

AWARENESS

April is Autism Awareness Month. Here are some quick facts about autism:

WHAT IS AUTISM?

A neurobiological disorder that is typically lifelong and its symptoms can go from extremely mild to very severe. It affects a person's communication skills, social skills, routines and obsessive tendencies. The disorder occurs in all racial, ethnic and social groups but is much more common in boys than girls.

FACTS

Currently, autism affects one in 150 people.

Four times more boys than girls are diagnosed with the disorder.

The disorder was identified by Dr. Leo Kanner of Johns Hopkins Hospital in 1943.

Autism is generally diagnosed by the time a child reaches 3 years old.

TREATMENTS

While there is not one designated or official way to treat autism, there are some different ways individuals choose to treat those it affects. Some methods include:

Gluten- or casein-free diet

While there are no scientifically proven facts to support this, many families of autistic individuals report a noticeable difference in the habits, sleeping patterns and behaviors (for the better) when put on certain diets, specifically eliminating gluten and casein from their diets.

Occupational therapy

The goal of this method is to help those coping with autism to become as independent as possible, aiming to improve coping skills, fine motor skills, play skills, self-help skills and social skills as part of the therapy.

Speech therapy

This method focuses mainly on children affected by the disorder. Though the degree in which communication varies from person to person, speech therapy is a good way to help either maintain a high level of communication or improve the current level of speaking. These begin with an assessment of the individual's current language level.

If you want to learn more about autism or things you can do to help, visit [autism Speaks.org](http://autism Speaks.org).

SOURCE: AUTISM SPEAKS.ORG

# FACES + PLACES



HELLO MY NAME IS  
Taylor Raymond

Taylor Raymond is not one to back down from a challenge. When the elementary education senior became the president of the MSU All-Girl Competitive Cheer Team, she was challenged with taking the squad from a group of enthusiastic athletes to a legitimate competing squad.

"We decided we want a whole new focus and we really wanted to take competitive cheerleading to a whole new level for MSU," Raymond said. Raymond said it takes more than jumps and stunts to succeed.

"You can have the skills and the talent," Raymond said. "And if you don't have the heart and the drive, you're just solely someone on the team that can do their stuff. I think it takes everything to be a really good cheerleader."

—Compiled by Cole Bertoso, photo by Josh Radtke, The State News

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Wednesday

## meeting special needs

LAP Respite Center fills gap in after-school programs, serves Lansing's special needs community



NICK DENTAMARO/THE STATE NEWS

Gall Henry ties Brent Harvey's shoes after he arrived on Tuesday at the LAP Respite Center. "We've gotta teach you a better way to tie these, Brent," Henry said. The employees in the center provide the students with care and a safe place for activities after school.

"Every once in a while you can call into work sick, or you have holidays, but when you're the parent and care provider for a child that needs special attention, you can't do that."

Judy Wagner, executive director of LAP Respite Center

By Julie Baker  
THE STATE NEWS

Sometimes, they just need a break. And that's what the LAP Respite Center aims to do for local families looking for temporary relief — a week-end or two-hour-long break from seeing to the needs of their high-needs children or dependents.

This respite has enabled a single mother to receive and recover from a needed surgery, helped another couple go on their first vacation for 10 days and given many other times to take care of themselves, the center's Executive Director Judy Wagner said.

After 20 years of service, LAP Respite Center offers in-home respite, where care providers go into the family home for a scheduled number of hours. The LAP Respite House involves up to four children or adults staying at the program's house for an entire weekend or 24 hours. And the after-school program provides a three-to-one student-to-care provider ratio for a day care center for children ages 5-26 in special education.

A burgeoning program

The center started as a grassroots organization. A group of parents in the Lansing area came together in about 1982 in need of a way to take a break from caring for their children with disabilities — if only for a couple hours a week.

"We all want time off from everything once in a while," Wagner said. "Every once in a while you can call into work sick, or you have holidays, but when you're the parent and care provider for a child that needs special attention, you can't do that. That's a 24/7 job. You

get no breaks whatsoever."

At the time, Wagner said many of the children were staying in state institutions. As those closed and the children came home to their families, respite services weren't available in the area. Eventually, the group got some political and monetary support from various local, state and federal entities.

In 1989, LAP (once Lansing Area Parents') Respite Center was officially formed. For a number of years, it offered only about two hours of in-home respite care to parents once or twice each week.

Soon there were 100 people interested in the services, which were run by contracting with home health care providers who weren't necessarily trained to work with the types of high-needs children LAP Respite Center looked after. After awhile, they started training care providers in lifespan care techniques and ethics, including areas such as communication, daily personal care, eating, feeding and swallowing, medication training and family-centered planning.

They also acquired a house from Ingham Regional Medical Center that would be used, after renovations, for a full weekend respite house.

Since the center opened in 1995, Wagner said they've been at the maximum of four children on almost all weekends. Since there are so many families interested in the program, they often come once every month or two months.

"Because the kids need such high amounts of care, like tube feedings, breathing tubes ... typically only things mom can do ... it's not easy having that going on all the time," Wagner said.

The next steps

When a single mother working on finishing her master's degree at MSU came to Wagner for help in finding day care for her 14-year-old son who needed assistance, the two scoured local day care centers. But since the boy was 14, and not toilet-trained and in need of other assistance, there was no place in the area that was capable of taking him in. That was when Wagner knew they needed a day care — something they hadn't yet thought of. The after-school day care program opened in 1996 at the Marvin E. Beekman Center, 2901 Wabash Road, in Lansing.

Kari Roosa, after-school program director, said she enjoys working with the students involved in the program and having access to the Beekman Cen-