



# The Kids Newsletter

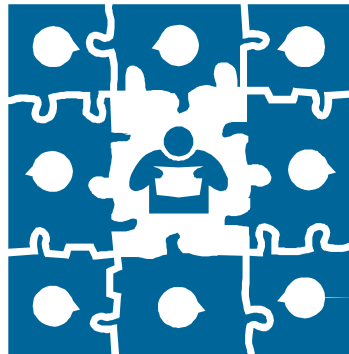
...for parents by parents.

## A Parents Story

### The Puzzle Piece! By Pamela G.

As I am sure many of you know, the symbol for autism awareness is the “puzzle piece”. I wear one on my jacket and get asked repeatedly what it represents. I am also pleased to report that many more people seem to already know what that blue pin stands for.

The topic of autism is in the news more than ever these days. When I first learned the specifics of autism I was in my undergraduate program training to be a special education teacher. It seemed to be one of the more challenging groups of students that I would be asked to teach one day. Armed with the knowledge I chose to be placed at the May Center in Chatham, Massachusetts for my student teaching assignment. There, I knew I would get the intense training I so craved. After graduation I got a teaching job in a public school where my classroom was made up of children with a variety of disabilities, including autism. For the next eight consecutive summers I worked with a young girl on Martha’s Vineyard who also had a diagnosis of autism. After some years of teaching I entered a Master’s program and received a degree in Special Education and Counseling. I wanted to be better equipped at effectively assisting families of newly diagnosed children. I finally felt I had the skills I needed to meet the varying needs of my students and their caring families. I was about to get the shock of life...



It wasn’t until my own son received a diagnosis of autism at 20 months that I realized how important my training as a special education teacher had been. Don’t get me wrong, I didn’t feel lucky at the time....my background did not seem to matter in those first few weeks after Riley was diagnosed. I refer to that time as the “Dark Days after the Diagnosis”. Anyone who has received that news from a trusted practitioner knows the pain, confusion, and feeling of hopelessness that comes right along with it. You start reading, googling, and panicking all in one hysterical moment. I dug out all my text books, diagnostic materials....anything I could get my hands on. Even as a trained special education teacher the information overwhelmed me.

**“The autism puzzle is a constant work in progress.....when you get a piece to fit, tap it one more time and Grin Big!”**

After the shock and self-defeating “Why me?” moments....I do remember getting from point of “Why me?” to “Thank Goodness Me!”. I joined a Mother’s Group that was helpful and anxiety provoking all at once. Helpful, because you were with people who were going through the

same struggles and could offer some advice as to what things worked for them. It was also anxiety provoking because these amazing women were trying everything on this planet to get their child back from the clutches of autism. Some of these included research proven strategies like Applied Behavioral Analysis, gluten-free diets, listening therapy, to having their children’s toxicity levels checked for heavy metals. People were willing to try just about anything that may have some chance of helping their child.

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Volume 3, Issue 3

Spring 2008

### Special points of interest:

- ☺ A Parents Story
- ☺ Spring activities
- ☺ Good websites
- ☺ Legislative Updates
- ☺ Free/ low-cost activities
- ☺ Parent workshops

### Inside this issue:

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### ***The Puzzle Piece!***

I would come home practically hyperventilation that I wasn't doing enough for Riley. It is at this group that I met one of my dearest friends, Diane. She is my sounding board, advice guru, and one of Riley's biggest cheerleaders! When I am down and hyper-focused on the latest challenge, Diane is the one that reminds me of all the positive things and purposeful changes that are happening with Riley. She is also the person that lets me complain, cry and feel bad for myself from time to time....with nothing more than a nod and an "I know I know!". She doesn't try to fix everything, she allows me to just be in the "thick of it" until the moment passes and we can move on. For that I am forever indebted to her.

All these people and experiences feel like my puzzle pieces. Our life, our family is the Big Picture. The trials and tribulations, the challenges, struggles and achievements are pieces that we add to that

big puzzle everyday. Some people complete puzzles by putting together the outside border first, others find objects within the puzzle itself and focus on those. Anyone who has a life touched by autism knows it is never that simple. One day you work on your border then the next day you focus on the blue sky and clouds of that puzzle. When you find that tiny obscure piece that fits in the exact spot you need, a great feeling comes over you....you tap that piece in place one more time and grin big! The same can be said when you finally find that therapist or teacher that just "get" your child, or when your child will tolerate the toothbrush for a length of time. You begin to see your puzzle take shape when he finally speaks or wraps his sister in a huge embrace and says "We love each other!".

The autism puzzle is a constant work in progress. It certainly has its more challenging sections but each puzzle piece that we place is getting us closer to the Big Picture.

So remember when you do get a piece to fit, tap it one more time and Grin Big!

***"Our life, our family is the Big Picture". The trials and tribulations, the challenges, struggles and achievement are pieces that we add to that puzzle everyday".***

## **Legislative Updates**

### **Family Matters**

March 10, 2008

Dear Friends:

We are working very hard as part of the Collaborative, a group that represents all community-based human service organizations, as we advocate with state government for increased funding. I am one of three provider CEOs sitting on the steering committee for the Collaborative.

The website in this e-mail will help you to gain familiarity with what the Collaborative is doing to increase rates for services that will allow us to pay better wages, meet the cost of healthcare, increase mileage reimbursement, keep our buildings in good condition, etc.

Over the next few weeks, we will be meeting with legislators to make the case for Senate 65 which is the piece of legislation we need passed in order to succeed. Governor Patrick has already stated that he will sign this bill if we can get it through the legislature, so we have some real hope for success in this legislative year which ends June 30.

Please review these materials: [www.strengthenhumanservices.org](http://www.strengthenhumanservices.org). Consider a call or letter to your local Representative or Senator. And, please let us know if you have any special relationships that may help.

Thanks for your support.

Scott M. Bock



## Kids Activities

**Free tickets for the Shriners Circus on Friday, April 25, 2008 at 10 am.** The tickets will be distributed on a first come first served basis. Check out the enclosed flyer for more details.

Riverside Family Support is creating a low-cost **Wacky Science Class**. If you have a child between the ages of 6 and 12, we need your input. Please fill out the enclosed survey and return it to our Wakefield office. Thank you.

*...or you can check out [www.mass-vacation.com](http://www.mass-vacation.com) and search for low cost activities in your own community.*



## Useful Resources

### **Check out these helpful websites from a local Parent:**

[www.talkaboutcuringautism.org](http://www.talkaboutcuringautism.org)— TACA provides information, resources, and support to families affected by autism. On their website they have a section titled GFCF Diet. In that section, there is a list of **gluten free/ casein free school supplies** ( and candy) for Pre-K and Elementary School. The website also lists other helpful resources, such as [www.gfcfdiet.com](http://www.gfcfdiet.com) and [www.elmers.com](http://www.elmers.com)



## Upcoming Workshops & Events

Be a part of something great! Riverside is offering a **Family Support Parent Advisory Committee**. The group typically meets on Friday mornings every other month from 9:30 to 11:30 AM. The next meeting is on May 23rd at 9:30 am. The committee meets at our Wakefield office. Check out the enclosed flyer for details and directions.

**Massachusetts Families Organizing for Change** is organizing a conference entitled **Stone Soup** on Saturday, March 29, 2008, 8:30 am-3:15 pm at the Boston University Conference Center, Tyngsboro, MA. Details and registration information available at [www.mfofc.org](http://www.mfofc.org), or you can contact the Statewide Coordinator, Dianne Huggon, at 1-800-406-3632.

Join the Autism Support Center at the **2008 Autism Awareness Day** at the State House on April 15th at 9:30 am. Call Gloria Castillo at 978-624-2301 for more details.

Autism Support Center is holding it's second annual **Spanish Conference focusing on Behavior** on April 17th from 8:30 am to 1 pm. The Keynote is Dr. Mariela Vargas. The event will be held at the Lawrence Heritage Museum, One Jackson Street, Lawrence. Call Gloria Castillo at 978-624-2301 for more details.

The Federation for Children with Special Needs is holding the following **parent workshops** in our area:

3/26/08– Turning Three, 7 to 9 pm, Criterion Stoneham Early Intervention, Woburn

4/2/08—MCAS, 7 to 9 pm, Higgins Middle School, Peabody

4/10/08—Yelling Doesn't Work, 7 to 9 pm, Ripley Building, Concord

4/16/08—Basic Rights, 7 to 9 pm, Stoneham High School, Stoneham

5/5/08—Basic Rights, 7 to 9 pm, Shaker Lane School Library, Littleton

Check out [www.fcsn.org](http://www.fcsn.org) for more details or to register for the parent workshop in your area.



Riverside Family & Individual Support is funded primarily by the Massachusetts Department of Mental Retardation. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the funding source. Riverside Family & Individual Support does not endorse any product, service, or theory referred to in the newsletter. Resources and announcements are included for information only.

# Riverside Community Care

THE HELP YOU NEED CLOSE TO HOME

Riverside Family & Individual Support  
338 Main Street, Suite 301  
Wakefield, MA 01880

We're on the web...  
[www.riversidefamilysupport.org](http://www.riversidefamilysupport.org)

## We'd like your input!

This newsletter is geared at being by parents for parents with disabled children. Each Issue will have an article with a families story, useful websites, free or inexpensive resources, legislative news, and any information that may be helpful to a family raising a disabled child. Our goal is to increase awareness and reach out to families by supplying them with useful information.

### We welcome your story's and ideas!

If you would like to contribute feedback, please email, fax or mail your thoughts to:

Email: [treilly@riversidecc.org](mailto:treilly@riversidecc.org)

Please put *Newsletter* in the topic of the email.

Fax: 781-245-2454

Address: listed above.



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