

# Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders

[www.childrensnational.org/CASD](http://www.childrensnational.org/CASD)



## Children's National: CASD CHAT

### Introduction

#### **Greetings, and welcome to another exciting issue of CASD Chat!**

In this issue, we will introduce you to our new Community Outreach Coordinator, Yetta Myrick, provide tips on how to enjoy the holiday season in CASD Cares, share upcoming community events in our Calendar of Events, and announce exciting career and research opportunities.

### CASD Welcomes Community Outreach Coordinator Yetta Myrick

Yetta Myrick is the mother of a thirteen-year-old son with autism and is the founder, president, and executive director of DC Autism Parents (DCAP), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in Washington, DC. Yetta holds a BA in Communication Studies from The Catholic University of America and for the past eleven years has worked as a Studio Technician at the Cable Satellite Public Affairs Network (C-SPAN).

Since 2013, Yetta has served as the chair of the Stakeholder Advisory Board for our Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) funded project, "A Community-Based Executive Function Intervention for Low Income Children with ADHD and ASD." She also serves on the National Youth Transition Center's Program Advisory Committee (NYTC-PAC), and is the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s Act Early Ambassador to the District of Columbia.



Clinical Research Coordinator, Meredith Powers, sat down with Yetta to reflect on her new career path.

**Meredith Powers:** Hi, Yetta, thanks for sitting down with me today! Let's start with learning about your background. Tell me how you ended up in this position.

**Yetta Myrick:** Thanks for having me, Meredith! I'm ready to get to work. It was a long road to this position. I started my non-profit, DC Autism Parents (DCAP) in the winter of 2008. I ran support group meetings, our DC Autism Buddies program, and became active in the DC autism community. However, I was doing this all while working as a studio technician at C-SPAN. A little over a year ago, the DCAP board decided that we need to take a break to reframe our organization as our children were growing older, and to be honest, we were trying to avoid burnout. During that break, I was accepted into the DC Advocacy Partners Program, a nine-month leadership development program focusing on disability policy. I came in contact with so many great people and learned so much. It was through this program that I decided I needed to be doing advocacy work full time. I knew that I wanted to change careers, but did not know what it would look like. Over time, the CASD position presented itself. I applied and the rest, as they say, is history.

**MP:** What is it like to be a parent of a child with ASD, now working in the field?

**YM:** Joining CASD is a total career change for me. It is a very exciting time, but I have to admit it is a little scary, too. It is one thing to do this on your own time but it is another to be compensated for doing the work you love. I hold myself to very high standards. My biggest challenge is finding a work-life balance. It is definitely difficult for me to keep work at work. I have all these ideas, and I really enjoy the things I'm doing. That being said, I am learning to discipline myself because everyone needs some downtime.

**MP:** Who is your role model and why?

**YM:** My role model in the autism community is Eustacia Cutler, Temple Grandin's mother. This is a woman who raised her daughter in the 1950s when the term *refrigerator mother* was used to blame a mother's "cold" personality for her child's autism diagnosis (a theory that has since been disproven). The odds were stacked against Eustacia, even given all her financial resources. Ultimately, she persevered and got Temple the help she needed. I met Eustacia at a Families Together Family Enrichment weekend in 2008, and she forever changed my life. She talked about how much easier it was to raise Temple in a time when manners and routines were the norm and how it is so much more difficult for parents today. Prior to leaving the event, I remember prompting my son, Aidan, who was 4 ½ at time, to say goodbye and look at her. Eustacia told me, "You don't have to make him look at me. It's fine. Don't force it. Sometimes it is too difficult for them to do that. Temple told me that." In that moment, I did not feel judged for what my son could not do; rather, I felt empowered to allow my son to be his true self. For this, I will forever be grateful.

**MP:** Tell me about a project or accomplishment that you consider to be the most significant in your career.

**YM:** Well, I have two projects that I consider to be significant in my career. The first is when I suggested Temple Grandin to be a guest on C-SPAN's BookTV InDepth Program in 2009, and was allowed to co-produce [the show](#). It was truly an honor to meet Dr. Grandin, as well as introduce her to the BookTV audience. My second accomplishment was being chosen as the Center for Disease Control (CDC) "Learn the Signs. Act Early." (LTSAE) Ambassador to the District of Columbia this past spring. My son did not receive early intervention services because I did not have access to information about how to monitor his developmental milestones. My hope is that I can help other parents learn the early warning signs of autism. I deeply believe that knowledge is power, and that an informed parent is an engaged parent. For this reason, LTSAE parent resources are invaluable. I am very honored and proud to promote this campaign.

**MP:** If we are sitting here a year from now celebrating what a great year it's been for you in this role, what did we (CASD) achieve together?

**YM:** A year from now, I hope that we have increased CASD's visibility in the DC metro area autism community. I also hope that we are recruiting record numbers of families to our research studies. Particularly, families who are diverse and reflective of the community we serve.

**MP:** To end our interview, I'd like to share with readers a clip that I think is really reflective of your mission here at CASD. Is that okay with you?

**YM:** Sure! This is a clip of my farewell speech at C-SPAN where I discuss my career transition from working in television to autism advocacy:



Yetta Myrick Career Transition Speech

If you are interested in speaking with Yetta and/or would like to discuss future community outreach opportunities for CASD, please contact [ymyrick@childrensnational.org](mailto:ymyrick@childrensnational.org) or 301-765-5488.

## CASD Cares

### How to Embrace and Enjoy the Holidays

As Thanksgiving and the winter holidays approach, anxiety starts to build over cooking a perfect Thanksgiving dinner and finding the right gift for your loved ones. This is the case for most of us, but add autism into the mix, and there is another set of concerns. How will my child enjoy the holidays with all the changes in routine?

Here are three tips to help you enjoy the holiday season with your family.

1. While the holidays are about togetherness, **find some time for you**. On a daily basis we are worried about our schedules and demands, whether it be therapies, doctor's appointment, etc. Take a moment and think to yourself, "When was the last time I spent time by myself doing something I truly enjoyed?" Take some time over the holidays to rediscover "Me Time." Remember you cannot advocate for your child if you are not recharging yourself on a regular basis.
2. **Learn when to say YES and NO**. As parents of children with autism, we often take on so much responsibility for our children's progress. This can be a blessing and a curse. If family members or friends offer to help, accept their offer. Remember you cannot, and should not, do everything yourself. Even though you may feel that you are the only one who will do it right, learn to give other adults a chance to help your child. With that said, if your family is asked to attend multiple holiday events, and you are concerned about how your child may react in different environments, it is okay to decline. Instead, use that time to . . .
3. **Enjoy your family**. The holidays are a time to come together as family, and celebrate one another. Have a family discussion about what each family member would like to do for the holidays, and how you can be flexible to include aspects of everyone's "wants" in your plan. That way everyone feels included and equally valued. Who knows, you may start some new family traditions!

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