

The Collective Connection

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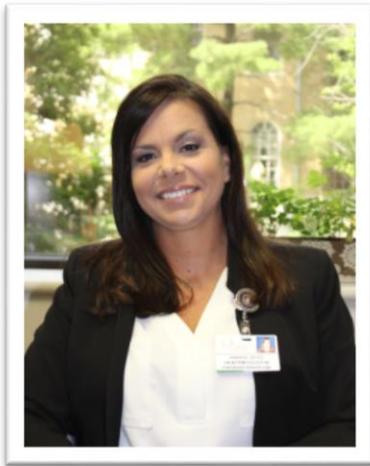


Resources to Review

- COVID-19 and Additional Online Resources



A Message from the Executive Director



As we begin another week of shelter-in-place, like so many of you, I am filled with mixed feelings and emotions: sadness for those who are forced to cancel or delay important life events, worry for family and friends who are risking their lives to care for others, grateful for technology that allows me to still see the faces of loved ones, and on and on. I am also thankful The Autism Collective was able to begin guiding families on their autism journeys in January (page 4). We have already assisted more than 80 families, and are not slowing down during the pandemic. And on April 2nd, in recognition of World Autism Awareness Day, The Autism Collective released a statement regarding the increase in the prevalence of autism (page 5).

In this edition of *The Collective Connection*, I will introduce you to the Els for Autism Foundation in “Making a Difference.” The foundation was established in 2009 by Liezl and Ernie Els after their son Ben was diagnosed with autism. The world class pro golfer and his wife have devoted their efforts to The Els Center of Excellence. The Foundation offers innovative, evidenced-based programs for families and individuals across the lifespan in six focus areas: adult services, education, global support, recreation services, research, and therapy services.

And in our special feature, “A New View,” we continue to explore autism from many perspectives. In this issue, I would like to introduce you to Christopher James Baker. Chris is a self-taught artist from Cardiff, South Wales. As an autistic pencil artist with a talent for creating hyper-realistic works, Chris believes “every negative has a positive.”

Please check out “Resources to Review” to stay connected with important pandemic-related resources and links.

If you would like to nominate someone for either a “Making a Difference” or “A New View,” please reach out to me at amanda.l.estes@theautismcollective.org.

Finally, I want to share with you a quote from Aristotle Onassis: “It is during our darkest moments that we must focus to see the light.”

Amanda Estes, Executive Director, MBA, ACHE

Making a Difference



Els for Autism is delivering and facilitating programs that are leading examples of what can and should be available to people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The foundation is committed to better understanding the aspirations of people with ASD and helping them to fulfill their potential to lead positive, productive and rewarding lives, through:

- Understanding the nature of ASD and facilitating the development and delivery of treatment therapies, educational programs, training programs, and recreational programs as well as independent living programs.
- Ensuring the development of global outreach that will facilitate the sharing of best practices and programs.
- Raising awareness and promoting the value, acceptance, and inclusion of people with ASD.

The Els Center of Excellence campus hosts world-class, leading-edge programs and services that are accessible to families and caregivers around the world. Based in Jupiter, Florida, the 26-acre campus provides on-site education for over 250 students who attend The Learning Center and The Learning Academy. With all the essential components on one location, the campus is the perfect hub for a variety of global outreach activities. This ensures that positive influence of The Els Center of Excellence campus is felt far beyond the boundaries of its walls. Once the campus construction is completed, the impact will be magnified!

The Medical & Research Facility is planned to be an on-campus building to host medical services and study the causes and treatments for ASD. The Foundation's goal is to continue to create partnerships with prestigious medical and research institutions to develop collaborative research programs. The foundation is committed to engaging in research to further knowledge in the field of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). In 2019, the research team contributed to various journals and presentations in order to share information and findings.





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New Autism Prevalence Rate

CDC estimate on autism prevalence increases by
nearly 10 percent, to 1 in 54 children

Approximately 8,000 children in Central Illinois are expected to be living with autism

Peoria, IL, April 2nd 2020- On March 27th, the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention announced that the autism spectrum disorder (ASD) prevalence rate in the United States has increased from 1 in 59 children, to 1 in 54. This nearly 10 percent increase shows an improvement in early identification and early diagnostic efforts. It is estimated that 8,000 children in Central Illinois are living with autism.

“We anticipated this increase and it shows progress towards getting young children the developmental screenings that they need”, said Amanda Estes, Executive Director of The Autism Collective. “Autism is a spectrum disorder, every child with ASD is unique and has individual strengths and challenges”.

The study also shows that ASD occurs among all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. Boys are 4 times more likely to be identified with ASD than girls. Only 33% of identified children had an intellectual disability in conjunction with their autism diagnosis.

“The increase in the prevalence rate shows an increase in diagnoses and awareness. Although we have made great progress on both fronts, there is still work to be done in order to provide proper support to these families”, said Estes. “The diagnosis is just the beginning. The Autism Collective works with families to be their champion, helping them navigate the complex system of supports available and advocate for their needs to be met”.

Observing the rising need to serve families living with an ASD diagnosis in our community, Easterseals Central Illinois and OSF HealthCare Children’s Hospital of Illinois, announced The Autism Collective in 2019. This independent organization is dedicated to ending the isolation felt by these families by uniting experts and connecting families to the resources they need. Since it began serving families in January of 2020, The Autism Collective has added 87 clients to its caseload, all at no charge to the families.

A New View



Diagnosed as being on the autism spectrum, Chris struggled in school and was removed from mainstream education at the age of 14 when his school was not able to provide the support he needed to be successful. However, Chris' parents were soon left without many options when they were told Chris was not "special" enough to be in a specialized school. They decided to keep Chris home. However, while at home for a year, he started to draw. He drew his inspiration from his favorite movies and television shows.

Chris has an amazing eye for detail, and many of his drawings are often mistaken for photographs. In October of 2011, Chris drew his first realistic portrait of Will Smith, and from there he has perfected his art and continues to draw many famous people.

Chris' parents decided to register him as self-employed, and now Chris makes a career from his art. Chris even brought his parents along for the ride. Because Chris still struggles with social interactions, he avoids speaking to people he does not know. So Chris' mom does the talking, while his dad takes care of transporting the art.

Art is a gift that both allows Chris to express himself and reduce his anxiety. And his portraits of famous stars have attracted lots of attention. Through his amazing talent Chris has met many famous people, including Rick Harrison, Benedict Cumberbatch, David Walliams, Anne Hegarty, Mark Gatiss, Robert Englund, Sam Warburton and Jamie Foxx who now has two of Chris' drawings. In fact, in September 2016, Chris got to share his portrait of Gandalf with Sir Ian McKellan.

Due to a new and exciting partnership based in America, Chris is working very hard to produce new work and proving being different can sometimes lead to the most amazing successes.





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Resources to Review

[Easterseals Central Illinois COVID-19 Resources for Caregivers](#)

[OSF HealthCare Children's Hospital of Illinois COVID-19 Resources](#)

[Central Illinois Autism Association Emergency Grant Application](#)

[Autism Speaks COVID-19 Information and Resources](#)

[National Autism Association COVID-19 Resources for Families](#)

[Autism Society COVID-19 Toolkits by Topic](#)

[Autism Research Institute: Coping with the Covid-19 Pandemic - Resources for Individuals & Families](#)

[Sesame Street & Autism: Coping with COVID-19 - A "For Now" Normal](#)

[ECHO Autism: Parent Resources during COVID-19](#)

[The Cares Act Key Components - LPL Financial](#)

The Autism Collective Care Coordination Hotline: 844.910.0770