



AUTISM: The Musical

Tuesday, 4 May 2010, 6:30 p.m.

AUTISM: The Musical

In 1980, autism was a relatively rare disorder, diagnosed in one in 10,000 children in the United States. Now it is one in 165. **AUTISM: THE MUSICAL** counters today's bleak statistics with one woman's optimistic pledge to lead a group of autistic children in defying diagnosed expectations by writing, rehearsing and performing their own full-length musical. Following five Los Angeles children over the course of six months, director Tricia Regan captures the struggles and triumphs of their family lives and observes how this musical production gives these performers a comfort zone in which they can explore their creative sides. Both on and off stage, **AUTISM: THE MUSICAL** is a call-to-arms, bringing attention to a modern-day epidemic, all the while celebrating the way the human spirit can overcome any challenge.



www.autismthemusical.com

World Autism Awareness Day

On December 18, 2007, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 62/139, tabled by the State of Qatar, which declares April 2 as World Autism Awareness Day (WAAD) in perpetuity. Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Missned, Consort of His Highness Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the Emir of the State of Qatar, supported the campaign for a World Autism Awareness Day through the current 62nd UN General Assembly Session, garnering

consensus support from all United Nations Member States.

This UN resolution is one of only three official disease-specific United Nations Days and will bring the world's attention to autism, a pervasive disorder that affects tens of millions. The World Autism Awareness Day resolution encourages all Member States to take measures to raise awareness about autism throughout society and to encourage early diagnosis and early intervention. It further expresses deep concern at the prevalence and high rate of autism in children in all regions of the world and the consequent developmental challenges.

World Autism Awareness Day shines a bright light on autism as a growing global health crisis. WAAD activities help to increase and develop world knowledge of the autism epidemic and impart information regarding the importance of early diagnosis and early intervention. Additionally, WAAD celebrates the unique talents and skills of persons with autism and is a day when individuals with autism are warmly welcomed and embraced in community events around the globe.

By bringing together autism organizations all around the world, we will give a voice to the millions of individuals worldwide who are undiagnosed, misunderstood and looking for help. Please join us in our effort to inspire compassion, inclusion and hope.

AUTISM EUROPE

Aurélië Baranger has been the director of Autism-Europe since 2007. Autism-Europe is an international association whose main objective is to advance the rights of persons with autism and their families and to help them improve their quality of life. Autism-Europe ensures effective liaison between more than 80 member associations of parents of persons with autism in 30 European countries, including 20 Member States of the European Union, governments and European and international institutions. Autism-Europe plays a key role in raising public awareness, and in influencing the European decision-makers on all issues relating to autism, including the promotion of the rights of people with autism and other disabilities involving complex dependency needs. In order to implement its objectives and maximise its impact on EU policies, Autism-Europe has built strategic alliances with European social partners. Autism-Europe holds the vice-Presidency of the European Disability Forum (EDF). Autism-Europe is also a member of the European Coalition for Community Living (ECCL) and the Platform of European Social NGOs. Autism-Europe has established a structured dialogue with the European Institutions and is also active towards the World Health Organisation (WHO).

www.autismeurope.org

Flemish Parents and Family Association

Sarah Schelstraete is the coordinator of the Flemish Parents and Family Association since 2005. She has a 10 year old son with autism. The "Vlaamse Vereniging Autisme" is the Flemish Parents and Family Association. Their main goal is to promote the development of people with autism and to represent the interests of persons with autism and their families by creating public awareness for autism and supporting parents and family members to exchange experiences.

www.autismevlaanderen.be

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or **autism** is a significant lifelong disability due to multiple medical causes, interfering with the normal development and functioning of the brain, identifiable in very early childhood.

Autism deeply affects the way the person communicates and relates with his or her environment. It is characterized by a triad of symptoms: impairments in social interaction (children and adults find it difficult or impossible to relate to other people in a meaningful way); impairments in communication; and restricted interests and repetitive behavior, which can lead to major learning disabilities.

While great strides are being made, there is currently no cure for autism. Fortunately, however, there is strong evidence that appropriate, lifelong educational approaches, support for families and professionals, and provision of high quality community services can dramatically improve the lives of persons with ASD and their families.

Autism can affect any family, regardless of ethnic or social class, and it is four times more frequent in males than in females. There is now converging evidence that, using current diagnostic criteria, many more individuals, in many different countries are being diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD). According to the World Health Organisation, about 1 in 165 persons is affected by an ASD. Autism is therefore not a rare condition.

Many children with autism do not have access to a basic education, a fundamental human right. Due to lack of information and in some instances cultural difference, autism is often confused with mental illness. As a result, children with autism are kept at home and hidden. They do not have the life chances of others in terms of going to school and accessing health care. Adapted intervention and care services are lacking and many parents have virtually no respite care. Dissemination of information is vital and so is early intervention to allow persons with autism to develop their full potential.

SECRETARY-GENERAL of the UNITED NATIONS

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MESSAGE FOR WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY 2010
2 April 2010

Autism is a complex and inadequately understood disability with a wide range of manifestations. Children and adults with autism - and, indeed, those living with disabilities in general - have a double burden. In addition to the daily challenges of their disability, they must also cope with the negative attitudes of society, inadequate support for their needs and, in some cases, blatant discrimination.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which entered into force in May 2008, is a powerful tool to redress such situations. It aims to promote equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by persons with disabilities. As of today, 144 countries have signed the Convention and 83 have ratified it.

World Autism Awareness Day is dedicated to creating greater understanding about autism and promoting universal adherence to the UN Convention. By combining research and awareness-raising efforts, we can provide adults and children with disabilities such as autism the protection, support and full membership of an inclusive society.

As we commemorate World Autism Awareness Day 2010, let us remember that each of us can take on that responsibility. Let us join persons with autism, their families and their advocates in a community of voices for greater awareness and understanding. Let us also look within, and re-evaluate our attitudes and those of our societies so we can remove the prejudices that discriminate against persons with disabilities. Let us dedicate ourselves to creating a fair and caring society that affords true dignity and rights for all.
