

PRESS RELEASE

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St. John's Community Services Recognizes April as Autism Awareness Month

Washington, D.C. – During Autism Awareness Month, it is important to step back and reflect on the life of an individual living with autism, knowing that it represents only one story among thousands. Two years ago when Alexa's family first visited the St. John's Community Services (SJCS) classroom at an elementary school in the District of Columbia Public Schools, they didn't know what to expect. Alexa, a beautiful five-year-old with autism, was never in a classroom setting before and had little experience with other children. At the time, she exhibited little speech and language capability.

From the moment Alexa entered the classroom, she became animated at being part of this whole new experience—the colors of the room, the dolls, the games and learning exercises, the daily structure of activities, and the caring teachers and new classmates. Any early anxieties the family may have had were replaced by feelings of wonder, joy and excitement.

Only one year after enrolling in the SJCS class, Alexa showed growth in so many areas. She had learned to manage her personal belongings, eat meals independently, and remain attentive to classroom instruction. And most moving, according to her teachers and family, was that Alexa could speak simple phrases, sight read fluently, and have fun with her classmates and other students.

Accomplishments such as Alexa's are demonstrated every day by children and adults with autism and other disabilities who fully participate in community life with adequate support and the love of family, friends and neighbors with and without disabilities. SJCS remains dedicated to advocating for increased community opportunities, education, research and health care access for the rapidly expanding number of people with autism and other disabilities.

St. John's Community Services, founded in 1868, is a non-profit, non-denominational agency that is dedicated to *advancing community support and opportunities for people living with disabilities*. SJCS provides residential, employment, adult day and educational services to over 500 adults and children in Washington, DC, Virginia, Tennessee and Pennsylvania.

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