



# THE GAZETTE



A Publication of Modern Support Services, LLC  
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**“You cannot keep people safe by denying them a life.™”**

Tom Pomeranz, PhD

## MSS Spotlight

### The 2011 Kaiser Permanente Pasadena Marathon Wheelchair Stroll

By Jack Darakjian

MSS was proud to be the title sponsor of the 2011 Kaiser Permanente Pasadena Marathon Wheelchair Stroll.

This was the first year that Pasadena Marathon had a Wheelchair Stroll event and it was an honor to take part in an event that promotes healthy living and community involvement.

Modern Support Services believes in promoting independence, healthy living & community involvement; so we had no problems fitting right in with the Marathon's goals & ideals.

This was the inaugural year for the Wheelchair Stroll event. Next year we hope to improve and increase registration for the 2012 Marathon.

Promotion of the Wheelchair Stroll was done via 'word of mouth' and e-mails to local Regional Centers and other agencies serving disabled individuals.

Thank you for all those who participated, who volunteered and who helped spread the word. See you next year! ♡



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# AUTISM – A SUMMARY

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## **If you've met one person with autism....you've met one person with autism.**

Much has been written, researched and discussed about autism over the years. This discourse ranges from the causes of autism to its many treatments and interventions. Celebrities have stepped into the limelight to tout their favorite organization or to insist that they have found a “cure.” But finally, when all is said and done, what must inform us about autism is what has been discovered through careful research with results that have been borne out over time. Let's sum up what we know so far.

### **What is autism?**

The first thing to understand about autism is that it is not one thing. Autism falls on a spectrum, that is, there is a whole range of possible symptoms of autism. There is also a range in the severity of the symptoms. There are a number of diagnoses along this spectrum including Asperger's Syndrome, Pervasive Developmental Delay and, of course, classic autism.

The fact that these are all grouped together into a common spectrum means that there are shared features among all of these. People on the spectrum experience some or all of the following:

- Difficulty understanding or engaging in social situations; difficulty reading common social cues; discomfort with or unwillingness to look at eyes
- Sensory processing challenges – any or all senses may be impacted and be either more acute or depressed; this may result in tactile sensitivity, discomfort in loud or crowded situations, fear of common noises, food sensitivities, very high or low pain threshold, etc.
- Strict adherence to routine and difficulty adapting to changes
- Extraordinary abilities in one or more areas such as memorizing facts, photographic memory, musical prowess etc.
- Difficulty with language and communication ranging from non-verbal to delayed language development
- Repetitive movements such as rocking, flapping of hands, spinning; described by some with autism as a way of calming themselves down

### **How does a person get autism?**

The short answer is that no one knows for sure. Many theories have been floated that have since been debunked. However, it is becoming clear that there is not a single way in which people become autistic. It appears to be a combination of genetics and environmental factors. It was once believed that vaccines played a role in the development of autism. There is no one in the scientific community who ascribes to that theory based on all of the follow up research done since that time. The unfortunate result of that misguided belief is that parents stopped immunizing their children and diseases such as whooping cough that were all but eradicated have made a resurgence. Meanwhile the number of cases of autism continues to grow.

*“Autism – A Summary” Continues on Page 5*

## A VISIT WITH SARA & MELINDA

By Julie Eby-McKenzie

When I came into the room, Sara was snuggled up on her hotel bed with her service dog, Pachino, an adorable little fuzzy black dog who has been with Sara for nearly 14 years. Pachino does not look like the typical service dog, but he has been indispensable to Sara. He lets her know when she is about to have a seizure, giving her time to get into a safe place before it hits. His name is Peace in Italian, an apt description of his affect on Sara.

Equally important in Sara's life has been Melinda and her other MSS staff members who provide 24 hour support to her. Sara has been receiving supported living services from MSS for about two years. She had been living independently, but, with a serious increase in seizure activity, she needed more intensive support than her housemate could provide to her. Sara's mother and her housemate researched options available and landed on MSS and they have never looked back.

MSS has supported Sara through some rough and bumpy times including hospitalizations and this most recent turn of events, living in a hotel room for three weeks. Her apartment was flooded from a backed up sewer and they have been waiting for her landlord to make the needed repairs. Meanwhile, Sara, Melinda and the other staff flex around this new arrangement and keep life going.

When life is not so topsy turvy, Sara and her MSS staff enjoy life together. Melinda and Sara particularly like exploring new places and activities. Together they've gone to the California Science Center, the County Fair, various museums, the Los Angeles Zoo and other Southern California attractions. They partner to make the routines of daily life happen. Together they grocery shop, cook, clean, do laundry, take Pachino out for walks and pick up after him. It is important to Sara that she be a responsible dog- owner. Melinda teaches Sara how to do things for herself; she has taught her how to make her favorite meal, fried chicken, though she still prefers some help with turning over the chicken in the hot oil. One thing Melinda will not do is to "do for" Sara. Sara says, "Sometimes I get in a mood where I try to tell Melinda to do things for me, but she won't." Melinda always reminds Sara that it is her life and she has to take care of herself. Melinda and Sara's other support staff are always standing by to provide assistance if and when it's needed.

At the end of my visit Melinda comments that she and Sara are very compatible. They like a lot of the same things, joke around together and even squabble now and then. But when it comes down to it, they both know that MSS being in Sara's life is what makes it possible for her to live as independently as she does. For this she is very grateful. ♡

## IN MEMORY OF PATRICK ALLEN

December 21, 1967 – April 12, 2011

By Jack Darakjian

I am deeply saddened to announce the passing of Patrick Allen, a MSS Direct Support Professional for nearly four years. He was a very nice, gentle person; hard worker and easy going. Every time he came into the office and saw me, he would greet me "hey Darak," a play on my last name. I would say, "Hey Patrick, how is it?". He will be missed by everyone.

Several staff and people that Patrick supported have offered their memories of him.

Jim Williams writes: "I am very saddened by the loss of Patrick. He was an exemplary employee, without a doubt. But bigger and more important than that, he was an exemplary person. He always made it a point to step into my office with a greeting and a smile. It's funny because he was always there at just the right moment when I needed some picking up. I couldn't help but feel at ease when he popped his head in with a big smile, "Big Jim! How'ya doing?!" We would talk for awhile and he would always manage to make me laugh. I consider him one of those rare caring individuals who was always looking at the positive in life. That just seemed to be an ingrained part of his character. His ability to bond with the individuals he supported was an example that all should strive for. No matter what challenges the individuals were facing, he had a fantastic ability to get their guards down and get them to be comfortable and open up to him. I know I will personally feel his loss for sometime. I'm going to miss that smiling face popping into my office, 'Big Jim! How'ya doing!?"

Armineh and Ara commented about Patrick that he was a very friendly guy, always had a smile on his face. Whenever he noticed someone was having a bad day, he would ask how they were doing. He loved to joke around and was very complimentary. His work was always neat and detailed. Patrick took his job seriously and would flex around the needs of the people he supported. He always took time for others and never complained. He will be deeply missed.

Robert, one of the men that Patrick supported, had this to say: "He helped me with things I had trouble doing on my own like shopping. He was always willing to help me with problems. He joked with me and made me laugh. He called me his "little buddy," (Patrick was much taller than me.) I will miss Patrick much. He was very kind and caring. I will miss his laughter and caring. I will just miss him generally."

Patrick, you exemplified all that Modern Support stands for. We will deeply miss your kindness, your ready smile, the joy you shared with those who crossed your path and your unwavering commitment to everyone who had the pleasure of being a part of your life. ♡



## AUTISM – A SUMMARY

Some things that we do know are that autism sets in before the age of three, it affects a person's physical brain structure and it does not go away. There are some risk factors as well:

- Autism is three or four times more likely to affect boys than girls
- Parents of one child with autism are more likely to have another child with autism than the general population
- Men over the age of 40 are more likely to father a child with autism than younger men
- Other conditions such as Fragile X Syndrome, epilepsy and Tourette Syndrome may contribute to the development of autism

### Treatments and Interventions for Autism

There have been a number of approaches to treating autism. Almost all of them focus on children.

- **Behavior and communication therapies.** Many programs such as Applied Behavioral Analysis address the range of social, language and behavioral difficulties associated with autism. Some programs focus on reducing problem behaviors and teaching new skills. Other programs focus on teaching people how to act in social situations or how to communicate more effectively.
- **Educational therapies.** Children with autism often respond well to highly structured education programs.
- **Medications.** No medication can improve the core signs of autism, but certain medications can help control symptoms such as anxiety and depression.

*Excerpted from a 1998-2010 article by Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research (MFMER).*

### What does all this have to do with MSS?

At MSS we strive to provide individualized support to everyone we serve. Part of that requires us to seek to understand what a person's life experience might be like. When you work with someone with autism you do well to:

- be mindful of situations that might cause a sensory overload for the person
- respect a person's routine
- understand that spinning, flapping or rocking aren't "bad behavior;" they may merely be ways for the person to calm down
- model and gently encourage socially appropriate ways of interacting with others
- always exercise respect and patience
- educate the public by modeling for others that adults with autism deserve the same respect as all other adults

Finally, though people with autism share some common traits, remember that when you've met one person with autism...you've met one person with autism. Treat each as a unique and valuable individual, just as you would choose to be treated. ♡

QUALITY ASSURANCE SURVEY

In an effort for Modern Support Services to go green we have provided our Quality Assurance Survey on-line. Please visit our website, [www.modernsupportservices.org](http://www.modernsupportservices.org) to complete the Consumer Quality Assurance Survey. If you don't have a computer, you can access one at your local library.

# THE GAZETTE

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