

## SPECIAL RECEPTION MARKS NATIONAL AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH

In recognition of National Autism Awareness month, The Help Group held a special reception at its Sherman Oaks campus on April 13 to honor individuals and organizations with a commitment to California's children and their families. The reception was generously sponsored by Keyes Automotive Group and attended by distinguished leaders, supporters and parents of children with an autism spectrum disorder.

To welcome guests, The Help Group's Village Glen Recorder Ensemble performed Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* and students from The Help Group's Young Learners Preschool for Autism delighted audience members with an enthusiastic musical performance of *Mr. Sun*.

In her opening remarks, Dr. Barbara Firestone, Help Group President and CEO and Vice Chair of the California Legislative Blue Ribbon Commission on Autism, emphasized the importance of a renewed resolve to ensure that children have every opportunity to fully realize their potential, "With growing public awareness and advocacy, breakthrough research and the development of more effective diagnostic and intervention approaches, autism and hope are no longer mutually exclusive – it is a new era of positive and potent change that is long overdue for the children affected by autism spectrum disorders."

State Senator Darrell Steinberg, who chairs the California Legislative Blue Ribbon Commission on Autism, shared his insights and perspectives regarding the State's commitment to autism issues. Joining him with special remarks was Assemblymember Julia Brownley. Together, they presented The Help Group with a resolution on behalf of the California Legislature, applauding The Help Group's efforts to ensure a bright future for all children, commending its exemplary leadership role in the field of autism and recognizing April 13, 2007, as The Help Group Autism Awareness Day in the State of California.

Wendy Greuel, President pro Tem of the Los Angeles City Council and representative of the 2nd district, recognized the collective impact of autism on families and shared in her commitment to help create bright futures for all children. She presented The Help Group with a resolution on behalf of the city, declaring April 13, 2007, as The Help Group Autism Awareness Day in the City of Los Angeles.

Dr. Louis Vismara, policy consultant to Senate President pro Tem Don Perata was acknowledged for his efforts on behalf of children and families living with autism. He is one of the five founding fathers of the M.I.N.D. Institute, serves on the First 5 Commission and was one of the driving forces that led to the establishment of the Blue Ribbon Commission. Together, Dr. Vismara and Dr. Firestone presented The Help Group's *Autism Leadership Award* to former Senator John Burton, who has spearheaded autism efforts at the State level for nearly four decades, and has



1. Gary H. Carmona, Dr. Barbara Firestone, Councilmember Wendy Greuel, Senator Darrell Steinberg, Assemblymember Julia Brownley
2. Senator John Burton, Stanley Zax, Senator Darrell Steinberg
3. Gary Cole
4. Mel Elias
5. Tami Clark, Jane Carlstrom, Ellen Belot
6. Dick Zelle
7. Susan Berk
8. Sheri Disney, Ken Simril, Dave Clark
9. Tim Redmond, Help Group Student, Hee-Sook Nelson, Yvonne Coopriider
10. Dr. Lou Vismara
11. Norton & Kristina Kell
12. Rachel Griffin, Dr. Barbara Firestone, Reagan Holmes

dedicated himself to humanitarian efforts on behalf of the children of California. In his acceptance remarks, Senator Burton praised the efforts of his fellow colleagues for their commitment to the children of California and expressed his ongoing dedication to create a roadmap for change. Dr. David Feinberg, Medical Director at Resnick Neuropsychiatric Hospital at UCLA-Semel Institute, announced the formation of The Help Group-UCLA Autism Education Research Alliance, a new initiative that will focus on autism education and treatment research.

The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf® was given special recognition for its outstanding philanthropic support of The Help Group and for hosting The Help Group's autism awareness campaign for the past six years in its 200 retail stores throughout the western United States. Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf Chief Operating Officer Mel Elias, along with Tami Clark, Ellen Belot and Jane Carlstrom accepted The Help Group's *Philanthropic Excellence Award* and presented a check for over \$287,000 to The Help Group.

Actor Gary Cole was named, Celebrity Parent Spokesperson for The Help Group. For many years, Gary has actively contributed to The Help Group's public information outreach efforts to promote the importance of early identification and intervention. As a father of a child living with autism, Cole spoke openly and candidly about his family's experiences and of his goal to bring the message of hope to other parents.

Kristina Kell, parent of a child at The Help Group's Young Learners Preschool for Autism, spoke from the heart about the difference early identification and intervention has made in the life of her son Norton and her family. Norton is completing his 2nd year at Young Learners and joined the reception to present his mother with flowers on stage.

The Help Group's Chairman of the Board, Gary H. Carmona, presented Gelson's markets with the *Autism Partner Award*. The Help Group was proud to salute Gelson's Markets for featuring The Help Group's, *There is Help, There is Hope: Learn the Early Signs of Autism* campaign during the month of April in its 18 Southern California stores. Yvonne Coopriider, Director of Marketing and her colleagues Tim Redmond and Hee-Sook Nelson, accepted the award on behalf of Gelson's.

Dr. Firestone welcomed MGA Entertainment to The Help Group family and acknowledged MGA for its generous gift in support of The Help Group's efforts. Rachel Griffin, Public Relations Manager and Reagan Holmes, Public Relations Coordinator from MGA accepted artwork made by the children of The Help Group as a gift of appreciation.

To pay tribute to all of the day's special guests and honorees, students from the Village Glen and Bridgeport Schools sang *What a Wonderful World* and closed the reception with a warm thank you to everyone in attendance.

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