

Recognizing Autism Awareness Month

NB's Autism Home Support Services answers frequently asked questions

STAFF REPORT

April is Autism Awareness Month. The medical field has changed how it views autism and related disorders, now lumping them all under one category: autism spectrum disorders.

The Centers for Disease Control estimate one in 68 children may have autism. The disorder affects boys to a greater degree, with one in 42 estimated to be on the spectrum.

The Tower caught up with Laura Bonfante, a board certified behavior analyst with Northbrook-based Autism Home Support Services, and Shelly Andrews, the organization's marketing director, to learn more about autism.

Northbrook Tower: What are some signs of autism spectrum disorders?

Laura Bonfante: Each child is different but some of major indicators of autism are lack of interest in social interactions, repetitive behavior, delayed communication.

For kiddos who don't have communication skills, they may communicate in other ways: whining, crying meltdowns, challenges going into the community, whether it's the grocery store or getting a haircut, attending family functions.

NT: How are autism spectrum disorders diagnosed?

Shelly Andrews: A pediatrician should be giving an M-CHAT at 24 months. It's a Modified Checklist for Autism in Toddlers. It's something that should be routinely given. At 18 and then at 24 months, there's a series of questions that parents answer about their children on different things they may or may not do. Depending on how they answer, they'll give a score determining level of risk.

NT: What are some of

the challenges associated with having a child with autism?

LB: Investment in therapies, time and cost. We try to help with communication skills, communicating with their world around them — parents, siblings, pulling them out of their shell to interact with others. Playing with others.

Also we work a lot on learner readiness skills, learning to attend, learning how to sit at a table, how to complete tasks. Simple classroom-type directions.

SA: It's not atypical to get letters from parents after starting to receive treatment. Their son said 'I love you' for the first time, their son or daughter responds to their name now. It's those types of communication things — not interacting with parents, not responding to their name — we can help with.

Things that come somewhat naturally to kids need to be learned by kids with ASD. If you were to throw a child into kindergarten or first grade, a lot of times

they're disruptive in class, not able to do these things that most people think about, things that come naturally to most people.

NT: What's the biggest misconception about people with autism?

LB: I think coming from a clinical background, [that] they don't want to interact with the world around them when in fact that's not true. They just don't know how to, so that's our job to teach them. How to communicate, how to interact, how to develop relationships.

How are therapies for autism covered under the Affordable Care Act?

LB: Therapy is covered under most insurance providers.

SA: The Affordable Care Act does provide policies that cover therapy; there typically needs to be a mandate in the state to provide coverage. (There is a mandate in Illinois)

Most insurances would have to have a diagnosis, they would cover the as-

essment and treatment. Typically a board certified behavior analyst after the assessment would determine how many hours of treatment that child needs. Typically applied behavior analysis therapy is more intensive than your typical speech therapy. We typically see a child 20-40 hours a week, depending on the child. Our minimum is 12 hours. It is a commitment for the parent and the child.

NT: How can parents best address the needs of their children with autism?

LB: What we do is a lot of parent training. A big focus of their treatment is not only getting direct therapy from applied behavior analysis therapists but also consulting with a board certified behavior analyst like myself, we will go in and help parents learn the skills to supplement the treatment their child is receiving. Help them understand why we're doing what we're doing, how to work through those situations.

SA: And as always be informed, ask hard questions, push pediatricians if you have concerns. Earlier is always better so don't be afraid to push for that earlier diagnosis.

NT: What should Northbrook know about how they can help support and bring positive awareness to the ASD community?

SA: Some of the things they can do is certainly support Autism Speaks, go to the walk. Something else they can do is talk to their kids, talk to family members, especially if they have kids that are school-age, if they know a child that has autism, to talk to them about how to interact, and just about general acceptance.

LB: Talking with differences with their children, maybe if they have any friends or family members that have child with autism, offering to reach out and help and support, and be there for their family and friends to help support them.

NEWS FROM YOUR NEIGHBORS

THE WINNETKA CURRENT

Winnetka Village Council reworks Village manager's compensation structure

Upon the annual review of Village employee compensation, Winnetka trustees identified a lapse in terms of the \$250,000 housing loan given to Village Manager Robert Bahan to relocate to Winnetka upon his appointment Sept. 29, 2010.

The loan, as trustee Andrew Cripe explained, is a facet of Bahan's com-

penetration structure and is common among local municipal governments. However, Village Attorney Peter Friedman stressed that the current loan conditions were not structured to benefit Bahan or the Village.

"I believe the main thing is that in the agreement right now, the loan provisions we have in the employment agreement is not a standard provision," Friedman said. "It doesn't provide retention incentive

for the Village manager. It doesn't provide a realistic mechanism for the repayment of the loan or the forgiveness for the loan or just the handling of the loan."

The new agreement, which was unanimously approved by council members April 18, implements a series of loan forgiveness stipulations.

Reporting by Lauren Kiggins, Freelance Reporter. Full story at WinnetkaCurrent.com.

THE LAKE FOREST LEADER Residents request regulations on Airbnb rentals

Airbnb, the short-term rental company that helps homeowners rent out their houses and apartments, has made its way to Lake Bluff, leaving some residents asking what they can do to stop it.

After first addressing the Village Board during its April 10 meeting, residents Julie Astbury Capps and her husband Peter

Capps brought the issue before the Lake Bluff Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals at its meeting on Wednesday, April 19. The couple shares a driveway with their neighbor and began noticing a constant stream of varying cars and visitors at the house about a month ago. Julie Astbury Capps found the listing on the Airbnb website.

"It's not what we signed up for," Julie Astbury Capps said. "Every night

there is ... a car in my driveway with someone who doesn't live here."

Village Attorney Benjamin Schuster said the Village Board is aware of residents' concerns, but are held up by zoning codes that were written before the prevalence of short-term rentals. He said the board is looking at how to best interpret current zoning and form new policies around Airbnb, whether prohibiting it all together

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