How we are going to do it?

- Fund Raisers during March & April
- Educational Programs
- Get Principals and Special Ed. Director involved or parents advisory board, PTO/A
- Walk at all schools to benefit Autism Project of RI

Suggestions for events

- o Buy a Book Program
- o Contest among grades
- o Autism Forum with educators, parents, professionals and students
- o April is Autism Awareness Month
- o District wide Dress-Down day
- o Popcorn sales, ribbon sales, etc.
- o Programs for students and staff with speakers
- o Autism books read during reading week with guest readers

Make it fun for kids

- o Get kids involved with contest
- o Working with peers
- o Posters, games
- o Sensory day

Principals do something fun if school raises most money

How Schools benefit?

- o Donated AUTISM/ADHD Resource Libraries
- o Top teams win free training from APRI
- o Money for workshops and conferences
- o Better understanding for everyone involved

You are invited to the Kick off Meeting

For the

5th Imagine Walk & Family Fun day

Monday, March 26, 2007

At 6:30 p.m.

Cranston Public Library William Hall Branch

1825 Broad St.

Cranston, RI 02905

(781-2450 for directions)

Come for refreshments and meet other families and professionals gearing up for a great walk
Please RSVP to Susan Sposato at 785-2666

Camp Registration Info Available Online

Get your swim suits, sneakers and t-shirts ready... it's time to plan for camp! Camp registration packets and information are now available on our website at www.theautismproject.org. Camp Director Connie Rinehart and Assistant Camp Director Deanna Dufficy are working to create another memorable experience for all our campers.

New to the team is Program Coordinator/Trainer Sue Fisher. Sue started in January under the United Way of RI grant and is overseeing social groups and camp staff. "Sue brings excellent experience and a strong understanding of autism to the team," said Connie. "She will work with the staff at Camp to best support all of the campers."

Camp runs from 9:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Session I will be August 13th to 17th and Session II will be August 20th to August 24th. Children from age 5 (and entering kindergarten) to 19 with an ASD diagnosis or related communication disorder may attend Move, Think, Create, and Communicate. Camp groups are determined according to children's abilities and diagnoses.

The tuition for camp is \$450.00 per week. Tuition may be paid by personal check, VISA, MasterCard or checks from other funding sources. PLEASE NOTE: Katie Beckett (RI Medical Assistance) DOES NOT pay for camp.

Camperships are available and will be awarded on a sliding scale. Be sure to submit a Campership application and a copy of your W-2 for 2006 with your camp application. The application is also available online.

Camp Employment Opportunities

We are accepting applications for staff at camp for the positions of lead teacher, counselor, junior counselor and volunteers. Applications can be downloaded from our website.

APRI Expands Advisory Board

Ten community members and parents were recently added to APRI's Advisory Board. "We worked for several months to recruit a broad representation of the community," commented Joanne Quinn, executive director. "We are thrilled with the response and look forward to hearing community input to prioritize and improve programming for individuals with autism."

The advisory board's mission statement states "*We are a think tank comprised of professionals and families working to bring information to the Autism Project of RI regarding the needs of the individuals with ASD, their families and the community.*"

Our purpose is to guide the Autism Project of RI as it endeavors to make practical applications of current best practices accessible to all."

Members of the board include: Deb Belanger, parent and RIPIN; Gloria Bussell, parent; Sue Constable, RITAP Autism Support Center, DOE; Barbara DuBois, SLP; Melissa Ferreira, paraprofessional; Glynis Forcht, parent and webmaster for www.riautism.org; Lisa Landry, parent; Nancy Levin, parent; Deborah Marcello, parent and educator; Sue Morsilli, parent; Jennifer Parsons, Early Intervention; Mary Schatz, School Social Worker; Sue Shanley, Kent County YMCA; Dr. Stephen Sheinkoph, Ph. D., Brown Center for the Study at Risk Women & Infants Hospital; Joanne Weaver, preschool special educator; Roberta Zimmerly, parent, co-chair Imagine Walk and Family Fun Day.

Remember Bittersweet...Friday, March 16 at the Rosecliff Mansion in Newport!



In Memory of:

On January 29, 2007 Angela Regine passed away at her home in Middletown, RI. The Autism Project of RI mourns her passing deeply. Mrs. Regine was a very special person to the entire special needs community of RI, but especially the Autism Project. After receiving her degree from Trinity University in Washington, DC, and a Master's degree from Boston College, she devoted her life to teaching. In her later years she devoted her efforts as Special Education Consultant for Blackstone Academy in Pawtucket.



Over many years Mrs. Regine expended great energy towards fundraising and other activities in order to make a difference in the lives of children in RI. She was tireless in her efforts and touched many lives in a very substantive and positive way. Her wonderful spirit will live on with us for a long, long time. Because of her spirit and generosity our Camp expanded to include many youngsters from across our state.

The Autism Project gratefully acknowledges the donations we received on behalf of the family of Angela Regine, wife of Dr. Anthony Regine, member of the executive board.

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RESEARCH

Jersey Scientists Find A Possible Key To Autism

By Peggy O'Crowley for NJ Star-Ledger.

A team of New Jersey scientists believes it has found ways to detect biological risk factors for autism through simple urine and blood tests, a discovery that could lead to groundbreaking medical treatment for the neurological disorder.

The team of 16 scientists, mostly drawn from the campuses of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, say their findings, the result of more than two years of study on how the body breaks down fatty acids, could be a breakthrough for what is the fastest-growing developmental disorder

in the nation, with no known cause or cure.

The UMDNJ researchers say they have found that children with autism are unable to metabolize key fatty acids that help the body fight inflammation that causes damage to the brain and other organs. "It's an exciting story that's unfolding," said George Lambert, coordinator of the 15-member research team.

The potential treatment, members of the team say, is a kind of "therapeutic cocktail" tailored to each child, which would give them a dose of a "good" fatty acid that they are not able to make on their own. Team member Bernd Spur of UMDNJ-Stratford created the chemical process to replicate one of those good fatty

acids. "The pathway doesn't work (in the body), so we circumvent it," said Spur, a chemist.

Currently, the only way to diagnose autism is by a clinical assessment of symptoms, which include difficulty with communication and social interaction, as well as obsessive behaviors and interests. New Jersey has a high incidence of the disorder, affecting 1 in 94 children in the state, compared with 1 in 150 in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Researchers say that in the future a person's risk for autism could be measured with a simple urine test that would look for high levels of "bad" fat molecules, or a blood test that could reveal genetic problems, including the absence of a key gene, called GSTM1, which is responsible for metabolizing good fats. Many people with autism do not have this gene.

Xue Ming, a neuroscientist and a founding director of the Autism Center at UMNDJ-Newark, discovered that children with autism have higher levels of bad fat molecules in their urine than typical children.

No one understands yet why it is that so many children with autism have such metabolic differences, but Ming suggested it might be caused by an interaction between the genes and the environment. It may be that having less of these key fats reduces the body's ability to deal with environmental and metabolic stress. Since the 1990s, scientists have known about the potential for good fatty acids to treat inflammatory diseases such as Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, even asthma and Alzheimer's.

That potential has spurred a frenzy of research into lipids, the fatty compounds that include fatty acids. Studies at the University of Pennsylvania and Vanderbilt University have confirmed the New Jersey group's findings, said Spur.

At Harvard University, researchers are working on treatments for asthma and periodontal disease, while researchers at Louisiana State University are focusing on stroke.

Team members have been meeting every week for more than two years to discuss the results of their experiments. They include Lambert, a pediatric toxicologist who looks at the impact of the environment on children; Spur, the chemist who replicated the fatty acid in the lab; neurologist William Johnson, who associated the missing gene with autism; and Ming, a neuroscientist who tested for the presence of bad lipids in children.

So far, the scientists have obtained six patents for their research, Lambert said. They soon will meet with the Food and Drug Administration to discuss the requirements for producing and testing their substances, he added.

"Metabolic issues in autism are entirely understudied," said Sophia Colamarino, science director for Cure Autism Now, a major advocacy and research group in Los Angeles. "It's a very exciting area. There is accumulating evidence that would clearly tell me this is where I should look."

The New Jersey scientists are cautious, however, about their preliminary results, and warn families not to expect a miracle cure. Testing on humans, they say, could take a few years.

Meanwhile, the researchers are preparing a preliminary study to begin in September. Lambert hopes to work with 5- to 7-year-olds at the Douglass Developmental Disabilities Center in New Brunswick, a school for children with autism run by Rutgers.

Lambert will be giving the children doses of a good fatty acids to see if they have any noticeable effect on the children's cognitive, social and behavioral states. The study will use a control group of similar students.