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World Autism Awareness Day recognized locally

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The Town of Shelburne showed their support for families in the community with Autism last Thursday (April 1) with the raising of the Hearts Wide Open for Autism flag in recognition of World Autism Awareness Day.

Hearts Wide Open founder Deanna Avison, Megan Young and Shelburne Mayor Wade Mills gathered at Shelburne Town Hall for a small ceremony marking the annual celebration of World Autism Awareness Day (April 2).

?It's an important cause in my mind and an important cause for the community,? said Mayor Mills, following the flag raising. ?It's staggering when you consider the percentage of children who are being born on the spectrum. Any chance we have as a community to raise awareness, so the community can get behind families and then support them in any way they can ? it's an important step.?

According to data released by the National Autism Spectrum Disorder Surveillance System (NASS) in March of 2018, 1 in 66 Canadian children and youth between the ages of 5 and 17 are diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The Canadian Medical Association Journal says there are approximately 135,000 people living in Ontario with autism.

Deanna Avison, the founder of local organization Hearts Wide Open for Autism, started raising awareness for the disorder after her grandchildren were diagnosed on the spectrum. Avison approached the Town to proclaim the day within the community and for the last seven years the flag has been raised in support.

Hearts Wide Open for Autism supports more than 300 children in the community with their fundraising.

?It's so close to my heart. I've met wonderful families with children on the spectrum and they are such wonderful children; they're smart and they really need to be recognized for who they are,? Avison told the Free Press.

Speaking about her grandchildren's diagnoses with ASD and her work with autism, Avison said, ?I do it from the heart, I'm just a grandmother, but it's because of them ? they give me the reason to do this for everybody else and the families.?

?Thanks to Wade, the Town, and everybody that has stood behind us for all these years and supported the children. I can't thank them enough for everything they've done.?