



HOWARD COUNTY AUTISM SOCIETY

HCAS President's Report – 2015 Annual General Membership Meeting - December 17, 2015

HCAS Members,

As 2015 draws to a close, I wanted to take the opportunity to thank you for all of your continued support. Because of our combined efforts, we have once again had a very 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 and generating memories to share with your friends and family.

In addition to our many successful activities and events, 2015 was also a year of change at HCAS. Over the last six months, the Board of Directors has been working diligently to chart our future course. This effort included reaching outside of the organization for an independent look at our practices and construct. We have utilized that feedback, as well as feedback from the community, to set our vision of governance and our top level priorities for the future. We are excited to continue our journey and strengthen our support of the community. That journey takes a new step tonight, with the election of our 2016 slate for the HCAS Board of Directors, and will continue in the coming month as we begin our search for a new Executive Director.

Rest assured; our organization is strong. Our November financial information detailing our current position is available for review for those interested. 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. These activities, and many others completed behind the scenes at HCAS are key to the continued support of our loved ones on the spectrum as well as their extended families. The 2nd page of this letter includes a sampling of some of the activities HCAS led throughout 2015.

On a personal note, as I step into a new role for HCAS in 2016, I'd like to thank you; all of you; for your many efforts to support and strengthen the community over the past two years. I'm excited for our future because I know that together, we can continue to be a strong voice within the community for our friends, family members, and loved ones.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Roger E. Thibaudeau". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Roger Thibaudeau
President – HCAS Board of Directors
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Partial List of HCAS 2015 Activities

Social Events held in 2015:

- Trips to Great Wolf Lodge and Snow Tubing at Liberty Mountain
- Restaurant fundraising nights
- Mom's Night out and 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 events
- Autism Awareness Month activities including a trip to Skyzone in Columbia

General HCAS Activities from 2015:

- Held our 10th annual Pieces of the Puzzle Gala
- Held our 9th annual One Step Closer ... Autism Walk and 5K Run
- Held our 2nd annual Transition Symposium, providing a full day of presenters and workshops covering a wide variety of Transition topics
- Held our annual camp fair providing information on summer camp opportunities for those with special needs.
- Established the Middle School Autism Workgroup, co-chaired by HCAS and HCPSS, to evaluate issues and opportunities to improve the middle school experience for students with autism. The workgroup includes administrators, instructional facilitators, resource teachers, instructional team leaders and parents.
- 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
- Held four Brown Bag Series workshops in partnership with Pathfinders for Autism
- Provided state-mandated autism training to new recruit classes of the Howard County Police Department.
- Held meetings with HCPSS Department of Special Education and Student Services (DSESS) leadership to continue work on improving the services and opportunities for those on the spectrum.
- Continued updating our Special Education News Center with information and articles pertinent to special education advocacy and support.
- Expanded our social skills/opportunities program by adding an 11-15 age group. Both age groups (11-15; 16-23) met throughout 2015 and already have sessions scheduled in 2016.
- Partnered with HCPSS, Howard County Recreation and Parks and Howard County Department of Citizens Services to form the Transition Outreach Partnership with the goal 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, completed initial research into future housing solutions for those on the spectrum in Howard County. A smaller housing 'workgroup' is now continuing with efforts to push forward with the potential housing options that have been identified.