



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 31, 2011

Contact: Ann Potempa, (907) 269-7957, Cell (907) 230-4001, ann.potempa@alaska.gov

Greg Wilkinson, (907) 269-7285, Cell (907) 382-7032, gregory.wilkinson@alaska.gov

## **Anchorage art exhibit to raise awareness about autism**

*Autism Awareness Month events to be held throughout Alaska during April*

ANCHORAGE, AK — A new art exhibit will be installed in Anchorage to help people better understand autism spectrum disorders and the special skills and interests of those with the disability.

The exhibit, titled “Art for Autism,” will be on display in the Anchorage Museum at Rasmuson Center from April 1 through April 30, 2011. Autism is a type of developmental disability that is characterized by delays in communication, difficulties with social interaction, and restrictive and repetitive patterns of behaviors.

“Art for Autism” will be displayed in the museum educational hallway adjacent to the Imaginarium Discovery Center. The Alaska Autism Resource Center has received about 50 pieces of art from individuals with autism, and their friends and family members from around the state.

“I hope that it will spark an interest in autism in the people who see the exhibit,” said Krista James, project coordinator with the Alaska Autism Resource Center. “I hope they will see that people with autism have wonderful talents and very unique strengths and special skills.”

In recognition of Autism Awareness Month in April, the state of Alaska Autism Program is publishing information about this and other related events that raise awareness about developmental disorders on its website, <http://www.autism.alaska.gov>. The events are posted on a calendar at <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/autism/calendar.htm>.

The state Autism Program is focused on helping parents, caregivers and health care providers recognize signs of autism and other developmental delays as early as possible. About 1 percent of all babies born in Alaska each year will develop an autism spectrum disorder, according to estimates from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In other words, about 11,000 Alaskans will be born this year, and 110 of them will be diagnosed with an autism disorder by age 8.

For more information or to reach the state of Alaska Autism Program, call 269-3400 or 1-800-799-7570 if calling from outside Anchorage, or visit <http://www.autism.alaska.gov>.

### **More Autism Awareness Month events:**

#### **Alaska Walk for Autism**

Juneau: Saturday, April 2, 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Soldotna: Saturday, April 16, 12 p.m. – 2 p.m.

Fairbanks: Saturday, April 23, 11 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Anchorage: Saturday, April 30, 10 a.m. – 12 p.m.

The events in Fairbanks and Anchorage will welcome walkers and runners. For more information, call 1-877-374-4421 or visit

<http://www.asagoldenheart.org/alaskawalkforautism.htm>.

### **Free autism workshops**

Lauren Kerstein is a licensed clinical social worker who specializes in working with children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders. She is visiting Alaska and will give four presentations from 9 a.m. to noon at the following locations:

Fairbanks: Monday, April 11

Anchorage: Tuesday, April 12

Soldotna: Wednesday, April 13

Wasilla: Friday, April 15

There will be small parent sessions in each community in the afternoon, and these sessions require registration. For more information, call 1-877-374-4421, or visit

<http://www.asagoldenheart.org/laurenkersteinlcswws.htm>.

###