



Weekend Fundraisers in the River Region Bring Awareness to Autism

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by [Danielle Wallace](http://www.alabamaneews.net/bios/danielle-wallace-troy-newsroom-reporter/) (<http://www.alabamaneews.net/bios/danielle-wallace-troy-newsroom-reporter/>)

Parents at two autism events Saturday say the annual fundraisers do more than raise money. They also raise awareness, which is at least equally important.

One involved a 5K run in Montgomery and the other, cooking good food. The goal of both was helping people dealing with autism, like Carla Easterling and her son Isaac.

“We go to school with people with autism. We live in communities with people with autism. We work with people with autism and we need to know about autism and how to best support them,” says Carla Easterling.

Easterling says the situation in Alabama has improved since the legislature approved a bill mandating insurance coverage for autism therapy.

“We’re super excited about hb284 where we will now have insurance coverage to provide the therapies that they need,” says Easterling.

Just like the Autism Society of Alabama's efforts to raise money for autism, one group in Prattville is doing the same each year to keep the doors of one local school open for children with disabilities and learning differences. Another parent dealing with autism is Jana Wood.

"The tuition at New Hope Academy is very small so they rely on this event," says Jana Wood.

That's why the Prattville group holds raffles with prizes and sells homemade food, to make it possible for children with autism and other special needs to attend the school.

"We serve all different types of learning disabilities. Mental and physical disabilities and also just kids that don't thrive in the local school system. They come to us where they have individualized learning plans," says Crystal Moody, Director of Development at New Hope Academy.

"Every year it's grown from the very first year we probably made three thousand dollars or to last year at about thirty-four thousand dollars, so the response is incredible and people have been so generous over the years."

Advocates for autism say no matter how far they get with awareness, their fight continues for their children and others.

"We're always working to better our communities locally and statewide," says Easterling.

People at Prattville's autism awareness event say that the money raised will support New Hope Academy for the entire year.

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