

# Helping Children with Autism & Developmental Disabilities, The Kids Foundation Funds Education and Therapy Services



Matt Ross is president and founder of The Kids Foundation in Cresskill, New Jersey, a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization that has raised more than \$2 million for organizations that work with children with developmental disabilities and autism.



BY MILES Z. EPSTEIN  
EDITOR, COMMERCE

One percent of all boys and one in 166 total children born today develop autism. Statistically, these numbers are more than significant.

**M**ATT ROSS IS PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER OF The Kids Foundation in Cresskill, New Jersey, a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization that has raised more than \$2 million for organizations that work with children with developmental disabilities and autism. With an ever-increasing number of children in the tri-state area being diagnosed every year, The Kids Foundation is providing financial support to organizations that provide education and therapy services for these children.

The Kids Foundation provided seed capital and helped to fund the development of Columbia University's Developmental Neuropsychiatry Center, a world-class, multi-disciplinary clinic at the forefront of treating children with autism and other developmental disabilities. To date, the foundation has provided \$250,000 in total support to the center.

Ross, who became an activist for autism causes after his son was diagnosed in 1999, is chairman of the board of the Paul Green School of Rock Music, LLC. He has held executive positions with Clear Channel Communications, Emmis Broadcasting and CBS Radio, and has been widely recognized as one of the most accomplished leaders in the media business. In fact, Ross was responsible for leading some of the most significant radio industry turnarounds in the country, including New York's Classic Rock Station Q104.3.

Today, he has committed himself to the mission of

The Kids Foundation, and wants to make a positive contribution to the efforts to help children with developmental disabilities and autism. For this special section on "Caring for Kids with Special Needs," *COMMERCE* magazine interviewed Matt Ross about his charitable efforts and The Kids Foundation.

**COMMERCE:** *Why did you get involved in the effort to help children with autism? What was your motivation for helping others?*

**MATT ROSS:** I moved back to New York in 1999 to work as General Manager of Q104.3 Radio. At the time, my son was recently diagnosed with autism and I had a sense that there was a massive need in the community for resources. I had the radio station resources to get the word out and begin the task of helping others.

**Q.** *What is The Kids Foundation, and why is it important to you and others concerned about children with autism?*

**A.** We raise money for organizations that provide therapy and educational services for children with developmental disabilities. Autism is the fastest growing disability among children and it is growing at epidemic rates. Since my son was diagnosed 10 years ago, the incidence rate has grown tenfold.

*continued on page 34*

*continued from page 32*

**Q.** *What is autism, and what causes it?*

**A.** Autism is a spectrum disorder that impacts people in a variety of ways. The benchmark challenges impacting people with autism are significant gaps in speech and basic socialization. Today, the causes remain unclear. While there are many assumptions, there are an equal number of studies that refute a bunch of those ideas. Unfortunately, the disorder seems to potentially have multiple causal agents and it seems that some of those are environmental.

**Q.** *What needs to happen? What type of research is called for, and how can companies help?*

**A.** One percent of all boys and one in 166 total children born today develop autism. Statistically, these numbers are more than significant. If we continue on the pace we are on, it may be one in 10. The cost to society down the road is going to be staggering and I have been telling everybody this for 10 years. It always gets down to money. This hasn't been a "sexy" cause until Bob Wright created Autism Speaks and unfortunately it takes someone with his access to make stuff happen. Now, everyone needs to help and fast.

**Q.** *The 8th Annual Kids Foundation Golf Classic is one of your fundraisers. What can you tell us about this year's event?*

**A.** The Kids Foundation Golf Classic returns for the eighth straight year. It's being held Monday, August 13, 2007 at the Westchester Country Club in Rye, New York—one week before Tiger Woods and the best players in the world converge to play the first FedEx Cup Qualifier. There will be a special after-golf performance from the Paul Green School of Rock All Stars—the hottest teenage musicians in the country. Past event participants have included Gilbert Gottfried, The NY Knicks City Dancers, The Characters, the Smithereens, Southside Johnny, Dickey Betts and Gary "U.S." Bonds and Michael McDonald.

**Q.** *What are some of the issues parents face when they have children in their family with autism?*

**A.** You name it...nothing is predictable. You can go from bliss to crisis at any moment.

**Q.** *What are some of the resources that are available to help families deal with autism in New Jersey and nationally?*

**A.** There are more today than ever. We have worked to support a number of programs throughout New Jersey. Go to our Web site at [www.thekidsfoundation.com](http://www.thekidsfoundation.com) and look at our grant recipients. Check out COSAC as well. We have also helped to create the Developmental Neuropsychiatry Center at Columbia University and they are fantastic.

**Q.** *Are there any bills in the legislature or in Congress that your organization is supporting that will help in the battle against autism?*

**A.** The past year saw the funding of the Combating Autism Act and it was a significant step led by my friends at Autism Speaks. We support the coalition that has now developed into Autism Speaks and they act as our industry lobbyist.

**Q.** *What are the signs that parents and family members can use to recognize that a child might be autistic?*

**A.** If a child is too independent, not responding to social cues and/or has significant speech delays, get them checked out ASAP and make sure you are not in denial.

**Q.** *What type of questions should they ask a doctor?*

**A.** Most doctors are better trained today than before...go to a developmental pediatrician. Tell them your concerns and push for answers.

**Q.** *What type of issues do they need to address if they learn their loved one has autism?*

**A.** It is very lonely and you can lose yourself in it. Find a support group and talk to people who have walked in these shoes. It is the best way to learn. The issues are so complex that they impact every aspect of your life.

**Q.** *What role does The Kids Foundation play in comparison to Autism Speaks?*

**A.** We are tri-state based and we don't fund research. We fund real, local organizations that need money for computers, therapy rooms, equipment, etc. We help kids get what they need to grow and we are small and easy to access. We are also 100 percent volunteers...we don't pay one salary. ■

