

# FOUNDATION GIVES **HELP+HOPE** TO FAMILIES AFFECTED BY AUTISM

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By CAROL WHITAKER / Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News

*As a baby, Aaron Bouck wanted no part of his mother's cuddling. As a toddler, he didn't talk. Any change in routine – like getting into the black car when the family usually takes the red car – could trigger a tantrum.*

His mother, Kelli Bouck, thought she was a bad mother and Aaron was a bad child. She felt guilty, angry and stressed. When Aaron was 3, he was diagnosed with autism. Speech therapy helped, but Aaron's behavior didn't change. Mrs. Bouck and her husband, Jeff, found a specialist who charged \$1,500 a month to work with Aaron. Before long, the Coppell family could no longer afford the fee.

Then a friend showed Mrs. Bouck a newspaper article about the Brent Woodall Foundation for Exceptional Children. She met director Tracy Woodall of Coppell and thought, finally, someone who "gets it completely."

Through the foundation, Aaron's parents have been able to get him the help he needs. At 5 years old, he is in a regular kindergarten class at Coppell's Town Center Elementary. His favorite games are playing tag, and hide and seek, and dressing up like a pirate.

The key to making a positive difference in the lives of autistic children and their families is "early intervention," Mrs. Woodall said.

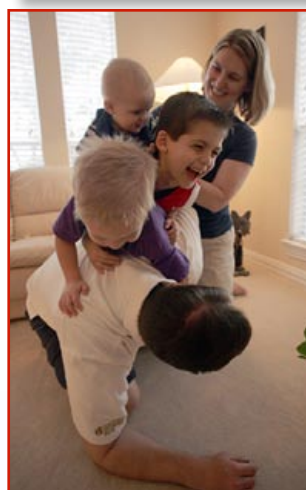
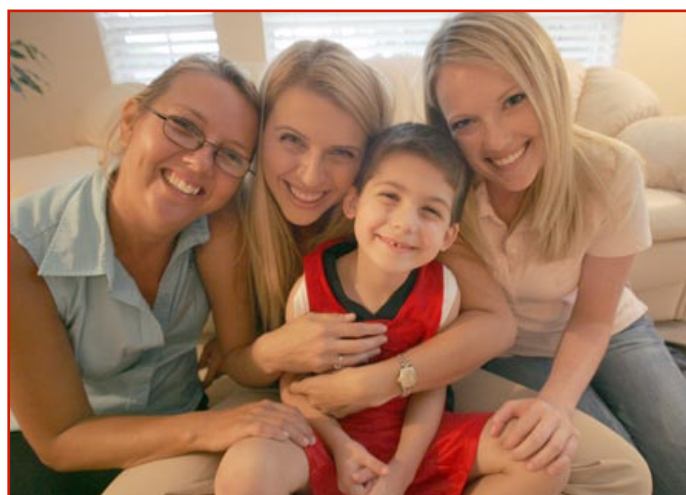
She studied autism in college and named the foundation after her husband, who died in the World Trade Center attacks. The foundation, launched in 2004, is funded by private donations and money raised through its annual Walkabout for Autism. This year's event is scheduled for Sept. 9.

Mrs. Woodall said the foundation is committed to making sure families get help – for free. It offers free assessments for children between the ages of 18 months and 6 years, and parents are taught to work with their children.

"This is not rocket science," Mrs. Woodall said. "Parents can do this themselves."

Today, Aaron is a different child. He has come a long way and made his parents proud. Last year Aaron traveled the entire route of the Walkabout with his family.

And he and his family plan to be there again this year.



Top: Therapist Jamie Tucker, Tracy Woodall, and Therapist Carley McAnally help kids like Aaron succeed. RICKY MOON/ Special Contributor

Left: Aaron Bouck, 5, laughs with his parents, Kelli and Jeff, and brother Ben, 3. The family relies on The Brent Woodall Foundation for Exceptional Children to help Aaron overcome autism.

## IF YOU GO:

Walkabout for Autism 2006 is Sept. 9 at Andrew Brown Jr. Community Park East in Coppell. Early registration is from noon to 2 p.m. Sept. 2 at Coppell Family YMCA, 146 Town Center Blvd., or from 7 to 9 a.m. at Starbucks at the intersection of Denton Tap and Sandy Lake roads. Registration the day of the walk is at 8 a.m. The walk begins at 9 a.m. Cost is \$25 for adults, \$10 for children. For more information call 1-800-209-9776 or visit [www.woodallkids.org](http://www.woodallkids.org).