

REPORT OF  
GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE  
AUTISM SUBCOMMITTEE

The Autism Subcommittee is focused on assisting First Responders in recognizing and responding to people with autism. In accordance with the findings from the Arkansas Legislative Task Force on Autism's Final Report dated August 29, 2008, the existing systems of care for individuals with autism are complex, and families report major barriers in accessing and navigating the limited services that are available. In addition, due to the fact that in emergency situations individuals with autism may have difficulty responding to first responders, the Subcommittee is concerned that without appropriate training in how to recognize and respond to individuals with autism, first responders may misinterpret behaviors common to individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) especially during life threatening situations and impact the safety of both the individual and first responder. The use of lights, bullhorns and other equipment, for example, may frighten a person with autism spectrum disorder into running away or exhibiting behavior that may be misinterpreted as aggressive. First responders such as law enforcement professionals, particularly in school settings, may also have interactions with children with ASD. By acquiring additional knowledge and skills to enhance the effectiveness of interactions with individuals with disabilities, school resource officers and other law enforcement professionals who interact with children with ASD, will be better equipped to meet the needs of this important group.

The Subcommittee's primary goal is to advocate and facilitate training that is designed to assist emergency personnel and first responders in recognizing, responding to and interacting with individuals with autism spectrum disorder.

**OBJECTIVES**

- Continue to facilitate and guide the development of statewide training opportunities for first responders
- Continue to search for funding to increase statewide training opportunities for first responders
- Continue to raise awareness of developmental disabilities within the first responder community
- Continue to listen to the first responder community regarding their needs and desires to improve the safety of developmentally disabled citizens