

The Autism New Jersey Fund

The Murphy Family •

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December 2016

Dear Autism New Jersey Family & Friends,

“Call COSAC,” the nurse said, almost as an afterthought, handing me a small slip of paper with a phone number. “They’ll give you more information.” I was leaving the neurologist’s office with my two-year-old son, Patrick, stunned at his diagnosis of autism. He was affectionate, often made eye contact, and didn’t pull away from our hugs, so we naively assumed that his speech delay was due to other causes.

We have learned so much since then. We have weathered challenges that were invisible but heartbreaking; we have witnessed victories that were small but breathtaking. Weaving through it all was our connection with Autism New Jersey, formerly known as COSAC. Moms who went through the essential six-week parent training with me have become lifelong friends. When it was clear that our district preschool program would not be appropriate, I showed our case manager the [COSAC list of school programs](#). We are forever grateful that he was accepted to a wonderful school so committed to families with autism that they send their entire staff to the Autism New Jersey conference every year. With medical, legal, educational and community resources, and ongoing training to thousands of professionals, the support that families like ours receive from Autism New Jersey is immeasurable.

My first experience at the [annual Autism New Jersey conference](#) was a revelation. Suddenly I was immersed in an entire community of people in the same situation, who could understand our struggles and share in our successes. I walked past the display that his preschool had set up - and there was a picture of Patrick, working at a desktop, cutting with scissors, unimaginable only months before that! I learned about ABA and services and how to craft an IEP - but I also learned in networking with other parents how much was possible for our son’s daily life. Travel with Patrick? Have him receive sacraments at church? Have him live away from us someday? It was unthinkable in the abstract, but here were real people who had achieved all of these things.

Our connections with Autism New Jersey have even produced some unexpected results. Ten years ago, our 11-year-old daughter Aleta wrote a charming piece for the first [Sibling Essay contest](#). As a Harry Potter fan, she wrote about what she would see in the “Mirror of Erised,” such as a family trip to Disney World or going to the same school, or even simply playing basketball with her brother. Although it seemed impossible at the time,



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some of those wishes have come true. Since then she has been an Autism Awareness Ambassador for Autism New Jersey and a featured speaker at sibling events.

In high school, Aleta began to attend the conference with me. We were at a presentation on psychopharmacology when she scribbled on the handout, “Makes me not hate science so much.” She is now set to graduate from Rutgers with a double major in neuroscience and psychology and plans to do autism research in the future.

While Patrick is still very limited in his language, academics, daily living and coping skills, he has been blessed with many amazing opportunities. He received his First Communion and Confirmation at our church, where he was recently appointed as the parish Advocate for the Disabled. He goes out to work four days a week as part of his high school transition program. He participates with Special Olympics swimming and track. He walked the runway in an autism awareness fashion show at Princeton University. He has even spent up to three weeks at sleep-away summer camp! After winning a contest at the Liberty Science Center years ago,

he inspired them to create Special Needs Day. Hundreds of students who might never have had a chance before can now experience a free field trip to the center with much smaller crowds and other accommodations. For all of these, I must credit his very many dedicated teachers as well as the resources from Autism New Jersey.

Today, as Patrick approaches his 18th birthday, there is a whole new set of visions that my husband Pat and I see in our family’s version of Harry Potter’s Mirror: reliable funding from federal and state sources, [healthcare coverage](#) for our children’s unique needs, meaningful day programs, employers willing to take a chance on our kids, and plentiful varied [housing options](#) for our adults, with a team of well-trained [direct support professionals](#) adequately paid to care for them.

How many of these could be a reality in his future? With your help, a strong Autism New Jersey will make them all possible.

Thank you,

Tara, Pat, Aleta & Patrick Murphy

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ABOUT AUTISM NEW JERSEY:

Autism New Jersey serves as a collective and influential voice for the community and systematically and compassionately improves the lives of individuals with autism every day through our four core service pillars: [Information Services](#), [Education & Training](#), [Public Policy](#), and [Awareness](#).

We’re proud to have been serving the autism community in New Jersey since 1965. Autism New Jersey provides assistance at all stages of an individual’s life, from diagnosis to early intervention to school programs to transition strategies for teens and options for adults. Our Annual Fund Drive provides valuable support for our efforts on behalf of families like the Murphy’s.

