Tallahassee to host advocacy day for autism

Capitol event CARD Day sponsored by the FSU chapter of the Centers for Autism and Related Disabilities

Matthew Loftis hasn’t spoken in 21 years. It’s not that he doesn’t want to — he can’t. Matthew has autism. Despite the many obstacles in his life, he attends school and enjoys playing interactive electronic games and communicating with his mother and brother on his assistive technology device.

On Tuesday, Matthew and his family will join with many other families with autism who will travel to Tallahassee in support of CARD Day at the Capitol, an annual event sponsored by the Florida State University chapter of the Centers for Autism and Related Disabilities. There are seven university chapters of CARD spread throughout the state of Florida.

“I’m really proud of my son Matthew and how far he has come,” said Sue Loftis. “I’m especially grateful, for the training that the CARD staff has provided, not just to me, but to his teachers, therapists and the entire community. What CARD does for one person branches out to others and helps make everyone involved better prepared to help the person with autism succeed.”

CARD Day will kick off at 11:30 a.m. with a reception on the portico outside the House office building. At noon, State Representative Erik Fresen of Miami will welcome the families traveling from his native South Florida and will speak on the Legislature’s continued efforts to support CARD and Florida families with autism. Additional House and Senate representatives are expected to attend. Refreshments and a light lunch will be served. The event is free and open to the public.

This year, CARD is seeking a budget increase of $2.5 million dollars. Increased funding will allow CARD to hire additional staff to serve more Floridians with autism.

CARD services include hands-on training for educators, classroom support for students with autism, in-home family and parent training and community assistance for children and adults with autism and related disabilities.

“Our funding levels began dropping in 2008 through a series of budget cuts,” said Dr. Lindsey Morgan, Director of FSU-CARD.

“In this time our constituency has doubled, so we are serving twice as many people with autism than we were five years ago, but with fewer resources to work with. ‘This $2.5 million increase will enable us to bring added supports into the classroom for children with autism, will help support the families in their home and we’ll be able to provide teacher training and more community supports for children and adults with autism and other related disabilities,’ she said.

For more information about CARD Day at the Capitol events, or to support funding for CARD, contact Sue Baldino at sbaldino@comcast.net.

C. Cotten-Evans is the mother of three: a 4-year-old daughter with autism, a 3-year-old son and a 2-year-old daughter with Down syndrome. She serves as advocacy chair for the FSU Center for Autism and Related Disabilities Constituency Board.