

The Bradley *Bulletin*

News and notes for our friends and supporters.

Winter 2024

FAMILY'S ANNUAL GIFT ON ANNIVERSARY PAYS FORWARD BRADLEY'S LIFECHANGING CARE

It was a Google search that would change their son's life and the family as a whole.

"We were a family in crisis," says Karen O'Dell, "and we isolated ourselves without even realizing it."

Karen and Bill live in Allegany, New York, nearly 500 miles from Rhode Island. They have three beautiful kids, Josh, 29, Katie, 26, and Ethan, who is 22. At three, Ethan was diagnosed with autism.

For years, Ethan demonstrated few behavioral issues, struggling instead with communicating and self-stimulation. He had special support at school and was in a traditional classroom. At age eight, everything changed.

Seemingly overnight, Ethan's frustration tolerance disappeared, and he began showing aggression toward family. Things fell apart at school. The family couldn't go anywhere for fear of his meltdowns.

There were appointments with psychiatrists and community programs and attempts with medication. Nothing worked.

Then, Ethan had his most troubling episode while Bill was away for work. It led to a 10 day hospitalization, followed by three months at a program in Pittsburgh. But days after returning home, they were "back at square one." Then Google turned up Bradley Hospital.

Karen scheduled a visit in spring 2011 and the O'Dells made the long trek to the Ocean State. From the moment they saw Bradley's Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities, they knew it was "different."

Ethan was admitted to inpatient, beginning a 10 month treatment stay. Karen, a school counselor and autism specialist, took a leave to temporarily relocate to Rhode Island.



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—Karen O'Dell

Bradley's team of experts worked on Ethan's aggression and instilling coping mechanisms. He was treated like a kid, first and foremost, and enjoyed the playground and picking vegetables from the hospital's garden.

Ethan was a complex case, but he made tremendous progress and in late 2011 began the transition process to return home. Karen had a nearby apartment and there were Bradley-supervised visits, then visits of just the two of them. Ethan was doing great.

He returned to New York with his Bradley team providing the tools he needed to thrive in his home environment. They made videos

for his school and classroom and lists of resources and OT equipment that helped him. "It was amazing what they did," Karen says. "The transition process was key to where we are today."

It's been more than a decade since Ethan was treated at Bradley and exhibited aggression. His parents call him their "miracle, with the kindest heart."

In 2016, the couple began a tradition of donating to Bradley each year on their wedding anniversary. It's made in gratitude of the hospital "healing" and "restoring" their family.

"We were broken—I don't think we could have continued with that level of stress," says Bill. "Bradley gave us our life back."

"People need to know Bradley is amazing," adds Karen. "The place is a one-of-a-kind treasure that puts kids and families at the center of everything they do."



STUDYING THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON MENTAL HEALTH

Is climate change adversely impacting mental health? Mounting evidence suggests it is—particularly in children—and a noted Bradley Hospital psychiatrist agrees.

“Five years ago, if you told someone that climate change affects mental health, they’d say, ‘What are you talking about?’” observes Joshua Wortzel, MD. Dr. Wortzel chairs national committees on climate mental health at the American Psychiatric Association and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and has spoken to national news media and briefed the US Congress on this topic. “Now, when we show them data, it’s ‘Whoa, I didn’t think about that!’”

Climate change affects mental health in three main ways. There are direct effects of heat on the brain, such as a four to six percent increase in violence for every 1°C increase during heatwaves. There are indirect effects, such as higher rates of ADHD, lower IQs, and developmental disorders in children exposed to airborne pollutants from forest fires and fossil fuels. There are also psychological effects, including trauma from more frequent and severe natural disasters and existential distress that 84 percent of young people feel about climate change.



Currently, Dr. Wortzel’s research focuses on two areas: analyzing the clinical effects of climate distress on children using data from a cohort of 300 Bradley patients; and investigating the link between rising temperatures and suicidality using data from approximately 7,000 Hasbro Children’s emergency room patients.

“This is still burgeoning science,” Dr. Wortzel concludes. “But few other places are studying it as empirically as we are at Bradley and Brown. It’s exciting to help lead the way.”

‘INCREDIBLE’ PARENT PROGRAM PROMOTES POSITIVE CHILD DEVELOPMENT

For more than a decade, Bradley Hospital has offered The Incredible Years®, a program that helps parents of children presenting with challenging behaviors, ages six to eight, reduce their kids’ aggression, address behavior problems, and increase social competence at home and in school.

“Parents often feel hopeless and isolated because they’ve used the tools they have in their belt and aren’t seeing results,” explains Melanie Stark, PhD, facilitator of The Incredible Years. “Our program promotes positive parenting strategies and helps caregivers feel more confident and less stressed by strengthening their capacity to effectively manage and ultimately change their children’s maladaptive behaviors—replacing them with ‘positive opposites’ or adaptive ways to get needs communicated and met in the world. The intervention is truly prevention focused, designed to maximize children’s future successes.”

The Incredible Years employs a suite of interactive tools to help create healthier family dynamics, from instructor-led, skills-building activities to educational and training videos, as well as more open forum discussions.

“The structure and teaching of the groups are fairly consistent,” Dr. Stark points out, “but we also have the ability to individualize the program based on what needs a constellation of participants are presenting. For example, if several parents in a group also have older kids at home, we can introduce interventions which take that factor into consideration.”

In addition to the direct benefits The Incredible Years provides to participating families, the program also offers a meaningful, evidence-based training opportunity for Brown University psychiatry residents and fellows—supporting their clinical roles and extending their reach throughout the community for years to come.



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For information about the Bradley Hospital Foundation, please contact Anne Morton Smith at 401-432-1451 or asmith18@lifespan.org.

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