

'Autism Awareness Month' was recognized by mayor, police chief in Denville

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TOM ANDES



FRANK PERNA

DENVILLE TWP. – April was “Autism Awareness Month” and in its recognition, messages were issued by Mayor Tom Andes, Police Chief Frank Perna and parents of the township’s “Celebrate The Children” School.

It is estimated that 1 in 54 children in the United States has been identified with an Autism Spectrum Disorder, or ASD, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. This prevalence varies across states, with the highest rate of incidence at 1 in 32 children in New Jersey.

“It is important to remember that autistic people are people first who have thoughts, emotions, and desires just like the rest of us. Just because they are different doesn’t mean they are any less of a person than the rest of us. The Denville Mayor, Police, and Community as a whole honor and respect each individual living with autism for whom they are,” Andes said.

Celebrate the Children School (CTC) and the Autism Community celebrate and honor parents, siblings, grandparents, teachers, and other professionals who provide support and love to those living on the autism spectrum, he said.

“We celebrate those who, years ago, did not accept what they were told they couldn’t do and today have shown what they are capable of. We celebrate those elected officials, businesses, and religious leaders who value the beauty of a person with autism,” the mayor said.

“We must remember that while we aim to increase awareness of autism, the larger societal need extends way beyond awareness. Our nation still lacks a strong commitment to assuring that each person living with autism is provided an opportunity to realize a quality of life so many are still denied. Today, most people living with autism are discriminated against in many aspects of their lives,” Andes said.

“Although Denville is one of the most progressive towns when it comes to celebrating diversity and embracing individuals with autism and other disabilities with open arms, there is always room for improvement for individuals who are different. We can still do

better to abolish discrimination and inequity for people with special needs," he said.

"Our word to society and the Denville community is to please be more understanding of people living with autism. The world can be a lot better if we accept and understand each other and try to find compassion for the same pain and joy in others' lives as we do for our own," parents Saumya and Tuli Mukherjee said in a release issued by Celebrate The Children.

"The world would be a lot better place to live in if there was more awareness, compassion, and understanding about what autism means to the affected population. We live with a dream of a world where we have open arms and acceptance in our own neighborhoods for people with autism," they wrote.

Denville Police Perspective

"As Denville Township Police Officers, we receive mandatory training regarding interacting with individuals with Autism." Sgt. Dennis Subrizi said.

"We have made a commitment to the Denville Community to continue learning how to interact with Autistic individuals in a safe and positive way. Autism Awareness has been built into the culture of the Denville Police Department with the help of Celebrate the Children School. When we learn we are responding to an incident involving an Autistic individual, we understand that we will have to tailor our response to the incident to the particular needs of the Autistic individual."

Celebrate the Children Teacher Perspective

"In all of my years as an educator, I have seen a lot of positive change regarding the acceptance of students on the autism spectrum. I have seen changes in the way my students have been viewed, treated, and appreciated," Celebrate The Children teacher Amy Keveanos said.

"Sadly, there is still a long way to go. Students on the autism spectrum are still running into situations where it is assumed that they are not the amazing, intelligent, and capable people that they are. This population of skilled individuals deserves to be celebrated for the many talents and attributes that they possess," she said.

"Unfortunately, when some people come across a person who may be non-verbal, sensory seeking, or lack eye contact, they begin to make assumptions about their level of intellect or their capability to have reciprocal relationships, full of feelings and

engagement. My students have taught me more than I could ever have taught them. They have taught me how to view the world through their eyes, full of compassion, kindness, and love. I look forward to the day when acceptance is a given, and students on the autism spectrum are truly valued and appreciated for all that they are," she said.

For more information, visit www.celebratethechildren.org, www.profectum.org or www.limitlessasd.com

The school is located on Diamond Spring Road.