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July 8, 2010

Celebrating the Grand Opening of the Southeast Missouri Autism Center

July 7th marked the grand opening of the Southeast Missouri Autism Center for Diagnosis and Treatment. The work to get this center up and running began in 2007, and the many families who will be helped by the Center are truly a cause to celebrate.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, one in 91 children in this country is diagnosed with autism, and each one of those children has a family who wants nothing more than to get help for their child. This fact guided the work to make the Southeast Missouri Autism Center a reality. In 2007, \$2.6 million was secured for the Center. Another \$494,000 in operating funds for the center has been annually included in the budget since 2008. That funding allowed the center to move into its new facility last December and begin providing autism treatment and diagnosis to Southeast Missouri families.

The completed Center is an 11,582-square-foot facility next to Southeast Missouri State University at the old Washington School at the corner of Fountain Streets and Mill Streets in Cape Girardeau. The center has numerous therapy areas equipped with special observation areas — this includes rooms designed specifically for music therapy, occupational therapy, and life-skills training. In addition to specializing in autism diagnosis and treatment, the center is equipped with conference and training space for parent education, staff meetings, and university instruction.



The Southeast Missouri Autism Center.



Making sure resources are available in local communities is one way to help families dealing with autism, but we also successfully addressed another issue that was making it hard for families to get treatment. House Bill 1311 passed this year and was recently signed into law by Governor Nixon. The legislation requires health insurance companies to cover treatment for autism spectrum disorders. Out of the top 10 childhood neurobiological disorders, autism was the only one not covered by health insurance. The bill also restricts health carriers from refusing to issue or renew coverage based solely on an autism diagnosis. The insurance coverage includes a physician or psychiatrist's referral of ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis) therapy — up to \$40,000 per year for individuals younger than 19.

If you know someone who might need help or have questions there are many local groups available for support. Their contact information is available below:

- **Autism Center for Diagnosis and Treatment** : 611 N. Fountain St., Cape Girardeau, MO 63701
(573) 986-4985

<http://semo.edu/autismcenter/>

- **The Tailor Institute:** 611 N. Fountain St., Cape Girardeau, MO 63701
(573) 339-9552

www.tailorinstitute.org

- **TouchPoint Autism Services:** 611 N. Fountain St., Cape Girardeau, MO 63701
(573) 339-9300

<http://www.touchpointautism.org/>

- **Ethan and Friends for Autism:** 232 Camellia Dr., Cape Girardeau, MO 63703
(573) 225-1328

ethanandfriendsforautism.org

Contact Me

As always, I appreciate hearing your comments, opinions, and concerns. Please feel free to contact me in Jefferson City at (573) 751-2459. You may write to me at Jason Crowell; Missouri Senate; State Capitol; Jefferson City, MO 65101, or email me at: jcrowell@senate.mo.gov or visit me on the web at <http://www.senate.mo.gov/crowell>.

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