

Strand Theatre Shelbyville, Inc.

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Strand Theatre Lecture Series: Autism

Written by David on February, 23 2011

STRAND THEATRE LECTURE SERIES

April 20, 2011

7:00 pm

FREE

Dana Renay, Executive director for the Autism Society of America - Indiana, will present the first in the Strand Theatre Lecture series. She will speak on many issues surrounding autism.

Autism is a complex developmental disability, typically appearing during the first three years of life. It is the result of a complex neurological disorder that affects the normal functioning of the brain, impacting development in the areas of social interaction and communication skills. Both children and adults with autism typically show difficulties in verbal and non-verbal communication, social interactions, and leisure or play activities.

Autism is a spectrum disorder, meaning that although it is defined by a certain set of behaviors, children and adults with autism can exhibit any combination of these behaviors in any degree of severity. Thus, two children with the same diagnosis may differ greatly in their behavior, their capabilities, and their needs. Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) includes classic autism, as well as Asperger syndrome and the less specific classification of pervasive developmental disorders not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS). For the purposes here, ASD and the more general term "autism" will be considered equivalent and used interchangeably.

While there is no single cause or cure for autism, it is treatable. Children do not outgrow autism, but studies show that early diagnosis and intervention lead to significantly improved outcomes.

Every person diagnosed with an ASD is different, and every family has different needs. The variety of services and resources available in Indiana is broad, including financial assistance, advocacy, parent and sibling support, education, training, and respite care.

Autism is the most common Pervasive Developmental Disorder, affecting one in 96 people annually. This translates to over 1.5 million Americans, and the numbers are growing.

The challenge is that while 10 children can be diagnosed with autism, the autism can manifest itself in many different forms. For example, some children may be higher functioning at a cognitive level, but may have very poor social skills. Some children might have strong verbal skills while others have no verbal skills whatsoever. Additionally, some people may have multiple diagnosis that include: ADHD, OCD, ADD, Bi-Polar Disorder, Downs Syndrome, or any combination of these. Because of these gross differences, it is virtually impossible for two people on the spectrum to take the same path to wellness.

DANA RENAY

Dana is the parent of six children, one of whom is on the Autism Spectrum. He was diagnosed at age three and enrolled in a significant amount of early interventions including: ABA therapy, Speech Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Hipotherapy, and Social Skills Groups. Dana has been an advocate for families affected by autism in Indiana since the diagnosis of her son in 2005.

Dana had worked as a volunteer for the Autism Society of America ? Indiana for three years prior to advancing to the

position of Executive Director. Additionally, she consults with organizations and groups to help structure programs that work with children on the Autism Spectrum, provides training sessions, and speaks to groups of people around Indianapolis about the importance of early diagnosis and intervention.

As the Executive Director of the Autism Society, Dana is responsible for many aspects of the organization. Through this role, she is responsible for not only maturing the organization, but also for the Indiana State Comprehensive Plan for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder. In this position, she is responsible for the Interagency Autism Coordinating Council, made up of key leaders from state agencies, including Dept. Of Education, FSSA, Vocational Rehabilitation, ARC of Indiana, Dept. of Corrections, Department of Child Services, and more. She also manages a team of Contractors who are working on additional parts of the contract including development of the Autism Resource Network of Indiana (ARNI) to exchange information, Minority Outreach and Cultural Competencies, Best Practices, and the administration of all parts of the Comprehensive Plan. Dana represents the Autism Society on several boards and committees around Indiana.

Dana has grown the organization in many ways, including creating a strategic plan to grow the organization, building the board, and fundraising. Additionally, Dana has authored several articles for distribution throughout Indiana focusing on parenting special needs children, specifically, those with Autism.

Prior to the birth of her first child, Dana's career focused on Information Technology, specializing in telecommunications and web-based systems for companies in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Europe. Her span of responsibilities ranged from Account Management, Project Management, Mergers and Acquisitions, Systems Development.

Dana was selected to be a part of the 2009-10 Leadership United Executive Women's Series, and is a member of the 2010 IBJ Forty under 40 class. She is also studying to become a Board Certified Behavior Analyst and is proud to join the 2010 Lacy Leadership Association's LEAD class.

Images on this post:

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