

The Autism New Jersey Fund

The Pollicino Family

December 2019

Dear Autism New Jersey Family & Friends,

It was just two short years ago when the words came out of the doctor's mouth: "Your son is autistic." At that moment, we learned that parents are never fully prepared for being told their child has a disability. We wanted to hope for the best and just assume everything would be fine. We would eventually learn that autism is frustrating, exhausting, isolating, and life-altering, but it could also be beautiful.

We are the Pollicino family: Jessica, Nick, and our amazing son, Ben. Ben has always been a happy and playful boy, but as he turned 1, we noticed some slight delays.

When we took Ben to the pediatrician for his 15-month checkup, his doctor asked specific developmental questions about Ben. Was he pointing? Was he making eye contact? Did he engage with other children? Did he have at least ten words in his vocabulary? The answers were all NO.

Once we received the doctor's diagnosis, we came face-to-face with the reality of autism. Ben was almost two years old and had a non-existent vocabulary. With certain triggers that we had yet to identify, he would act aggressively toward us. He would bite, scratch, and hit himself and others. He never responded to his name. He would scream, cry, and bang his head. It was heartbreaking and scary to see this happen to such a warm and happy child. We felt helpless and defeated, but we did not give up.

At first, we didn't know where to turn. But then we found Autism New Jersey. Less than a month after his formal diagnosis — January 18, 2018, to be exact — we called the phone number, 800.4.AUTISM, listed on their website. That phone call to Autism New Jersey's Helpline was one of the best and most informative interactions we have had with anyone in the autism community. The Information Services team was incredibly knowledgeable, kind, and caring. They put our minds at ease and had so much information.

With their guidance, we fought harder for our son and did everything we could to research our options. We were fortunate to get a flexible schedule at work to allow for more time to get Ben some additional early intervention hours. More importantly, we were able to get him Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy, which turned out to be a real game-changer.

A couple of months before Ben was set to "age out" of early intervention, we went through the process of trying to get him into the special-needs program in our local school district. Thanks to the addition of ABA therapy, he was doing decidedly better. We worried, however, that the evaluators would only see this happy, friendly child and not all the other deficits for which he still needed help.

(Continued on back)



500 Horizon Drive, Suite 530
Robbinsville, NJ 08691

800.4.AUTISM

www.autismnj.org



to improve our therapy, and work went into helping Ben become this now chatty, super-smart, sassy, silly child.

The support and love of our family, therapists, and all of the kind, amazing folks at Autism New Jersey helped guide us in the best direction, and to advocate and fight for our child. We are grateful to everyone at Autism New Jersey for setting us on the right path.

We are not the only family Autism New Jersey has helped with their knowledge and know-how, their kindness and compassion. Whether it's via their Helpline, educational conferences, awareness efforts, or important statewide policy work, they continue to do amazing work for the entire autism community!

We hope you will consider making a tax-deductible contribution to support their important and essential mission that has made a world of difference for Ben and so many others of all ages.

Thank you,

Jessica and Nick Pollicino

Jessica and Nick Pollicino

ABOUT AUTISM NEW JERSEY:

Autism New Jersey serves as a collective and influential voice for the community and systematically and compassionately improves the lives of individuals with autism every day through our four core service pillars: Information Services, Education & Training, Public Policy, and Awareness.

We're proud to have been serving the autism community in New Jersey since 1965. 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 Pollicinos.

To learn more about Autism New Jersey's efforts to serve families like the Pollicinos, visit www.autismnj.org.

After his final evaluation, we waited about a week in anguish for the results. When we went back for a meeting to review what they found, they told us he was admitted to the program! After so many months of progress and hard work, this was a huge win for us. Honestly, it was one of the best days of our lives! Ben steadily became happier and more confident.

As Ben approaches his 4th birthday, he is doing amazing. With every day and with every milestone he reaches, we are truly grateful and overjoyed, and we never take a second of it for granted.

Though the journey is far from over, we've come a long way from where we started. People sometimes make comments like "he doesn't look autistic," "you can't even tell he is autistic," or "that's just what kids do." Those types of statements used to make us defensive or upset. But now, we not only use it as an opportunity to educate, we also look at it as a compliment to the commitment we've made son's life. Because we know that A LOT of time,

