



From: **AUTISM SPEAKS**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**AUTISM SPEAKS TO CELEBRATE WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY  
WITH DAY-LONG SERIES OF INTERNATIONAL EVENTS ON APRIL 2**

**New York Stock Exchange Bell-Ringing, Shafallah Center Celebration and  
“Walk on the Web” Highlight Global Awareness Initiative**

NEW YORK, NY (March 11, 2008) -- Autism Speaks, the world's largest autism advocacy organization, today announced a series of international events to mark the inaugural celebration of World Autism Awareness Day, an unprecedented global effort to heighten awareness about a disorder affecting millions of individuals and families around the world. The April 2 events will take place on three continents and in venues ranging from the floor of the New York Stock Exchange to local bookstores and the worldwide web, and are expected to generate significant national and international media coverage.

Autism Speaks Co-Founders Bob and Suzanne Wright, along with other families affected by autism, will kick off World Autism Awareness Day with a visit to the New York Stock Exchange to ring the opening bell. Ceremonies will also take place at the Shafallah Center for Children with Special Needs in Doha, Qatar during the first two weeks of April. Last month, Autism Speaks and the Shafallah Center announced a new partnership designed to increase global autism awareness and speed the pace of autism research worldwide. On World Autism Awareness Day, new autism research activities will commence at Shafallah.

Throughout World Autism Awareness Day – and during Autism Awareness Month taking place in April – people from around the world will take part in the Autism Speaks “Walk Now on the Web.” Modeled after Autism Speaks’ successful Walk Now for Autism fundraising events and sponsored by Toys“R”Us, the “virtual walk” will enable anyone with Internet access to join together to build community, learn more about autism and raise funds for programs and research. Toys“R”Us serves as national sponsor of more than 75 Walk Now for Autism events across the United States. Walks are also taking place in Canada and Great Britain.

Barnes & Noble bookstores in ten major U.S. markets will host Storytime events to mark World Autism Awareness Day. Celebrities and others will read from books that encourage compassion and respect for individuals with autism and other disabilities. Some 500 Barnes & Noble stores will also host autism Storytime events during Autism Awareness Month.

The day will conclude with a special performance of Feld Entertainment’s Ringling Brothers & Barnum and Bailey Circus at Madison Square Garden in New York City

tailored to children with autism and their families. The arena will feature quiet rooms where children can take a break but still enjoy the show. In addition, the children will be able to interact with the large animals prior to the performance in a supervised environment. The event signifies the launch of a yearlong partnership between the “Greatest Show On Earth” and Autism Speaks.

The Sundance Channel will host the television premiere of the acclaimed documentary *Autism Every Day* on April 2. The film, which debuted at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival, documents a typical 24-hour day in the lives of eight families struggling to raise children with autism. *Autism Every Day* shows how developmental skills that most parents take for granted – a child’s ability to brush his teeth or communicate a need – can prove enormous hurdles for a child with autism. At the same time, the film captures the unconditional, powerful love these parents have for their children.

Autism Speaks UK will hold an “Authors for Autism Research” character auction on eBay beginning March 23 and ending on April 2. Bidders will be vying to have their name given to a character in a future work by a leading UK author. Among the authors participating are RJ Ellory, Ken Follet, Marti Leimbach and Esther Freud. Visit [www.autismspeaks.org.uk](http://www.autismspeaks.org.uk) for more information. Isobel Bayonaras, President of the World Autism Organisation, will be speaking at the meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Autism at the House of Commons on April 2nd on international developments in autism.

World Autism Awareness Day plans for Canada include efforts to involve national media to bring attention to this historic day. Federal and provincial government representatives are being encouraged to wear a puzzle piece pin and officially recognize April 2 in the House of Commons and provincial legislatures. Autism Speaks Canada is planning a number of awareness events throughout April, including an awareness night with the Toronto Rock Lacrosse Team and an autism-friendly movie day in partnership with *Today’s Parent Magazine* and Movies for Mommies.

“Autism knows no geographic boundaries – it affects individuals and families on every continent and in every country,” said Suzanne Wright, co-founder of Autism Speaks. “The celebration of World Autism Awareness Day is an important way to help the world better understand the scope of this health crisis and the need for compassion and acceptance for those living with autism. This remarkable day – the first of many to come – promises to be a time of great hope and happiness as we work to build a global autism community.”

Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Missned of Qatar supported the campaign for a World Autism Awareness Day through the current 62<sup>nd</sup> UN General Assembly Session, garnering consensus support from all United Nations Member States. On December 18, 2007, the United Nations General Assembly, by unanimous consent, passed the resolution of the Third Committee designating April 2 as World Autism Awareness Day in perpetuity starting in 2008.

To learn more about these and other events Autism Speaks has planned for World Autism Awareness Day, visit [www.worldautismawarenessday.org](http://www.worldautismawarenessday.org).

**About Autism**

Autism is a complex brain disorder that inhibits a person's ability to communicate and develop social relationships, and is often accompanied by extreme behavioral challenges. Autism spectrum disorders are diagnosed in one in 150 children in the United States, affecting four times as many boys as girls. The diagnosis of autism has increased tenfold in the last decade. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have called autism a national public health crisis whose cause and cure remain unknown.

**About Autism Speaks**

Autism Speaks is dedicated to increasing awareness of autism spectrum disorders, to funding research into the causes, prevention and treatments for autism, and to advocating for the needs of individuals with autism and their families. It was founded in February 2005 by Suzanne and Bob Wright, the grandparents of a child with autism. Bob Wright is Vice Chairman, General Electric, and served as chairman and chief executive officer of NBC Universal for more than twenty years. To learn more about Autism Speaks, please visit [www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org).

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