

The Journey That Is Autism

April 2026

As World Autism Month ends, I am reminded that this journey that is Autism for me and my two Autistic sons is marking quite a milestone this year (2026). Well, in fact, three milestones!

My eldest son turned 25 at the beginning of March and my younger son will turn 18 at the end of May. Mom (aka yours truly) will be 55 years young also in May. So, as I continue to contemplate as to how best mark this banner year, I also thought it would be very fitting to update this remarkable story, times 3 of course.

I am reminded of all the legendary battles that I had to wage for both of my sons, beginning with my eldest when he was 4 and how he set a precedent in being the youngest user of adapted transport at the time, 21 years ago!

Fast forward to when he transitioned to the adult sector, after having remained in high school until age 21, the necessity to wage the battle to maintain his participation in the program that he began in that initial transitional year. It dawned on me then that the advocacy would never end.

That same advocacy would take on a whole other level with such a depth of meaning when it would come to the legendary battles that I waged on behalf of my younger son. The first of which was waged in the public health and social services sector, to secure his (and 5 peers) placement in a specialized pre-k. This was so time sensitive as my younger son and his peers were going to age out of this program, seeing as they were all going to be turning 5 years old!



This legendary battle led to the honour of appearing on the inaugural issue of Laval Families Magazine.

Then the second monumental battle I had to wage on behalf of my younger son, would come several years later while he was in his last cycle of elementary school and this one was in the education sector. Following multiple suspensions, my younger son was eventually expelled. All of this would then play out within the context of the beginning of the pandemic, when the world as we knew it would forever be changed.

This monumental battle was eventually resolved with the intervention of the mediator of the Human Rights Commission and my lawyer. My younger son then transitioned to a specialized school for high school where he will remain until age 21.

All of this lived and living experience would serve me so well (in retrospect) in assuming my new professional role of working in the community sector. I had the opportunity to conceive, plan and then implement a unique program in Laval specifically for English-speaking parents of neurodivergent children!

Now in its 6th year, the HEY (Healthy Early Years) Program has had 15 cohorts of its virtual Parent Workshops; monthly virtual Parent Support Group meetings; monthly Play Dates and now a lending library as well. For additional information concerning the HEY Program, [click here](#).

And now having had the privilege to journey with approximately 95-100 families within the HEY community and many more in the Autism community at large, I am reminded of how ALL of this would not have been possible if it were not for my sons and how they have expanded my horizons beyond anything I could have ever imagined for myself!

If there is one message I would leave about the remarkable journey that is Autism, as this World Autism Month comes to an end, it is this: every single experience that has been woven into my sons' lives and mine too has built such a resilience and has served to deepen a true and real gratitude for having seen it through.

It is this resilience, gratitude and ultimately love that will also ensure that my sons and I will always continue to see it through.

Natalina Pace,

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