

# The Autism New Jersey Fund

## The Cristo Family

December 2011

Dear Autism New Jersey Family and Friends:

To us, Ava was a super model baby. She developed typically and on-target. She crawled, smiled, babbled and engaged us with eye contact, cuddles and kisses. Like all parents, we were bursting with pride, especially when she booked her first modeling job as an infant. She ate like a champ, loved to swing at the park, slept through the night and played peek-a-boo and "so big!" At 12 months, she had words: duck, baby, mama and "hi!"

At 15 months, Ava regressed significantly. Our child drifted away from us and retreated into her own world. She stopped responding to her name. She screamed when we put her on the swing at the park. Her words were gone. She did not notice other people in the room. She woke in the middle of the night, sometimes for hours. Her food choices narrowed and she began some unusual and repetitive behaviors (hand flapping, mouth tensing and running back and forth) that amused and puzzled us at the same time.

I took her to "Mommy and Me" gym class one afternoon and I watched the other children alongside Ava. They were playing and laughing and listening to the teacher. They engaged with their moms while Ava was licking the floor and cried when the noise level increased. I left the class and put her in the car where she calmed down. I sat in my car and cried because I knew this was not a bad day, but that there was something really wrong with our daughter.

Her pediatrician immediately referred us to the New Jersey Early Intervention System and we began evaluations. After a two month wait, we got an appointment with a developmental pediatrician who diagnosed Ava with autism at 19 months. We left the doctor's office feeling lost. What do we do now? How do we help our little girl? We knew nothing about autism other than what we learned from *Rain Man!*

A family member gave us the helpline number for Autism New Jersey and we made the call. We are so thankful that we did. It was then my husband and I began what I call, "Autism College," our autism education provided by Autism New Jersey.

Autism New Jersey applauded us for addressing Ava's developmental concerns early and set us on a track to get Ava the best quality services, research insurance plans that cover autism under the state mandate, find

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800.4.AUTISM

[www.autismnj.org](http://www.autismnj.org)

### Gift Amount

- \$2,500 (Hero)
- \$1,000 (Supporter)
- \$500 (Friend)
- \$250
- \$100
- \$50
- Other: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

### Give to Autism New Jersey

Thank you for supporting Autism New Jersey and our efforts on behalf of individuals with autism spectrum disorders, the families who love them and the professionals who work with them.

First Name\* Middle Initial Last Name\*

Company/Organization (if gift is from a business or institution)

Address\*

City\* State\* Zip\*

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\*Indicates required information

Please make this gift anonymous.

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the right school program and prepare for her adult future financially and emotionally. Autism New Jersey directed us to parent support groups that helped us not only cope, but also learn of the struggles of parents with teenage and adult children with autism. I attended the Autism New Jersey Annual Conference where my eyes were opened to various topics such as Individualized Education Plans, estate planning, potty training and the Division of Developmental Disabilities. I left better prepared to be the best advocate for my daughter.

When you have a child with autism, you get a lot of unsolicited advice on “what cures autism.” Through Autism New Jersey’s publications and expertise, we learned how to find the scientifically proven therapies and weed out approaches that could be harmful or ineffective. Autism New Jersey taught us to learn about Ava’s needs and know what is best for her. Autism is not a cookie-cutter disorder; it varies from individual to individual.

Our super model Ava booked her first modeling job when she was just an infant. Now, at age 3, she has retired from modeling and switched careers to autism advocate. She has appeared on WABC-TV’s Dr. Jay Adlersberg, NJN’s Sarah Lee Kessler autism segment and WPIX’s Autism Awareness Month coverage. Just after her third birthday, she entered an excellent program and has made considerable strides toward independence. Her future is bright – and Autism New Jersey made it possible because of the knowledge and support they gave us.

Early intervention and ongoing parent education are key to helping individuals with autism lead productive and independent lives. Please contribute to Autism New Jersey so more families like ours can learn about autism and become the best advocates for their children.

Sincerely,

*Kim Cristo*  
Kim Cristo and Family



**Our Mission:**

Autism New Jersey is a nonprofit agency committed to ensuring safe and fulfilling lives for individuals with autism, their families, and the professionals who support them. Through awareness, credible information, education, and public policy initiatives, Autism New Jersey leads the way to lifelong individualized services provided with skill and compassion. We recognize the autism community’s many contributions to society and work to enhance their resilience, abilities and quality of life.

**Where the funds go:**

Funds from our Annual Appeal support Autism New Jersey’s important work on behalf of the autism community, including:

**Helpline**

Our toll-free helpline (800.4.AUTISM) that thousands of families utilize each year is now no longer supported by government funds. We are relying 100% on private donations from friends like you to ensure your calls and information requests can be answered in a timely manner by knowledgeable, compassionate professionals.

**Public Policy**

Our 2012 public policy agenda includes advocating for issues of vital importance such as housing and behavioral crisis services.

Help us help families like the Cristos. Give today!

**Payment Method**

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Donate online at [www.autismnj.org](http://www.autismnj.org). Questions? **800.4.AUTISM** or e-mail [donate@autismnj.org](mailto:donate@autismnj.org)