

The Autism New Jersey Fund

The Seeger Family

December 2010

Dear Autism New Jersey Family and Friends:

On August 26, 2010, Jacob turned 10 years old. Jacob is a numbers guy. Sequencing, order and dates are all very important to him. So turning “double digits” was pretty monumental. While sitting down at breakfast that morning, I thought we would discuss the planned events for the “big day.” However, the first words out of his mouth were “Mom, now that I am 10, do I have autism anymore?” In that moment, the last decade flashed through my mind.

When Jacob was one year old he wasn't progressing like his older sibling. Early Intervention began and small changes followed. Jacob picked up sign language, often as quickly as words, but there was still that lack of connection. Words were beautiful, but they were just that, words. I wanted more. I wanted feelings, expressions and emotions. Basically, I wanted him to know that he was loved and I wanted to know he loved us.

At about two years old Jacob's speech therapist gave me a six letter word to look up. She explained that, although she wasn't a doctor, she had been working with children for a long time and had seen kids that behaved like Jacob before. That night, I typed “autism” into my web search. A flood of information appeared on the screen. Through the confusion, I actually saw similarities between this word—autism—and Jacob. I felt I had something to go on.

At two and a half, when the doctor handed over his diagnosis, I was not shocked. The first thing the doctor wrote on a yellow piece of paper was COSAC (now known as Autism New Jersey). Eager to begin my journey to help Jacob, I called the 800 number the next day. Instantly, I was accepted into a society that understood my son. The emotional connection that I was lacking with Jacob was filled by Autism New Jersey. They directed me to seek answers and further help to pull him out of this world of autism. They offered practical solutions and resources for school, therapy and recreation.

Through Autism New Jersey annual conferences, I found expertise and answers to many questions. Year to year, I have gained deeper insight, given his teachers new methods and techniques, or realized I am not alone on this journey. As I attend the conferences now, I am still learning how to help Jacob. I never walk away overwhelmed. Rather, I feel empowered to apply all that I learned to help Jacob.

Years later, as a family, we act as a community resource with Autism New Jersey's guidance. Jacob's older brother, Erich, has been a Junior Autism Awareness Ambassador for Autism New Jersey and has worked to educate our community about autism. Over the past six years Erich has written essays, published articles in the school paper, created bulletin boards and given speeches at church about his brother. This past year, Erich began a campaign called “Know the Signs.” He personally contacted more than 45 local businesses asking them

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to post facts about autism on their billboards and in their stores for the month of April. The community was so receptive to his campaign. Jacob's school district even presented Erich with a proclamation declaring it Autism Awareness Month.

Believe it or not, I feel blessed that our lives have taken this path. Jacob has given us insight into a world that too often passes most of us by. However, I am most grateful for the connection that Jacob has developed and shared with all of us. Every person he meets is touched by his pure enthusiasm, his true self and his unconditional love. He has opened so many doors, but the greatest one he has opened is himself to us.

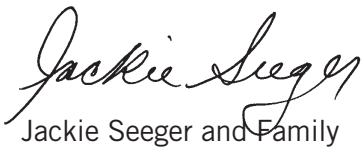
So, what was my response to Jacob, when he asked me on his 10th birthday if he "still has autism?" I told him "Yes, Jacob, you do still have autism, but obviously autism doesn't have you."

Autism New Jersey has been a valued resource for our family and continues to be so as we move forward on our journey with Jacob. Through Autism New Jersey we have been able to gain the knowledge and confidence needed to address Jacob's needs when it comes to working with our school, community, church and a sometimes-uninformed public.

Please consider making a tax-deductible donation to help Autism New Jersey help many more families like mine.

Jacob's next decade will bring the adventures of adolescence and adulthood. I know Autism New Jersey will be there for us. Won't you be there for them?

Sincerely,



Jackie Seeger and Family

About the Seegers:

Jackie and Ed Seeger live in Little Egg Harbor with their sons Erich, 13, Jacob, 10, and Phillip, 7. Jacob is a frequent guest at local minor league ball games where he performs "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" for fans.

About Autism New Jersey:

Since 1965, we have been the dependable resource to which parents and professionals can turn for information, advocacy, support and training. With more than four decades of expertise, Autism New Jersey provides assistance at all stages of an individual's life, from diagnosis to early intervention to school programs to transition strategies for teens and options for adults. Our Annual Fund Drive provides valuable support for our efforts on behalf of families like the Seegers.

Donate Now!

Mail:

Complete the enclosed form and return to:
Autism New Jersey
500 Horizon Drive, Suite 530
Robbinsville, NJ 08691

Online: www.autismnj.org

Phone: 609.588.8200 or 800.4.AUTISM

