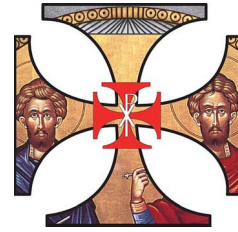


National Philoptochos Society 2014-2016 Committee Report



Autism Assistance Fund

Chair: Barbara Vittas
Liaison: Jeannie Ranglas
Members: Marian Catechis
Toula Georgiopoulos
Frances Levas
Anne Michals
Katherine Siavelis

The Autism Assistance Fund was established during the July 2008 Biennial National Convention in Washington, D.C. This discretionary fund was created to enable Philoptochos to heighten awareness of autism and to provide assistance and support to persons within the autism spectrum.

Autism and autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are both terms for a group of complex disorders of brain development. Autism is a neurological disorder that affects development in areas of social interaction and communication skills. The most obvious signs of autism tend to emerge between 12 and 18 months of age. ASD is estimated to affect more than 2 million individuals in the U.S. and statistics show that prevalence rates have increased 10 to 17 percent annually in recent years. Health officials attribute the increase largely to better recognition through wider screening and better diagnosis.

What we need to remember is that autism is a lifelong developmental disability. Children and adults with autism are unable to relate to others in a socially meaningful way, and as these children become adults, their ability to develop friendships is impaired as is their capacity to understand people's feelings. People with autism can often have accompanying learning disabilities. They face challenges in developing vocational skills and finding employment as well as developing their independent living skills.

Since National Philoptochos established the Autism Assistance Fund, we have learned much and continue to learn about the effects of ASD. I hope this summary will be of some help in enlightening our membership to the social challenges faced in assisting families and individuals in dealing with this disability so that Philoptochos can take a role in increasingly effective assistance.

Philoptochos chapters support this fund with a discretionary contribution in the month of February. Since 2009, National Philoptochos has donated \$168,530 from the Autism Assistance Fund to organizations and individuals.