

## April is Autism Awareness Month

A common thread among the BHUMC Differently Abled Ministry and the Health & Wellness Ministry is to show love, support, and advocacy while embracing members, their families and the surrounding community to live healthy and well and with dignity. Our Ministry's goal is to share relevant information, resources, and insightful stories to our audience. We applaud our own families at Ben Hill UMC who have and live with a loved one with autism!

Autism (also known as Spectrum Disorder (ASD)) is a complex, lifelong developmental disability that typically appears during early childhood and can impact a person's social skills, communication, relationships, and self-regulation. While there is currently no known single cause of autism, early diagnosis helps a person receive the support and services that they need, which can lead to a quality life filled with opportunity. To learn more about autism, visit <https://www.autism-society.org/what-is/>.

Facts from the Autism Foundation of GA:

- 1 in 59 children will receive an Autism Spectrum diagnosis
  - A new case is diagnosed almost every 20 minutes
  - Autism costs a family \$60,000 a year on average
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### **A Mom's story - Why Do I Celebrate Autism!**

By Diedra Darst, Apr 2019, Yahoo Life

. . . Because I love my son who has autism.

“When I became a mom, I knew it would be my job to prepare my kids for the outside world. It would be my responsibility to teach them about strangers, bullies and being kind to others. It would be my job to teach them about God. I would be the one teaching them how to cross the road safely, swim and brush their teeth. When I became a parent, I signed up for all that stuff. I didn't know I would have to teach the world about my son. The day he received his autism diagnosis, I gained a new title: advocate.

Both of my sons are amazing — the neurotypical one and the one who has autism. I want the world to know that — scratch that, I need the world to know that. So I will celebrate Autism Awareness Month.

To me, April is the time we shine a light on autism. We are celebrating the unique, au-mazing, wonderful individuals who happen to have autism.

So we advocate. We share our stories — the struggles and the triumphs. We highlight the amazing things our kids can do despite the barriers before them. We join together as the autism community and raise awareness.

...Because autism awareness leads to autism acceptance.

At this point, I think most people know about autism. Just knowing about it, well that is awareness. Now we push for acceptance.

- I want my son to live in a world that acknowledges his struggles and celebrates his victories.
  - I want my son to live in a world that sees his value and encourages him to pursue his dreams.
  - I want my son to live in a world that loves and accepts him for who is.
  - It is my responsibility to create that world.
  - It is my responsibility to be his voice until he can advocate for himself.
  - It is my responsibility to fight for the things he needs. It is my responsibility to educate others.
- Acceptance starts with me. It starts with you. Doctor Seuss said it best: “Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing’s going to get better, it’s not.” We can’t just expect things to change — it takes action from those of us who care a whole awful lot.

Our advocacy shouldn’t stop on April 30. It is my mission to advocate for my son — and all on the spectrum — every day of the year. April might be the “official” Autism Awareness Month, but I am declaring every month “Autism Acceptance Month.” Now bring it, April. Here I come!

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This is just one Mom’s story but the joy, courage, hope and challenges are real and are shared by many Moms and Dads across the U.S. and the world. For all of these reasons and more, Ben Hill UMC will continue to keep the spotlight shining on autism!

Please Note: The Autism Society of America is committed to the ongoing concerns surrounding COVID-19 in support of autism communities. To receive updates, relevant and reputable resources and information, please visit [www.autism-society.org/covid-19](http://www.autism-society.org/covid-19).

Provided by: BHUMC Love Ministries - Differently Abled / Health & Wellness