

ISAND

INTEGRATED SERVICES FOR AUTISM AND NEURODEVELOPMENTAL DISORDERS

“Right from the start we sensed a difference”

In early 2011 Daniella Laise and Michael Nitsopoulos were thrilled to learn they were expecting their first child. When baby Nathan was born in October it was the end of a years-long journey to parenthood that included many moments of despair and three miscarriages.

However by Nathan’s first birthday, his parents suspected something was amiss.

“Nathan began flapping his hands a lot,” Daniella recalls, describing repetitive movements, often known as “stimming”, that can be early signs of autism. “He also just repeated back the words we spoke instead of initiating words on his own.”

When at age two Nathan was still not forming words independently or showing an interest in playing with other children, Daniella and Michael insisted his doctor refer him for an autism assessment.

The confirmation of Nathan’s autism devastated them. “That day we felt like



we were walking into an abyss, with no understanding of the diagnosis or how to help our child,” says Daniella. “We wondered if he would ever have friends, get married, or have a happy life.”

A member of Nathan’s diagnostic assessment team recommended they contact ISAND.

“Right from the start we sensed a difference,” recalls Daniella. “The ISAND staff focused on the things that were great about our son. We were told, ‘Don’t you worry. Nathan will be the best little boy he can be!’ Nathan began sessions with a variety of ISAND specialists. Six months later, Nathan finally spoke the words Daniella had dreamed of hearing: “I love you Mama!”

Now, after two years at ISAND, Nathan is thriving. He initiates play and his language skills are at grade level. “As an added bonus,” says Daniella, “with the help of an occupational therapist, he went from being unable to jump to doing flips on the trampoline in gymnastics class!”

The family has come a long way since the bleak days following Nathan’s diagnosis.

“We know that Nathan will have struggles,” says Daniella, “but ISAND has made a world of difference. They have enabled us to engage with our child. What an incredible gift!”

Daniella Laise and Michael Nitsopoulos with their children Nathan (left) and Evan.

Welcome friends!

We are excited to share our inaugural newsletter with you!

Each child, youth and young adult we are privileged to serve is filled with amazing promise. We are honoured to be part of their journey as they realize their potential and grow into their unique roles in their families and communities. We are delighted to share their stories with you.

In this and future newsletters we will also include updates about our services and programs, new initiatives, clinical leadership and research, events, and

much more. As ISAND continues to evolve and grow, our goal is to keep you informed about all the exciting developments and inspire you along the way.

Please feel free to share this newsletter with others who you think would like to learn more about our important work. As well, let's connect on social media!

Here's to promise and potential!



Wendy

Dr. Wendy Roberts
Clinical Director

David

David Gray
Executive Director



Elpida Autism Foundation Gala shines with hope

The 3rd annual Elpida Autism Foundation gala in November raised an amazing \$50,923 for ISAND.

This wonderful event raises funds to support autism awareness, research and development, and programs that help young people living on the autism spectrum. Since its inception, the Elpida gala has raised more than \$250,000! ISAND was honoured to

be a co-beneficiary of the gala, along with the Autism Research Centre at the Bloorview Research Institute.

“Elpida” is the Greek word for hope, which shone through in every aspect of the gala. It was an inspiring example of what can be achieved when people with a vision come together to make it a reality. Congratulations to Themy and Paula Koutrakos, James Koutrakos and the gala committee for

their tremendous leadership and to everyone who contributed to the gala's success.

Photo: Representatives of the Elpida Autism Foundation visited ISAND to present their generous donation. (From left) ISAND Board member Jason Arbutck, Themy D. Koutrakos, Paula Koutrakos, ISAND Executive Director David Gray, James Koutrakos, Nick D. Zafonitis, and Peter Kerasiotis.

Shared vision leads Jill Gotlieb to ISAND

Advocate and philanthropist Jill Gotlieb has been a part of the ISAND story since its very beginning. Jill has seen the impact that ISAND has on the lives of children and young adults with autism and their families, including her own.

"I got involved with ISAND because I've personally seen the difference integrated intervention makes," says Jill. "I shared the vision of trying to make things better for the lives of people living with autism, which can financially and emotionally devastate an entire family. The idea of ISAND is to offer hope; I love that."

Jill met Dr. Wendy Roberts (ISAND's clinical director) when she treated her son at SickKids Hospital. "Wendy told me that she and a group of clinical and autism experts were forming a non-profit organization to provide integrated and coordinated services from early infancy right through to young adulthood, all under one roof," recalls Jill. "I got excited and wanted to help and be a part of this."

Jill committed substantial time and effort to help develop ISAND. Jill,

together with her mother, Carol Silverstein, provided significant funding to help ISAND get off the ground. That initial support made a major difference to the organization and their ongoing financial support enables ISAND to serve an increasing number of families.

"I got involved with ISAND because I've personally seen the difference integrated intervention makes," says Jill.

"I was always travelling place to place to see different specialists, often with a screaming child in the back seat and hours spent in traffic," says Jill. "Plus, there was the prohibitive expense of monthly team meetings with the therapists to discuss my son's progress. This was all going to be alleviated by all services being in one centre. The concept was so amazing to me. All the clinicians and doctors are the best of the best, so I feel my family foundation is making an important and worthy investment by donating and continuing to support ISAND."



David Gray, ISAND's Executive Director, credits Jill's commitment with helping the organization get to where it is today. "As a board leader, champion and supporter, Jill's dedication to building services and filling gaps has never wavered. Her support and encouragement has been essential to ISAND achieving our current success."

Since launching in August 2013, ISAND's integrated team of developmental pediatricians, psychologists, clinicians, and therapists has grown to serve hundreds of families and children each year. That's quite a legacy!



ISAND Clubs Program coming soon!

ISAND is excited to be launching its Clubs Program this Spring/Summer. Through this program, teens and young adults with ASD and other neurodevelopmental disorders will have the opportunity to enjoy social and leisure experiences. If you have any new or gently used video games, equipment, TV screens, or board games to donate, please contact Ali Dussault, Clinical Services Manager at ali.dussault@isand.ca. Programs like these are made possible through your support and generous donations. Thank you!



ASK THE PROFESSIONAL

Members of our clinical team answer questions from parents.



Dr. Vicki Rombough

Dr. Wendy Roberts

“I’m having a hard time understanding how much of my child’s behaviour relates to autism, and how much is anxiety. How common is anxiety with autism, and how can I help him?”

Response provided by psychologist Dr. Vicki Rombough and developmental pediatrician Dr. Wendy Roberts, Clinical Director.

Anxiety is a frequent and recurring problem in all ages of people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). It is more common in children with ASD than in neurotypical children. Roughly half of children with ASD will have at least one anxiety disorder, compared to about 10 per cent of typically developing children. In addition, anxiety increases with the age of a child. It also appears to be more prevalent in children who have both higher intellectual ability and milder symptoms of ASD, bringing the prevalence of anxiety closer to 80 per cent for these children.

There are many different reasons why individuals with ASD might be more likely to experience anxiety. Sensory sensitivities may be related to increased anxiety in children with ASD. Deficits in social skills, combined with physiological over-arousal, may also contribute to social anxiety in people with ASD. It is often impossible to separate autism symptoms that can be increased by anxiety from symptoms of anxiety alone.

It may be helpful to meet with a professional who has expertise in both anxiety and ASD to help identify the factors involved and to discuss ways to help your child to cope better. Often people who are anxious will try to resist or avoid situations that make them feel anxious. They may ask many questions about the situation to help prepare them for what to expect and/or try to control the situation to make it more predictable. When they are anxious, individuals with ASD may show increased symptoms of ASD. These changes in behaviour are often a clue that the person may be feeling

anxious or overwhelmed in a given situation.

The good news is that, once identified, we can help children with ASD learn coping strategies to help to manage their anxiety better. Cognitive-behaviour therapy, mindfulness-based therapies and parent coaching related to anxiety can be helpful.

For certain young people, when behavioural strategies are failing or their anxiety is too impairing for them to benefit from psychotherapy, we consider using anxiety-reducing medication (alone or in combination with psychotherapy). This is the same medicine used for people with anxiety who don’t have ASD. Often the doses used in ASD are significantly lower, since people with ASD may be more sensitive to medication. We understand parents want to try all other routes of treatment first before considering medication. When using medication, is important to work with a doctor experienced in treating anxiety in people with ASD.



Girls Night Out supports ISAND

The 2016 Girls Night Out event, organized by Action 4 Autism, raised \$42,000 to support ISAND services and programs for families living with autism. Action 4 Autism founder and ISAND Board member Jennifer Koffman (centre) and event committee member Carrie Habert visited the ISAND office to present a cheque to Executive Director David Gray.

"I feel very supported by a whole team of people who are helping me give Miller what he needs."

– Robyn Way, mom of ISAND client

Watch the video featuring Robyn and Dave Way, who share the impact of ISAND's services and programs on their young son and entire family. <https://www.isand.ca/videos>



Welcome new ISAND team members!

We are pleased to welcome the following individuals to our integrated team of clinical professionals.



Ali Dussault came on board in November as our Clinical Services Manager, focusing primarily on managing and developing our programs. As well, Ali supports our behavioural program through consultations, therapy and program supervision. Most recently Ali served as Clinical Director at Montreal's Gold Centre. Among her many accomplishments during her six-year tenure, Ali created, developed and managed the centre-based program for young children with ASD and developmental disabilities as well as the Centre's community-based ABA program for school age children and young adults. Ali holds her M.Ed. in Special Education, with a concentration in Autism and Developmental Disabilities from the University of British Columbia. She subsequently received her certification as a Board Certified Behaviour Analyst.



Speech and Language Pathologist **Amanda Cox** joined ISAND in January. In addition to providing assessment and therapy for speech and language clients, Amanda is supporting our social peer program and contributing to the development of other programs. Most recently, Amanda practised in Australia, where she worked in an allied health team to treat children with a variety neurodevelopmental disorders. Among the programs Amanda developed is a SwimEd program for children with disabilities (drawing on her experience as an elite athlete in water polo), and a workshop series for childcare providers, schools, and parents. Amanda has also worked as an ABA therapist. Amanda holds a degree in speech pathology from the University of Sydney and a post-graduate certificate in Autism Studies from Griffith University.



Amanda Brown also joined ISAND in January as a Behaviour Therapist working with our multidisciplinary team. Amanda, a Board Certified Behaviour Analyst, brings a decade of experience in the behaviour therapy field. She was a supervisor at STAR of CA, an ASD and mental health services organization in California. While there Amanda designed and implemented advanced methodologies for children with autism and related disorders. Amanda holds her MA in Exceptional Student Education from the University of West Florida and a B.Sc. in Psychology from California State University.

ISAND's teaching role grows



Sabrina Fuenzalida (left), a recent speech-language pathology master's program graduate, receives mentoring from Shelley Mitchell, PhD.



Dr. Cynthia Goldfarb (left) and Dr. Amber Makino, Developmental Pediatric Fellow.

Did you know that ISAND is becoming known as a teaching centre in both speech-language pathology and pediatrics?

New graduates of master's degree programs in speech-language pathology are mentored by Shelley Mitchell, the team lead for ISAND'S speech services and programs and an annual guest lecturer at the University of Western Ontario and the University of Toronto. ISAND's mentorship program enables graduates to complete their initial practice period as per the requirements of the College of Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists of Ontario. Since 2013 ISAND has mentored four individuals and looks forward to welcoming two new speech and language mentees this summer. In 2016 ISAND received the Speech-Language & Audiology Canada 2016 Award of Excellence for Interprofessional Collaboration. This award recognizes the contribution of an interprofessional team to improve client outcomes in the field of speech-language pathology through collaboration and teamwork.

Under the leadership of Dr. Cynthia Goldfarb, the team lead for Developmental Medical Care, ISAND provides teaching and mentorship across all levels of pediatric medical education, including family medicine, pediatrics and developmental paediatrics. Cynthia is also the Head of the Community Section of Developmental Paediatrics in the Division of Developmental Paediatrics at the University of Toronto.

ISAND offers an ideal setting for clinical learning. Its integrated team approach to comprehensive care provides the chance to learn from and connect with clinicians in a variety of other disciplines, such as occupational therapy, psychology, counselling, developmental pediatrics, and speech and behavioural therapy. Clinicians who spend time at ISAND see first-hand the unique benefits of this approach, one that they will hopefully carry forward in their career.

Give a Latte campaign inspires generosity

December's online *Give a Latte* campaign by iCapital inspired hundreds of people to forgo their morning coffee and instead make a donation to support ISAND. The \$23,392 raised, a combination of funds contributed by generous donors and a \$10,000 match from iCapital, will enable ISAND to support even more families living with autism so that young people can reach their full potential.

The *Give a Latte* campaign, now in its third year, is inspired by 18-year-old Anthony, whose ISAND support worker Amy Kirsh is helping him build social skills, develop interests, and engage with the world. Anthony and Amy visited iCapital to accept the cheque from Domenic Sgambelluri and Anthony's aunt, Diane Capobianco. Thank you iCapital!

PHOTO: Anthony proudly displays a cheque for the \$23,392 raised through the iCapital Give a Latte campaign.





No fun spared at Bowl for Autism!

With the help of generous donors and 230 enthusiastic participants, ISAND's 3rd annual *Bowl for Autism* last fall raised more than \$50,000.

Many thanks to all our supporters and sponsors, including Starbucks, Dave and Robyn Way, Kingpin sponsors Fidelity Investments, Shane Nixon/HollisWealth, The Sharpe-Way Group/Scotia Wealth Management, Silvercore Properties and TD.

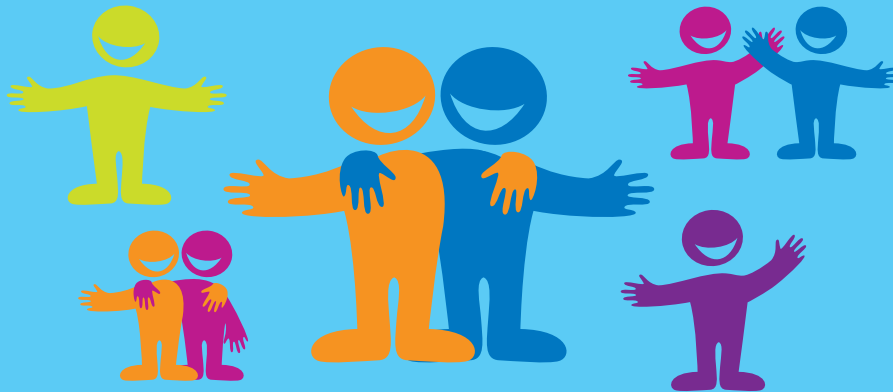
Additional support was provided by Argyle Public Relationships, Booyah, CBRE, Cresa, Mico Systems, Microsoft, Oxford Learning – Lawrence Plaza, Pennylegion Chung LLP, Pizza Pizza and PracticePerfect.

A fundraising incentive prize was donated by WestJet through its *WestJetters Caring for Our Community* program.

Congratulations to our top fundraiser Shane Nixon, who won the WestJet fundraising incentive prize. Shane raised an amazing \$10,150 in pledges!



We embrace the uniqueness of everyone living with autism. Today and every day.



World Autism Awareness Day – April 2, 2017

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PRESENTED BY CYNERGY MECHANICAL

Join us!

Friday, April 21, 2017

at 6:30 p.m.

Fontana Primavera Event Centre
77 Woodstream Blvd. Vaughan ON

Tickets \$125 each
Tables of 10 for \$1250

Learn more, explore sponsorship opportunities, or reserve your tickets at www.cynergymechanical.ca/isand-charity-gala

Net proceeds to benefit ISAND services and programs for autism!



Your support makes a difference.

Donations from generous supporters enables ISAND to provide professional care to even more families living with autism. Please consider making a gift today! www.isand.ca/donate. To explore giving opportunities tailored to your unique philanthropy goals, please contact David Gray, Executive Director, at 416-224-5959 or david.gray@isand.ca

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