

**# 73 Sensory friendly films, media attention to disabilities, Autism insurance bills, transition fair in Forsyth County, and Community Choice Act**

Dearest Advocates:

In the Sunday Atlanta Journal-Constitution (AJC) newspaper there were two things I wanted to bring your attention to:

1. Reporter, Jill Vejnaska ([jvejnaska@ajc.com](mailto:jvejnaska@ajc.com)), wrote a wonderful article on sensory friendly films at AMC theaters. Please write her a thank you letting her know how much we appreciate continued coverage of good things going on in the community to help benefit our children.
2. Target Corporation in their Sunday Ad flyer had a child with Down syndrome modeling their clothes. I do think this is showing a strong message to society that children with disabilities are like any other child. Many times the only time our children are placed in the media is when the media is writing about their disability. I truly appreciate Target seeing that our kids - - -are like any other kids. They want the same things out of life - - - Friendships, love, respect, and acceptance in this world!

If you agree, you can go to this website and send your comments:

<http://www.target.com/gp/help/display-contact-us-form.html?displayLink=tci>

or you can write them a letter and include a picture of your child.

Address: Target, 1000 Nicollet Mall, Minneapolis, MN 55403

I do feel that education is the key to success in seeing our children for their **abilities** and not just their disabilities.

Let's thank Target for their simple effort. Never know where this may lead in the future- - -  
Saying "Thank You" could change the World!

I wanted you all to be aware of two Autism insurance reform bills in the Georgia House and Senate that have been introduced. Please note that these bills do **not** impact those families that have healthcare insurance that are self funded policies (which is the majority of us). I do know that there are also some federal initiatives being worked on now that could impact everyone in the future. Please see below for more information.

I do feel that their needs to be more of a national focus on **all** children with disabilities and receiving the necessary care and intervention services mandated at a Federal level. An example of this is with therapy. (Rehabilitation verses habilitation). I understand that EPSDT (Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment services) is mandated by Federal Medicaid but it is not being implemented to the fullest extent in the State of Georgia right now. Go to [www.heidijmoore.com](http://www.heidijmoore.com) under "Advocacy" for more information on EPSDT.

Also - The Federal **Community Choice Act (CCA)** needs your support. See below for more information and how to get involved.

In addition, **Forsyth County is having a transition Fair on Feb. 26, 2009.** For more information and the flyer, please go to my website under "Events".

Also- On February 12, 2009 the AJC newspaper wrote an article on the disability waiver waiting lists. Please send the reporter, Gracie Bonds-Staples ([gstaples@ajc.com](mailto:gstaples@ajc.com)), a thank you for continuing to bring attention to this issue. Over 7,000 individuals are on waiting lists for disability waives in Georgia. More information on this issue go to:  
<http://www.unlockthewaitinglists.com/>

Here is the actual article:

[http://www.ajc.com/metro/content/metro/stories/2009/02/11/waiting\\_for\\_services.html](http://www.ajc.com/metro/content/metro/stories/2009/02/11/waiting_for_services.html)

Hope you find this information helpful!

***“UNITED – WE WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE!”***

Sincerely,

***Heidi***

**(Proud Mother to Jacob - 9 yrs old with Down syndrome and Jared - 7 yrs old)**

***“Help the Children Now, So They Can Help Themselves Later!”***

[www.heidijmoore.com](http://www.heidijmoore.com)

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**Sensory Friendly Films at AMC Theaters and AJC Article:**

AMC Entertainment® and the Autism Society of America have teamed up to bring families affected by autism a special opportunity to enjoy their favorite films in a safe and accepting environment on a monthly basis. With Sensory Friendly Films, the movie auditoriums will have their lights brought up and the sound turned down, and the AMC "Silence is Golden" policy will not be enforced.

Three theaters in the Atlanta market have been selected to host "Sensory Friendly Films".

AMC Phipps Plaza 14  
3500 Peachtree Road NE  
Atlanta, GA 30326  
404-231-1492

AMC Discover Mills 18  
5900 Sugarloaf Pkwy  
L'ville, GA 30043  
678-847-9265

AMC Southlake 24  
7065 Mount Zion Circle  
Morrow, GA 30260

770-473-0719

For tickets to this unique experience, please visit the theater's box office the day of the event.

The next sensory friendly film is:  
RACE TO WITCH MOUNTAIN  
SATURDAY, MARCH 14th - 10:00am

The following article was in Sunday's Atlanta Journal Constitution:

Autistic kids free to be themselves at movies  
By Jill Vejnaska  
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution  
Sunday, February 15, 2009

Eat your tubby heart out, Paul Blart, mall cop. It was Chase Morrison who did the real boffo movie numbers a few Saturdays ago:

Four: How many times the Alpharetta 6-year-old scooted out of his seat and up the aisle toward the lobby during a morning showing of "Hotel for Dogs" at the AMC Phipps Plaza.

Three: Number of trips he made to the concessions stand with his father, Chris.

One: Very good time he had, simply getting to be a kid.

"It's just fun for him," Chris Morrison said before he and Chase watched an entire "sensory-friendly" movie with other autistic children and their families. "You don't always think about that, but it matters."

Indeed, pint-size Americans are endowed with certain inalienable rights, among them life, liberty and — perhaps most important — the pursuit of endless hours of watching "Shrek" and "Harry Potter" in darkened theaters while consuming twice their weight in popcorn and Milk Duds.

But what if the same things that make moviegoing so exciting for kids — cartoon pandas kung fu-ing in blazing Technicolor, that wacky "Madagascar 2" menagerie playing it for very loud laughs — can prove unsettling to those with autism?

Among some of autism's more common traits are sensitivity to sound, hyperactivity, distress when normal routines are changed, and a tendency to repeat words or phrases.

Not exactly conducive to sitting quietly through, say, "Hotel for Dogs" for more than 90 minutes in a crowded multiplex.

"My son loves to go to the movies, and at the end he has to sing to

all the credits," said Heidi Fernandez, a Woodstock mother of an autistic 14-year-old, who knows of families that can't take their children to movies for fear of being asked to leave. "That's why this is an amazing resource."

"This" is a recently launched effort to show first-run movies in "sensory-friendly" form at select AMC theaters. The lights are turned up, the sound is turned down, and ads, coming attractions and AMC's "Silence Is Golden" policy all get the old heave-ho.

That's why, on this particular Saturday, Chase was free to let out a delighted "A-Ha-HA!" not long after the movie featuring a four-legged troupe straight out of Cuddly K-9 Central Casting had begun.

"In a normal theater, that would get a bunch of `Shhhshes,'" said Chris, who'd purposely sat on the aisle so his son could "escape" when necessary. "But here, nothing."

Two weeks earlier, they'd tried and failed to make it all the way through "The Tale of Despereaux." But that was at a regular showing, which Chris and his wife, Beth, had decided to give a try after seeing how much Chase enjoyed one of the first sensory-friendly films at Phipps.

"It was too dark and loud for him," said Chris, a manufacturer's rep for a ceiling fan company. "He was getting up a lot. And he just started laughing at an inappropriate time."

But on this day, there were no inappropriate times to laugh — or do anything else. Some children hummed softly or repeated favorite words or phrases, while others occasionally drummed the floor with their feet. One little girl rocked back and forth on her mother's knee, her hands pressed tightly over her ears while her eyes never left the screen. A boy clutching a plastic sword raced up the aisle and back again.

For a newcomer, it wasn't much more distracting than sitting in a theater full of grownups who "forget" to turn off their cellphones or start whispering about where to go eat halfway through the movie. For the parents and other adults in the audience, the relief at not having to explain their children's behavior to anyone was obvious.

"It's more relaxing for us," said Chris, who wishes more companies would make similar accommodations for autistic and special needs children. "Frankly, this is a very good business decision. On Sundays when my parents watch the kids, my wife and I are going to go to an AMC theater over any other [chain] because of what they've done for us."

Still, business seemed the furthest thing from his mind as he and his son watched a sweetly silly kids' movie together from start to finish — albeit with a few brief "escapes." Returning from one such

trip to the lobby, Chase spied his seat and dove for it, an ear-to-ear grin spreading across his face. His father handed him a frozen Edy's Fruit Bar, his second of the day.

"He wins," Chris laughed, watching Chase's eyes dart between the pooches on screen and the treat in his hand. "There's a fine line between discipline and just letting him enjoy himself.

"Today, enjoyment wins."

#### NEXT SHOWING

The next sensory-friendly screening at three area AMC theaters is "Race to Witch Mountain." It is scheduled for 10 a.m. March 14 at Phipps Plaza, Discover Mills 18 and Southlake 24. Information: [www.autism-society.org](http://www.autism-society.org) or [www.asaga.com](http://www.asaga.com)

"Milestones" covers significant events and times in the lives of metro Atlantans. Big or small, hugely celebrated or known only to a few — tell us of a milestone we should write about at: [jvejnaska@ajc.com](mailto:jvejnaska@ajc.com) or mail it to Milestones, c/o Jill Vejnaska, 72 Marietta St. NW, Atlanta, GA 30303. Please include your phone number and/or e-mail address.

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#### **Georgia Autism Insurance Reform Law introduced in House and Senate:**

We have made great progress in our effort to get the insurance legislation moved forward. Just yesterday, the bill was introduced in both the house and the senate. They have been posted to the GA Assembly website, which you can find here:

Senate bill: [http://www.legis.ga.gov/legis/2009\\_10/sum/sb161.htm](http://www.legis.ga.gov/legis/2009_10/sum/sb161.htm)

House bill: [http://www.legis.ga.gov/legis/2009\\_10/sum/hb426.htm](http://www.legis.ga.gov/legis/2009_10/sum/hb426.htm)

Bill numbers are SB 161 and HB 426. As always, please sign up for news updates and action alerts at [www.autismvotes.org/georgia](http://www.autismvotes.org/georgia) and encourage everyone you know to do the same. Please pass this along to everyone you know in Georgia. We need as much help and support as we can get! Thanks.

Jeff Chiusano

Georgia Statewide Chapter Advocacy Co-Chair

[www.autismvotes.org](http://www.autismvotes.org)

[chiusano@bellsouth.net](mailto:chiusano@bellsouth.net)

(770) 329-3752

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**From Mark Johnson – Advocacy Director for Shepard Center – Community Choice Act needs YOUR Support:**

Ask your U.S. Senators and Representative in Congress to become initial cosponsors of the Community Choice Act (CCA)!  
It only takes a COUPLE of minutes. CCA will be reintroduced soon. Rather than start all over again building the number of cosponsors, we want to have the bill reintroduced with as many initial cosponsors as YOU help us get.

Use these links to contact your US Senators and Representative.

Contact your Senators at:

<http://capwiz.com/rochestercdr/issues/alert/?alertid=12598871>

Contact your Representative at:

<http://capwiz.com/rochestercdr/issues/alert/?alertid=12597841>

-CCA Summary (will be assigned a new bill #):

<http://www.adapt.org/casa/summary.htm>

-CCA Talking Points: <http://www.adapt.org/casa/talkingpts.html>

Monday, February 16th, President's Day, ADAPT will contact the Obama (a sponsor when he was a Senator) Administration.

Tuesday, February 17th, CCA supporters across the country will visit the local offices of members who haven't signed on.

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