



# News Release

## UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

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### **MILITARY FAMILIES CELEBRATE AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH**

**CHARLESTON AIR FORCE BASE, S.C.** – April is Autism Awareness Month, and several military families from the Charleston area gathered April 22 to discuss how autism affects them.

Adrienne Rousseau, wife of Tech. Sgt. Cy Rousseau, 437<sup>th</sup> Aerial Port Squadron, and the South Carolina representative for Unlocking Autism, said 10 years ago, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated one in every 10,000 children were affected by autism. Two years ago, that estimate changed to one in 500. Today, the estimate is one in 300, with some areas seeing one in 150 children affected with this disease.

According to Unlocking Autism's Web-site, [www.unlockingautism.org](http://www.unlockingautism.org), autism is a developmental disability that generally appears in children between 15 and 20 months of age. In most cases, the child is progressing normally, and then begins to regress losing speech, social skills and physical abilities.

While there are varying degrees of severity, most children completely withdraw into a world of their own. Boys are more often affected than girls.

Adrienne became a state representative for Unlocking Autism for a variety of reasons, one being her 5-year-old son, Xander, who has autism.

"I wanted to do something that would help in a significant way to raise awareness, not just locally, but through out the state," Adrienne said. "I didn't want to focus only on education, but also on legislation, appropriate health care and research funding."

She contacted families from Charleston AFB and from Naval Weapons Station Charleston so they could share their stories with other military families.

"Our four families aren't the only military families here affected by autism," Adrienne said. "But we want people to know this is a problem affecting many families."

Senior Airman Matt Ancell, 437<sup>th</sup> Aircraft Generation Squadron, and his wife, Leanna, are raising a 4-year-old son, Bryce, with autism.

"If people are interested, they should ask," Leanna said. "Don't just stare. I'd rather they ask. People may think he's being a bad kid when he throws his fits, or that I'm a bad mom because he only eats from a bottle. What they don't know unless they ask is, if he doesn't have a bottle, he has a feeding tube."

Another family echoed Leanna's remarks.

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“Not every child with autism is ‘like Rain Man,’” said Brandy Piccard, wife of Petty Officer 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Nicholas Piccard.

The Piccard’s son, Eric, 4, is what many doctors refer to as a “high-functioning” autistic. This has caused some problems for the Piccards when it comes to what treatments insurance will cover.

Mary Fairbairn, wife of Navy Commander Edward Fairbairn, said she’s seen what the Piccards are dealing with in her 10 years of caring for her autistic son, Tommy.

“He didn’t talk until he was 4,” Mary said. “We’ve come a long way, but we have paid literally thousands and thousands of dollars for the type of therapy he needs.”

Tommy did very well with a one-on-one style of therapy called Applied Behavioral Analysis, according to Mary.

“TRICARE covers traditional treatments, but not the more educational treatments,” Mary said.

She said the individually designed treatment plan that worked for her son is pivotal, since every child with autism is different and is affected by the disease in different ways.

Adrienne said she’d like to start a support group for siblings of autistic children. She also organizes a support group for families with disabled children, which meets once a month. For more information, contact Adrienne at 207-0629.

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