

**THE HELP GROUP PROMOTES AUTISM AWARENESS WITH
CELEBRITY PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS BEGINNING IN APRIL**

Sherman Oaks, CA (April 1, 2005) – The Help Group, one of the nation's largest and most progressive education and treatment centers for children with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs), today announced the launch of its 2005 National Autism Awareness Campaign with six public service announcements that begin airing today.

The PSAs feature well-known actors who have children with ASDs including **Ed Asner**, *West Wing's* **Gary Cole**; *Smallville's* **John Schneider**, and *Joan of Arcadia's* **Joe Mantegna**. In addition, *Battlestar Galactica's* **Edward James Olmos**, a long-time friend of The Help Group, hosted a Spanish-language version of the PSA. **Dr. Bruce Hensel**, NBC's Los Angeles health correspondent also hosted a special PSA for the NBC family of stations.

Typically characterized by language delays or other communication problems, as well as difficulties with social skills and repetitive behaviors, the incidence of ASDs is growing at an alarming rate affecting as many as 1 in every 166 children. The goal of the PSA campaign is to promote early identification and intervention by reaching out to parents, families and the community at large with current facts about ASDs.

"Early identification and intervention makes the critical difference for many children with autism spectrum disorders, enabling them to make significant strides in their development," said Dr. Barbara Firestone, President and CEO of The Help Group. "The goal of our Autism Awareness campaign is to reach out to families with information that can have a major impact on the lives of children with autism and to promote greater awareness and understanding in the community at large."

(more)

THE HELP GROUP CELEBRITY PSA CAMPAIGN LAUNCHES

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"The real key to helping families who may be confronting the challenges of autism is to let them know that there is help and there is hope," said Joe Mantegna. "There are many other parents who have traveled the same road who are willing to lend their support."

"There's no better way to convey that message than through a public service campaign that reaches people in their living rooms and really opens their eyes to the facts about autism and what can be done for the children," added Ed Asner.

The PSAs will begin running today throughout California including Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco and Sacramento, and will be rolled out nationwide throughout the coming months.

About The Help Group. Founded in 1975, The Help Group is the largest, most innovative and comprehensive nonprofit organization of its kind serving children with special needs related to autism, Asperger's disorder, learning disabilities, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, mental retardation, abuse and emotional problems. Its six specialized day schools offer pre-K through high school programs for more than 1,100 students on a daily basis. Its wide range of mental health and therapy services, child abuse, foster family and residential programs extend the organization's reach to more than 5,000 children and their families each year. The Help Group's state-of-the-art schools and programs are operated by its more than 700 employees on four major campuses in the Los Angeles area. The Group is inspired by its belief that dignity, hope, opportunity and love are the birthrights of all children. For more information about the work of The Help Group, please call 818-779-5212 or visit www.thehelpgroup.org

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