



Wednesday, March 17, 2004

Jack's Place for Autism teams up with OU

Jack's Place for Autism, a metro Detroit nonprofit organization led by a powerful group of sports and community leaders, is working with Oakland University to create one of the nation's first campus-based centers designed to help meet the needs of families and children with autism spectrum disorders as they grow into adulthood.

Jack's Place plans to launch the initiative with OU's **School of Education and Human Services**. Oakland was selected because it is one of only two universities in Michigan approved to offer the autism endorsement to teachers and because of its history as a leader in autism, said Jim Price, Jack's Place Foundation president.

"This is a unique collaboration that benefits the university, the foundation and most of all, families and children with autism," said Mary Otto, dean of OU's School of Education and Human Services, who has joined the Jack's Place Board of Directors. "Oakland University has a long history of educating professionals about autism. This new collaboration with Jack's Place provides the faculty and staff with a distinct opportunity to rapidly advance their work in this important area.

"It is unusual for the goals of two groups to be so compatible. We are looking forward to a productive future where together we will create model training, education and service programs."

The Jack's Place Foundation will provide funding to hire staff to begin coordinating current programs and develop new projects that advance the goals of both groups. Additionally, the foundation and OU will work together to seek funds to construct, equip and staff a state-of-the-art autism center.

Proposed plans include:

- expanding OU's autism resource center and making it available for use by families and professionals;
- creating and customizing professional development programs for educators, nurses, law enforcement personnel and other professionals who serve individuals with autism spectrum disorder;
- greater integration of knowledge about autism spectrum disorders within OU's School of Education and Human Services' curricula;
- exploring potential job coaching, employment and internship opportunities within the autism field for OU students;
- identifying job and training opportunities for individuals with autism spectrum disorder;
- improving outreach of existing university programs, services and facilities to families with autism, and to professionals.

"This partnership provides us an opportunity to further promote the understanding and awareness of autism, while at the same time offering our students and faculty a unique opportunity to learn and serve the community," OU President Gary Russi said.

There are an estimated 1.5 million American children and adults with autism, a neurological disorder that affects how a person perceives and processes sensory information. Typically diagnosed in the first three years of life, autism affects boys at about four times the rate of girls. Children and adults with autism typically have difficulties in verbal and non-verbal communication, cognitive function and social interactions.

The number of people diagnosed with autism skyrocketed during the 1990s, climbing 172 percent from 1990-1999, according to a report to Congress by the U.S. Department of Education. By the end of this decade, experts believe that more than 4 million Americans will have been diagnosed with the developmental disorder, rapidly stretching an already-strapped education, health care and social services system.

"We are thrilled to see our dream becoming a reality," said Price, whose son, Jack, has autism. "Oakland has valuable expertise and a commitment to lifelong learning that fits well with the goal of Jack's Place to eventually create a

unique, multi-disciplinary center with links to community resources such as independent living facilities, community agencies, job training and other services."

Price, a catcher with the World Series-winning '68 Tigers and current broadcaster for the Detroit Tigers, founded Jack's Place for Autism two years ago. The group already has received support from the Tigers organization and Fantasy Campers as well as the Red Wings, Lions, Pistons and numerous of other metro Detroit organizations.

For more information on Jack's Place, visit the **Jack's Place for Autism** Web site or call (248) 443-7427.

SUMMARY

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