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“An ABC7 Special: Autism Heroes”

Show: An ABC7 Special: Autism Heroes
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Summary:

April is national Autism Awareness Month, designed to bring more attention to the neurobiological disorder that now affects as many as 1 in 150 children in the U.S. and is four times more likely to strike boys than girls. The signs of Autism are typically noticeable in a child's first years of life.

Hosted by ABC7's **Michelle Tuzee**, “Autism Heroes,” features families caring for children with Autism. We start the show by talking to **Dr. Dan Geschwind** of UCLA, a top researcher in the field, who gives us the latest facts on Autism. Next, we hear from **Dr. Barbara Firestone**, Founder and CEO of The Help Group, a non-profit organization serving children with special needs related to Autism and other developmental issues.

The program is presented from the Sherman Oaks campus of The Help Group, which provides innovative Autism programs for 1,300 students in the Los Angeles area. ABC7's Jovana Lara goes inside The Help Group for a tour of this unique school, which brings new hope for children with Autism.

The program continues with stories of families coping with Autism as they discuss the challenges they face, the hope they have and the commitment to caring for their children that gets them through each day. ABC7's **Phillip Palmer** sits down with actor **Gary Cole** and his wife Teddi for a candid interview about their journey through Autism with their daughter Mary.

Then, Joanne and Tom Palmer have three sons. They knew early on their son Carson was developing differently and were able to get him early treatment with an intensive preschool for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Joanne now advocates publicly for Autism awareness and early detection. **Anna Andrews** tells how she made major life-altering decisions, due to her daughter Cyntrea's Autism -- but Anna's love for her daughter is what gives her the strength to get through each new day. **Hilary and Bob Kip's** twin boys, Kenneth and Daniel both have Autism Spectrum Disorders. The Kips are proactive about providing their children with the opportunities their community has to offer and they've mastered many life lessons, proving to be an inspiration to others. **Elena and Walter Cervantes** knew their teenager Johnny needed a special environment that would help him deal with his Asperger's Disorder. They struggled until they finally found a place that nurtured Johnny. Today, they're excited about his future, which looks bright.

Parents want their children to develop to their fullest potential and **Dr. Lou and Wendy Vismara** are no different, even though their son Mark has Autism. Lou has dedicated himself to helping other families by establishing the UC Davis M.I.N.D. Institute, which is committed to understanding neurobiological disorders.

Magdalena del Olmo and her late husband, journalist Frank del Olmo, had great aspirations for their son Frankie when he was born. When Frankie was later diagnosed with high functioning Autism, they remained determined to help him reach his fullest potential.

Hosts: ABC7 Anchors Michelle Tuzee, Jovana Lara and Phillip Palmer
