

Our family would like to take this time to thank everyone who is participating in this year's Swim a Thon. As you know, the money this year is being donated to fund a collaborative effort between the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (Center for Autism Research), and the Bucks County Autism Support Coalition. Our very generous teams have raised a significant amount of money over the years to support some very worthy causes, but our family has chosen to speak out on this one in particular as our beautiful son Matthew (age 11) is very significantly affected by autism.

Matthew is in a full time autistic support classroom at Bridge Valley Elementary in the Central Bucks School District. He was a normally developing infant until the age of 15 months when autism began to rob him of normal communication, cognitive, behavioral, and social development. One of the keys to making sure that Matthew and other children like him are able to develop to their potential is securing quality services as early as possible after diagnosis. Right after Matthew was diagnosed, our question immediately on the heels of "How? Why?" was "What do we do now to help Matthew?!"

The money that you donate will help many families like ours to take those first steps towards a brighter future for their children. There is much to do. The seminars that CHOP will conduct will give families a central place to go to immediately secure some quality information relating to, among other things, the latest medical and educational/behavioral therapies available in our area. We would have appreciated something like this so much when Matthew was first diagnosed. We look back and feel that precious time was wasted just trying to chart our initial course.

Our beautiful Matthew has worked very hard and come a long way over the years, however, as it appears now, until such time as his autism yields to science and/or our prayers, he will always require supervision and will not be able to live an independent life. Not all children with autism are like Matthew. Autism is a "spectrum" disorder – with children being affected in different ways and to different degrees. Regardless of where a child "fits in" on the spectrum, until there is a cure, help is needed!

Thanks again so much for supporting this cause. Please feel free to contact us if you know someone who is looking for someone to talk to regarding their child's autism. We have attacked Matthew's autism on many fronts using both traditional and "alternative" approaches and

would be happy to talk to anyone who would like to hear our experiences.

The Slysh Family

Mark, Ellen, Andrew, Daniel, Matthew



Andrew, Matthew, and Daniel Slysh