

# The Autism New Jersey Fund

## The Sblendorio Family



December 2009

Dear Autism New Jersey Family and Friends,

For our small family of three, the obstacles and triumphs in our autism journey have been momentous. A surviving twin, my son, Val, was born in 1994. From the beginning, his behavior was strikingly different from the other infants who surrounded us. Our pediatrician was unable to provide us any answers. As I would need to do many times in the years since, I rolled up my sleeves and sat in the library determined to link the symptoms with a diagnosis. Finally, I came across a six letter word that would change our lives forever: AUTISM.

At the time, autism was not the household word it is today; well intentioned family members and doctors tried to reassure my husband, Lenny, and me. We often heard “He’s a boy, he will outgrow it” or “You are looking for something to be wrong.” My “mother’s intuition” prevailed and at 14 months a developmental pediatrician concurred. Val had autism.

By Val’s third birthday, our school district welcomed us into their program; however they were not ready for the challenging behavioral component of autism. Val was non-verbal until he was almost six and endured a seizure disorder that would strike up to sixty times per day. We struggled to find a suitable placement to meet Val’s needs, but eventually we did.

Since that time we have been on a tumultuous journey with autism that has included countless medical professionals, severe behavioral episodes, and encounters with law enforcement in need of education about autism. If there was an obstacle, we seemed to run into it. Our persistence would be frequently tested, but we always prevailed.

Lenny and I share our story because through this very long haul there has been only **one agency** that has been able to address **every one of our needs**. That agency is Autism New Jersey.

Autism New Jersey’s Annual Conference, in particular, was a savior for us and we’ve returned many times. Each year, workshops gave us the tools and techniques we needed to assist our son and help him make progress. Their conference put us in a nurturing environment surrounded by families, professionals and leaders who helped push us forward.

Most importantly, Autism New Jersey helped us make connections. Through them, we found trusted attorneys and financial advisors who understood our needs and helped us plan for Val’s future. They introduced us to the Division of Developmental Disabilities and guided us through a complicated system charged with supporting our son. Autism New Jersey linked us to programs that could help us manage Val’s challenging behaviors at home. The list continues. The contacts we made via the organization have been a beacon during very dark times.

(Continued on back.)



P.O. Box 55120  
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800.4.AUTISM

[www.autismnj.org](http://www.autismnj.org)



When my son was facing emergency hospitalization not too long ago, we reached out for fast information regarding the reputations of the facilities that were being considered. Other agencies turned their backs on us or responded with limited information some three weeks after admittance. Not Autism New Jersey. They responded within hours with compassion and determination to address our concerns during this crisis. No question has been too small or no problem too big in the hands and hearts of Autism New Jersey.

Families can not do this alone... educators and medical professionals can not do this alone...and Autism New Jersey can not do this alone. We need to rally together as one to make a difference in our community and for our loved ones. We need to support each other and Autism New Jersey's efforts.

Though the past few years have been financially difficult for most of us, please consider making a tax-deductible donation in support of Autism New Jersey. The organization has demonstrated a proven ability to make a positive change for those living with an autism diagnosis and the people who embrace them. No gift is too small and the impact on families like mine can be remarkable.

While we don't have a crystal ball to see into Val's future, we know it will be brighter thanks to Autism New Jersey. They have given so much to us and others like us. Please give back to them.

Sincerely,

*Jani Sblendorio*

Jani Sblendorio and Family

**About the Sblendorios:**

Inspired by their son, both Jani and her husband, Lenny, are therapists in the autism field. They live in Passaic County, NJ. Their son, Val, is now 15 years old and resides in a residential facility. Jani and Lenny founded the non-profit organization, United by Autism, which provides autism educational materials to local schools and libraries.

**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 Sblendorios.

**Donate Now!**

**Mail:**

Complete the enclosed form and return to:  
Autism New Jersey  
P.O. Box 55120  
Trenton, NJ 08638

**Online:** [www.autismnj.org](http://www.autismnj.org)

**Phone:** 800.4.AUTISM