

exploring autism treatments

Innovative Programs Help Local Kids Recover

by Lynn Machon



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Last April marked the first-ever World Autism Day – a sobering acknowledgement of the growing epidemic that now affects the lives of one in 150 American children.

As global researchers scramble to identify the factors that lead to autism spectrum disorders, local families report that new treatments and therapies, while not “scientifically” proven, are helping their children recover from autism.

It's All in the Definition

Autism has long been classified as a lifelong psychiatric disability, something many autism

advocates today call a destructive label. In fact, they say, autism is a neurological disorder, one that stems from physical injury to the brain from certain genes as well as toxins and environmental factors.

El Dorado Hills mom Vicky Long explains, “Our kids have autism, they are not ‘autistic.’ A child with cancer is not cancerous. He’s a child with an illness. Until we all see autism as a medical illness that can be treated, we can only do so much.”

Long, whose son Tyler was diagnosed with autism last year on his third birthday, is a mom on a

mission. "I want nothing less than complete recovery for my son, and we're only going to get that by treating the underlying issues that are causing his delays and behaviors."

Biomedical Program Treatment

The treatment path Long refers to recognizes autism as a medical disease that causes inflammation of the brain and gut, nutritional deficiencies, and undernourished muscle tissue among other outcomes.

Biomedical treatment for autism, the basis of Defeat Autism Now!(DAN!) is simply a process of dietary change, supplements and detoxification that helps rid the body of toxins, replenishes missing nutrients and repairs damage to the child's nervous, immune and gastrointestinal systems. According to DAN! trained doctors, by first healing the physical problems, children can begin emotional and developmental recovery.

For Long's son Tyler, the path toward recovery literally happened overnight. While they noticed significant improvements after simply changing Tyler's diet, the real miracle, says Vicky, was the mB12 vitamin injection which they gave their son as he slept. "The morning after his first shot, he literally woke up and said his first sentence."

Integrated Play Group Therapy

While interventions such as biomedical treatment can help heal physical damage, developmental delays in children with autism still must be addressed. Behavioral, educational and social therapies work to bring a child's development up to speed with their typically-developing peers.

One of today's newer forms of social therapy is called Integrated Play Groups (IPG), a model created by Dr. Pamela Wolfberg, Associate Professor of Special Education at San Francisco State University.

Based upon award-winning research, Integrated Play Groups are made up of both children on the spectrum and their typically-developing peers, playing together under the guidance of a qualified adult facilitator. IPG bi-weekly sessions generally last 30-60 minutes and take place in specially designed rooms that offer a wide range of motivating toys and activities.

Here in our community, Montessori Autism Programs and Services (MAPS) at Sundance Montessori School in Folsom offers a shining example of an IPG. One of only a handful in the country, it's the only IPG pro-

gram in the Greater Sacramento area that is recognized and funded by the state.

Melissa Bowden Christopher, one of the owners of MAPS, and mom to a 10 year old son with autism, says 30 students with developmental delays currently participate in the IPG and another 50 are on the program's waitlist. She says parents have seen enormous progress in kids, and vastly improved social skills after just six weeks in the program.

Efforts to expand the popular IPG program are underway in cooperation with area churches such as Lakehills Church in El Dorado Hills, and Bowden Christopher says many local public schools are moving toward more inclusionary programs for children with autism based on the success of IPG.

Parents Become Advocates

Because the mainstream medical community hesitates to embrace the concept of autism treatment without objective proof, parents must rely on each other and autism advocates for information on breakthrough treatments and therapies.

One local advocate is Sylvia Pimentel, a Granite Bay mom of two boys on the spectrum. A volunteer for Families for Early Autism Treatment (FEAT), Pimentel also owns and moderates a local biomedical internet discussion group called sac-autism-biomed.

Like others, Pimentel is impressed with biomedical treatments. "My oldest son in particular has had vast improvements in his autistic symptoms," she says. "His irrational fears and OCD issues have decreased dramatically." Her Yahoo group allows parents to discuss their children, exchange information and resources, and follow the latest medical breakthroughs.

At the county level, innovative programs such as El Dorado County's PRIDE and Joy, offer vital early intervention for developmentally delayed and at-risk infants up to age three. And Placer County's special education district is one of the most active parent and student support efforts in the state.

Empowered by their own personal success stories, these local parents and advocates hope that increased awareness and access to treatment will help more and more kids return from the mysterious darkness of autism to live brighter lives. ●



RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

El Dorado County PRIDE and Joy

familyconnected.org

Montessori Autism Programs and Services (MAPS)

mapsautism.com

Sacramento Autism Bio-med Discussion Group

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/sac-autism-biomed/>

UC Davis M.I.N.D. Institute

ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/mindinstitute

Alta California Regional Center

altaregional.org

Recovering Autistic Children,

by Dr. Stephen M. Edelson, Ph.D. and Dr. Bernard Rimland, Ph.D.

Healing the New Childhood Epidemics,

by Dr. Kenneth Bock, M.D., and Cameron Stauth

Autism One, autismone.org

Autism Speaks, autismspeaks.org

US Autism and Asperger Association, usautism.org

Autism Institute on Peer Relations and Play – IPG Model, wolfberg.com

Autism Society of America

autism-society.org

Talk About Curing Autism Now

talkaboutcuringautism.org

Autism Research Institute

autism.com

Defeat Autism Now!(DAN!)

defeatautismnow.com

Families for Early Autism Treatment (FEAT), feat.org