

## Mother of autistic boys champions care in Illinois



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Annette Gallagher from Crystal Lake has three children and two of them have autism. Not only does she home-school her two boys with autism, but she also runs a home day care and is the executive director of the Northern Illinois Center for Autism.

Annette has given of herself tirelessly to develop programs for children and their families in northern Illinois. NICA has been in existence for almost five years now and the position Annette holds is completely volunteer at this time. She has put in countless hours not only developing programs, but working to obtain grants and funds in order to keep the center running. In addition, the center rents out a banquet hall for additional funds and many of those banquets have been run by Annette herself. A newly-developed resale shop has also been opened in the center in order to provide opportunities for teens and adults with autism to be successful in a job.

Annette is always thinking of new ways to assist those with autism in the community and works with families to provide services and resources to them. She spends many hours talking to other families and helping them in any way she can. She attends meetings with other local service agencies and attempts to provide cohesive services to families. Some of the programs developed include family swim time, team fitness, social language groups, educational and cooking networks, a biomedical coalition, and guest speakers. Annette, the board of directors, and many volunteers also work to raise funds through fundraising efforts such as Dining and Dancing for Autism and Rock for Autism. Again, countless hours given by Annette to help those with autism and their families.

Annette is one of those people with a passion, vision, and a dream to give children and adults with autism a chance to succeed in all they do. Her dedication to her family and to others is an inspiration to all.

Julie Ciero, board member, Northern Illinois Center for Autism

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