

“The New Autism Speaks “ Autism POVs podcast episode Transcript

HOST: This is “Autism Points of View” by Autism Speaks. I’m Felipe Maya.

In this special episode, we’ll talk about some exciting changes at Autism Speaks we want you to know about. If you’re listening to this, you’ve probably already noticed our new, more colorful, autism points of view thumbnail image.

Autism speaks was founded 15 years ago and to mark that anniversary and to better reflect our evolved understanding of autism and our deepened commitment to inclusivity, we’ve brought the diversity of the autism spectrum to our logo through color. And you’ll notice this new spectrum of brilliant colors everywhere we are, from our website, social media, p-s-a-s and more.

Here’s autism speaks president and CEO, Angela Geiger.

ANGELA GEIGER: I think one of the most important things about Autism Speaks as we celebrate our 15th anniversary is that we’ve evolved as the community has evolved. Whether that was 4 years ago when we changed our mission statement and created a vision for our next 10 years but really listening and learning from people with autism and families and researchers. And I think that’s why this logo refresh is so important because everybody knows the iconic blue puzzle piece, but it was very singular. This new brand truly keeps the legacy of what was so important about Autism Speaks, putting that stake in the ground of making sure that autism is an issue that people cared about and its now evolved to really reflect the diversity of the spectrum and also the lifespan.

HOST: We talked to some families in the autism community to ask what has changed for them over the last 15 years.

OWEN: I think the changes from the beginning of our journey with autism is almost indescribable because you start out from a place where there’s no knowledge by the people surrounding you so have to become the educator and that also means you have to know everything already.

HOST: this is Susan Murray, mom to Owen, who is 26 years old and was diagnosed at 18 months.

SUSAN MURRAY: We had someone come to our house to do a diagnosis and I was definitely not prepared for what I was going to be told.

He asked me if I knew what Autism was and I wasn’t sure still because back then you really didn’t hear about it that often. The main frame of reference I think back then was really the movie Rain Man. That’s how everybody knew what you were talking about.

A huge change with having Autism Speaks in our world that is now encompassed by autism. It's just a complete game changer because we had a road map after that. Everybody's path is different, but they gave everybody an individualized roadmap.

You have toolkits for all kinds of different issues. You can download them on the website and anyone no matter if you live in New York or if you live in Topeka, Kansas. Or wherever...you have access to all of that amazing information and that information came from experts... clinicians and doctors.

If I had a son now today with autism my experience would be 100% different with him now. So now I would have information, now I would have an automatic, instant huge support group whether it be locally and also globally really. It's almost like you're part of a family now and that makes all the difference in the world.

HOST: Carmen Sanchez says when her 15-year-old son Jacob was first diagnosed at age 3, she didn't know what to do next to support him.

CARMEN SANCHEZ : No one that I knew had a child with autism so this was so new to my whole family. I relied a lot on some friends who knew of a friend who had tried something and that's how we started.

Back then, they didn't have doctors that were just specifically designed for it wasn't that title where this is a specialist for autism.

I found Autism Speaks and that's when we found so many of the very first services for him.

HOST: Larry Lin talks about what was going through his mind after receiving an autism diagnosis for his eleven year old daughter, Bridget, when she was 3.

LARRY LIN: There was a lot of confusion. We heard about autism before. When it actually happened to us...it's very personal. We didn't know exactly how it happened to Bridget, either she would become mainstream or she would require lots of care for the rest of her life. We didn't know anything.

We definitely went to the internet. So we searched for the words autism, development delay and a lot of things.

By now there are a lot more resources on the internet. It's easier for us to find very credible sources and very influential organizations like Autism Speaks.

We know that there is the 100 day resource kit so we started with that and then also shared with other families and also with the school and other Chinese parents about this resource. And also, always getting the policy guidance there, because when we lived in different states, they didn't have some of the important therapies covered. Organizations like Autism Speaks continues to help different states to put those benefits into place.

HOST: Sophie, who is twenty-two years old and on the spectrum, looks back at some of the difficulties she had speaking when she was younger.

SOPHIE: When I was little, I was non-verbal and I had a difficult time communicating with people and interacting with other kids and that was really hard for me. A miraculous moment happened in my life when I was little...I was in the car with my mom and probably even driving back from school or going home from somewhere and my mom would play the Disney princess soundtrack CD in the car for me because that would keep me occupied and then one of the songs from the CD popped up and I'm sitting in the car and I start singing. I start singing, and I'm singing and singing and my mom is driving in the car and she is bawling her eyes out. She was like, thank god...oh my god she can finally speak, she can finally communicate with people, she can find her voice now.

HOST: Besides the new more colorful autism speaks, you might have also noticed another change. our name is now written in lower case.

ANGELA GEIGER: It was just a more welcoming typeface. Sometimes this is as simple as what looks good to people. It was really creating a look that made people wanna lean in and be part of Autism Speaks.

When we actually started thinking about how this was gonna look and feel we tested it with people and we had people in the community look at it and give us feedback. One of the things that was great was, when people just looked at it, they were able to articulate exactly what we were trying to do with the change.

HOST: We got to give some of the people you've heard from in this episode a sneak peek at the new autism speaks... here are some of their reactions.

SOPHIE: Oh my God! Oh this is wonderful! Oh my God! This is so nice! I really like the rainbow puzzle piece. It's really cool.

HOST: Here's Carmen Sanchez's son, Jacob.

JACOB: Ready, one, two, three...Oh wow! I love it! Ooooooh! There's not just blue there's a yellowish orangeish color! It's an improvement!"

It's all inclusive, all encompassing.

OWEN: That's amazing! I love it. You like it? Yes. I love it. It's really great, I love it. Pink and yellow. Yeah!

HOST: That was Susan Murray and her son Owen. Here's what Owen's dad, Kevin had to say.

KEVIN: I think that Autism speaks was to give a voice not just to those who didn't speak, but to those communities that needed a voice.

The logo is reminiscent of the old puzzle band that we all first were exposed to. So now it's an improved version and it more reflective of where we're going and not where we were.

HOST: To deepen our commitment to inclusivity in 2020, Autism Speaks isn't just changing its look, it's also taking action.

ANGELA GEIGER: We'd like our 15th year to be the year of kindness and- We're gonna be celebrating acts of kindness throughout the year both for in the general population but also for people with autism. We just think the world needs a little more of that

So I think the other thing we just wish that all of you join us for this anniversary is to create a kinder world and do that in your daily life however that's meaningful to you.

HOST: Autism Speaks' kindness campaign will be counting acts of kindness, big and small, with the goal of hitting 1 million kindness acts to create a kinder world for autistic people.

I'm going to leave you with Sophie's great advice for the autism community.

SOPHIE: Just go for your dreams and don't let anyone stop you from achieving your dreams and your goals.

HOST: Well said, Sophie. thank you for listening to this episode of autism points of view. to learn more about the kindness campaign, visit [autism speaks dot org slash kindness](https://autismspeaks.org/kindness). to learn more about our podcast and listen to past episodes, visit [autism speaks dot org slash podcast](https://autismspeaks.org/podcast).

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This episode was written and produced by me and edited by Dax Schaffer with transcription by Valerie Turcios. I'm Felipe Maya, thanks for listening.