**Raising Autism Awareness Day & Knight**

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**California, MD**- April is Autism Awareness Month. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is one of the fastest growing developmental disorders in the country. One in 68 children are diagnosed with autism—and boys are five times more likely than girls to have autism. There’s no medical detection or cure for ASD—but across the country groups are working to educate the public on the disorder.

Personalized Therapy in California is hosting its 10th Annual Autism Awareness event Saturday, April 8. This year’s theme is Raising Autism Awareness Day and Knight. “The event is something we’ve been doing for years. It is to help people become aware of something that has been around for a while but it is starting to shine and we want to invite everyone, especially our families, that may not know much about autism. We just want to bring the community together,” explained Megan Lawrence, Human Resources coordinator. “It’s also to cast a more positive light on children with autism, not autistic children. It’s just something they’re born with, it doesn’t make them who they are.”

Owner Melanie Lohwater said there are many misconceptions about people with autism, particularly children. “Many people think children with autism are just bad. A child doesn’t want to be bad. There are hidden reasons for their behavior. They really do want to please people.” Jennifer Tennyson, a board-certified assistant behavior analyst, explained autism is a spectrum because it affects everyone differently. “Children with autism are not the same. They do not all have aggressive or ‘bad’ behavior. Our job is to promote their positive behaviors while decreasing unwanted behavior. That’s what we’re trying to educate the community about.”

Personalized Therapy provides a variety of services for children and adults. In particular, they offer Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) services for kids with autism. Kristi Getson, clinical director, stated, “ABA therapy is the only researched-based intervention that is effective for children with autism. After receiving ABA therapy, 40 to 60 percent of children with autism can become undisguisable among their peers.” Tennyson, who is the founding member of the Behavioral Health Division at Personalized Therapy explained how it works. “It’s evaluating the science of behavior and then focusing on increasing appropriate behavior and decreasing unwanted behaviors. We do that by building on skills and teaching new skills in areas of their deficiency—whether it be social, behavioral or language skills.”

Lawrence said ABA services provides one on one coordination with different skills. “We work with toddlers to teach them how to walk or brush their teeth—or with teenagers who needs the skills to set their daily goals for homework or preparing to tests.” At Personalized Therapy, they can combine ABA therapy with other needed therapy. “If children have other needs, such as speech therapy or occupational therapy, they’re able to get it at one place. There’s comradery between our staff and they work hand in hand with each other to make sure the patient is receiving everything they need while they’re here.” Lawrence noted.

The company provides ABA therapy in office, at home, in daycares and even in some private schools. Personalized Therapy has two locations, California and Prince Frederick.

At this weekend’s event, Lohwater said there will be important resources to introduce to the community. “We’ll have several resources to help people familiarize themselves with what’s available out there and they can meet our staff. Many people have someone in their life with autism and this can help them understand a little more about the disorder.”

Families can also enjoy jousting, bounce houses, raffle, bake sale and a silent auction. “The silent auction is a big part of the event. We visit businesses in the tri-county area and ask them if they’d like to make a basket for a donation and a lot of them donate willingly.” Lawrence said.

The event is being hosted at a new location this year. It will be at Bollywood in California at 23418 Three Notch Rd from 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. Lawrence encourages families to come out and enjoy the day, “Come out and help us raise community awareness. Children, whether they have autism or not, they’ll enjoy this event. Even if you don’t have family members with autism, you never know if you’ll be able to help out someone who does have autism. It’s going to be a fun event for the entire family. We want to shine a positive light on autism.”

For more information, click here [https://www.facebook.com/events/209715149511770/](https://www.facebook.com/events/209715149511770/)

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