

## Dozens attend autism risk and safety management training in Lee County

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Published: August 11, 2017, 6:16 pm



OPELIKA, Ala. — Friday morning, nearly 100 members of the law enforcement community and first responders from Alabama and Georgia attended the third annual Autism Risk and Safety Management Training.

For the event organizer, Luanne Helms, her 18-year-old son, Jake, served as the inspiration for the event. Jake has non-verbal autism and was diagnosed when she was two years old. A few years ago, she wanted to bring training to first responders in her community. Since then, the event has grown in attendance each year, and it something she is very proud of.

“It’s one of the most important things I do in the autism community,” Helms said. “If this can help one family that needs a first responders assistance, it is well worth it.”

Those in attendance learned effective approaches on how to interact with those who have autism.

Dennis Debbaudt led the training session. Debbaudt has a 34-year-old son with autism. He has been conducting these training sessions since 1995 when he provided the first autism training at the Detroit Police Academy.

“As a parent of young man who has autism, this is a mission for me,” Debbaudt said. “When I learned this information didn’t exist in 1991, I made it a mission to find out about it and report what I’ve found and share it with others.”

Lee County Sheriff Jay Jones calls this training crucial for all members of law enforcement.

“The more knowledge we have as first responders in regards to the specific needs of this particular group in our population, then the better service we can provide,” Sheriff Jones said. “It’s certainly something I think all public safety, all first responders need to avail themselves of.”

Helms said she hopes to offer another session in a couple of months and is working to be able to lead training sessions herself.

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