

**Dan River Autism Awareness 5k**  
**[www.danriverautism5k.org](http://www.danriverautism5k.org)**

**PRESS RELEASE**  
**For Immediate Release**

**DANVILLE, VA (JUNE 1, 2012)** – On Saturday, April 21, over 500 residents of Danville, Pittsylvania County and surrounding cities and counties gathered at the Riverwalk in Danville to participate in the first annual Dan River Autism Awareness 5k.

Due to requests from participants, the donation deadline was extended through May 31, 2012. Participants raised approximately \$22,000, far exceeding the event fundraising goal of \$15,000. A portion of the funds was donated to Autism Speaks, a national autism advocacy and research organization. The majority of the funds was used to establish the Autism Education Fund through the Community Foundation of the Dan River Region.

“The Dan River Autism Awareness 5k was a first-time, one-day event, but with the endowment of the Autism Education Fund, its impact on our community will be permanent,” said Lauren Mathena, a member of the event planning team.

The purpose of the Autism Education Fund is broadly defined as “to support autism education-related programs or organizations benefitting individuals, families, educators and the community.” As an endowed fund, the Autism Education Fund will generate interest on principal, which can then be dispersed into the community as grants. Non-profit organizations are eligible to apply directly to the Community Foundation for these grants. Individuals or for-profit organizations may access the fund if a non-profit organization agrees to serve as a fiscal intermediary.

“The Community Foundation is excited to partner with the many volunteers and supporters of the Dan River Autism Awareness 5K in the creation of the Autism Education Fund. We look forward to working together to help support area programs or organizations focused on autism,” said Debra Dodson, Executive Director, The Community Foundation of the Dan River Region.

Fundraising was only the secondary goal for the Dan River Autism Awareness 5k. The primary goal of the event was to raise awareness about autism in the Dan River Region. After finishing the 5k or 1-mile course, participants joined the post-event autism celebration. Building Blocks Center for Autism and The Hughes Center for Exceptional Children provided educational information about autism. Yard signs containing facts about autism were located between the sign in area and the 5k course. Participants were encouraged to decorate a puzzle piece to share personal reasons for participating in the event.

Courtney Adams is a member of the planning team and the program director of Building Blocks Center for Autism. Adams said, “We are thrilled with the fundraising amount, but we are most excited about the opportunity to build the sense of community among local individuals, families, educators and others impacted by autism.”

Building Blocks Center for Autism was a key sponsor of the event. The Hughes Center for Exceptional Children, Danville Regional Medical Center, Center for Pediatric Therapies, and around 15 other local organizations joined them.

Heather Showalter is a member of the planning team and the Autism program director at The Hughes Center. Showalter said, “The Hughes Center is extremely proud to have been a part of such an amazing community event. Autism awareness is so very important as it helps to ensure vital research funding efforts and increased treatment availability for individuals living with Autism. Everyone at The Hughes Center is looking forward to being a part of next year’s event.”

“Planning is already underway for the second annual Dan River Autism Awareness 5k, which will be held in April 2013. We hope to increase participation and fundraising, and make next year’s event an even more empowering experience for our local autism community,” said Mathena.

The community is invited to learn more about the Autism Education Fund at a reception to be held June 13<sup>th</sup>. For attend, please contact Lauren Mathena at (434) 836-5883 or [info@danriverautism5k.org](mailto:info@danriverautism5k.org).

To learn more information about the Dan River Autism Awareness 5k, visit <http://www.danriverautism5k.org>. To make a contribution directly to the Autism Education Fund, contact the Community Foundation of the Dan River Region at (434) 793-0884 or visit <http://www.cfdr.org>.

### **About Autism**

Autism is a complex neurobiological disorder that inhibits a person's ability to communicate and develop social relationships, and is often accompanied by behavioral challenges. Autism Spectrum Disorders are diagnosed in one in 88 children in the United States. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have called autism a national public health crisis whose cause and cure remain unknown. (Source: <http://www.autismspeaks.org>)

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For additional information about this press release, please contact Lauren Mathena at [info@danriverautism5k.org](mailto:info@danriverautism5k.org) or 434-836-5883