

# JULIE CULLIFER



## ONE CHILD CENTER FOR AUTISM

Following graduation from the College of William and Mary, Julie Cullifer pursued a career in public policy in Washington D.C. She and her husband lived abroad for several years and returned to settle in Williamsburg to raise a family.

They discovered that their young son had Autism.

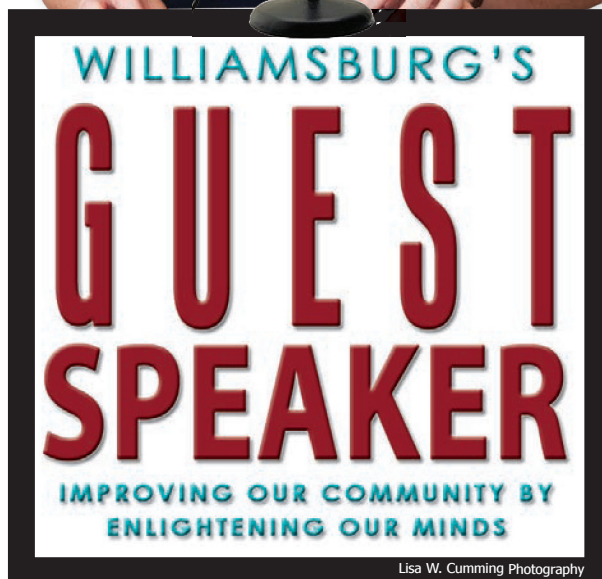
“This experience taught me that life has a way of molding and reshaping our aspirations often in inconceivable ways.” Julie founded One Child Center for Autism (One Child) in 2013, but says she felt inadequate to the task and responsibility of building a non-profit organization.

“However, I’ve discovered that my various professional and life experi-

ences have not only provided me with a unique view of what helping and supporting children and families affected by Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) can and should be, but also prepared me for my responsibilities as Executive Director of One Child.”

### When did you first become involved with One Child Center for Autism?

I founded One Child because the needs of my family and many others were not being fulfilled. When my son was diagnosed with ASD, the doctor provided a list of therapies and told us to pursue these “as much, as soon, as possible.” I quickly discovered that despite having good



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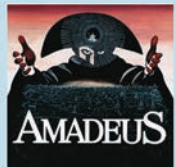
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health insurance through my husband's employer, none of the recommended therapies were covered. As I sought alternative ways to get services for my son, I encountered long wait lists and many therapists that would not accept clients that had to privately pay. I often met and spoke with other families like mine and noticed our discussions often turned to the hardships we were experiencing - the struggle to find and keep services, navigate the educational system and utilize our health insurance coverage.

### What is the mission and purpose of the group?

One Child is founded on three core principles: (1) Children with ASD require an individualized collaborative approach to therapy services; (2) a Child with Autism should not be denied access to therapy due to a lack of insurance coverage or financial resources; (3) Supporting parents and siblings of children with Autism improves and strengthens the entire family unit.

One Child was founded to help Autism Families, but we also recognize that children with other disabilities can benefit from our services and we are committed to helping all children.

While acknowledging the difficulties children and families affected by Autism encounter is important, I also believe we should celebrate the wonderful attributes and achievements of our children with Autism just as we would for any of our other children. Children with Autism are neither broken nor burdens; they are like all children that laugh, play and feel deeply. As parents, it is important to remember that our children have strengths and weaknesses like everyone else in our families and it is our responsibility to empower and equip them for their futures. One Child works to help families achieve this reality.

### What types of services does the group do to support the mission?

One Child is best known for our Skill Builder social skills groups that focus on improving pragmatic language and practicing successful navigation of social interactions. We also provide individual speech-language therapy sessions for families that do not have insurance coverage. One Child provides these services at a reduced rate to families and is able to offer scholarships to families in need, thanks to donations to the One Child Scholarship Fund.

One Child also offers two programs focused on providing support to the families. The first is KIDS' Night, a respite program for families which occurs every other month. KIDS' Night provides a night of qualified childcare for children with special needs and their siblings in a fun environment. One Child also organizes A Night Out with Friends, a social event for women that meets every other month and provides an opportunity for women to connect with and support each other.

### What have been parents' reactions?

Parents have been overwhelmingly excited and grateful to One Child and our staff. These are families that have struggled to help their child and are relieved to find a local organization that provides services and support to the entire family.

### What can readers do to help you?

First, I very much want to ensure that families in need of services and support know that One Child exists. Please spread the word about One Child to your family and friends and connect with us on our website at [www.OneChildCenterforAutism.org](http://www.OneChildCenterforAutism.org) and Facebook page.

Second, despite offering our services at a reduced cost, many families still struggle financially and cannot afford our services. Contributions to the One Child Scholarship Fund make therapy accessible to families in need. My goal is to grow our Scholarship Fund to provide at least three more children therapy for the Fall Semester.


### What are some personal experiences you have had that renew your commitment to One Child?

I've been blessed to witness moments in which a parent is filled with a renewed joy, a sense of belonging and hope. Moments when a parent takes the time to excitedly tell me what a difference being in a social skills group has made for their son this school year, or a parent sharing that KIDS' Night was the first time they have left their child in 10 years, or through the pictures and videos from our social skills groups that show the kids laughing and developing true friendships. All of these moments motivate me to continue to serve these families and this community.

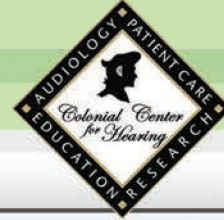
We are told that no child is alike, and in fact, there is a common saying within the Autism community - "Once you've met One Child with Autism, you've met One Child with Autism" (Stephen Shore). This saying reflects the reality that there is not a map for navigating the world of Autism Spectrum Disorder and each family must make difficult choices about how they equip their children to navigate a world that is very unfamiliar to them. One Child exists to support each family on their individual journey and positively impact families.

### How has your work with One Child affected your personal life and outlook?

When I founded One Child out of a practical need for my son, I knew that my reality was not uncommon but I could never have imagined how great the need was in the Williamsburg community. Likewise, I've been humbled by the generosity of local businesses, individuals, therapists, special education professionals and volunteers that have supported One Child and helped me transform a vision into an organization.

Ultimately, this experience has taught me that we are each stronger, that I am stronger, with people in our lives that acknowledge and support our family's unique journey. That in helping other families and working to create a positive and supportive community, my son and his peers will ultimately benefit. To that end, One Child strives to create a space that not only provides support for our children with Autism but also a place which considers the well-being of the parents and siblings. My hope for One Child is that it will serve as an oasis, a space where our children are celebrated for their unique talents and gifts and families feel a sense of acceptance. 

# Colonial Center for Hearing



## Checklist

- order turkey*
- Nuteracker tickets*
- RSVP Xmas party*
- send holiday cards*
- decorate tree*
- wrap presents*
- get my ears checked*



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