

FIRST NATIONAL PROGRAM LAUNCHED TO COMBAT DIVORCE RATES IN AUTISM COMMUNITY

Nixa, MO – Today the National Autism Association (NAA) announced its launching of The Family First Program, a comprehensive national marital counseling program to combat divorce rates within the autism community. The new initiative offers couples with autistic children immediate access to marital counseling, and a grant program for those unable to afford it.

Caring for an autistic child often can result in marital hardship and isolation, but with the help of OnDemand services, couples don't have to leave their home to seek guidance. "Many couples have a difficult time going to counseling due to limited childcare options," says parent and NAA Executive Director Rita Shreffler. "We partnered with the OnDemand company Luminent Counseling so that couples have access to trained, certified therapists without needing to leave their home."

NAA also hopes general awareness about the rising divorce rates will spark positive dialogue within the autism community. "The main goal of Family First is to keep families together," says NAA Board Member and parent Lori McIlwain. "For many, this could mean providing a stronger foundation for their children to progress, two-income potential, and less stress on one parent."

NAA is presently conducting a national divorce survey of autism families. Several organizations and news outlets have used the often-quoted autism divorce rate of 80%--NAA hopes to confirm or update that percentage before referencing it in its program materials.

The new Family First program will work in tandem with NAA's Helping Hand Project. Since 2004, Helping Hand has provided tens of thousands of dollars to autism families in need for medical and therapy interventions.

The Centers for Disease Control now estimates that 1 in 150 children are on the spectrum, which means every 20 minutes a child is diagnosed with autism.

HOW THE FAMILY FIRST PROGRAM WORKS:

Couples can visit

<http://www.nationalautismassociation.org/familyfirst.php>. There, they will find information about the program and can choose from a listing of certified marriage counselors. Rates are discounted for NAA visitors, but if financial aid is needed, couples can download the Family First Grant

Application at

<http://www.nationalautismassociation.org/familyfirstapp07.pdf>.

To make a tax-deductible donation to Family First, please visit

<http://www.nationalautismassociation.org/proddetail.php?prod=FamilyFirstDonation>

For more information or ways to volunteer, write to

lori@nationalautism.org.

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