



HOWARD COUNTY AUTISM SOCIETY

HCAS President's Report – 2016 Annual General Membership Meeting - December 15, 2016

HCAS Members,

Let me take this opportunity to first thank you for all of your continued support. HCAS had another successful year supporting the Howard County autism community. From our social events to our awareness and advocacy efforts, we hope we were able to play a small part in making your lives a little better. Of course, if we helped to create a memory with your friends and family, all the better. HCAS was honored to be recognized by the Howard County Commission of Disability Issues in October of 2016 when County Executive, Allan Kittleman, presented HCAS a Service Award. To me, recognition by your peers is the highest form of compliment.

2016 was a year of transition at HCAS; we conducted a long and thorough search for a new Executive Director; and, Melissa Rosenberg will begin full time in January of 2017. In addition, the Board updated the Bylaws to ensure a new strategic focus and formalized its Board Member commitments. These efforts will continue as the new ED works with the new Board to further strengthen our support of the community. The 2017 slate for the HCAS Board of Directors will be discussed and voted on later tonight.

The November financial information detailing our current position is available for your review. Our financial stability, combined with the hard work and the dedication of the staff, Board and volunteers throughout the year have allowed our committees to continue many successful programs, events and partnerships to serve the community. The second page of this letter includes a sampling of the activities HCAS led throughout 2016.

As always, we hope to see you out at our many events. With your participation in and support of our committee activities, HCAS will continue to be a strong voice within the community for our friends, family members, and loved ones.

Theresa Ballinger
President, HCAS Board of Directors
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Howard County Autism Society Partial List of HCAS 2016 Activities

Social Events held in 2016:

- Trip to Kalahari Resort
- Restaurant fundraising night at The Grille in Maple Lawn
- Dad's Night Out events
- Bi-weekly yoga classes for 10-18 year olds on the spectrum.
- 'Fitness First' events
- Semi-annual pool parties
- Sensory-friendly movie events
- Sensory-friendly Santa and Easter Bunny events
- Autism Awareness Month activities including a trip to Skyzone in Columbia

General HCAS Activities from 2016:

- Held our 11th annual Pieces of the Puzzle Gala
- Held our 10th annual One Step Closer ... Autism Walk and 5K Run
- Held our 3rd annual Transition Symposium, providing a full day of presenters and workshops covering a wide variety of Transition topics including a self-advocate track
- Held our annual special needs camp fair providing information on summer camp opportunities.
- Held monthly meetings of the various support groups including the Asperger's Group, Transition and Adulthood Group and general HCAS support group. These meetings often included guest speakers on a variety of topics of interest to the community.
- Continued execution of our Family Advocacy and Parent Education (FAPE) Grant, offering assistance to those with questions and issues surrounding the school system
- Held FAPE conference co-sponsored by Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) and RISE for Autism.
- Continued updating our Special Education News Center with information and articles pertinent to special education advocacy and support.
- Transitioned to the HCAS *monthly* eNewsletter, Perspectives
- Held Brown Bag Series workshops in partnership with Pathfinders for Autism
- Sponsored a BE SAFE training workshop attended by HC Police recruits and self-advocates.
- Provided state-mandated autism training to new recruit classes of the HC Police Department.
- Held meetings with HCPSS Department of Special Education and Student Services leadership to continue work on improving the services and opportunities for those on the spectrum.
- Completed the Middle School Workgroup, a 2+ year effort focused on improving the educational experience of those in middle school.
- Implemented 'The Lions' Den'; a "Best Buddies" like program at Murray Hill Middle School. Program still going strong with solid administration support. Looking for opportunities to spread within HCPSS.
- Participated on the HCPSS Diversity and Inclusion Committee which provided a set of recommendations to expand programs promoting positive behavior, and respect.
- Jointly organized the 2016 Board of Education Primary Election Candidates Forum on special education with SECAC and The Arc of Howard County.
- Continued our work with HCPSS, Howard County Recreation and Parks and Howard County Department of Citizens Services on the Transition Outreach Partnership to increase outreach, programming and support of our children transitioning out of the school system in Howard County.
- Through the work of our Housing Subcommittee, conducted a feasibility study for a potential housing solution for those on the spectrum in Howard County which culminated in a Discovery Workshop in October 2016 which was attended by State and local authorities as well as developers and financiers in the industry.