

# LIFEWORKS' SPOTLIGHT



**Lifeworks**

ADVOCACY • EMPOWERMENT • OPPORTUNITY

**April 2021**

April is Autism Acceptance Month. Lifeworks' Family Autism Center (FAC), which is the Autism Support Center in the Newton/South Norfolk area for the Department of Developmental Services (DDS), has been a community resource for over two decades in this area. Through this center Lifeworks has developed a variety of services for these people in need.

## AUTISM SUPPORT SERVICES EXPANSION AND NEW AGENCY COLLABORATIONS

Interviews by Kathy Montal  
Lifeworks, Inc.

FAC, now the Autism Support Center, began in 1996, much like Lifeworks (then the Arc of South Norfolk) began decades earlier; a group of parents came together seeking support for their child with intellectual or developmental disabilities but had nowhere to go and no one to turn to for support. Autism at the time wasn't as prevalent as it is today. This group of families collaborated with the leadership of Lifeworks to establish the Center. The agency offered office space, administrative support and to fund 50% of a director for the program. In return, the families operating as the agency's Steering Committee for the program, agreed to raise funds for the remainder of the costs. Parents organized softball and hockey tournaments, tag sales and dinner events. Through these activities, a supportive community of parents emerged.

Lifeworks' Autism Support Center is supported by:



Our Associate Director of Family Support and a parent of a program participant Tessa Cannata said, "We wanted to have a community, a coming together of like minded people, so we developed funds in hopes of gathering resources and programming. Tessa adds, "We wanted to do something positive for the next generation of parents seeking support." Their tenacity paid off as a variety of support groups emerged for dads, teenagers, and grandparents expanding their circle of community support. Advocating for their needs, the Autism Support Center quickly became a welcome resource for parents.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), "About 1 in 54 children has been identified with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) according to estimates from CDC's Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network". Over the past 25 years, the number of individuals served through the Autism Support Center has grown from 151 in its early days to 965 in 2021.

With funding awarded from the Department of Developmental Services (DDS), the Autism Support Center of Lifeworks provides a range of services including service navigation of DDS services, assistance with access to MassHealth and Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) programs, and providing social and recreation programs for both children and adults.

Our staff administer the DDS Flexible Funding supports program in conjunction with the Lifeworks Family Support Program, the DDS Children's Autism Waiver Program and Medicaid Waiver Program for MassHealth.

Our center also offers support groups for family members including parents and grandparents throughout the year. Workshops and trainings for parents with professionals are available on topics such as sexuality, IEP Training, financial planning and public housing support. In collaboration with the Family Support Program, a Transition Training series covering Guardianship, DDS Eligibility and SSI is offered.

"One of the unique qualities of our program is that we don't have a menu of services," said Daniel Sullivan, Vice President of Quality and Community Services. "We talk to our families and ask them what kinds of services would be helpful to them. It's working with the individuals, finding out what they want and building a program to meet their needs. This model has proven to be very successful over the years."

In the fall of 2020. Lifeworks was awarded new service contracts to increase the scope of our services provided through the Autism Support Center. Under the direction of Christine Baker, Associate Director for the Adult Autism Support Center, we will now provide a full range of supports throughout the Metro Boston region of DDS



**“IT’S A PRIVILEGE TO EXPAND OUR AUTISM SUPPORT SERVICES IN THE DDS METRO BOSTON REGION. WE LOOK FORWARD TO PROVIDING OUR COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORTS AND SERVICES AS WE ESTABLISH NEW COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS.”**

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Dan Sullivan, Vice  
President  
Lifeworks, Inc.

Lifeworks Autism Support  
Centers are supported by:

**BAILEY’S TEAM for AUTISM**



*Supporting Individuals Living with  
Autism Spectrum Disorders and their Families*

to persons with autism who do not have an intellectual disability. We will work closely with the DDS team in each area we serve to identify those who need services and outline the specific individualized services. Our team meets frequently with DDS service coordinators to discuss referrals and case management, to ensure that persons being served are receiving the proper clinical or financial supports as some individuals qualify for allocated funding plans.

One of the keys to the success of our Autism Support Center programs has been that strong, collaborative working relationship with DDS. The Autism Program Coordinator from DDS, Maria Stefano, has described working with our program and staff thusly: “I always look forward to collaborating with the center. They have innovative ideas, work tirelessly, and are always happy to volunteer on projects and try out new things. They provide great perspectives and lessons learned though their gentle approach of meeting each person “where they are at”, and come to the table with a great mix of professionalism, compassion, and honesty. The great communication and teamwork among their staff is evident and a great benefit to everyone with whom they interact. They also have great open communication with all DDS staff and are always available for updates, discussions, feedback, and brainstorming”.

In addition to this new service, the Adult Autism Support Center, which will be based in West Roxbury, in conjunction with with our Harbor Counseling Center and Lifeworks Employment Services, is now one of the agencies who will be able to provide supports for Pre-Engagement and Coaching Services for persons with autism,



a service that is key to the transition of people into adult services. Lifeworks provides employment and day services for persons with autism in Norwood and Westwood as well as a Day Habilitation support program in Westwood. These services for persons with ASD, are integrated into our regular services in employment, day and residential services. Our Lifeworks Employment Services ("LES") program offers the Bridge program, designed to provide specific, small-group and individualized supports for persons with ASD.

Michael Foley, a young adult served by Lifeworks is grateful for the support he has received from the staff, particularly Brian Clark and Christine Baker. "Brian Clark and Christine Baker helped me move into my new apartment and helped me secure an internship that is now my full-time job." Michael has been an active participant in the peer virtual and in-person social groups and gets together with friends he's made through Lifeworks activities. A self-advocate, Michael has attended Autism Awareness Day events at the Statehouse. Michael often volunteers at family events and workshops for younger children and families.

**To support our programs, please consider making a donation [here](#).**

**To read our latest Press Release [click here](#).**

**The Autism Support Center is also grateful for support from the "Tyler Can!" initiative (Tyler Forgeron pictured above) and generous grants from The Norwood Elks Lodge Number 1124.**