

ONE ICON



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TRAINS FOR
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TALK ABOUT *CURING* AUTISM

BY ELISHA MATTA

A **SINGLE** PERSON CAN CREATE POSITIVE CHANGE.

In a hurried world where a sense of community can be rare as we rush from one engagement to the next, where a single face may seem indistinguishable in the crowd and apathy is the easy route to take, there are individuals out there making their voices heard. It's not an easy path to tread, but sometimes the path chooses the person and they rise to the occasion in ways they never dreamt they could.



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MEET LISA ACKERMAN



Lisa is the mother of a 14-year-old boy named Jeff who crushes on Katy Perry, took a role in his class play and is able to hold his own in typical eighth grade classes. This may seem mundane to some, but for her, he is a “walking miracle.” At two years old, Jeff was diagnosed with autism. It was a prognosis that left little room for hope for the future.

Unwilling to accept that there was nothing she could do, Lisa and her husband Glen threw themselves into researching the condition, attending seminars, devouring books, watching hours of videos – consuming as much information as they could – to learn more about the mysterious disorder that is autism.

They realized that while autism was defined as a behavioral condition, Jeff also had biomedical issues that needed

attention. So they began a two-pronged attack to help their son.

Then, one day—hoping to connect with like-minded parents – Lisa put her home address out on the Internet. “Thank god we moved from that house,” Lisa laughs as she recounts the story.

After posting a simple thread inviting parents of children living with autism into her home to share positive thoughts



over coffee, she had 10 people show up on her porch. A month later, she hired a speaker, hosted a second meeting and 20 more people showed up. Unbeknownst to Lisa, the foundation for Talk About Curing Autism (TACA) was being built.

Between the families, they were able to divide and conquer; looking for answers to challenges they were all facing, whether that was discovering a recipe that didn't taste like cardboard or locating a speech therapist with experience working with children with autism.

Over the next year, that original

group swelled to 150 families and by 2003, TACA was incorporated. "I can't believe [Lisa] had the wisdom and the courage to establish TACA," says a TACA parent. "I know my life would be different without TACA. I feel like I have the tools to either chip away at those mountains or learn how to scale them ... [TACA] has made

a difference in my life, and that makes a difference in my son's life." With TACA, Lisa established an empowering community for parents determined to advocate for the health of their children and founded an organization that helps to backfill services that previously did not exist.¹



¹ TACA Programs include Coffee Talks, meetings with speakers, web chats, telephone support, parent mentoring, medical scholarships and a youth ambassador program. Their website provides vital information for parents on their journey including everything from what Autism symptoms mean, access to knowledgeable parent resources & professionals, available funding, recipes, information on development stages, blogs, etc.



Today, Lisa is not only the proud mother of a son who has grown leaps and bounds beyond what medical professionals said was possible; she is also the Executive Director of TACA.

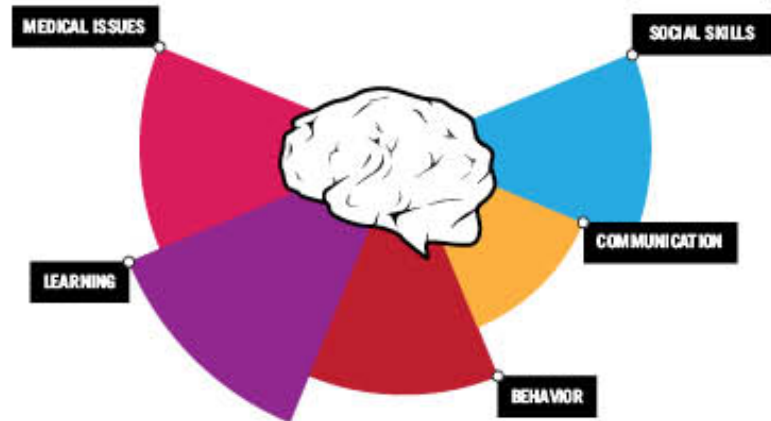
AUTISM IS A DEVASTATING NEUROLOGICAL AND BIOLOGICAL DISORDER.

It's a simple statement, but what does it really mean? The truth is that it means something different for each child. Autistic symptoms are often linked to a wide range of coexisting medical conditions including sensitivities to sound, light and/or touch, severe food allergies, gastrointestinal issues, above or below average pain thresholds and so much more.²

It can become a "problem of generalities," as Lisa explains it. "Healthcare is set up like fast food ... there's no way to treat the complex medical issues that often come with autism if doctors aren't able to spend time thoroughly examining the patient."

"It's tricky on steroids," Lisa admits. "Every child is like a snowflake, but huge strides can be made when

FIVE EFFECTS OF AUTISM



¹ Typically, autism affects individuals in five key areas:

- Communication (verbal and non-verbal)
- Social skills
- Behaviors
- Learning
- Medical issues

you attempt to understand and treat each individual symptom."

Some children who receive an early diagnosis, intense behavioral intervention, medical treatment and speech therapy will lead typical lives. But not all people diagnosed with autism receive such an early diagnosis or enjoy this outcome.

One of TACA's goals is to educate

and empower families to get their children the help they need to work toward a more typical day-to-day life.

But that goal faces big challenges like changing the old paradigm that autism is a "game over" diagnosis and overcoming the false belief that autism is a result of bad parenting and bad genes.



To Lisa, the notion of false hope is dangerous. “Hopelessness is a painful existence,” she says. “I think false pessimism is more harmful than false hope.”

She is a firm believer – and her son along with thousands of TACA members are living proof – that some autistic behaviors point to a medical problem, which when treated, minimize the behavior. “When you feel better, you act better, right?” Lisa asks. It’s a simple strategy, but it can take years, countless doctor’s visits, endless treatment plans and thousands of dollars to achieve.

Some people affected with autism will require life-long care at the cost of \$5 to \$7 million dollars. The life span of an autistic child is no less than that of a neurotypical child. This means that the financial burden of caring for a person living with autism extends beyond the individual to the governmental level.

On the individual level, TACA began providing medical scholarships in 2006 to help families pay for physician-prescribed services such as stopgap medical treatments, independent assessments or other necessary crisis funding.

Other organizations and federally funded programs exist to help families close the gap between insurance-covered medical expenses and their total annual expenditure. But the reality is that autism is



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**MORE CHILDREN
WILL BE DIAGNOSED
WITH **AUTISM** THIS
YEAR THAN WITH
**AIDS, DIABETES &
CANCER** COMBINED**



one of the fastest-growing serious developmental disabilities in the U.S.³ And despite recent increases in spending, as mandated by the Obama administration, the level of funding allocated for autism research is disproportionate to the continued increase in nationwide rates of autism.⁴

APRIL IS AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH.

“We have to advocate for our children and their future,” says Lisa. “If you’re not fighting, you don’t get.”

In April, and every day, Lisa hopes TACA can help change the way people look at autism, give parents hope and motivate people to support the cause in whatever way they can.⁵

When I asked Lisa where she hoped TACA would be in five years, without a moment’s hesitation she said, “Out of business.” But if it’s not possible to find a cure for autism in that time, she hopes to double the number of families they’re currently helping and utilize more technologies to reach families that are unable to come to them.

“I have lofty goals,” she smiles. But I think we should all be very glad that she does.

**TODAY, AUTISM
AFFECTS
1 IN EVERY 91 CHILDREN.**

When an Oakley family found TACA and wanted to give back for the support they received TACA Signature Series glasses were born. Over the course of two years sales of the glass rose more than a quarter of a million dollars.