

**THE HELP GROUP NATIONAL AUTISM FOUNDATION WITH FOCUS ON AUTISM AWARENESS,
EFFECTIVE EDUCATION AND TREATMENT IS LAUNCHED IN SACRAMENTO**

**President Pro Tem Don Perata, Speaker Fabian Nunez, The Help Group
and Actor/Parent Ed Asner Promote Autism Awareness at the State Capitol**

SACRAMENTO (April 13, 2005) – Today at a press conference at the California State Capitol, The Help Group's President and CEO Dr. Barbara Firestone, joined by California Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata; Speaker of the California Assembly Fabian Nunez; and actor and parent Ed Asner, announced the launch of *The Help Group National Autism Foundation*. With one of every 166 children today having some form of an autism spectrum disorder, The Foundation has been created to promote greater awareness, early identification, early intervention, and education and treatment opportunities for children, adolescents and young adults with autism.

"Autism calls for our collective attention, efforts and resolve to unlock its mysteries, to provide the most effective education and treatment for the children and to give hope and support to the families," remarked Firestone. "Today we are honored to join President Pro Tem Perata and Speaker Nunez who share the commitment to helping children with autism realize their fullest potential."

The Help Group National Autism Foundation will achieve its goals through its ongoing national autism awareness campaigns; the dissemination of The Help Group's innovative educational and therapeutic models that incorporate current and emerging research; professional and parent education seminars, national conferences and publications; expanded graduate and post-graduate professional training programs; ongoing collaborative endeavors with public policy makers at the local, state and federal levels; affiliations aimed at bridging research and practice with major universities such as its current partnership with UCLA's Neuropsychiatric Institute.

President Pro Tem Perata and Speaker Nunez spoke of the alarming increase in the numbers of children being diagnosed with autism and the importance of educational opportunities, like those provided by The Help Group, the nation's largest and most progressive education and treatment center for children with autism.

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"The astounding increase in diagnoses of children with autism means that virtually everyone in California knows a family member, friend, coworker or neighbor struggling with the challenges surrounding autism," Perata said. "As a 16 year veteran of the classroom I am committed that all children in California receive the best possible education and I am pleased to work with the Help Group and Speaker Nunez to help make that a reality for children with autism."

"We know that there is no cure for autism, but that early intervention is the best antidote for leading a child with autism into a world of possibility and away from a world of solitude," commented Nunez. "Supporting outstanding organizations like The Help Group is part of the answer to this great challenge."

Actor Ed Asner, who is a parent of a 17 year-old boy with an autism spectrum disorder, spoke today of the lack of information and services that were available to children with autism when his son was growing up.

"There has been a tsunami in the incidence of autism around the world with no scientific or miracle cures in sight," remarked Asner. "The Help Group programs and its people are the ones who understand how to impact the lives of these children every day and help parents help their children as well, which is why it is critical that we help support and expand the foundation that this organization has carefully built."

Asner, along with *The West Wing's* Gary Cole, *Smallville's* John Schneider and *Joan of Arcadia's* Joe Mantegna, all fathers of children with autism spectrum disorders, hosted public service announcements on behalf of The Help Group.

Also adding to today's remarks was Joanne Palmer, mother of 4-year-old Carson who has autism. At the press conference Palmer related her family's experiences and how all of their lives were changed after Carson started at The Help Group's Young Learner's Preschool.

Palmer remarked "Carson has made progress beyond our expectations at The Help Group. Before, life was a challenge. But by identifying Carson's needs and addressing them while he is still young, we can now look forward to a bright future for our son."

Today's press conference was held at the State Capitol where The Help Group's touring photo exhibit called "All About Me" is on public display throughout the week. Comprising 28 black and white photographs and personal narratives created by Help Group students, this compelling exhibit gives a glimpse into the lives of children coping with autism.

About The Help Group. Founded in 1975, The Help Group is the largest, most innovative and comprehensive nonprofit organization of its kind serving children with special needs related to autism, Asperger's disorder, learning disabilities, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, mental retardation, abuse and emotional problems. Its six specialized day schools offer pre-K through high school programs for more than 1,100 students on a daily basis. Its wide range of mental health and therapy services, child abuse, foster family and residential programs extend the organization's reach to more than 5,000 children and their families each year. The Help Group's state-of-the-art schools and programs are operated by its more than 700 employees on four major campuses in the Los Angeles area. The Group is inspired by its belief that dignity, hope, opportunity and love are the birthrights of all children. For more information about the work of The Help Group, please call 818-779-5212 or visit www.thehelpgroup.org