

The Sun

Newsletter

January–March 2017

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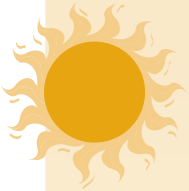
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Our mission

To help people and families affected by autism spectrum disorder (ASD)



Talley Cares Program “adopts” Autism Delaware

Sun contributor Mark Mayer is the principal of Talley Middle School in Wilmington.

Talley Middle School works hard to educate the whole child! The students learn not only reading, writing, and mathematics, but also how to get engaged in their community by giving back.

This schoolwide effort is called the Talley Cares Program. As part of the program, Talley Middle School “adopts” a nonprofit organization every year and raises awareness and money in support of this nonprofit. Talley Cares teaches its students and their families about the adopted nonprofit through various school activities. Students also find ways to volunteer, collect needed items, and fundraise.

For the 2016–17 school year, Talley Middle School is excited to partner with Autism Delaware. Our faculty, students, and their families have already been introduced to Autism Delaware

in a meet-and-greet session. Talley has also connected with our schools that serve students through the Brandywine Specialized Autism Program (BSAP) and reached out to the BSAP Parent Action Committee (PAC). The goal was to convince students of the merits in mentoring younger students with autism from the Bush Early Education Center, Claymont Elementary School, and Harlan Elementary School.

The entire student body worked to benefit Autism Delaware during Talley Middle School Service Month—November 20

to December 20. And to help raise money for Autism Delaware, “grub night” took place November 22, 2016, at

Grub Burger Bar in the Concord Mall. A portion of the proceeds went to Autism Delaware programs and services.



How to give back to the community

- Form a team for Autism Delaware’s statewide Walk for Autism in April, and help raise funds for critically needed programs and services. For more information, visit autismdelaware.org.
- Set up an information table and raise funds at your favorite restaurant. For help, call Autism Delaware development director David Woods at (302) 224-6020, ext. 206, or send an email of interest to david.woods@delautism.org.

Autism Delaware™

Newark

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Suite 201, Newark DE 19713
Phone: 302.224.6020

Dover

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The Sun

A publication of Autism Delaware

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Ultimate success and vitality depend on volunteers

In our modern life, we are all stretched to our limit with work and family obligations. The last thing we want to do is devote our precious free time to a cause or organization that does not meet our standards of excellence.

As the Autism Delaware Board of Directors President, I have come to know firsthand the expertise, hard work, passion, and dedication of the Autism Delaware staff. Each staff member is committed to the mission: helping people and families affected by autism.

I have also witnessed the dedication of my fellow board members. They have varying backgrounds, life experiences, and talents, but we all have one thing in common: a passion and commitment to Autism Delaware's mission.

I believe it is a positive reflection on the great work of Autism Delaware that our volunteers also devote their funds, time, and energy to promote our mission. The ultimate success and vitality of any not-for-profit organization are highly dependent on volunteers. Autism Delaware is blessed by the dedication of numerous volunteers in a range of efforts, both large and small.

With the growing autism community comes the need for more volunteers. A variety of opportunities are available at our many fundraisers, social events, and family support programs.

Another way to help is by advocating for change on the legislative front. Autism Delaware Policy and

Community Outreach Director Alex Eldreth is currently working to expand our grassroots effort and is looking for volunteers. If you're interested, call Alex at (302) 224-6020, ext. 204.

You can also support Autism Delaware's ever-growing adult employment program. Called Productive Opportunities for Work and Recreation (POW&R), the program needs companies to employ our participants. I work at Dover Downs Hotel & Casino where we employ 12 POW&R participants. From my company perspective, we have gained highly productive, reliable employees who, day in and day out, make a difference in our organization.

If you, your spouse, or your organization have a relationship with a company that could benefit from well-trained and well-supported POW&R employees, please contact Autism Delaware POW&R Director Katina Demetriou or Autism Delaware Assistant POW&R Director Melissa Martin at the numbers listed below.

And anyone who wants to make a difference in our world, please volunteer your time. As a longtime volunteer, I can guarantee you will be glad you did.

Regards,

Pete Bradley



Pete Bradley
President

A service of Autism Delaware



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Volunteering as a “full circle” benefit for POW&R participants

Sun contributor Gail Hecky, MEd, retired from a 35-year career in special education before joining the Autism Delaware™ Lewes office as program and operational assistant.

“Making it come full circle is the goal” says Melissa Martin. As the assistant director of Autism Delaware’s adult employment program, Martin maintains that volunteering is crucial for any young adult with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Those who participate in the Autism Delaware program—which is known as Productive Opportunities for Work and Recreation



POW&R participants Tim Magee (left) and Andrew Bergmann help at the Millsboro Food Bank in September.

food products on shelves. Recently, she was responsible for putting lunches together for distribution as emergency food kits. Campbell states that food bank managers have always treated her well.

The idea of volunteering is one of giving rather than receiving, but quite often POW&R participants find that the skills and

(or POW&R, for short)—volunteer as their work schedules allow.

In the Sussex area, POW&R participants find themselves helping at a wide range of places, such as the Millsboro and Milford Food Banks, All Saints Thrift Shop in Rehoboth Beach, the Red Barn in Georgetown, and Nassau Valley Vineyards in Lewes.

This volunteer work, notes Martin, gives POW&R participants a chance to give back to the community in a meaningful way that can also enhance their skill levels. “Businesses find the help offered to be quite beneficial,” states Martin, “so the experience becomes a win-win for everyone.”

In 2011, the first Sussex County site established for these efforts was the All Saints Parish Thrift Shop. There, the volunteers sort shirts by size, hang clothing on racks, dust furniture, organize shoes, and so on. This work gives them an opportunity to “practice job skills to reinforce vocational goals,” according to POW&R team lead Theresa Klinger. “The goal for each POW&R participant is to get a job, so volunteer work, such as this, can directly help participants acquire skills leading to that goal, completing the ‘circle.’”

At the Milford Food Bank, where POW&R participants also volunteer on a weekly basis when their schedules permit, the managers eagerly await the arrival of the POW&R team. POW&R participant Rose Campbell enthusiastically reports that she looks forward to going each week. She says her work usually involves unpacking boxes and placing

experience acquired through volunteering can be added to a resumé and shared in an interview, making a huge difference to a potential employer. A young adult with ASD can come into an interview with an attitude that says “I can do things. Here are the things I have done,” says Martin.

Thanks to the outreach efforts of Autism Delaware staff, volunteer work has been secured that requires a wide variety of skills. For instance, a group was once asked to put hundreds of informational packets together for a major Beebe Hospital public outreach campaign. In Dover, the Kent County Library once invited POW&R participants to volunteer for a three- to four-day stretch that had the added benefit of allowing POW&R staff the chance to assess skills while aiding the library in accomplishing the needed task.

Of course, not every POW&R participant is enthusiastic about volunteering. Klinger shared a story about one young man who was not interested initially in volunteering. So, she asked him what his goal was in the program. “He said that he just wants to get a job.” Klinger then asked what skills the young man possessed that would make him employable. When Klinger pointed out that he could get these skills by volunteering, the young man had a total change of attitude. Today, he sees the value of the time he spends as a volunteer.

Klinger has noted changes in the attitudes of most POW&R participants she has worked with, especially when they realize that their time and effort are valued and make a difference.

How to give back to the community

Become an autism advocate in Delaware, and let your voice be heard on Smart Cookie Day in April. For more information, call Autism Delaware policy and community outreach director Alex Eldreth at (302) 224-6020, ext. 204, or send an email to alex.eldreth@delautism.org.

INSIDE Autism[™] Delaware

2016 Blue Jean Ball presented by Hertrich Toyota

Long-time southern Delaware favorite

On September 16, party-goers at this year's Blue Jean Ball danced the night away to the music of Carnivale—the *Baddest Band On The Planet!* This new entertainment was made possible, thanks to the continuing support of Autism Delaware exclusive band sponsor Peninsula Oil and Propane.

And thanks to Autism Delaware exclusive presenting sponsor and BidPal sponsor Hertrich Toyota, the event was well-organized and the auction items were well-presented and easy to bid on.

Taking place at Delaware's first and only award-winning winery, wine aficionados also got to sample the Nassau Valley Vineyards's own award-winning wines as well as taste goodies from local restaurants, such as FINS, Kirby & Holloway, Doyles, Touch of Italy, Crooked Hammock, Bethany Blues, Big Fish Grill, and Blue Oyster Brewery.

"Thanks to the generosity of individuals," notes Autism Delaware events manager Deanna Principe, "who donate whatever they are able, and businesses like Arbor Care, Deakyne Law Office, and John F. Kleinstuber & Associates, Autism Delaware raised funds critical to continuing the services and supports our families need. From children to adults on the spectrum—and their families—the programs and services include awareness and advocacy as well as family support, clinical services, and community-based vocational services." This year, the Blue Jean Ball raised more than \$63,000.



Enjoying the 2016 Blue Jean Ball are (front row L-R) Delaware Representative Stephen T. Smyk (R-Dist. 20), Lyndie Hertrich, San Willey, Tushar Patel, and Susan Patel. In the back row (L-R) are Fred Hertrich IV, John Willey, Del. Senator Ernesto Lopez (R-Dist. 6), and Speaker of the House Peter Schwartzkopf (D-Dist. 14).

Gov. Markell signs SB93 into law in Newark office

In Autism Delaware's Newark office on September 14, 2016, Delaware Governor Jack Markell addressed an appreciative crowd of autism advocates. Including a host of agencies and individuals as well as staff from Autism Delaware and the University of Delaware Center for Disabilities Studies, these advocates had been working collectively for the last five years to get to the legal creation of the Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism.

The advocates then gathered behind the governor, and with the stroke of his pen, Governor Markell signed Senate Bill 93 into law, establishing the Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism (the network).



The network will be housed at UD's Center for Disabilities Studies. As a hub for training, the network will include schools, early intervention, the medical field, social services, and family support. The network's goal is to help provide training and technical assistance for Delaware professionals serving individuals on the spectrum in the state.

The network also creates a more efficient statewide system of services by bringing together key stakeholders to look for gaps and recognize duplication, leveraging the best efforts of all professionals and advocates. By designing a true network of autism professionals, all types of service providers can find high-quality training in autism and better serve their clients.

Sponsored by Del. Sen. Margaret Rose Henry (D-Dist. 2) and Del. Rep. Earl G. Jaques (D-Dist. 27), SB93 was passed unanimously by the Delaware State Legislature in April 2016. After the governor included start-up funding for the network in his budget, the state legislature maintained the funding through the year's budget process.

The process for creating laws that benefit people with autism and their families can be a positive, exciting experience.

For more information, call Autism Delaware director of policy and community outreach Alex Eldreth at (302) 224-6020, ext. 204. Or send an email of interest to alex.eldreth@delautism.org.

Send your child to day camp this summer

Some parents may not feel that their children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are ready to go away to camp for a week or two, staying overnight. Other parents may be unsure if a traditional summer camp can meet their children's unique needs while providing an enjoyable camp experience. For these families, a good place to start may be a day camp especially designed for youth with ASD.

Autism Delaware offers the day camp experience every August, from 9:00AM to 4:00PM, at the oceanfront Children's Beach House in Lewes. A highly structured, four-day program, Autism Delaware Summer Day Camp uses a repeating daily schedule to provide routine for campers on the spectrum.

This camp is appropriate for youth who are toilet-trained and will be enrolled in grade 3 or higher in the 2017–18 school year (up to and including age 17).

Campers enjoy kayaking, sailing, swimming in the ocean and the pool, a low ropes course, and arts and crafts. Throughout each activity, the staff encourages communication and practicing social skills and provides opportunities that help the children build their self-esteem. Using a "challenge by choice" approach, the staff also encourages campers to try something new but never forces them. Emotional and physical safety are always priorities.

To support campers and maintain a low staff-to-camper ratio, Autism Delaware employs supportive staff members who understand the special needs of youth with ASD, such as teachers and paraprofessionals with autism training and experience.

"Our goal," says Autism Delaware family service coordinator Dafne Carnright, "is to help children with ASD have a fun and successful summer camp experience. Our campers cannot wait to return next year!"

For more information

Call Dafne Carnright at (302) 644-3410, or email her at dafne.carnright@delautism.org. And be sure to ask how you can pay for your child's summer day camp experience with respite funds from the Delaware Health & Social Services' Division of Developmental Disabilities Services!



INSIDE Autism™ Delaware

Autism A–Z conference inspires and educates

Autism Delaware was proud to partner with Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health in a full-day autism conference on September 30 at the Chase Center on the Riverfront.

Devereux is a resource that changes lives by unlocking and nurturing human potential in people living with emotional, behavioral, or cognitive differences.

Entitled *Autism A–Z: Beyond the Puzzle, Implementing Evidence-based Practices through Family-Provider Partnerships*, the conference was designed for families affected by autism as well as the professionals who serve them.

Approximately 275 participants customized their learning experience by choosing from a variety of interactive workshops that were focused on such topics as

- education,
- social skills,
- nutrition,
- medication,
- housing,
- technology, and
- functional behavior assessments.

CEUs (continuing education units) and CME (continuing medical education) credits were available for physicians, psychologists, teachers, and social workers.

The featured keynote addresses were given by The May's Institute's chief clinical officer, Deidre L. Donaldson, PhD, ABPP, and Peter F. Gerhardt, EdD, executive director of the EPIC School in Paramus, New Jersey.

"We are grateful to Devereux for making this conference possible," says Autism Delaware executive director Teresa Avery. "So many incredible speakers shared so much knowledge! I'm glad our parents could sit in with the professionals who serve our community."



Delaware Attorney General Matt Denn (left) joined Secretary of the Department of Health and Social Services Rita Landgraf (right) in honoring Christine "Chris" Miller (center) who was awarded the Ability Network of Delaware Community Excellence Award on September 1, 2016. Miller has worked as a direct support professional (DSP) with Autism Delaware's adult employment program (known as Productive Opportunities for Work and Recreation, or POW&R, for short) since August 2014. Miller distinguished herself by consistently exhibiting dignity and respect while supporting the individuals she serves.

INSIDE Autism™ Delaware

January–March programs listing

For the up-to-date listing of programs, visit autismdelaware.org.

January

4, 11, 18, 25—Bowling night. Bowlerama. 3031 New Castle Av. New Castle. 5:30–7:00PM. *Register:* Karen.Tuohy@redclay.k12.de.us.

11—Parent coffee hour. Panera Bread. Wilmington. 7:00PM. *R.S.V.P.:* Heidi Mizell at (302) 224-6020.

12—Bounce night. Hopping Good Time. 23 Cochran Dr. Camden. 5:30–7:30PM. *R.S.V.P.:* Gail Hecky at (302) 644-3410.

28—Sensory friendly movie: *A Dog's Purpose*. Carmike Cinemas in the Dover Mall. 1365 North Dupont Hwy. 10:00AM.

February

1—Parent coffee hour. Hampton Inn. Middletown. 9:30AM. *R.S.V.P.:* Jennifer Sparks at sparkjm@aol.com.

1, 8, 15, 22—Bowling night. Bowlerama. 3031 New Castle Av. New Castle. 5:30–7:00PM. *Register:* Karen.Tuohy@redclay.k12.de.us.

9—Bounce night. Hopping Good Time. 23 Cochran Dr. Camden. 5:30–7:30PM. *R.S.V.P.:* Gail Hecky at (302) 644-3410.

11—Sensory friendly movie: *Lego Batman*. Carmike Cinemas in the Dover Mall. 1365 North Dupont Hwy. 10:00AM.

20—Grandparents support group. Autism Delaware Newark office. 6:30–7:30PM. *R.S.V.P.:* Heidi Mizell at (302) 224-6020.

March

1, 8, 15, 22, 29—Bowling night. Bowlerama. 3031 New Castle Av. New Castle. 5:30–7:00PM. *Register:* Karen.Tuohy@redclay.k12.de.us.

8—Parent coffee hour. Panera Bread. Wilmington. 7:00PM. *R.S.V.P.:* Heidi Mizell at (302) 224-6020.

9—Bounce night. Hopping Good Time. 23 Cochran Dr. Camden. 5:30–7:30PM. *R.S.V.P.:* Gail Hecky at (302) 644-3410.

18—Sensory friendly movie: *Beauty and the Beast*. Carmike Cinemas in the Dover Mall. 1365 North Dupont Hwy. 10:00AM.

Burning Up the Dance Floor for Autism



Photo by Andrew Zeltt

The theme of the 2016 Autism Delaware Fall Auction Gala was *Disco Inferno: Burning Up the Dance Floor for Autism*. Dressed in bell bottoms and platform shoes, the party-goers inside the World Café Live at The Queen in Wilmington danced “The Hustle” and participated in a lip sync battle while bidding in live and silent auctions, all to raise funds for Autism Delaware’s critically needed programs and services.

Joining Autism Delaware in this goal, individuals and businesses donated auction items and supported the event as sponsors.

“The Woolard Family Foundation is our biggest sponsor this year,” notes Autism Delaware events manager Deanna Principe. “We are grateful for their generosity and continuing support. As a parent with two children on the autism spectrum, I want to thank them from the bottom of my heart.”

Other top sponsors included AAA Mid-Atlantic, the Kempner Family, P.J. Fitzpatrick, Swift Pools, the Fischer Family, and Dover International Speedway.

“Thanks to the generosity of individuals and businesses,” continues Principe, “Autism Delaware can continue to provide much-needed programs and services. From the needs of children to the needs of adults on the spectrum—and their families—the programs and services include awareness, advocacy, family support, clinical services, and community-based vocational services and social and wellness activities.”

Many thanks to the volunteers who worked the fall auction gala. You ensured that more of the raised funds go where they're needed. Your effort made a big difference.

—Autism Delaware

How to give back to the community

Volunteer your time and expertise on behalf of Autism Delaware’s administrative, fundraising, and family support efforts. For details, send an email of interest to volunteers@delautism.org.

Volunteer appreciation and awards night

On October 14, 2016, at Dover Downs Hotel & Casino, Autism Delaware celebrated the people and businesses that make extraordinary efforts on behalf of individuals and families affected by autism. The invitation-only affair drew long-time volunteers from across the state. All were acknowledged in moving tributes from Autism Delaware associate director Brian Hall and executive director Teresa Avery.

Among the standout honors, the Jason Anderson Outstanding Employee Award was pre-

sented to Sherry Wanamaker for her evolving effort as a natural support for Autism Delaware's adult program participants working at Grotto Pizza in Long Neck.

The Autism Delaware Noel Perry Smith Award for Outstanding Employer was

presented to Sodexo/Nemours for its role in providing a place of meaningful employment for Autism Delaware's adult employees as well as for being a true advocate for individuals on the autism spectrum.

The Autism Delaware Outstanding Community Partner Award was presented to Westtown Movies for its many, continued contributions to Autism Delaware and the autism community.

Also honored were the winners of this year's Autism Delaware Daniel and Lois Gray Memorial Scholarship and the Autism Delaware Adults with Autism Scholarship. For details about each winner, see *The Sun* (October–December 2016).

Wrapping up the evening's festivities, Autism Delaware development director David Woods highlighted the efforts of the 12 most-recent volunteer-of-the-month winners before singling out autism advocate Kathy DeNight for the Autism Delaware Volunteer of the Year Award. DeNight was honored for her longtime, dedicated effort on behalf of Autism Delaware family support programs as well as for her outstanding work as a leading advocate in the autism community.



Longtime disabilities advocate Marie-Anne Aghazadian received the Paul Wilkinson Lifetime Achievement Award from Governor Jack Markell in October at the 2016 Governor's Outstanding Volunteer Service Awards in Dover. The parent of an individual with special needs, Aghazadian helped found Autism Delaware and create the Delaware Autism Program (DAP) and the Post-21 Adult Special Population Program. Recently retired as executive director of the Parent Information Center of Delaware, Aghazadian currently serves as vice president of Autism Delaware's board of directors and continues to serve as an educational surrogate parent and resource for the autism community. Aghazadian is also working on a new "Share the Care" advocacy initiative for adults with disabilities.



Volunteers from the New Castle Police, Fire, Rod & Gun Club presented Autism Delaware with a check for \$9,300 in the fall of 2016. To raise the money, the motorcycle enthusiasts circled northern New Castle County during the 8th Annual Autism Run & Ride 2 Know. The club makes the motorcycle run even more fun by selling custom-designed T-shirts, holding a silent auction, and hosting a pig roast. The event is a labor of love for organizer Eugene "Chief" Stoopes (third from left) and the many club members who work to make it happen every year. Over the past eight years of the event, the club has raised more than \$40,000 for Autism Delaware's much-needed programs and services.

Volunteering and its surprising benefits

How giving to others makes you healthier and happier

In an adapted health report published by Harvard Health Publications, HelpGuide editorial director and co-founder Jeanne Segal, PhD, worked with senior writer-editor Lawrence Robinson to create this article. It is adapted with permission from *Simple Changes, Big Rewards: A practical, easy guide for healthy, happy living* (a special health report published by Harvard Health Publications).

HelpGuide is a Santa Monica, California, nonprofit dedicated to charitable and educational purposes. HelpGuide collaborates with Harvard Health Publications, the consumer health publishing division of Harvard Medical School.

With busy lives, it can be hard to find time to volunteer. However, the benefits of volunteering are enormous to you, your family, and your community. The right match can help you to reduce stress, find friends, reach out to the community, learn new skills, and even advance your career. Giving to others can also help protect your mental and physical health. Learn more about the many benefits of helping others and find tips on getting started.

Why volunteer?

Volunteering offers vital help to people in need, worthwhile causes, and the community, but the benefits can be even greater for you, the volunteer. Volunteering and helping others can help you reduce stress, combat depression, keep you mentally stimulated, and provide a sense of purpose. While it's true that the more you volunteer, the more benefits you'll experience, volunteering doesn't have to involve a long-term commitment or take a huge amount of time out of your busy day. Giving in even simple ways can help others, those in need, and improve your health and happiness.

Volunteering: The happiness effect

Helping others kindles happiness, as many studies have demonstrated. When researchers at the London School of Economics examined the relationship between volunteering and measures of happiness in a large group of American adults, they found the more people volunteered, the happier they were, according to a study in *Social Science and Medicine*. Compared with people who never volunteered, the odds of being "very happy" rose 7% among those who volunteer monthly and 12% for people who volunteer every two to four weeks. Among weekly volunteers, 16% felt very happy—a hike in happiness comparable to having an income of \$75,000–\$100,000 versus \$20,000, say the researchers.

Benefit 1: Volunteering connects you to others.

Benefit 2: Volunteering is good for your mind and body.

Benefit 3: Volunteering can advance your career.

Benefit 4: Volunteering brings fun and fulfillment to your life.

Benefit 1: Volunteering connects you to others

One of the better-known benefits of volunteering is the impact on the community. Volunteering allows you to connect to your community and make it a better place. Even helping out with the smallest tasks can make a real difference to the lives of people, animals, and organizations in need. And volunteering is a two-way street: It can benefit you and your family as much as the cause you choose to help. Dedicating your time as a volunteer helps you make new friends, expand your network, and boost your social skills.

Make new friends and contacts

One of the best ways to make new friends and strengthen existing relationships is to commit to a shared activity together. Volunteering is a great way to meet new people, especially if you are new to an area. It strengthens your ties to the community and broadens your support network, exposing you to people with common interests, neighborhood resources, and fun and fulfilling activities.

Increase your social and relationship skills

While some people are naturally outgoing, others are shy and have a hard time meeting new people. Volunteering gives you the opportunity to practice and develop your social skills, since you are meeting regularly with a group of people with common interests.

Once you have momentum, it's easier to branch out and make more friends and contacts.

Volunteering as a family

Children watch everything you do. By giving back to the community, you show them firsthand how volunteering makes a difference and how good it feels to help other people and animals and enact change. It's also a valuable way for you to get to know organizations in the community and find resources and activities for your children and family.

Benefit 2: Volunteering is good for your mind and body

Volunteering provides many benefits to both mental and physical health.

Volunteering helps counteract the effects of stress, anger, and anxiety. The social contact aspect of helping and working with others can have a profound effect on your overall psychological well-being. Nothing relieves stress better than a meaningful connection to another person. Working with pets and other animals has also been shown to improve mood and reduce stress and anxiety.

Volunteering combats depression. Volunteering keeps you in regular contact with others and helps you develop a solid support system, which in turn protects you against depression.

Continued from page 8

Volunteering makes you happy. By measuring hormones and brain activity, researchers have discovered that being helpful to others delivers immense pleasure. Human beings are hard-wired to give to others. The more we give, the happier we feel.

Volunteering increases self-confidence. You are doing good for others and the community, which provides a natural sense of accomplishment. Your role as a volunteer can also give you a sense of pride and identity. And the better you feel about yourself, the more likely you are to have a positive view of your life and future goals.

Volunteering provides a sense of purpose. Older adults, especially those who have retired or lost a spouse, can find new meaning and direction in their lives by helping others. Whatever your age or life situation, volunteering can help take your mind off your own worries, keep you mentally stimulated, and add more zest to your life.

Volunteering helps you stay physically healthy. Studies have found that those who volunteer have a lower mortality rate than those who do not. Older volunteers tend to walk more, find it easier to cope with everyday tasks, are less likely to develop high blood pressure, and have better thinking skills. Volunteering can also lessen symptoms of chronic pain and reduce the risk of heart disease.

**I have limited mobility—
Can I still volunteer?**

People with disabilities or chronic health conditions can still benefit greatly from volunteering. In fact, research has shown that adults with disabilities or health conditions ranging from hearing and vision loss to heart disease, diabetes or digestive disorders, all show improvement after volunteering.

Whether due to a disability, a lack of transportation, or time constraints, many people choose to volunteer their time via phone or computer. In today's digital age many organizations need help with writing, graphic design, email, and other web-based tasks. Some organizations may require you to attend an initial training session or periodical meetings while others can be done completely remotely. In any volunteer situation, make sure that you are getting enough social contact and that the organization is available to support you should you have questions.

**Benefit 3: Volunteering can
advance your career**

If you're considering a new career, volunteering can help you get experience in your area of interest and meet people in the field. Even if you're not planning on changing careers, volunteering gives you the opportunity to practice important skills used in the workplace, such as teamwork, communication, problem solving, project planning, task management, and organization. You might feel more comfortable stretching your wings at work once you've honed these skills in a volunteer position first.

Gaining career experience

Volunteering offers you the chance to try out a new career without making a long-term commitment. It is also a great way to gain experience in a new field. In some fields, you can volunteer directly at an organization that does the kind of work you're interested in. For example, if you're interested in nursing, you could volunteer at a hospital or a nursing home.

Your volunteer work might also expose you to professional organizations or internships that could be of benefit to your career.

Teaching you valuable job skills

Just because volunteer work is unpaid does not mean the skills you learn are basic. Many volunteering opportunities provide extensive training. For example, you could become an experienced crisis counselor while volunteering for a women's shelter or a knowledgeable art historian while donating your time as a museum docent.

Volunteering can also help you build upon skills you already have and use them to benefit the greater community. For instance, if you hold a successful sales position, you raise awareness for your favorite cause as a volunteer advocate while further developing and improving your public speaking, communication, and marketing skills.

My volunteering for Autism Delaware™ began when I realized how much the organization has given to me and my children. I continue to volunteer because it's fun! I love seeing my bowlers and their families and caregivers weekly as we have become a support network. We celebrate accomplishments, and we brainstorm solutions and resources when things aren't going well.

Also volunteering for community resource fairs has allowed me to make connections that I might not have made.

My volunteering for the Walk for Autism? It is such an uplifting, high-energy event that brings the community together. I wouldn't miss it for the world!

—Karen Tuohy
Parent and Autism Delaware volunteer

I've always volunteered—at all the schools my children attended. My volunteerism turned into a paid position and career, but I'm not the only one. I've had a few volunteers land jobs rather quickly here at Autism Delaware. If you have a passion for support or change, it will come through.

—Heidi Mizell
Parent
Autism Delaware resource coordinator and volunteer
Special Olympics volunteer

Read this article in its entirety at <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/work-career/volunteering-and-its-surprising-benefits.htm>.

What our children are capable of

Sun contributor Jen Nardo is a parent mentor and long-time Autism Delaware™ volunteer as well as a dedicated member of Autism Delaware's newsletter committee.

Our kids who live on the autism spectrum benefit from many fundraisers and charitable gifts. There are fundraisers to promote research, fundraisers to provide iPads, and fundraisers for schools and school events. As a member of the autism community, I am grateful for all that is done to help our kids and our families.

My older, neurotypical son, Frankie, graduated from a high school that required a certain number of volunteer hours per year. My husband and I had exposed my son to the concept of volunteerism prior to high school, but this requirement made it impossible to ignore.

I often wondered, will my son on the spectrum, Jake, ever have the

opportunity to help others in a similar way?

Behavioral concerns made it seem unachievable—until Jake became a student in the Delaware Autism Program (DAP) at Christiana High School. During the last few years, he has been a part of the Viking Mobile Market. The market has two parts:

- The first is a cart that the students fill with snacks and drinks and then take to the Brennen School to sell their wares.
- Jake's classroom was also open during certain hours so all students and faculty in the high school could buy something, too.

The market creates many opportunities for our kids on the spectrum to learn something new. They have to travel to Brennen from an offsite location, so they learned to go online and make a DART Paratransit reservation. Not only did they

learn computer skills, but they all learned how to ride that bus together. (Staff rode behind in a van.)

The students also have to keep an inventory of the items on the cart so they know when to buy more. This step involves math skills and leads to grocery shopping. The shopping involves finding the items, counting out what is needed, and making the purchase.

Because social skills are difficult for our kids, the market creates possibilities for conversation, problem solving, and more work on math and purchasing skills. These abilities are invaluable for the future.

The final step involves the sales' proceeds. One year, our students bought items for the Child Life Program at the Nemours Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children. With a list of wanted toys, food, and music, the students went shopping. When all the items were collected, the students went to the hospital and presented their gifts. The hospital knew they were coming and gave our students a very warm welcome.

This visit was a win-win situation: All the students went to the hospital—and no one wanted to give them an exam!

I am so proud that my son got to be a part of this program. He understood that he was helping children who were sick and in the hospital. He learned how to see former teachers and staff and not run away. And he bettered his business skills and enjoyed the shopping.



Jake and Frankie Nardo

How to give back to the community

Volunteer to help run an Autism Delaware program, such as a parent coffee hour or social event for our families affected by autism. For more information:

- in New Castle County, contact Autism Delaware resource coordinator Heidi Mizell at (302) 224-6020, ext. 205, or heidi.mizell@delautism.org.
- in Kent and Sussex Counties, contact Dafne Carnright at (302) 644-3410 or dafne.carnright@delautism.org.

All information provided or published by Autism Delaware™ is for informational purposes only. Reference to any treatment or therapy option or to any program, service, or treatment provider is not an endorsement by Autism Delaware. You should investigate alternatives that may be more appropriate for a specific individual. Autism Delaware assumes no responsibility for the use made of any information published or provided by Autism Delaware.

Learning and succeeding by giving back

“Over the years,” says 36-year-old Kyle Bryan who is on the autism spectrum, “volunteering has helped me immensely in learning the importance of reaching out.”

As a Boy Scout growing up in Pennsylvania and Delaware, Bryan was taught to give back to the community. “The scout master emphasized giving and being an active part of the community,” explains Bryan, “so we worked on a variety of projects. We painted the local firehouses, assisted with the setup and breakdown of fundraising events for

the Pearl S. Buck Foundation, cleaned the roadside, and improved the properties of local businesses and schools.”

When Bryan became a Life Scout and assumed the part of a role model and leader in the Boy Scout troop, he continued to give back to the community by helping to plant trees, organize fundraising events, and maintain the grounds at a local church as well as assisting the scout’s patrol leader by making sure the troop was organized on trips and during meals.

About the Boy Scouts

“The Boy Scouts of America relies on dedicated volunteers to promote its mission of preparing young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetime by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Scout Law. Today, nearly 1.2 million adults provide leadership and mentoring to Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, and Venturers.

“Through the dedication of these many volunteers, the Boy Scouts of America remains the foremost youth program of character development and values-based leadership training in America” (<http://www.scouting.org/Volunteer.aspx>).

“By aiding or providing guidance and leadership to those in the community,” continues Bryan, “I’ve gained confidence that I can succeed amidst my personal struggles with autism.”

At 17, Bryan began volunteering his time as a chaplain in the scout troop. There, he received the moral guidance that helped him understand the values and principles of fulfilled day-to-day living. “I worked with the principles of Scout Law in helping others,” notes Bryan, “and my role gave me the foundation I needed to maintain an emotional and spiritual stability.”

Today, Bryan also enjoys photography and history. In fact, his understanding of history supported his data entry experience in the Hagley Museum and Library volunteer program. And as a budding photographer, Bryan has submitted work to a number of juried shows; three of his photos currently hang

in the Autism Delaware™ Newark office.

As a paid part-time office assistant at Autism Delaware, Bryan maintains his schedule of community service. For the last three years, Bryan has volunteered at Reformed University Friendship International (RUF) as part of the outreach program for the University of Delaware’s international students. He helps both students and scholars with their English lessons.

To the emotional boost of confidence that has come from his participation at RUF, Bryan adds the moral compass he obtained as chaplain—and can see an independent future. “I’m learning to live on my own, and I want my own home, family, and the means of making a decent living. If the opportunity comes up to make this all happen in the service of the community, I’ll gladly pounce on it!”

To this end, Bryan became an autism advocate last year and visited his state legislators for Smart Cookie Day in April.

Sharing his personal story and advocating for children and families affected by autism were big steps for Bryan. Undiagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) until 1999, Bryan had been afraid to tell his story because he didn’t understand it himself. He also felt marginalized. But on Smart Cookie Day, Bryan stood with his fellow autism advocates in a roomful of Delaware state legislators and Delaware Governor Jack Markell and told his personal story. Finishing with an impassioned plea on behalf of all people and families affected by autism, Bryan received a standing ovation.

“I’ve found that sharing my story has provided a great source of encouragement for those I interact with,” notes Bryan.

“If one individual on the spectrum can accomplish this much, imagine what a whole community could do! It’s something worth looking forward to in the future.”



Autism advocate Kyle Bryan stands before members of the Delaware legislature in Governor Jack Markell’s office and tells his personal story of struggles and accomplishments as an individual with autism.



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Helping People and Families Affected by Autism



How can you help?

April 6 is Autism Delaware Smart Cookie Day. Join Delaware's growing ranks of autism advocates as they describe their personal struggles to their elected legislators in Dover and support the legislation needed to help people and families affected by autism. For more information, contact Autism Delaware policy and community outreach director Alex Eldreth at (302) 224-6020, ext. 204.

Call Autism Delaware at (302) 224-6020, and

ask for a speaker to come to your workplace.

Set up an information table and fund-raise at your favorite restaurant or place of business.

For suggestions and help, call Autism Delaware development director David Woods at (302) 224-6020, ext. 206.

The statewide Walk for Autism is the perfect opportunity to put the "fun" in fundraising while also raising awareness:

April 1—Cape Henlopen State Park
April 8—Fox Point State Park

For more information, visit Autism Delaware's website, and click on the Annual Walk for Autism button.

April 2 is World Autism Awareness

Day. Raise awareness by lighting your house in blue. For more information, visit Autism Speaks' Light It Up Blue webpage at www.autismspeaks.org/liub.

AutismDelaware.org