



Autism Support
of West Shore
A place where everyone fits

February 2020

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Autism Support of West Shore Receives **2020 Best of Zeeland Award**

The Best of Zeeland Award Program was created to honor and generate public recognition of the achievements and positive contributions of businesses and organizations in and around Zeeland.



Soaring on the Ice

Ashley Merrick

Having a child with special needs can challenge every fiber of your being, but at the same time, it can be more rewarding and fulfilling than anything else this world has to offer. My son, Liam is 8 years old. He loves things most boys do, electronics, fortnite, super heroes, Pokémon, nerf.....but not in the same way as others his age. You see, he likes to play the same video game in the same spot over and over, he isn't trying to win or complete the challenge, he simply likes to go to a certain spot on the game and just replay it over and over. It makes playing with him on his electronics tedious and boring, but to him, it's his special thing and he loves it. Same with his other games and toys. He gets too rough with nerf guns (still working on it), Pokémon he is very technical with and has memorized the stats and facts to the point that he is very rule and fact based when playing and it takes the creativity and fun out of it for most kids his age.



So, while he may be 8 and in 2nd grade, he plays very repetitiously and more on a kindergarten level. He has been in the same school since young fives so he completed kindergarten, first grade and is now in second grade with the same group of kids and has grown up with them. But the other kids seem to grow up, while the Gap seems to widen between them and Liam. I watch from a distance as I see other boys in his age group riding their bikes without training wheels, they're skating at the roller rink beautifully and doing tricks and turns, they're playing video games and actually play to beat the game, and can play with another person in a way that others want to actually play with them. And that's not true for Liam, because he doesn't play like the other boys, and as they continue to get older the Gap gets bigger and they want to play with him less and less. The friends that he had, the same friends that he has had for years, have gotten new friends and Liam is asked less and less to come play. So how do we teach our kids to play in a way that is socially acceptable? I had to find out and learn this on my own, that it's not about teaching our kids to play in a way that others will accept, it's about teaching others that our kids play different and that's okay.

I put Liam in a special hockey team for children and young adults that have any kind of special needs. He seems to have excelled in this program, and it has been amazing to watch him grow. He can't ride his bike without training wheels and he can't roller-skate without the balance board, but he sure can ice-skate now. And while he doesn't play hockey to win the game, because he likes to lay down on the ice and grab onto somebody else's hockey stick while they're skating and be dragged around the ice, and he likes to lay in front of the goal and talk to the goalie and try and grab onto the puck as it comes near him with his hands..... that is okay. Because this group of special needs parents and hockey players of all ages, sizes and abilities is amazing. They understand that when he gets dressed and, on the ice, he's going to play his way and that's the best thing. It's a group of parents that all have that same understanding where you get to group and you have somebody there to talk to you about anything, everything and some days nothing at all. It's an amazing feeling to be able to have your child in a program where you don't feel like you're getting looks and judgment. Where you don't feel like other parents and teammates are frustrated when you walk in the door because they were hoping you weren't going to be there today. I had to learn that it's okay to teach your child to be

socially acceptable in a way where they're not being too rough with others and they're playing in a way that is respectful, but at the same time they're playing in a way that they want to play. Because when we teach our children to play just the way that others do and not in their own way it takes the fun out of it for them, and it's no longer playing, it's no longer fun for them. But because of social norms and acceptable politically correctness it's hard, so we need to find groups where our children can be themselves and play and excel, and it's important for parents as well because we get that comradery of other parents going through something similar. It still hurts when he doesn't get invited to birthday parties and he doesn't get the phone calls of other kids wanting to play, but at least he has an outlet and a group that he can go and be himself and play. He's been on the special hockey team for 2 years now and I absolutely love it. The team meets once a week for practice and then they have games where they join groups of other teams in other locations and they have other teams that come and help the kids Play and Learn in their own way. It's a group that Liam can be himself and that is a beautiful thing.

2019-2020 WM Special Hockey PLAYER Registration

FIRST STEPS - Register with USA Hockey and ASHA prior to filling this form out -- you need your numbers. IF you have registered with USA Hockey at all in the past, please complete USA Hockey Registration FIRST (if you ABSOLUTELY cannot afford the \$51, please let me know (see contact information at end of instructions) and put NA in the requested field on this form -- DO NOT DO ANYTHING WITH USA HOCKEY REGISTRATION if this is the case. We will reach out and discuss financial assistance). If you have never registered with USA Hockey, please put NEW in the field on this form -- your registration will be free) Then, register at www.americanspecialhockey.org next and THEN fill this form out. You will need the registration numbers from both entities to complete our registration

Since our inception, we have run this as a 'no pay' team, meaning we didn't charge our families to participate. All we have asked for was a \$50 deposit that we returned at the end of the season if you needed to borrow equipment. Between the cost of the ice time, the equipment costs, tournament fees, storage for the equipment, etc. we are going to ask for a \$75 fee to play this year. But we don't want this to be a deterrent from being part of the team. Please let us know if this hurdle is keeping you off the ice.

- o This fee can be spread out into three payments of \$25.

- o If you have registered already and no longer wish to play, email Marie at marie@wmspecialhockey.org

Still have questions? Email Ashley at myliam71311@gmail.com

Our Concert

On September 12, 2020, a group of West Michigan musicians will be hosting an open-air concert at Lakeshore Middle School in Grand Haven. Our Concert is the creation of local musician, Dave Palmer. The premise of Our Concert is to include and embrace the greater West Michigan community. All individuals and families with typical and unique learners are welcome to come and enjoy this amazing event. Not only will various bands play throughout the afternoon, attendees will have the opportunity to participate in raffle prizes. The entry ticket will be your entry and a raffle ticket for \$5,000. Tickets will soon be on sale for this event. Tickets are \$10.00 and ALL tickets sales goes directly to ASWS. We are looking for individuals who would be willing to sell tickets for ASWS (great volunteer opportunity for scholarship recipients). Tickets will be on sale at www.asws.org. If you're interested in ticket sales contact Linda at contact@asws.org.

Winter Sensory Friendly Performances at Wharton Center

Looking for a fun activity? Look no further than these free tickets to one of three sensory friendly performance at MSU's Wharton Center. Tickets are limited so get yours soon www.asws.org Parking ramp fee (\$10) is not included.

At Sensory-Friendly Performances, accommodations will include:

- Lower sound and light levels; all strobe light effects removed.
- House lights on at a low level throughout the performance.
- Audience members are welcome to stand, move around, and enter and leave the theatre as needed.
- An Activities Area with crafts and activities for engagement.
- Designated quiet and calm spaces.
- Autism specialists and trained volunteers on hand.
- Sensory supports available (fidgets, earplugs).
- A Social Narrative that portrays the theatre-going experience with pictures and text.
- A Character Guide with pictures identifying each character in the show.
- Audience members are welcome to bring their own manipulatives, seat cushions, comfort objects, headphones, electronics, special snacks, and other support items to the show.

February 22, 2020 2:00pm

Parsons Dance (10 tickets remaining)

The exuberant personality and joyous movement of Parsons Dance fuses the movement of modern dance with the discipline and precision of a classic ballet company. Known for engaging and uplifting works of incredible artistry, Parsons Dance was formed by dance legend David Parsons, whom *The New York Times* called "one of the great movers of modern dance." This athletic ensemble creates a spirited evening of dance for all ages.

"Parsons and his company are one of the hottest tickets in contemporary dance. They are all terrific performers, energized. Parsons provides choreography that's consistently intelligent, witty, well-crafted, and humane." -*The Toronto Star*

March 15, 2020 1:30

Dog Man the Musical (3 tickets remaining)

A hilarious new musical based on *The New York Times* #1 bestselling series from Dav Pilkey featuring the crime-biting canine who is part dog, part man and ALL HERO! He's ready to take on Petey the Cat, the felonious feline who's always hacking up harebrained schemes. Songs for the show by Kevin Del Aguila, a New York Outer Critics Circle Award nominee for *Altar Boyz*, and Brad Alexander, an Emmy winner for *Peg + Cat*

Recommended for ages 6-11.

April 26, 2020 1:30

Miss Nelson Has a Field Day (10 tickets remaining)

This fun-filled musical, featuring the Dallas Children's Theatre, takes us to Horace B. Smedley School where the Smedley Tornadoes have never won a football game. In fact, they have never even scored a single point! With such a poor record and a team that is out of control, kind-hearted Miss Nelson comes to the rescue when she enlists the help of her alter ego, the ill-tempered Miss Viola Swamp, to coach the team and whip them into shape.

Recommended for ages 5-11.

Putting on Your Football Pads

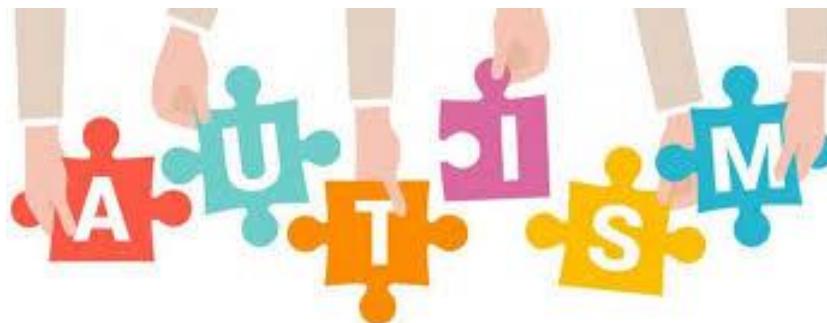
Vanessa Nolte

It is near the end of football season and I'm not really a football fan, but I do know the importance of the pads and helmet. They can be a matter of life and death for some. I've had to put on my football pads in my life. Ok, not real football pads, but I had to protect myself and my mind from what others say and even some things that my daughter does that are embarrassing. Let me explain. Just yesterday, Marissa informed me that the next day was a special day for her friend and her. You see, she has a special friend who is also on the spectrum and they have already decided they are getting married. (She is 9 years old) When I asked her what was so special about the day, she told me that it was breeding day for her and her friend. Yep, you read that right! Yikes! Thankfully she said that at home, but it didn't matter. She was convinced that it was a special day. Now, she doesn't know really what that means other than it produces a baby (she loves to study animals). I knew that she was going to talk about it at school and probably to her special friend. My initial thought was, I need to warn the school and her special friend's mom. I was concerned with our reputation. But then I thought, you know what, who cares what people think. I put my pads on and protected myself from any comments I might receive. You know what? None came! A lot of time we are fighting with ourselves, worried about what others think. I have learned recently that most people are too worried about themselves to pay much attention to what you are doing (or what your child is doing).

The other thing I battle is unsolicited advice or comments from others. The hardest is when it is someone you know well and are close to. I have had family challenge what I'm doing with our daughter. I've had someone "concerned" about her connection with her special friend. Isn't she spending too much time with him? they said to me. I've had someone else tell me I should just let the school do their job and if I have a problem with it, get a job there so I can see what it is like. Putting on my pads and helmet (and maybe some earplugs) for this one!

It is not always easy to let things roll off, but I think as a parent of a special needs child, I need to. We need to. I will often carry around bitterness because of what others have said or how others have treated us. I read something recently by Rachel-Clair Cockrell. She said, "There is nothing gained by holding on to bitterness. And yet I hold on to it. I clutch it the way a baby clutches a safety blanket. Except this safety blanket is on fire and I am the only one who gets burned".

Are you holding onto something that you should let go of? I have been there; I may still be there (working on it!). We need the protection, that ability to move on, or it will consume us. It will consume me. I am choosing to put on the pads and let go of the bitterness. Next time when someone comes at me with a comment or a jab, I will be protected! I will not let it overcome me. What about you?



Save the Date

Bowl with Autism Network of Muskegon

February 2, 2020

12:30

Northway Lanes

1751 Evanston, Muskegon

\$5.00 per bowler

<https://www.facebook.com/events/2283550248604303/>

Meet and Greet Social Gathering

February 12, 2020

6:00 – 8:00

Panera Bread Holland

Join us for a time of relaxed conversation. Children are welcome but babysitting is not provided. Dinner or refreshments are available to purchase. All are welcome.

Communication in Special Education meetings/IEP's:

March 2, 2020

Herrick District Library

300 S River, Holland

Communicating in tense or emotional special education meetings can be difficult. The Office of Special Education understands this and provides no cost services to help parents and schools communicate about planning for students with disabilities. Special Education Mediation Services (SEMS) is a grant funded program providing mediation, meeting facilitation and communication workshops throughout the state. Learn how these services can help you enhance your support for students with disabilities. Presented by Cindy Van Neste, Outreach Representative, Special Education Mediation Services. Register for this free event at www.asws.org under events.

Michigan Council for Exceptional Children

March 4 – 6, 2020

80th Annual Michigan CEC Conference

Amway Grand Plaza | Grand Rapids, Michigan

Register by February 12, 2020 for discounted rates

<https://www.cvent.com/events/80th-annual-michigan-council-for-exceptional-children-conference/registration-78c3ca29c9a443c78d00496edd24eb3c.aspx?fqp=true>

Access Expo

March 18, 2020

4-6 pm

Grand Haven Community Center

It can be frustrating to try and find helpful resources for visible and hidden disabilities. Searching for the right information and support can leave you feeling lost and overwhelmed. Join us for the third annual AccessExpo, where you can access the local resources you need to participate, contribute, and belong to an inclusive community.

- Job Opportunities •Disability Information • Local Experts •Access Information

START Annual Conference

April 27, 2020

8:30 – 3:30

Kellogg Hotel & Conference Center

219 S Harrison Rd
East Lansing
Registration opens December 2, 2019
<https://www.gvsu.edu/autismcenter/start-conference-167.htm>

Touch a Truck Event

May 2, 2020
10:00 – 2:00
Mart Dock
560 Mart St #1, Muskegon

Autism Network of Muskegon is hosting a day of getting up close and personal with monster trucks and service vehicle that are typically loud and scary. Children and adult will be welcome to touch and look at the vehicles while they are sitting quietly at the event.

Spring Fling Celebration and Banquet

May 16, 2020
5:30 – 9:00 pm
GVSU Alumni House
1 Circle Drive, Allendale

Speakers Tate and Tina Zellman

Join us for our annual celebration of the people who make a difference in the lives of our children helping them have their best life. It's time to start thinking about who impacts the lives of our children. Send nominations to contact@asws.org. A short nomination outlining why this person is special in your child's life and their contact information.

2020 Puzzle Run

June 27, 2020
Millennial Park
1400 Maynard Ave SW, Walker

This is it, the one we've been working on for a year. The 2020 Puzzle Run is now certified for a ½ marathon, 10k and 5 k run. Whatever your skill level we have it. Registration will open March 1, 2020 at www.asws.org under events.

What exactly is outside the box?

Kaarin Anderson Ryan, PhD, BCBA, LBA.

We love it. That phrase, "Think outside the box". It makes us think of creativity, progress, innovation, independence. Thing is, there is so much creativity and innovation on display out there, and it is so easy to find now with the internet and social media. It kind of makes us wonder, now that everything seems to be being done, what is outside the box anymore?

Well, let's just take a look at our own lives, and what might be outside our own boxes. Whether it's looking at yourself and your own personal habits, or looking at your role at work, or looking at how you approach parenting, there might be some ways you have trapped yourself into a box. So, it's time to ask yourself, what are your own boxes, and what is on the outside?

We all have habits we would like to change both personally and work. Maybe you get stuck in the same routines? Maybe you have a hard time keeping up with your list of things to do? Maybe you have some difficulties with interpersonal relationships, and the things you're trying to do to make this better aren't working? This is where your personal outside-the- box thinking can jump in and help you out. There is that famous saying about doing the same thing and expecting different results is the definition of insanity

(apparently Einstein is NOT actually the one who said this). But even though it is over-used and mis-referenced, it does make a good point. Think a little about your past week, and how many should-haves and would-haves you can count. Now, think about how you might have approached those things just a little bit differently to have had better outcomes.

Try making a list of what consistently works for you to give you the outcomes you need. Setting reminders, using good coping skills, going to the gym, etc. Now, make a list of the common habits you have that get in your way of having positive outcomes. Some of these habits may be things you do or don't do, and some of them may be things you think or don't think. I can tell you that sitting in my warm car outside the gym when it's nasty outside can trigger some pretty compelling thoughts about why I don't really need to go into the gym. *These are not good thought habits.* So my list would have to include that particular thought habit – talking myself out of doing something I know will be good because in that one moment it seems just a little too demanding. Thinking outside my box here will require me to stop and reconsider that habit.

Now let's apply this to our interactions with other people. If you're a parent, you may struggle with managing difficult behaviors from your kids – some common things would include kids not cleaning up after themselves, not listening to instructions, or not putting their devices or video games away when asked. What are you doing right now to deal with common difficulties you have as a parent?

Most of my posts include specific information for special needs or autism, but in this case the outside-the-box tools apply to all parents, and really to all relationships. Think about what is difficult about one of your relationships, be it with a friend, a sibling, a spouse, or a child. Answer the question about what you are doing to manage those difficulties right now. What is working consistently? What isn't really working at all? Make your lists and evaluate what kind of thinking you need to do to process these relationships and situations more effectively. It is always best to build on what **has** been working, and think about letting go of the tools that are just not working at all. So, what is outside the box for you?

Resources

Michigan Council for Exceptional Children awards scholarships/camperships (up to \$250) for student with an active IEP. This is an opportunity for students to apply for funding (up to \$250) to attend a summer camp in Michigan. These camperships are open to students with an active IEP, in need of financial support, and would otherwise not have an opportunity for a summer camp experience.

Nomination packets must be submitted by March 27, 2020. Notifications will be mailed by April 30, 2020.

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfvWaEz9Ojcpq1wH7MPWf4ljey4RbC5PjIebiVimHiyWqInYg/viewform>

Message from the Board,

Compared to prior years this winter has been very mild, allowing for lots of fun outdoor activities with my family. Hopefully you are also enjoying time with your family, and as you are making plans and loading up your calendar for 2020, I would like to take this opportunity to share with you the many events ASWS will hosting or supporting this year.

Our next ASWS social gathering will be on February 12th at Panera Bread in Holland at 6:30pm. This is a wonderful opportunity to meet other local families, share experiences, and learn more about available resources. On March 2nd there will be a Special Needs Mediation conference focusing on Communication in Special Education meetings/IEP's located at Herrick District Library in Holland from 6:30pm to 8:30pm. Another great conference coming up is the Michigan Council for Exceptional Children (MCEC), to be held March 6th through March 8th in Grand Rapids. There is a cost to attend that ASWS may be able to cover for members on an available basis. Typically, an attendee would select one of

the days to addend based on their available schedule (not necessary to attend all three days). On March 18th there will be an Access Expo for People of All Abilities at the Grand Haven Community Center from 4pm to 6pm.

On April 27th the START conference will take place at the Kellogg Center in Lansing. ASWS will have representatives at this event, and pending availability ASWS may be able to sponsor your participation in this event.

On May 2nd the Autism Network of Muskegon will be hosting a sensory friendly event called 2020 Lakeshore Touch a Truck where vehicles with typically loud and flashing lights (construction trucks, public service vehicles, etc.) will be available for individuals to touch with no sounds or lights flashing. Very sensory friendly.

This spring there will be several sensory friendly plays hosted by MSU theater department located at the Warton Center in East Lansing, MI. Available now on our website for tickets and additional details.

On May 16th ASWS will be hosting our annual Spring Fling awards banquet at Grand Valley State University. This is a wonderful event to recognize members of our community that make an impact on the lives of individuals and families impacted by autism. Registration for this event will be available soon on our website at www.asws.org.

On June 26th ASWS will be bringing back our annual Puzzle Run after a one-year hiatus to allow for a restructure of the event to now include a certified half marathon option for our runners. This event will continue to include both the 10-K and 5-K options as well as the new ½ marathon. All three races are certified runs. Registration will open by the end of February at www.asws.org.

On September 12th at Lakeshore Middle School in Grand Haven will be the site for a new event called Our Concert that will feature multiple performing artists and bands as well as amazing prizes for people who attend the event. More information will be available later this year regarding the lineup as well as tickets.

And finally, please mark your calendars for Saturday September 26th for the 2020 ASWS Golf Outing to again be hosted at Oak Ridge Golf Club in Norton Shore, MI. As our largest annual fundraiser, we really appreciate all of the sponsorship support, donated prizes, and all of our golfers and this amazing event. Always a lot of fun, on behalf of the ASWS Board we hope to see everyone at this year's event. Registration will open soon at www.asws.org.

As more information becomes available on the above events, we will do our best to keep everyone informed of new opportunities and additional details. Thank you again for your continued support for ASWS!

Dan Radley and the Board of Directors