

Sacramento Autism Speaks

Walk Planning Committee Volunteers



On December 7th & 17th, AS volunteers spent part of their holidays gift wrapping at Borders Books for Autism Speaks. Thank you to our dedicated volunteers who strengthen us everyday.

Rachel & Jacquie making the Holidays bright, generating autism awareness & raising funds for research.



AUTISM SPEAKS™
It's time to listen.

Volume 1, Issue 2

January 2009

Sacramento Walk Chairs

Kristen Byrne

Stephanie Blackard

Mitch Campbell

Jennifer Haas

Chris Haas

Renee Lewkowitz

Jeff Lewkowitz

Heidi Bernet

Julie Corbett

Elizabeth Edwards

Martin Byrne

A Touch of Understanding, Partners in the Community

One of the great attractions of the Walk Now for Autism event is the Resource Fair, which allows family and friends to learn about the wide variety of resources available, and assists and informs families affected by autism. One of the connections the Walk Planning Committee made early on in their search for valuable Resource Fair walk participants was with a nonprofit called A Touch of Understanding (ATOU). This unique group brings education to school-aged children, adolescents, and adults on the subject of disability awareness.

Founded in 1996, the organization grew from an idea into an entire program which reaches approximately 4,000 students in Northern California every year. ATOU is comprised of dedicated individuals, some with disabilities and some without, who come together to form a strong team working to help students look beyond the disability, the wheelchair, the braces, the unpredictable behavior and see the person. ATOU relies on community grants and sponsorship to keep the program running and has hopes to expand the program through out California and someday the US.

Each student participates in a two-part program. In the activity portion of the program, students use wheelchairs and mobility canes, write in Braille, handle braces and artificial limbs, and participate in a mirror-writing activity to understand the frustration of a learning disability. They also meet with ATOU volunteers who have disabilities, who share their insight and experiences with humor and honesty. The program's total running time is anywhere from 2 – 3 hrs and can be done over a period of a couple of days. In the activity portion of the program, 10 minutes are allotted to address each disability individually.

Excerpt from ATOU's website: *A Touch of Understanding fosters respect and empathy for all individuals. In a society that bombards us with violent images and victim mentality, ATOU stresses appreciation of others and their feelings, affirmation of human value, self (cont. pg. 2)*



Students participating in the mirror-writing activity try to write answers on a piece of paper without looking at their hands. They look at the image of their hands in a mirror.

Upcoming Events

Awards Walk Party Jan 2009

Walk Planning Meeting Feb 2009

What Works for Me—Tips from Families

While many of us parents work hard everyday to help our children and know our children like no other, it helps to hear from other parents on what strategies they use in their daily lives. We recognize that not all strategies work for all children, but if we can help just one family, we've achieved success.

If you'd like to share your tips and strategies you find successful in working with a loved one with autism, please send your suggestions to [Stephanie Blackard](mailto:Stephanie.Blackard@autismspeaks.org) at

sacramento@autismspeaks.org and we'll post a new suggestion each month in the newsletter.

Tip from Stephanie: Excerpt from *The Out-of-Sync Child* by Carol Stock Kranowitz, M.A. "Activities to Develop the Tactile Sense: People Sandwich- Have the 'salami' or 'cheese' (your child) lie facedown on the 'bread' (gym mat or couch cushion) with her head extended beyond the edge. With a 'spreader' (sponge, pot scrubber, basting or vegetable brush, paintbrush, or

washcloth) smear her arms, legs, and torso with pretend mustard, mayonnaise, relish, ketchup, etc. Use firm, downward strokes. Cover the child, from neck to toe, with another piece of 'bread' (folded mat or second cushion). Now press firmly on the mat to squish out the excess mustard, so the child feels the deep, soothing pressure. You can even roll or crawl across your child; the mat will distribute your weight. Your child will be in heaven."

A Touch of Understanding, Partners in the Community Contd. from page 1

esteem, mutual respect, character development, modeling perseverance and resiliency and problem solving with positive and meaningful solutions. To influence the attitudes of our youth, the program is geared toward elementary through high school students. With mainstreaming/full inclusion is becoming more prevalent, all students, able bodied and disabled need to recognize their common humanity, desires and feelings. With an interactive and "hands-on" approach, A Touch of Understanding encourages its participants to focus on their own strengths rather than weaknesses and realize that everyone is facing challenges. We have incredibly dedicated volunteers who interact with the students and profoundly change the perceptions and misconceptions commonly held toward those who seem different. The program works. It's turning negative attitudes into positive ones. It's facilitating stronger interpersonal skills within the next generation.

Today, ATOU's program does not address autism specifically; however, conversations with students during the program often include the topic of autism. ATOU recognizes the need to address this disability directly through an autism component. ATOU has formed a committee of researchers, doctors, parents, students and para-professionals all volunteering their time to build a

component on autism into the ATOU program. Currently the committee has met twice to brainstorm on appropriate techniques and strategies to use to teach autism to students and teachers. Plans to meet again in mid-January include role playing and working with manipulatives. When Kristen Byrne, Walk Co-Chair, asked Leslie DeDora at ATOU how she felt it was going, she said, "We are making great progress, but we are not there yet. We want this to be accurate, yet meaningful, and we won't stop working on it until we reach our goal."

As many already know, the challenges with autism are vast and there's no straight forward diagnosis, no single treatment or therapy and no two individuals with autism affected in the same way. So how will the committee, in simple, positive and meaningful terms cover an activity on the topic of autism in a 10-minute period of time? That's still a work in progress. However, there are similarities in ATOU's program on addressing the downstream impacts on individuals affected by a disability, especially in the classroom, on the acceptance of people's differences. This rings true with individuals with autism who just want to be seen as a person and recognized for their abilities. Our youngsters with autism work very hard

everyday to communicate and participate in the world around them. If their peers & teachers can recognize their strengths & appreciate their challenges, then it's worth the effort put forth by the ATOU team.

We wish ATOU well on their journey to educating the public on autism and look forward to collaborating in the future. To learn more about this great organization, request ATOU to come to your school, or find out how to support ATOU, please contact Leslie DeDora 916.791.4146 or go to ATOU's website:



Volunteer, Mike Penketh, showing his myoelectric hand to a school student.

<http://www.touchofunderstanding.org>

Share your stories by emailing Kristen Byrne at sacramento@autismspeaks.org

Sacramento Autism Speaks

www.walknowforautism.org/sacramento

www.autismspeaks.org

Email: sacramento@autismspeaks.org

Our Mission

At Autism Speaks, our goal is to change the future for all who struggle with autism spectrum disorders.

We are dedicated to funding global biomedical research into the causes, prevention, treatments, and cure for autism; to raising public awareness about autism and its effects on individuals, families, and society; and to bringing hope to all who deal with the hardships of this disorder. We are committed to raising the funds necessary to support these goals.

Autism Speaks aims to bring the autism community together as one strong voice to urge the government and private sector to listen to our concerns and take action to address this urgent global health crisis. It is our firm belief that, working together, we will find the missing pieces of the puzzle.

Autism Speaks. It's time to listen.

Books Available via the Parent to Parent Exchange:

You're Going to Love This Kid! By Paula Kluth

The Curious Incident of the dog in the night time By Mark Haddon

Unstrange Minds Remapping the World of Autism By Roy Richard Grinker

Ten Things You Student with Autism Wishes you knew By Ellen Notbohm

The Autistic Speactrum Parents Daily Helper By Philip Abrams & Leslie Henriques

George & Sam Two Boys, One Family, & Autism By Charlotte Moore

The Asperger Parent By Jeffrey Cohen

A Parent's Guide to Asperger Syndrome & High Functioning Autism By Sally Ozonoff, Geraldine Dawson & James McPartland

Over Coming Autism: Finding the Answers, Strategies, and Hope That Can Transform a Child's Life By Lynn Kern Koegel, & Claire Scovell LaZebnik

If you'd like to check out one of these books or you want to add a book to the list of the Parent to Parent Exchange, please email Kristen Byrne at sacramento@autismspeaks.org

Also check out the Autism Speaks book listing at:

<http://www.autismspeaks.org/community/resources/books.php>



Heidi & Mitch gift wrapping at Borders Books for Autism Speaks.

If you'd like to participate in planning Walk Now for Autism 2009, please email Kristen Byrne at sacramento@autismspeaks.org

Advocacy in Sacramento, California

Parents, Caregivers, Teachers, Providers, Researchers, Doctors and paraprofessionals, make sure your voice is heard and sign up online to the Autism Votes website to stay informed on National & Local legislation.

In Sacramento we are fortunate to have John Matthias, a parent, proud supporter and avid volunteer of Autism Speaks as our Sacramento Advocacy Chair.

John is up to date on all of the local,

regional, and national news on legislation on special needs specific to autism. To find out more on volunteering locally, email John at sacramento@autismspeaks.org

