



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Cleveland Heights resident recognized for her significant impact on the local autism community

Cleveland Heights resident Mia Buchwald Gelles is being inducted into the 10th class of the Beachwood High School Gallery of Success on April 11 for her transformative contributions to the autism community through Milestones Autism Resources, a nonprofit organization that she co-founded 12 years ago.

"I am thrilled to be honored by my high school for the contributions that Milestones has made," Gelles said.

As Operations Director, Gelles makes sure everything runs smoothly at Milestones. Her expertise in non-profit management is a big reason why a small staff of 10 can serve more than 1,500 individuals a year through educating, coaching and connecting family members and professionals throughout Northeast Ohio who are impacted by autism.

Gelles' impact on the autism community started when her son was diagnosed with autism. At the time, in 1998, autism was a relatively new word and there were few resources in the area for parents or professionals who wanted to learn more and help their children.

"Figuring out what interventions might help was a long, hard and lonely search," Gelles said. "Each night I would read anything I could to see if it looked promising. As the mom, I felt that unlocking the puzzle of my child's development was ultimately my responsibility."

Eventually there was some hope. Among other things, Gelles found help in a speech therapist's office, where in 2001 she met Ilana Hoffer Skoff, another mother struggling with similar issues. After extensive research, they had both experienced success with Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA), a system for prioritizing and systematically teaching skills one step at a time.

They soon realized they weren't unique, that there were hundreds of other families in the region struggling with these issues and not finding help. There were hundreds of teachers working with these children who could really use practical and effective strategies.

Gelles and Skoff decided to start being the help that they had needed. They launched Milestones Autism Resources, then known as Milestones Autism Organization, with a conference in August 2003 and 400 people showed up.

“Ilana and I still laugh ... we had no idea if anyone would show up,” Gelles said. “The turnout for the Conference was a clear indication that a resource like Milestones was a necessity in our area.”

Over the past 12 years, Milestones has remained at the forefront of addressing the needs of families impacted by autism and its Annual Autism Spectrum Disorder Conference has continued to be an invaluable resource for family members and professionals. This year, the Conference will be June 18-19 from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at the Cleveland I-X Center. To learn more or register, visit milestones.org.

Milestones focuses on educating and coaching for family members and professionals in evidence-based practical strategies. Its conferences, workshops, professional development, referral calls and online resources connect the autism community with vital information, and each other. More than 8,000 people have been served by Milestones since 2003, and its website, milestones.org, provides more than 900 autism resources.

Before Milestones, Mia Buchwald Gelles worked at Environmental Health Watch (EHW), a nonprofit organization that provides information about Northeast Ohio environmental problems and resources. There she did extensive project management, custom database design and website maintenance.

Along the way, Gelles also found time to raise a family including stepdaughter Ruth, 29, son Noam, 18, and daughter Shani, 16. She has taught a Torah study/learners service for 14 years at Beth El-The Heights synagogue and leads services and plays shofar. Her admiring husband Joe calls her a woman of valor and wisdom, and adds that success can come to those who aren't looking for it - successful people just do what is needed.

About Milestones Autism Resources

Founded in 2003, Milestones Autism Resources, previously known as Milestones Autism Organization, helps individuals with autism throughout Northeast Ohio reach their unique potential and is the first call for help at each transition of an individual's life. Milestones focuses on educating and coaching for family members and professionals in evidence-based practical strategies. Its conferences, workshops, professional development, referral calls and online resources connect the autism community with vital information, and each other. More than 8,000 people have been served by Milestones since 2003, and its website, milestones.org, provides more than 900 autism resources.

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