



A Call to Action

A MOTHER'S ELECTION WISH LIST

by Rita Miceli, Parent and Guest Writer

▲ Rita Miceli and her son, Giaci

Photo courtesy of Rita Miceli

EVERY AUTISTIC CHILD IS DIFFERENT, and every autistic adult is different. There are no two cases the same, so their needs must be addressed individually with consultation from their loved ones. I know this firsthand because I am the mother of an autistic adult son.

My son is now 26 years old. When he turned 18, services available to him dropped off significantly. It was a frightening time for us.

As the mother of four children, I am concerned about the responsibilities my three daughters will have to carry when my husband and I can no longer support our son. I'm concerned about my child's well-being when I am no longer able to care for him. These are worries shared by all parents, and they are magnified when you have an autistic child who is nonverbal.

As an autism community, we continue to feel isolated, ignored and alone. More services need to be provided. More financial support must be given.

Families affected by autism are already under considerable stress, and it is unfair to make them spend their precious resources and the little time they have wondering what to do, where to go for help, what help to get, whom to trust and whom to believe. Life is challenging enough when caring for someone with a developmental disability. No one should have also to battle the system for support.

So, what would I like to see happen? There are many things on my wish list, but I will keep it simple.

Accountability



More needs to be done

The government needs to provide more support to autistic adults. All political parties need to take a hard look at where this population has been forgotten and overlooked. They need to address the lack of opportunities for autistic adults in the workforce, especially those who may be nonverbal or have minimal language, cognitive abilities, or both.

Every human has the right to lead a dignified life and fulfil their potential. Everyone should be valued and respected. However, in our society, persons with autism are still not fully understood, and they continue to be overlooked.

If a person receives Ontario Disability Support Program supports and they work making over \$200 per month, monies are taken away from their monthly support. Taking away earnings is not proactive and does not give the person the ability to live with dignity. They are penalized for working. They should be allowed to make more and not have the government take funds away. The government needs to increase the employment income threshold, from

\$200 to at least \$800. I would also love to see programs available to address continued education, vocational training and life skills training. Currently, there isn't much out there, if anything at all.

More needs to be offered

Other unmet service needs include social skills programs, activity-based programs, recreation programs and specialized summer activities for adults with autism. Day programs should promote activities such as gardening, life skills, crafts, computer skills, social skill development and mental health programs.

There needs to be a focal point for autism information, provided by a trusted source, to save time navigating the current confusing and unreliable maze of information.

An appointed social worker dedicated to each family would be ideal to help them navigate the system and address all their needs. This person could address securing job coaching, employment and housing.

There is a serious deficit for housing opportunities. Many autistic adults are

in need of a safe and comfortable home that provides 24-hour support. Our government must address the lack of housing, group homes and supported living arrangements for adults with autism. An increase in the housing allowance to match market rent (based on the city the recipient lives in) would go a long way to resolving this.

Our society should ponder the social and economic benefits of encouraging continued development and increased quality of life for the autism community.

It doesn't take a village to raise a child on the spectrum; it takes a committed, open and honest government that is held accountable by our society.

This is a call for action. Address it now. There is no time to waste. ■

Autism does matter

Parents, make sure that your child's school is an inclusive place for children on the autism spectrum.

AutismMATTERS contains valuable articles for educators and parents, written by clinicians, educators and researchers as well as personal stories by students and adults on the spectrum.

Members of Autism Ontario receive this quarterly publication free. We encourage schools to register as professional members of Autism Ontario, which will give them a subscription to every issue of **Autism**MATTERS along with many other benefits.

If you have a child in an Ontario school, please encourage your school's principal or special educators to enroll as a professional member of Autism Ontario to make your school and community an inclusive place for students on the autism spectrum.

For more information, visit autismontario.com.



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