



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
August 28, 2007 · rev. 4/14/10

Nonprofit Shows Grade School Students How to Be Good Friends to Children with Autism

WAUKESHA, WI — When faced with the prospect that a 500-student elementary school may have as many as five children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), administrators and teachers may scramble to prepare. Educators may attend continuing education courses or brush up on their understanding of the pervasive developmental disorder in order to be equipped properly for the challenges, which are being introduced increasingly into regular education classrooms as children with autism are mainstreamed.

But what about the typically-developing student body? Who is preparing them for their experiences with differently-abled children? As districts face ever deeper cuts in spending, programs such as elementary school guidance counselors are going by the wayside. Privacy regulations restrict the manner of information administrators can share with other students' families.

Chelsea Budde (Waukesha), mother of an 11-year-old son with both ASD and bi-polar disorder, wanted to share information with her son's classmates and their parents before he was reintroduced to them after being away at a day treatment facility for more than a year. She found it difficult to disseminate that knowledge regarding her son's behavior effectively.

And Denise Schamens (Brookfield), also mother to a son with an ASD, faces similar road blocks when it comes to educating people about autism. "It's true that young children are generally friendly to students of all abilities, but it's not fair to expect them to know how to be friends to children with disabilities if no one is teaching them how," she says.

Budde and Schamens parlayed their families' struggles into Good Friend, Inc., a nonprofit corporation dedicated to creating autism awareness, teaching acceptance, and fostering empathy among typically-developing elementary school peers. Their original, professionally-produced video was launched in 2007, supporting Good Friend's proprietary positive, interactive curriculum for children in grades K-6 and their educators.

"The U.S. Department of Education knows that disability harassment is a problem in our schools, says Budde. "We're hoping our program will eliminate bullying in the upper grades by promoting understanding while the children are still young."

Good Friend is currently offering peer sensitivity workshops, general student assemblies, and staff in-services to elementary schools. For more information, contact Budde by phone at 414-510-0385, or email chelsea@goodfriendinc.com.

###

