

STEFANIA DEI TIGLI REDEFINES PHILANTHROPY

By Agata De Santis

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26-year old Stefania Dei Tigli didn't set out to start a foundation. It was inspired by a job she never planned to have.

"I never thought I'd work with children. I had no patience with kids," Dei Tigli recalls.

But when she found herself job hunting after completing a degree in psychology, she took a job as a shadow for a child with autism. The work involved following a child throughout his school day, assisting him as the need arose. That one job opened her eyes to the realities of autism and changed her career trajectory.

Today, she works as a behavior therapist with children with Autism Spectrum Disorders, or ASD.

"Working with the kids and their families, I saw first hand the struggles they go through, especially financially. There are a few funds out there, but they have a lot of limitations, and a long waiting list," Dei Tigli explains.

And so an idea started brewing. What if she started a foundation to help those parents and children? And that is exactly what she did. The mission of the Pama Foundation is to help children with ASD reach their full potential and benefit from the different services and equipment available.

**PAMA Foundation and Montreal Autism in Motion
invite you to a fun-filled holiday party...**

PAMA CLAUSE DAY!

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 8th @ 2-5PM
St. Brendan's Hall - 5740 15th Avenue, Montreal (QC) H1X 1N6



Pictures with Santa Clause and family portraits
will be available in a stress-free and sensory-friendly environment

Games, treats, refreshments and entertainment available for the whole family!
Treats and refreshments will be available by donation. Pictures available for a fee.

Reserve your place by e-mail:
info@pamafoundation.org or info@mtlautisminmotion.com

ADMISSION IS FREE. PRIZES TO BE WON!



Since its creation in March of 2012, the Foundation raised enough money to buy six iPads for children in need. For that one program alone, the Foundation received 200 applications.

Dei Tigli admits that her goals far outreach the funding the Foundation is able to raise right now. But still in its infancy, the Foundation is making a difference for many families.

One of the Foundation's first ever events, for example, was a sensory-friendly movie screening.

"Because of their sensory issues, many of these kids cannot participate in 'normal' activities. And so we set up a movie screening where the kids could be themselves. Even the parents seemed so relaxed. For once they did not have to worry if their kids would interrupt others," she comments.

"I want to raise enough money to cover therapy sessions for families. Right now they are not covered by insurance. Twenty hours of therapy a week, at \$30,00 an hour, adds up very quickly," Dei Tigli explains.

A big setback for parents is that government funded services for children with ASD end at age six when they start school. The wait alone for a diagnosis averages two years. Even if a parent is lucky enough to get their child diagnosed and enrolled in public-funded therapy, they don't have access to it for long. Private therapy becomes the only viable option for most parents.

"Once the diagnosis comes in, then it becomes a race to get the child ready for school. Once they're in school, the challenge becomes how to help the child succeed in school. Autism doesn't end at age six... it's for life," Dei Tigli continues.

The Foundation's name comes attached with a sweet backstory. "Pama" is actually not an acronym. Early in her career as a behavior therapist, Dei Tigli worked with a little boy who was considered "non-verbal." Six months into his therapy, he was speaking in full sentences. But he was never able to pronounce Dei Tigli's name.

"He would call me Pama," Dei Tigli fondly recalls.

“The little boy is now nine years old and functioning in school. It’s really in working with him and his family that I fully understood the struggles to get financial support. They were a big inspiration for creating the Foundation.”

“When people think autism, they don’t see the light at the end of the tunnel. They think that their child will never succeed in life. But that is far from true. There is a wide spectrum of symptoms, from social delay to mental handicap. People think worst-case scenario. But if you have the right support, life with autism is possible,” Dei Tigli continues.

This coming Sunday, December 8, 2013, the Foundation will be hosting *Pama Claude Day* at St. Brendan’s Hall in Montreal. Children will have the opportunity to take a photo with Santa Clause in a calm and stress-free and sensory-free environment.

On January 17, 2014, the Pama Foundation is hosting *Comedy for a Cause*, featuring comedians Joe Cacchione, Guido Grasso and Neil Janna. The dinner and comedy show will take place at Le Carlton in Montreal. All proceeds from the event will go to the Foundation.

To learn more about the Pama Foundation, please visit <http://www.pamafoundation.org>.