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Eagles Autism Foundation Grant and Speech-Language Institute of Salus University Give Hope to Speech Client

Elkins Park, PA - The Speech-Language Institute (SLI) of Salus University was a recipient of a \$15,500 grant from the Eagles Autism Foundation. As a result of the grant, SLI recently provided hope to one of their clients.

In the past, it has been challenging for Margarita Cintron to get her adult son Daniel to use a communication device. Diagnosed with autism, he's mostly non-verbal and has struggled learning how to use a device to communicate.

To compound the issue, Daniel's father died a year and a half ago, and the additional stress on the family has taken the focus off of helping Daniel effectively communicate with others.

SLI utilized some of the funds from the grant to provide Daniel with an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) device. "It supplements his current communication capabilities. He doesn't have a lot of verbal communication right now, so you can think of it as his voice," said Susan DeMilia, MA, CCC-SLP, speech-language pathologist and clinical educator at the SLI.

Daniel has a choice of icons on an iPad. He can choose many words in which to communicate with his family and his therapists at the SLI. He likes to use spelling as part of his communication, so he also uses the AAC device as well as a supplemental white board.

After a half dozen training sessions at the Elkins Park, Pennsylvania clinical facility, all indications are positive. "He's doing fabulous. In the beginning, he was a little hesitant because it was all new. But it's been nice to see his confidence grow each week," said DeMilia. "We see a lot more emotion in his face and he's more independent with the device than when he started. He's becoming more comfortable not only with the device itself but with his communication partner."

That communication partner is **Jacqueline Ostaszewski '24SLP**, who has learned about autism spectrum disorder (ASD) during her education at Salus University. "This is the biggest educational experience I've had," said Ostaszewski. "The ASD class has given me more background knowledge to work with someone with ASD. I never thought I would work with the adult population, but now I love working with adults."

In the beginning, Ostaszewski said she was hoping to be able to connect with Daniel and gave him confidence in her as someone with the knowledge to effectively introduce him to a new way of communicating. "I was nervous in the beginning. But Sue and the rest of the faculty and staff at SLI have helped me so much to not only connect with Daniel but to gain more knowledge with the AAC devices. Now I can have more confidence working with a bigger population."

Daniel's progress with the AAC device has given his mother some peace of mind as well. "We were blessed to be selected as part of this grant to receive the device from the Eagles Autism Foundation and I'm grateful," said Cintron. "We've been struggling since his father got sick and all my attention was directed in dealing with that. We had to get back on track and concentrate on Daniel. He needs to be able to communicate and it's such a relief to have someone teach him to use the AAC device."

According to Kara Maharay, MS, CCC-SLP, BC-S, director of Clinical Education at the SLI, being recipients of the Eagles Autism Foundation grant has been impactful in more ways than one. "The funds we received from this grant will allow us to have an even broader reach in supporting our clients and their families that are impacted by autism in addition to offering free services in the SLI," said Maharay. "With these funds we have been able to purchase additional augmentative alternative communication systems to use in therapy sessions. In addition, we are able to support our families by providing them with appropriate communication systems that are a necessity for communication. This ability will support our mission in ensuring all individuals have a voice."

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About Salus University

Salus University, founded as the Pennsylvania College of Optometry in 1919, today is a diversified, globally recognized professional academic center of learning that offers a wide range of degree programs in the professions of Optometry, Audiology, Physician Assistant Studies, Blindness and Low Vision Studies, Biomedicine, Occupational Therapy, Speech-Language Pathology and Orthotics and Prosthetics. Salus operates three clinical facilities in Philadelphia and Montgomery counties that provide highly specialized vision, hearing and balance, and speech-language pathology services. The University has over 1,200 students and more than 14,000 alumni worldwide. For more information, please visit www.salus.edu.

About Eagles Autism Foundation

The Eagles Autism Foundation is dedicated to raising funds for innovative autism research and care programs. By providing the necessary resources to doctors and

scientists at leading institutions, we will be able to assist those currently affected by autism, as well as future generations. The Foundation aims to inspire and engage the community, so together, we can provide much-needed support to make a lasting impact in the field of autism. Please visit EaglesAutismFoundation.org.