



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – April 30, 2018
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**JUST AS THE CDC ANNOUNCES NEW, HIGHER RATES OF AUTISM,
THE DOUG FLUTIE, JR. FOUNDATION FOR AUTISM AWARDS
SAN DIEGO NON-PROFIT WITH \$10,000 GRANT TO HELP FAMILIES
OF NEWLY DIAGNOSED CHILDREN**

The Grant Will Provide Funding for The National Foundation for Autism Research (NFAR) “Engage & Connect” Program to Help Parents and Families of Those with Autism Get the Knowledge and Support They Need to Ensure the Best Outcome for Their Child

San Diego, CA – Last Thursday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced that autism rates in school aged children has jumped 15% between 2012 and 2014, continuing a two-decade rise. The study estimates that autism is now present in 1.7 percent of the childhood population, or **1 in 59 children**.

On the heels of this news, the San Diego based NFAR proudly announces the award of a \$10,000 grant from The Doug Flutie, Jr. Foundation for Autism, which will fund their “Engage & Connect” program for families that have recently received an autism diagnosis.

The younger a child is when they start receiving autism services, the more likely they are to improve, as research has shown that early intervention (before school age) can have a significant impact on a child’s ability to increase communication and learn new social skills.

“I know firsthand how unsettling an autism diagnosis can be for parents,” stated Sharon Leon, NFAR Executive Director and mother of a son with autism. “Parents often find themselves isolated or unsure of what they should do next. With this program, we offer San Diego families the opportunity to connect with other parents and “NFAR Mentors” to exchange information about resources and find much-needed support and words of encouragement. Basically, we aim to help them not feel so alone.”

NFAR is planning multiple “Engage & Connect” sessions each month, where families and their children can engage together in structured, interactive play in a safe, comfortable environment. The sessions will also have an Occupational Therapist and a Special Education Teacher or Speech & Language Pathologist lead the creative activities to teach parents how to engage with their children, as children with autism often have communication deficits or behavior issues that interfere with play.

“Autism always impacts more than just the child,” Leon continued. “Thanks to this grant from the Doug Flutie, Jr. Foundation for Autism, we are able to reach more parents, more families, and get them connected to the resources and people who can be advocates for their child going forward. Our main goal is to help empower parents early so that they can meaningfully shape the lives and the futures for their children.”

The program aims to serve 1,400 San Diego children and their families over the next year.

The Doug Flutie, Jr. Foundation for Autism awards grants annually through a competitive application and review process. The grants that the Flutie Foundation distributes each year help to support family-focused programs in three key areas: promoting active lifestyles, improving access to services, and enhancing the independence of adults with autism.

For more information visit NFAR.org or by emailing info@nfar.org

About the National Foundation for Autism Research (NFAR)

NFAR was established in 2003 to serve the critical needs of families and their children with autism, including increasing local awareness, information, support, and services to improve the quality of life for persons living with autism or an autism spectrum disorder. Since 2005, NFAR has invested more than \$1.6 million throughout the San Diego community to positively impact the living and learning environment for thousands of people with autism. www.NFAR.org. www.raceforautism.org

About the Doug Flutie, Jr. Foundation for Autism

The Doug Flutie Jr. Foundation for Autism (DFJF) is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) public benefit corporation helping families affected by autism live life to the fullest. Through programs and partnerships, DFJF helps people with autism get access to care; lead more active lifestyles; and grow toward adult independence. NFL Quarterback Doug Flutie and his wife Laurie, whose personal experience raising a son on the autism spectrum inspired their passion to help other families, established the Foundation in 1998. DFJF serves families throughout New England, New York, New Jersey, Southern California, Central Florida and Canada. For more information on The Doug Flutie, Jr. Foundation for Autism, visit www.flutiefoundation.org.

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