

# The Fisher Family



Photo by Image maker

|Left to right: Kristina Chew, Charlie Fisher and James Fisher|

November 2005

Dear COSAC Family and Friends:

It was winter, 2000. My husband, Jim, my son, Charlie, and I were living in St. Louis, Missouri. Charlie had been diagnosed with autism almost two years earlier and was attending a special education preschool program with minimal success. Since the fall of 1999, he had made tremendous progress in an ABA home program but his severely delayed language made it difficult for him to be in anything but a special ed classroom. More and more, we were worrying about where there would be an appropriate place for Charlie.

The previous summer, we had started to seriously consider returning to New Jersey. In May of 2000, Jim's mother had called us from New Jersey. "There is a front page article in the New York Times about schools for children with autism," she said, adding, "A family moved all the way from Indiana just so their child could attend a private autism school. Families are moving from as far away as Greece."

"Mom," Jim said, "we're from Jersey. Charlie should have all those educational opportunities! We need to get back to Jersey." And something called COSAC helped us make our journey back.

We had first heard about COSAC from one of our ABA therapists who showed us COSAC's lists of autism schools and agencies. The sheer number of autism professionals in New Jersey stood out to us. Indeed, many of the families we knew in the Midwest had out-of-state consultants running their home programs.

In December of 2000, Jim accepted an offer of a one-semester faculty position at Saint Peter's College in Jersey City. It was real: We were going to leave the Midwest and come back to Jim's home state and my adopted one, New Jersey. But where should we live? Where would Charlie receive the best possible education?

COSAC provided the information and the answers that helped us figure out what to do for our boy. I remember the day I nervously called COSAC and gave them our address, wondering if staff would think it odd that someone in Missouri wanted their materials. The thick packet arrived and Jim and I poured over it. I started to make phone calls to familiar area codes — 609, 201, 908 — and writing to schools in towns across New Jersey.

*continued on back*

## The COSAC FUND

Please fill out both sides and return this portion with your tax-deductible contribution to the address below.



YES!

I would like to support The New Jersey Center for Outreach and Services for the Autism Community (COSAC). Enclosed is my donation of:

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My gift is...  in honor of \_\_\_\_\_  in memory of \_\_\_\_\_

Credit card donations accepted online [Visa/MC/Discover]. Go to [www.njcosac.org](http://www.njcosac.org) and click on *Make A Gift*.

Each and every gift, no matter the size, will help us meet our goal! Your contribution is fully **tax-deductible!**

COSAC/1450 Parkside Avenue, Suite 22, Ewing, NJ 08638/609.883.8100/609.883.5509 fax/1.800.4.AUTISM (in NJ)

In late May of 2001, we packed up our station wagon with three suitcases and many boxes of toys and books and drove for two days back to Jersey. Within a week, a yellow bus was pulling up in front of our house to take Charlie to his first day of school in his new home state.

Four years later, we are securely settled here. Jim and I had both given up our jobs at universities in the Midwest (his was a tenured position, mine tenure-track) so that we could come back here for Charlie; we have both been very fortunate to find similar positions here.

At eight years old, Charlie is just a few inches shorter than me (and fits my shoes). We know that adolescence and adulthood are just around the corner. COSAC is a rich source of information with its dedicated staff, publications, parent workshops, and its annual conference, which provides invaluable information about the latest developments in treating autism, and educating children with autism. Thanks to COSAC, we have found tools to help us plan ahead for Charlie's future, whether putting together a special needs trust or learning about services and residential options for him as an adult.

And we have learned much about teaching Charlie to be in the world. This past October, Charlie calmly and cheerfully sat through a five and a half-hour transcontinental flight (and a two-hour delay in the airport waiting room), so the three of us could attend my grandmother's 100th birthday party. In honor of her, and in honor of Charlie, my California relatives have made a donation to COSAC, to help it continue to fulfill its mission of helping Charlie and all individuals with autism to reach their full potential.

Another central part of COSAC's mission is to enhance the overall awareness of autism in the general public. It was not too long ago that an autism diagnosis meant institutionalization for a kid like Charlie while blame for this "terrible affliction" would have been planted on Jim and me. Such theories seem incredulous, if not ridiculous, to us today in no small part because of the unstinting advocacy for persons with autism and their families performed by COSAC during the past forty years. Charlie's education is always a work in progress. We know that COSAC will continue to advocate for our kids to receive the best possible education with highly-trained teachers, paraprofessionals and therapists, and will never hesitate to have the highest of expectations for what individuals with autism can achieve.

Charlie is a loving boy with a big heart, a joyful smile and a lot to say. We ride bikes, swim in the ocean, take the train into Manhattan, tell stories to each other. Life with autism is never easy and sometimes suffused with suffering you could never have expected, much less imagined. Life with Charlie is always good and Jim and I are confident that, with the help of COSAC, we can all keep making the world a better place for individuals with autism.

Thank you for your support.



Kristina Chew and James Fisher



## About COSAC

COSAC is New Jersey's Autism Resource, where parents and professionals can turn for information, advocacy, support and training. With 40 years of expertise, COSAC provides assistance at all stages of an individual's life — from first diagnosis to early intervention to school programs to transition strategies for teens and options for adults. The COSAC Fund is our annual fund drive and provides valuable support for COSAC's efforts on behalf of families like Charlie's.

For more information about COSAC or autism, contact our helpline at 1-800-4-AUTISM or visit [www.njcosac.org](http://www.njcosac.org).

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- Please do not list my /our name in any donor listing.
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Don't forget to forward a matching form so your gift to COSAC can *double*.

*COSAC is a nonprofit organization that is registered with the State of New Jersey's Attorney General's office.*