



Fall 2017

*Every cent raised is spent in our region to help improve the lives of those among us with autism and their families.*



### **OUR WEBSITE HAS A NEW LOOK!**

Our staff has worked hard to improve and update our website so it will continue to be a valuable resource for those with autism and their families. Like the expanding world of those living and working with autism, so it is with our website - benefiting from updating and enrichment. We would appreciate your comments and suggestions! The address is still the same so please click below to check out our brand new website at:

**[www.autismsocietypgh.org](http://www.autismsocietypgh.org)**

### **#AUT2KNOW**

Opinion-Commentary

It has been suggested by some in the field that the puzzle piece design, in ribbons and illustrations, is no longer an appropriate symbol or logo reference for autism - and should be replaced. With what?

What better symbolizes autism? Has the puzzle been solved? Has a universal genetic marker been discovered? Is there a single or combination of treatments guaranteed to overcome its disabling effects? Has the burgeoning incidence of autism been reversed? Has the cause or trigger for it been proven? Has a cure been found? A prevention? To what extent is it influenced by environment, trauma, toxicity, drugs, neonatal/prenatal influences? Is there sufficient appropriate residential care and treatment, and respite, for those struggling with severe autism impairment?

Or does autism remain a multi-faceted puzzle, with no puzzle-masters, no autism experts - just thousands of trainees, intensely studying and trying to determine where and how and if and when each piece fits in the big autism picture?

[Click here to read "Is it Time to Ditch the Autism Puzzle Piece?" from Disability Scoop](#)

## View from the Trenches

As you can read above, the autism "puzzle piece" criticism is based on a "research" study of 400 members of the general public. What do individuals actually working and dealing with the autism puzzle think? Autism has always been a puzzle to the general public. And negative, too - when was the last time you have seen a member of the general public searching around for an autistic person with whom to associate? To those of us living with autism, plus researchers trying to solve autism, the puzzle connotation is not negative, but a challenge. Isn't every research effort undertaken driven by a puzzling incentive?

The study authors' statement that staying with the puzzle piece imagery connotes our organization's deliberate intent to evoke negative associations is just plain stupid.

The unsupported statement that "many people on the spectrum object to the icon", arguing that it "represents autism as mysterious, disconnected and a need to fit in" is no surprise. That's exactly what autism is. People high on the autism spectrum, like those with Asperger's, are actually looked upon with awe, like *Rainman*, *Sheldon*, and now *The Good Doctor*. Indeed they appear "mysterious", "disconnected" and "needed to fit in", but that's reality. If the study authors and the general public want to call it negativity, so be it. That's their image of it, not ours.

Dan Torisky

The views expressed are those of the Autism Society of Pittsburgh, and not necessarily those of the Autism Society of America.



**NEWS OF IMMEDIATE INTEREST**

**...SPEAKING OF WHICH...**

## Making a Difference, One Puzzle Piece at a Time!

By Leah Schoolcraft, Correspondent | October 25, 2017



Members of Alpha Phi Omega sing Contry Roads after the run.  
Photo by Leah Schoolcraft

The WVU Lambda Omicron chapter of Alpha Phi Omega at West Virginia University took to the streets to raise awareness for a worthy cause last weekend with the 48th Annual Run for Autism Awareness.

The event began in 1969 and used to coincide with the Backyard Brawl between WVU and the University of Pittsburgh. "The Run" is the chapter's annual fundraiser for the Autism Society of Pittsburgh

The Autism Run is performed in relay style, meaning that each runner takes turns running for a distance and then switches with another runner. The runners carry an American flag and a puzzle piece as they make their 78 mile journey.

The run begins on the outskirts of the city of Pittsburgh and continues down route 19 until they reach the West Virginia state line.

Alex Clements, President of Alpha Phi Omega and Coordinator of the Run has been participating for five years, starting in 2013. She described it as her favorite service project that the chapter completes.

"[The Run] is probably best kept WVU secret tradition and something that I am proud to have had the chance to be part of," Clements said. "I think the Autism Society changes lives, and we get a chance to help by raising money. I can't think of a better cause."

"The Run" takes over a year to plan. It involves working with outside donations to provide funds and services like breakfast and drinks, planning the route and rallying runners.

"The Run' takes up a lot of my time but I can't complain about it. I love this project, it is the most direct project that we do that changes lives," Clements said. "My entire heart is in this and I wouldn't change anything.

Mary Wildman, a community relations manager at the Autism Society of Pittsburgh, spoke to the chapter that morning about the history of the organization, what they aim to accomplish, and what it means to her. She also spoke of her 21-year-old son, who has low-functioning Autism.

"We've trained all 540 magistrates across the state how to understand autism better, just in case they ever get an individual in their courtroom and they can help them a little bit more," Wildman said.

Wildman described how the society is currently working with local businesses to offer students with Autism possible employment options.

"The Autism Society, the families, and I appreciate all that [alpha phi omega] does," Wildman said. "Chances are pretty good that you've run into someone in your lifetime that has Autism."

Charis Bisciegliia, a freshman pledge of Alpha Phi Omega, was excited to participate in the run. She said that although she was sore and tired, it was all worth it.

"When the hills got steep or I just thought I couldn't run any farther I remembered that I wasn't doing this for me, I was doing this for each of the families that the Autism Society of Pittsburgh helps," Bisciegliia said.

Bisciegliia, as well as the other runners, started at 6:00 a.m. and ran until about 6:30 p.m. that same day to the finish line.

"What made this even better was the support we received from complete strangers," Bisciegliia said. "The number of honks and cheers from cars driving past showing support for our cause and encouraging us to continue was astounding."

Since the initial run, Alpha Phi Omega has raised more than \$100,000 for the Autism Society of Pittsburgh.

For more information about Alpha Phi Omega and the Autism Run please visit <http://wvualphaphiomega.webs.com/service>.

## **What We Do Hits the Mark With Local Case-Management Supports Professionals**

Autism-Pittsburgh,

I wanted to extend a very large thank you to you both for your stories and presentation by Jesse Torisky and Mary Wildman last week. The video and realness of your words touched our department in so many ways. Several employees came to me afterwards saying they wish that everyone they know could watch the film you presented "The Family Next Door". If you are still in touch with the Lund family we hope that you tell them from all of us how much it meant that they were willing to share a small glimpse into their lives for the sake of educating others.

In the future I do plan to have our training coordinator reach out to you to schedule a training open to our entire agency. In addition, I passed along your contact information to our Behavioral Health Manager, who oversees the criminal justice liaison case managers. He was encouraged that he can contact you for support in delivering our Mental Health First Aide training to more local law enforcement.

**Again, sincerely thank you for your time!**

## **You Can Now Enroll for ABLE Act Savings Protection!**

The Pennsylvania ABLE Act Community Information conference was held on Thursday, September 28 in the Circuit Center Ballroom on the South Side of Pittsburgh.

Special needs advocacy groups and organizations have been working long and hard in support of legislation that enables our developmentally disabled children and adults to build financial security.

Pennsylvania Treasurer Joe Torsella hosted this event to explain how our State's implementation of the ABLE Act can make a difference for you and your sons or daughters with special needs. He complimented our ongoing support for the ABLE Act initiative.

Most importantly, enrollment information, application forms, and guidelines were provided - and on request will be sent to any parent, guardian, or primary care giver. Just contact the Autism Society of Pittsburgh at 412-856-7223 or [info@autismsocietypgh.org](mailto:info@autismsocietypgh.org).

Before the end of this year we plan a workshop for parents and case managers. Legal, financial, and insurance professionals will be present.

## **Questions for the New Secretary of US Department of Health and Human Services:**

As a new US Secretary of Health and Human Services is about to be appointed, we hope he or she will be more successful in helping Congress cobble together a proper health care law. It must at least restore and assure coverage for those eligible people who were covered by Medicaid before the Un-affordable Care Act replaced what they had in 2010.

Many of our Autism-Pennsylvania members have asked "how might repeal and/or replacement of Obamacare (ACA) affect me and mine?" Three obvious concerns are: (a) insurance coverage must continue to be guaranteed for Americans with pre-existing conditions; (b) coverage also must be maintained for Americans up to age 26 who wish to remain on their parents' policies; (c) any Federal-State block grant funding disbursement must stipulate that Medicaid funding for eligible Americans with disabilities must NOT be reduced.

Here are eight additional questions any new DHHS Secretary should be asked to address: No one seems to have or be willing to give answers -- answers that will enable precise commentary on "repeal and/or replace" provisions. Therefore, good Secretary, please get us this information so that our autism community can more fully understand this incredibly important issue and more knowledgeably support or oppose accordingly:

1. Right now, at this moment, what specific services for individuals with autism and their families and caregivers paid for by Medical Assistance funding are threatened?
2. Separate and apart from repeal of Obamacare (ACA), there is talk about expansion of Medical Assistance funding upwards of \$500 billion dollars. Where is the \$500 billion coming from?

3. Does this Medicare Assistance expansion and this \$500 billion price tag hinge on repeal of Obamacare (ACA) - or regardless of repeal?
4. With the expansion of Medical Assistance, what new areas of reimbursement/entitlement/eligibility are involved for those with autism?
5. We understand that "block grants" to states might result from replacement or revision of Obamacare (ACA). If so, what will prevent a given state (like Pennsylvania) with its "one-size-fits-all" or "social engineering" mindset from using the money to promote its anti-choice, government-knows-best policies?
6. Don't you agree it would help you Mr./Ms. Secretary, and our elected Senators and Housers make more supportable decisions if you and they knew these changes actually benefited Americans who do not nor did not choose to be dependent?
7. Don't you also agree that those in our own autism community will be more willing to battle for certain provisions in any upcoming Health Care Act if they knew exactly what they were battling for - or against?

## **IEP Meeting Tips -- It's That Time of Year Again!**

### **Talk to Teachers and Support Staff**

Many of your child's teachers and support staff will be at the IEP meeting, but it's best to speak with them days before the meeting. Find out what concerns they have about your child's educational plan and what supportive services seem to be working. This will avoid the risk of being blindsided at the meeting and give you an opportunity to consider actionable solutions to any problems.

### **Talk to Your Child**

Before your IEP meeting, take some time and talk with your child about school. Find out what challenges they are having, as well as what learning techniques work best. Also, ask your child if they have any questions or concerns about the services they receive in school. This input will be invaluable to creating an effective IEP plan.

### **Have Everything in Order**

Don't go to your meeting unprepared. Gather as much information as possible, such as previous IEPs, school assessments and medical diagnoses. You should also prepare a list of topics you want to discuss, educational modifications you want for your child and questions you want to address. This will ensure you don't forget any important matters during the meeting.

### **Take Along Support**

Whether this is your first IEP meeting or 10th, it can be a little intimidating. It is strongly recommended to bring a support person along with you to the meeting. If possible, bring someone with IEP experience, such as a doctor or therapist. However, just having someone sit next to you who is willing to listen and take notes can be very helpful.

### **Communication Plan**

There may be nothing more frustrating than finding out your child is having problems at school but you are the last to know. Communication with all school personnel involved is a must. Insist that a viable communication plan that works for teachers, parents and student is created at the IEP meeting.

### **First IEP Meeting**

If this is your first IEP meeting, you definitely want to take a support person with if possible. Bring along a notepad to take notes, and be sure to ask lots of questions to make sure you understand exactly the contents of the IEP. Don't feel pressured into signing the IEP at the meeting. Instead, take it home with you and review it before signing. Discuss the contents with your child (if age-appropriate) and request adjustments if necessary.

## **Swim Team Presentation -- WQED Spreads the Inspirational Word!**



You will recall we presented this film for the first time in our region at a theater in the South Hills. WQED presented it for the rest of the Pittsburgh area on October 2. Autism Society of Pittsburgh spots "book-ended" the presentation. [Click here](#) to read more.



### **EVENTS AND WORKSHOPS**

We offer a range of services, including workshops and support groups, training and educational programs, fundraising events, and community awareness building activities. We stay up-to-date on relevant happenings throughout our local autism community.

#### **Upcoming Events**

**November ASD Support Group**



Join us for November's meeting

## Autism Spectrum Disorder Support Group Jeanette Tarnoci

Jeanette will speak about Mercer County Behavioral Health Commission's Transition Age Youth (14-21) Program. This a free event, open to the public. Children are welcome. Dinner provided. R.S.V.P. encouraged but not required, 724-992-2527

**Where:** Children's Aid Society of Mercer  
County, 350 w. Market St. Mercer

**When:** Wednesday, November 15th

**Time:** 6:00pm



### **Sensory Friendly Movies at AMC Lowes Waterfront 22**

**Thor: Ragnarok**

Saturday, November 11th at 10:00 am

**Thor: Ragnarok**

Tuesday, November 14th at 7:00 pm

**Cocoa**

Saturday, November 25th at 10:00 am

**Justice League**

Tuesday, November 28th at 7:00 pm

Please visit [www.amctheatres.com/programs/sensory-friendly-films](http://www.amctheatres.com/programs/sensory-friendly-films) for more information

### **Sensory-Friendly Events at the Carnegie Library**



**Storytime Sensory Discoveries - Hazelwood**

Tuesday, November 7th from 10:00 am - 10:45 am

**Storytime Sensory Discoveries - Hazelwood**

Tuesday, November 7th from 10:45 am - 11:30 am

**Storytime Sensory Discoveries - Hazelwood**

Thursday, November 9th from 10:00 am - 10:45 am

**Storytime Sensory Discoveries - Squirrel Hill**

Monday, November 13th from 4:15 pm - 5:00 pm

**Storytime Sensory Discoveries - Brookline**

Monday, November 13th from 6:30 pm - 7:00 pm

**Storytime Sensory Discoveries - East Liberty**

Saturday, November 18th from 11:00 am - 11:30 am

**Storytime Sensory Discoveries - Oakland (Main)**

Sunday, November 19th from 2:00 pm - 3:00 pm

**Storytime Sensory Discoveries - Squirrel Hill**

Monday, November 20th from 4:15 pm - 5:00 pm

**Storytime Sensory Discoveries - Brookline**

Monday, November 20th from 6:30 pm - 7:00 pm

**Storytime Sensory Discoveries - Squirrel Hill**

Monday, November 27th from 4:15 pm - 5:00 pm

Please visit [www.carnegielibrary.org/events/](http://www.carnegielibrary.org/events/) for more information



## AUTISM RESOURCES

We know that parenting a child with autism comes with many challenges and a solid support system is essential. We have highlighted below two places to contact when faced with crisis situations as well as a link to a comprehensive list of suggested resources in our region.

**Resolve Crisis Network**

Crisis intervention services through UPMC available 24 hours a day 7 days a week to Allegheny County residents at no cost. Call 1-888-796-8226 or 1-888-7-YOU-CAN

**IRES (Information, Referral, and Emergency Services)**

Emergency assistance available from Allegheny County 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call 412-350-4457 or 911, TTY 412-350-3467.

[Click here to download our complete resource list](#)



## WAYS TO HELP

Our programs and services would not exist without the help of the caring individuals, businesses, and volunteers that support us. Contributions of any size are our lifeblood - vital to our existence and effectiveness - providing the means for us to help children with autism, their families, and professionals who work with them.

### To Donate

Please consider visiting [our donations page](#) today to make a contribution through PayPal or learn about other ways to donate.

### To Volunteer

From time to time we need caring volunteers to help with our programs and fundraising events. If interested, please complete [our contact form](#) and we will be in touch when a volunteer opportunity arises that meets your interests and availability.



### About Us

The Autism Society of Pittsburgh has comprised the local chapter of the Autism Society of America since 1967. We are volunteers, parents and professionals, working on behalf of children with autism and those of adult age on the autism spectrum throughout the Greater Pittsburgh area struggling with this neurological disorder of behavior and communication.

### Our Goal

The goal of our Chapter is to help parents and professionals grow by providing as much relevant information on autism spectrum disorders as is known to us.

We cannot take your place. Parents are with their children for a lifetime: professionals for a career. Our efforts are aimed at helping both become as proficient as possible in evaluating and choosing the services, options and approaches that will enhance the growth and development of individuals with autism spectrum disorders.

### Options, A Basic Right

The right of a family to learn about and then select options they feel are most appropriate for their family member with autism is as basic as the family itself. It is rooted deeply in the very foundation of our American democracy and is the guiding philosophy of the Autism Society of America. An advocacy organization such as ours that holds such a position is then compelled to devote its highest priorities to:

1. encouraging, expanding and developing excellence in a continuum of service options, and

2. providing unbiased information for ALL such options to parents, families and to the caring professionals who work with them to reduce or overcome autism's disabling characteristics.

Visit [www.autismsocietypgh.org](http://www.autismsocietypgh.org) or call us for more information and resources.

**Give us a call today!**  
**412-856-7223**

***NOW AT TWO CONVENIENT LOCATIONS!***

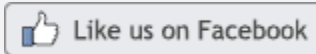
**Monroeville Office:**

4371 Northern Pike, Monroeville, PA 15146

**Wexford Office:**

11676 Perry Highway #1206, Wexford, PA 15090

**STAY CONNECTED**



Autism Society of Pittsburgh, 4371 Northern Pike, Monroeville, PA 15146

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