

# The Brunswick Sun Times

Thursday, September 29, 2005

## Katie Is First In U.S. To Get Aid From Special Foundation

BY "SAM" BOYER

It was an unexpected set of circumstances that led one Brunswick family to a better life for their autistic child.

Becky Lowe was employed as an adoption consultant for an international adoption agency. She wasn't scheduled to work but was filling in one day when she received a call from Tracy Pierce Woodall. Woodall was on her way to Russia to pick up an adopted child but also wanted to arrange to stop in Romania.

Why would anyone want to go to Romania? was the question Lowe asked. Woodall explained that she ran a school in Romania and a foundation that specialized in autism therapy.

Lowe was amazed. In January 2001, her daughter, Katie, was diagnosed with autism. Despite every attempt to find help for her and specialists who claimed their treatments would help, Katie's outlook was bleak.

I was so afraid that our daughter would change into Rain Man, Lowe admitted. She feared her loving, affectionate daughter would become emotionless.

After some private speech therapy, Katie was enrolled at age 3 in Bright Beginnings Preschool for children with disabilities, and some of her basic skills did improve, Lowe said. Katie could make simple verbal requests but couldn't hold a conversation. Because she was so non-verbal, other children didn't approach her.

Then came the conversation with Woodall in March of this year.

I knew that Tracy's husband, Brent, had been killed in the World Trade Center attacks, Lowe said. Tracy is an expert in Applied Behavior



Analysis and responded to a plea for help from Nancy Karpf who had visited a Romanian children's hospital with a volunteer group and was struck by one child who had seemed to exist in isolation. He displayed all the delays associated with autism. Woodall helped that little boy and in July 2001, the women started a school of applied behavior analysis to help youngsters who had been institutionalized.

Tracy and Brent had promised each other to continue her work and to bring her work to the United States. After Brent's death, she formed the foundation and through its funding, there are now two Romanian schools as well as a center in New York to train families in basic techniques of ABA, offering them up-to-date information on services and showing them how to be advocates for their children.

I told her about Katie and some of my experiences and she asked me to apply for help from the foundation, Lowe explained. I sent her all of the documentation from the school and medical



# The Brunswick Sun Times

Thursday, September 29, 2005

records. We videotaped Katie at her speech therapy sessions and in our home and shipped them off to Tracy.

The board of directors of the foundation reviewed the material and on April 26, Tracy e-mailed Lowe to say the foundation would like to help Katie. She was the first child in the United States to be helped by the foundation, Lowe said. She and husband, Roy, were amazed at the help provided to them.

Two therapists with whom she worked in New York City came to our home on June 11 and began working with Katie. They assessed her skills and later in the day began working with Katie using the ABA techniques. The changes in Katie were immediate, Lowe said. She calls it one of her daughter's biggest milestones.

That day, she came downstairs and asked her twin brother, Jake, to play with her for the first time. She had never asked him anything before. We saw all we had seen years ago, it gave us hope again, Lowe said. They worked with Tracy and Roy and gave them an outline to work with. We felt empowered, Becky said. After the therapists left, they sent all their information to Tracy who reviewed it.

She called and said the foundation would like to bring Katie and me to New York City for more intensive services, Lowe said. They went through intensive daily therapy with four ABA specialists over a two-week period. Within the first few days, the changes in Katie were obvious, Lowe said. She was interacting with peers, responding to requests and expressing so much joy.

In addition, they have helped fill out the proper documentation with the school district, participate through conference calls in Katie and Becky's IEP meetings at school, and offer continued support services. Becky was able to apply for an I-CAT grant that helps pay for some private therapy, but, in general, the private sessions have been paid from the family budget.

But Becky said it all seems worth it. Katie is as affectionate and cuddly as she was when she was an infant. She is in an inclusive first grade class at Memorial School, spending most of the day interacting with other 7-year-olds. She is bright and reads well. She is becoming a computer whiz. She is involved in Brownies, ballet and tap. Jake has been able to be in the same class with Katie for two years and is able to keep an eye out.

He's a good brother, Becky said. He can relate what happens in the classroom \_ he's a good reporter. Jake said he likes baseball. He played this year on a coach-pitch team.

Becky is a graduate of Brunswick High School and she and Roy have been married 12 years. She gave up her work outside the home to devote more time to Katie's therapies. Therapies she might never have learned about, if it weren't for that unexpected set of circumstances.

