

WORLD AUTISM MONTH

WCSI CULTURAL COMPETENCE COMMITTEE

The shift from “Autism Awareness Month” to “Autism Acceptance Month”

In April 2021, The Autism Society of America, took to social media to assist in the change of “Autism awareness month” to Autism Acceptance Month.” This campaign was titled “Celebrate the differences.”

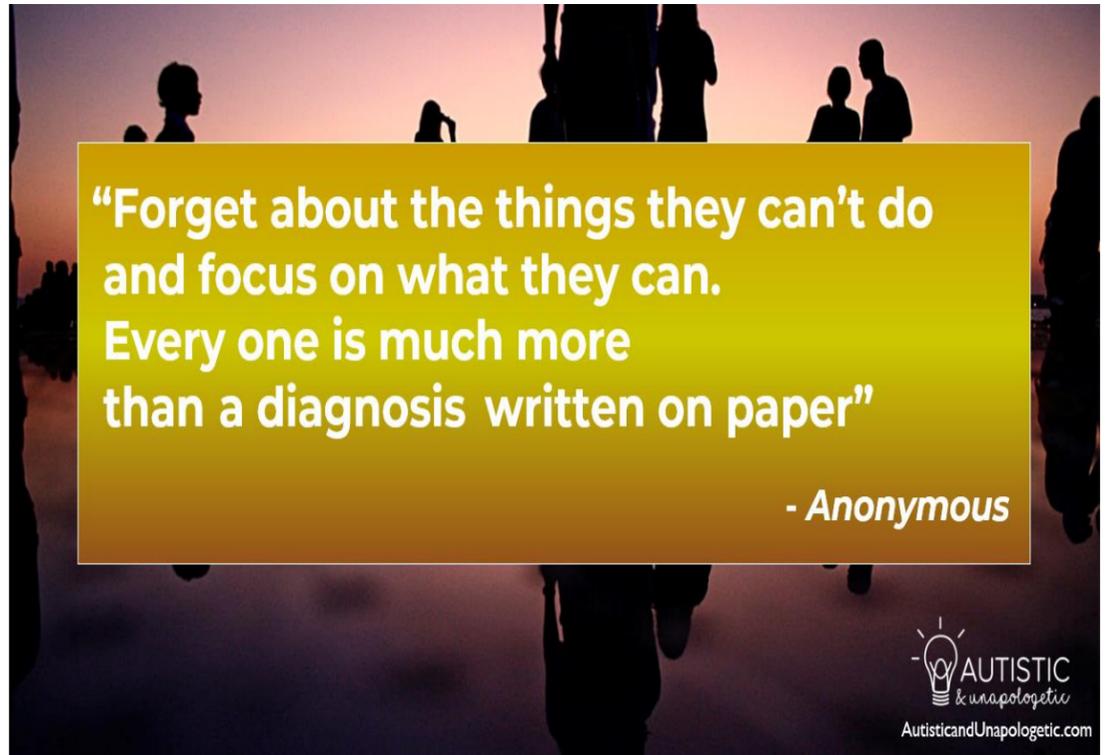
In 1970, the organization launched an ongoing national effort to promote Autism Awareness and to ensure that all people with Autism can achieve the highest quality of life possible. The first National Autistic Children’s week was in 1972. The campaign in 2021 was set to focus on building a better awareness of the signs, symptoms and realities of Autism and be more aware of Autism, promote acceptance and be more inclusive in everyday life.

So why the shift? Christopher Banks, President and CEO of the Autism Society of America, puts it like this: “While we will always work to spread awareness, words matter as we strive for autistic individuals to live fully in all areas of life. As many individuals and families affected by autism know, acceptance is often one of the biggest barriers to finding and developing a strong support system.”

Acceptance is something the global population has been and continues to struggle with, but engaging in conversation and learning about one another’s perspectives, we can individually become accepting. And if the global population decides to embrace such a philosophy, our world can be filled with more love and acceptance and less hatred and stigmatism. Let us all aim to be aware and accepting of the global autism community as well as others. It starts with you and educating yourself.



CDC



KNOW THE FACTS



The Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) refers to a group of conditions characterized by difficulty in social functioning and repetitive behaviors or stereotype interests. In 2013, the American Psychiatric Association merged four distinct Autism Diagnosis into one umbrella diagnosis of the autism spectrum disorder. They include autistic disorder, childhood disintegrative disorder, pervasive developmental disorder-not otherwise specified, Rhett’s disorder and Asperger syndrome. Some individuals have an intellectual disability while others have average or above average IQ levels.

The latest information from the CDC reports that 1 in every 59 children are diagnosed with autism which is 1% of the global population. According to Autism speaks, signs of autism usually appear by age 2-3 and can often be diagnosed as early as 18 months.

Many people with ASD find social interactions difficult. The mutual back and forth communication and interaction is often challenging. People with ASD may have different verbal abilities from no speech at all to speech that is fluent.

Many people with ASD engage in repetitive movements or unusual behaviors such as flapping their arms, rocking from side to side, or twirling. They may become preoccupied with parts of objects like the wheels on a toy truck. Children may also become obsessively interested in a particular topic such as airplanes or memorizing train schedules. Many people with ASD seem to thrive so much on routine that changes to the daily patterns of life — like an unexpected stop on the way home from school — can be very challenging. Some children may even get angry or have emotional outbursts, especially when placed in a new or overly stimulating environment.

Males are four times more likely to have autism than females.

About 40% of children with autism do not speak. About 25%-30% of children with autism will have some words at 12-18 months and then lose them. Others might speak, but not until later in childhood.

No 2 people with Autism are the same.

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How is ASD Diagnosed

ASD symptoms can vary from person to person depending on the severity of their disorder. Autism Spectrum Disorder is diagnosed by clinicians based on symptoms, signs and testing according to the diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders- V (DSM5), a guide created by the American Psychiatric Association used to diagnosis mental disorders.

Children should be screened for developmental delays during periodic checkups and specifically for Autism at 18-24-month well-child visits.

Very early indicators include:

- No babbling or pointing
- No single words by age 16 months or two-word phrases by age 2
- No response to name
- Loss of language or social skills previously acquired
- Poor eye contact
- Excessive lining up of toys or objects
- No smiling or social responsiveness

Later indicators include

- Impaired ability to make friends with peers
- Impaired ability to initiate or sustain a conversation with others

- Absence or impairment of imaginative and social play
- Repetitive or unusual use of language
- Abnormally intense or focused area
- Preoccupation with certain objects or subjects
- Inflexible adherence to specific routines or rituals.



Sesame Street gets a new character!

<https://youtu.be/dKCdV20zLMs> 10 minutes YouTube video of Julia's debut

Julia is a 4 year old fictional character on the children's television program Sesame Street, known for being the first *Sesame Street* character with Autism. She is a yellow anything Muppet with short red hair and green eyes. Her outfit consists of a dark pink tunic a light pink t-shirt, green pants, and black flats. The character premiered on television on 12 April 2017, though she was introduced in "digital form" in 2015. Her debut marked a new phase of Sesame Workshop's Autism awareness initiative, *Sesame Street and Autism: See Amazing in All Children*, which provides resources "designed to serve autistic children and their families". The character is performed by puppeteer Stacey Gordon, who has a son with autism. Julia Bascom of the Autistic Self Advocacy Network was consulted to create the character, Julia. Julia is Elmo's oldest buddy, and they share an amazing friendship.

Get to know the Autism team

WCSI'S IDD department has a specialized Autism team. New referrals that come from RIHS that have an autism only diagnosis, get assigned to the Autism team.

The Autism team

Jennifer Nolan- Supervisor
Hannah Kinley- Supports Coordinator
Sherrie Klos- Supports Coordinator
Shannen Segiel- Supports Coordinator
Jaden Meyer- Supports Coordinator
James Good- Supports Coordinator

Together the Autism team serve approximately 135 individuals of which around 70% are SC only (no funding). The Autism team is equip with sensory bags with items that they can offer at every appointment. They include-stress balls, Mr. Rogers videos and books about Julia, the Sesame Street character with autism.



Autism society- Autismsociety.org

I-pads for Autism- Dannyswish.org

Autism Speaks- Autismspeaks.org

Exceptional Adventures- exceptionaladventures.com

Pressley Ridge school for the autism- presselyridge.org/autism/schools

ASERT- PaAutism.org

Autism Connection- autismofpa.org

National Autism Association- nationalautismassociation.org