

# Resources for autism are highlight of fair

By Kelly Brooks  
Special to The Sentinel

Japheth Meyer, 2, let go of a string tied to a yellow balloon. He watched it float toward the gymnasium ceiling of the Largo Foundation School, where the fourth annual Resource Fair for Parents of Children with Developmental Disabilities was held for three hours Saturday.

Meg Dillman, an Upper Marlboro resident attending the fair as a representative of the Special Education Citizens Advisory Committee for Prince George's County Public Schools, reflexively grabbed the string.

Japheth released the balloon again. And again, and again.

"Catch it!" he yelled with a smile.

Dillman caught it each time before searching, in vain, for a belt loop to tie the string to Japheth's shorts. She held onto it until Japheth's parents, who were talking to people at a resource booth, took over balloon duty.

"It's nice to be able to come to one place," said Dillman, whose 9-year-old son, Michael, also attended the fair, has autism and has been in special education programs since he was an infant. "You can spend a lot of time on the Internet, but this is like a one shot."

Fort Washington residents Johnny and Michelle Meyer said it was the first time they had gone to an event like the resource fair. They attended to seek information on securing a diagnosis for Japheth and his sister, Charity, 1, both of whom have autistic tendencies.

"I noticed when he was about 5 months old, he didn't really coo and talk the way most babies do," Mrs. Meyer said. Charity, she added, didn't smile by 3 months and rarely made eye contact. Their third child, 3-month-old Gabrielle, is not displaying any signs of autism, she said.

According to data released in 2007 by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network, about one in 150 8-year-old children in multiple areas of the U.S. had an autism spectrum disorder. That makes the disorder the sec-

ond-most common serious developmental disability after mental retardation and intellectual impairment. Intervention must begin as early as possible so that children can reach their full potential, the center's Web site reads.

Michelle Meyer said the fair connected her family with the state Developmental Disabilities Administration, which provides financial assistance for appropriate services.

"We will be enrolled in DDA within the next couple of weeks," she said.

The Meyers also sat in on a noon workshop presented by Larry Lipsitz, a specialist in autism education issues and the director of Autism, Developmental, and Psychological Disabilities Intensive Positive Training in Waynesboro, Pa.

Michelle Meyer said Lipsitz taught her about discipline strategies, such as ways to diffuse a tantrum, and echolalia, which "promotes speech, so don't discourage it - just let it occur."

In his classroom presentation to about 25 parents and children, Lipsitz said he had worked with children who persevere on swings, for instance, and repeatedly run toward them.

See Fair, page E-4

## INSIDE...

Opinion E-2

Parent Pointe E-3

Sports E-8

Calendar E-10

Fun Page E-11

Classifieds E-12

[www.thesentinel.com](http://www.thesentinel.com)

**COVER STORY/NEWS****County parents learn resources to fight autism**

Fair, from page E-1

"Your goal is to teach him how to get to the swing, not to stop him," Lipsitz said, adding that explaining to the child how to cross the street should probably be included in that lesson. "People with autism have laws. They're very rigid in their thinking."

The event, meant to help parents of children with autism, down syndrome and other special needs, featured two workshops from Lipsitz. The gym also was decorated with information booths from area school systems, Metro Access, the Department of Rehabilitative Services, the DDA, health care providers, nutritionists and summer camp coordinators.

Mary Funk, deputy executive director of event co-host The Arc of Prince George's County, said she expected between 150 and 200 families to attend.

"It seems to grow every year," Funk said. "I love being able to work with families and I really just like the idea that we can support people in something that's really important for them, and that's raising their children."



PHOTO BY KELLY BROOKS

From left to right, Meg Dillman, helps Michelle Meyer and son, Japheth, 2, at the fourth annual Resource Fair for Parents of Children with Developmental Disabilities on Saturday. The event was held at the Largo Foundation School.