

Statement by Autism Ontario: A Better Way Forward to Keep Autistic Children and Adults Safe

Autism Ontario shares in the grief of Draven Graham’s death. Draven was an 11-year-old autistic boy who lived in Lindsay, Ontario. Our hearts go out to Draven’s family. This is a tragic outcome and a sad time for the autism community in Ontario.

We are very appreciative of the efforts of residents, volunteer rescue crews, police services, and emergency response units across multiple jurisdictions who helped in the search efforts. Yet out of this incalculable loss, comes the opportunity for positive change and a better way forward to keep autistic children and adults and those with special needs safe.

Autism Ontario supports any action that moves us as a society towards creating a solution to broadly notify the public and locate missing autistic children, adults, and seniors who are vulnerable. In a situation where an autistic person is missing, a provincial notification system could help to quickly notify emergency response personnel to locate the missing individual and reunite them with family or caregivers. Such a service should be created in consultation with families, self-advocates, and people with lived experience, as well as law enforcement, and within the context of relevant privacy legislation.

To be able to find a solution that works for families and balances what keeps a child or an individual safe without putting vulnerable children and adults at increased risk is key. We must also remember that for people who may not have the words to explain, situations such as this can be very distressing. Emergency response personnel and law enforcement must also be adequately trained to understand autism and how best to communicate and support autistic individuals safely and responsively.

Although Autism Ontario is not endorsing any one specific petition, we will support and encourage formal advocacy efforts to find a strategy that results in better ways to keep autistic children and vulnerable adults safe, realizing that there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

As community members, we must get to know our neighbours – we need to build relationships with our autistic neighbours so we can be better at supporting families and individuals. As a society, we are all responsible for recognizing and protecting our most vulnerable – and that means not being fearful about asking questions or getting involved so that we can create an inclusive Ontario for autism.

We are aware of the following actions that our community may participate in to honour Draven’s memory:

- [Draven Alert petition](#)
- [GoFundMe supporting Draven’s family](#)
- [Candlelight vigil in Draven’s memory](#)

-30-

For more information, email Autism Ontario’s media team at media@autismontario.com.

About Autism Ontario: Autism Ontario has a history of over 49 years of representing thousands of families and people on the autism spectrum across Ontario. We are the only organization in Ontario that has elected volunteer parent representation in all areas of the province through our seven Regions. We advocate with and on behalf of all people on the autism spectrum and their families – at all ages and stages of life, reflecting a wide range of expression and abilities. To connect with us, visit www.autismontario.com.