

The Howard County Autism Society

2012 ANNUAL REPORT

- **Providing information, support and advocacy**
- **Promoting awareness of autism that values the dignity and uniqueness of each individual**
- **Improving the quality and access to services and to educational opportunities**

Serving more than 2,000 people through our services, programming and information.

Providing information, support and advocacy . . .

We provide a community for parents and siblings. In 2012, we hosted numerous family fun events including HCAS night at the Pottery Stop, Parent's Dinner Out, sibling appreciation day, gymnastics open house, private Pump It Up parties, pool parties, a family picnic, an overnight retreat at Great Wolf Lodge, and a horse show at Merry Acre Farms.

We offer information and referral services. The Resource Center is open each weekday. In 2012, the staff fielded more than 750 requests for information and kept members up-to-date with regular e-newsletters and quarterly newsletters.

We advocate on behalf of individuals with autism spectrum disorder. We participated in the Education Advocacy Coalition for Students with Disabilities. We co-hosted a Legislative Breakfast with county legislators to address the most important disability issues of the day. Several board members lobbied in Annapolis in support of legislation that would impact individuals with autism, including the autism waiver, autism insurance coverage, and several educational bills.

We sponsor three monthly support groups. A general support group, a group for Asperger's syndrome, and another dedicated to transitioning youth and adults. Among our 2012 guest speakers: Patty Daley, executive director of special education and student services, HCPSS; Roma Vasa, child and adolescent psychiatrist; special education advocates Mary Hepple and Linda Carter Ferrier; Jenn Palmer of Nourishing Journey; and Sandee Moskoff of Penn-Mar Human Services.

We provide everyday opportunities for families with special needs. In 2012, we sponsored the Sensitive Easter Bunny and Sensitive Santa photo opportunities at the Columbia Mall, family fitness nights at Columbia Gym, and monthly sensory friendly movies at AMC Columbia.

We offer presentations by experts on special education, disability rights, transition and other topics. Among our many 2012 presentations: Julie Foley and Kim McKay of Parents for Parents presented on special education law; Janet Palmer of Advocates for Success discussed ways to protect and promote appropriate social behavior in teens; Susan Howarth of Success Transitions presented on vocational planning; Maryland Disability Law Center presented information on student discipline, restraint and seclusion, behavior plans, MSA and HSA issues, as well as modifications and accommodations; Emily Marshall, ministry coordinator of Faith Fellowship Church, discussed spirituality and how faith can positively impact families with special needs.

Promoting awareness that values the dignity and uniqueness of each individual . . .

We introduced the 911 Call Center Flagging Program to the disability community in collaboration with the Howard County Police Department. Families can now voluntarily flag their addresses in the 911 Call Center database to assist first responders with advance knowledge about a child with autism or a person with a disability in residence.

We developed an autism training video for Howard County Fire & Rescue Department. This training is mandatory for all 400 career personnel, plus hundreds of volunteer firefighters.

We supported and provided counsel to Howard County Department of Recreation and Parks on the development of the first Universal Destination Playground in Maryland. This park area will provide a sensory friendly play environment for individuals with autism and other special needs.

We actively promoted and facilitated the AMC Sensory Friendly Movies. This national program, which originated with a collaboration between the Howard County Autism Society and AMC Columbia, offers a monthly movie in a sensory friendly theater environment. HCAS board members attend every movie to greet families and distribute information.

Improving the quality and access to services and to educational opportunities . . .

Through the Family Advocacy and Parent Education Program, we provided free one-to-one assistance on special education matters to more than 200 families in 2012, including free consults with the Maryland Disability Law Center.

Howard County . . . A Destination for Families with Autism

Howard County has become a destination for families with loved ones with autism. Consequently the county has the highest incidence of autism per capita in the state. In comparison to the national incidence rate of 1 in 88, Howard County realizes a rate of 1 in 73. More than 700 students in Howard County schools are diagnosed with autism.

The Howard County Autism Society is here to serve these families as well as countless others outside of our borders. In 2012 more than 2,000 people were assisted by the Howard County Autism Society. We continued to provide a rich array of programs and services for families, individuals with autism, and community-wide providers.



April is Autism Awareness Month, during which time we host the annual Pieces of the Puzzle Gala to celebrate our achievements, thank our donors, and look forward to a new year of promise. In 2012 an ALOHA theme reinforced acceptance and friendship, accentuating the need in our community to work together for the sake of all those on the autism spectrum.



Each fall, the Howard County Autism Society sponsors the *One Step Closer ... Autism Walk & 5K Run* to raise money for its programs and services. In 2012 more than 500 individuals participated in this event.

Thank You to All Our Donors

\$15,000+

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FINANCES ...

The Howard County Autism Society typically operates on a balanced budget, and relies on the generosity of the community to support its programs and services. The net revenue in 2012, due to lower than budgeted expenses, brings us close to our financial stability goal of maintaining one year of operating funds available at all times.

