

Press Release

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Teen Creates Powerful Educational Video to Encourage Understanding of People with Autism

Westfield teen brings together experts and community to influence teens to accept peers with autism spectrum disorder

Fanwood, NJ, September 9, 2013 - Autism Family Times with Brianna, Inc., a local non-profit offering family-based programming for families living with autism spectrum disorder, has taken part in supporting the production of a compelling video, created by a young teen who serves as a peer mentor for the organization. Alexandra Jackman of Westfield, NJ, has created [A Teen's Guide to Understanding and Communicating with People with Autism - aimed to encourage teens to understand and accept with peers who have autism spectrum disorder \(ASD\)](#).

The film, now viewable online at <http://youtu.be/p9-l19CKISg>, was developed as part of an independent study program at Roosevelt Intermediate School in Westfield. Eighth grade students who are selected to take part in this Teddy Roosevelt Scholars program work with a teacher-mentor on a particular topic of student interest. Alex emphasized, "The purpose of my specific project was to help teenagers be more aware and understanding of people with autism spectrum disorder. The video is so important to me because I feel it could help anyone, especially typically-developing teens, to feel that they can interact and get to know people with autism and not be scared of the differences. People tend to be more accepting when they are more knowledgeable." This project represents her passion about making sure people with special needs are understood and treated fairly.

Autism Family Times has been coordinating training of peer mentors in order for them to participate in various educational and creative projects with children with ASD and other special needs. At age ten, Alex was trained as a peer mentor through this organization. Alex serves as a lead mentor, working with teens and young children with ASD. "I know so many people with autism through the volunteer work I do and I care about them a lot," says Jackman. Claudette Bardwil, president of Autism Family Times affirms Alex's favorable interactions with children of all abilities. "Alex is involved side by side with children with autism and other mentors. In all her volunteer efforts, her acceptance is contagious!"

As she developed the video, Alex emphasized that she wanted to include people who had expertise and personal insights in ASD, as well as some children and teens with the disorder. For Alex, the film needed to be entertaining, engaging, and relatable for teens. "I

thought a good trustable way to present this information would be by interviewing experts in the field." Jed Baker, Ph.D., a distinguished clinical psychologist, behavioral consultant, author, and lecturer accepted Alex's request to participate in this project. Dr. Baker understands many common issues related to teens with ASD and provides teen viewers with useful and practical information. Commending Alex and her project Dr. Baker underscored, "This is a great video created by an insightful student to help her peers understand what it is like to have autism. This is not your typical dry educational presentation, but a dynamic presentation that speaks to students of all ages to increase their sensitivity to those with autism."

Also participating in the film is Adrienne Robertiello, Autism Educator at Children's Specialized Hospital and Board member of Autism Family Times with Brianna. Ms. Robertiello steers collaborative initiatives to facilitate the awareness and participation of children with ASD and their families in community settings. Through generous funding from Kohl's Cares, Adrienne presents to families, community service providers, organizations, governmental agencies, as well as general members of the community. One of the hospital's autism education initiatives - Friends Like You. Friends Like Me. - helps educate children about ASD and offers tools to facilitate friendships among children with or without ASD. Because of this parallel message, Alex requested Ms. Robertiello's participation in the teen film. "This is exciting," says Ms. Robertiello,

"Alexandra has been able to put together an important message in a manner that's relevant to teens. This would be an effective piece to use in schools and other forums during autism awareness month or to support character education programs." Children with ASD and their families worked with Alex to help her illustrate positive attributes, rather than emphasizing the challenges of the disorder. A Teen's Guide to Understanding & Communicating with People with Autism highlights actions and voices of teens with ASD - revealing their affirmative spirit and desire for friendship. Alex has expressed her appreciation of all those involved in the film, demonstrating their support for building positive community relationships. Alex's parents, Michael and Lisa Jackman, are very proud of their daughter's accomplishment. "She has worked so hard, using her passion to make an impact on the people around her and beyond. She really enjoys and respects the children and teens with special needs and wanted to share her feelings with others."

Ultimately, it is Alex's hope that this video can help people with autism be more accepted in the community. As she now enters high school, she plans to promote more awareness about ASD, continuing her work with children with special needs through local organizations such as Autism Family Times with Brianna, the Friendship Circle and the Temple Emanu-El Ma'ayan Education Program for Students with Special Needs. A Facebook page has been established for information sharing and updates about Alex's work and video. The link to this page is <https://www.facebook.com/autismguide>.

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About Autism Spectrum Disorder:

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 1 in every 88 children in America is diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), making ASD more prevalent than juvenile diabetes, childhood cancer and pediatric AIDS combined. The rate of autism among New Jersey's children is about 1 in 49, second highest in the

nation. These disorders are characterized, in varying degrees, by difficulties in social interaction, verbal/nonverbal communication and repetitive behaviors. There is an increasing need for communities to be more aware of this disorder and identify ways to be more supportive and inclusive in community-based activities.

Autism Family Times with Brianna, Inc.:

Autism Family Times with Brianna, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to raising awareness and providing treatment services and support for families of children with autism so that they can enjoy leisure activities in the community as a family. Autism Family Times with Brianna offers customized, educational, and cultural family-centered leisure programs utilizing the services of community partners sensitive to the needs and challenges of people with autism, their siblings, and caregivers

Children's Specialized Hospital:

The hospital is the preeminent provider of rehabilitation services for children with special needs. The hospital serves children affected by brain injury, spinal cord injury, premature birth, autism, developmental delays, and life-changing illnesses. Children's Specialized Hospital has eleven sites in New Jersey and treats 20,000 children each year, making it the largest pediatric rehabilitation system of its kind in the nation.

Jed Baker, Ph.D. is the director of the Social Skills Training Project, a private organization serving individuals with autism and social communication problems. He also directs social skills training for Millburn Public Schools in New Jersey. He is on the professional advisory board of Autism Today, ASPEN, ANSWER, YAI, the Kelberman Center and several other autism organizations. In addition, he writes, lectures, and provides training internationally on the topic of social skills training and managing challenging behaviors. He is an award winning author.