

“I AM A WINNER!” These are the exact words that Eli shouted as he crossed the finish line at last year’s Autism Society Central Virginia 5K Run/Walk. Our family has been participating in the ASCV 5K event for 4 years and it has become one of my favorite days out of the year. It is a time where my family and friends get together and raise awareness about autism. It is a day of no special education, social skills classes, speech therapy and/or occupational therapy appointments. It is a day that educators don’t have to gather any data that determines how far Eli is delayed or the challenges he faces. We simply spend the day celebrating Eli for the fun loving smiling little guy that he is!

I often wonder what Eli thinks of the ASCV walk that we participate in every year. We often speak the word “autism” around him but have not had that “formal” conversation of telling him that he has autism. He has yet to question why we walk, why we wear shirts with his picture on them and why he sees so many familiar faces at the event- former speech therapists, occupational therapists, teachers, daycare teachers, coaches, family and friends. I am actually looking forward to the day that Eli asks “Mom, why do we participate in this event?” I think my response will go something like this:

- I walk because you are my son ... my only son. I walk because you are mine!
- I walk because you are brave without knowing it. You encounter noises and textures on a daily basis that make your body uncomfortable yet you continue on. I walk because you make me proud!
- I walk because you teach me how to be a better person. You have made me a better mother and a more compassionate person. I walk because you are a gift!
- I walk because you are smart. You see things in such a different way. You see the small joys in a spinning washing machine, an opening door or the smell of bubble gum. I walk because you give me insight!
- I walk because other families do not have support that we are blessed with. I walk for more information and research!
- I walk because one day a person will tell you that you are different and not typical and they won’t do it nicely. I walk for understanding!
- We walk because you are a son, a grandchild, a nephew, a cousin and a friend to many. We walk because autism has affected ALL who love you!
- We walk because we love you!

Last year Team bELieve came in 2nd place for the highest fundraising team- a big accomplishment! We are hoping for another successful year. All funds raised from this event will stay within the greater Richmond area, providing much needed support to families and individuals living with autism. Please think about showing your support in 2 ways:

1. Make a online donation to the ASCV Walk (Team bELieve): [YOUR LINK HERE](#)
2. AND/OR join Team bELieve and walk with us: [YOUR LINK HERE](#)

Thanks so much your continued support.

--Jennifer & Nathan (Eli’s #1 bELievers)