

“The beauty and innocence of the world that Kaylee sees and shares with everyone, at every corner, is nothing short of amazing.”

- John Fowler



Kaylee Fowler brings awareness to those diagnosed with Asperger's by raising funds for Autism Speaks

# Speaking Up For *Autism*

Nine-year-old Kaylee Fowler becomes an ambassador for her spectrum mates by raising over \$65,000 for Autism Speaks

Written by Clare Jensen | Photography by Lara Massey



Kaylee Fowler calls herself a bookworm, ballerina, scientist, inventor, chef, comedian, and child of the Lord. For the second year in a row, she was the top fundraiser for the Autism Speaks walk in Houston raising over \$65,000 in 2013. Her team, God's Little Lambs, seeks to help local families in need by raising autism awareness. Kaylee's fundraising efforts were inspired by a desire to increase understanding for her "spectrum mates" - because she has autism as well.

## Autism Spectrum

Autism is often characterized by repetitive behavior, difficulty with communication, and challenges in social interactions. Within the spectrum of autism, Kaylee has Asperger's Syndrome, which is a highly functioning form of autism.

One of her special qualities is that she focuses on specific interests so intensely that she learns expert level details before continuing to another topic. For example, at the age of 3, she became consumed with maps, and methodically proceeded to learn everything she could about geography, from continents to capitals. Once she learns something, it is imprinted in her memory for an extended period of time, often verbatim from her original understanding. Kaylee's extensive vocabulary has allowed her to read full-length novels since the age of 4 or 5.



Fowler's mom Lexy has also been diagnosed with Asperger's

## Fundraising for Love

Her fundraising efforts were fueled at the age of 5 with the gift of Easter baskets to children at Healthbridge Children's Hospital in Houston. In addition to raising the money through crayon-colored fliers and a driveway juice stand, Kaylee also carefully selected gifts for each child's basket. Upon delivery, the receptionist suggested that Kaylee give the children their baskets personally. Kaylee declined saying, "No, thank you. It's not about me. It's about God's love. Please, just let them know it's from one of God's little lambs to another."

The donation of these Easter baskets provided Kaylee with the name for her Autism Speaks team: God's Little Lambs.

Autism Speaks is a nationwide organization that dedicates itself to helping those with autism, from raising awareness to raising money. For the 2013 Autism Speaks walk, Kaylee set her goal at \$50,000. Through a church carnival and benefit concert, she was able to exceed that goal by over \$15,000.

The Fowlers are also in the process of making God's Little Lambs into a non-profit organization. "Kaylee wants to fundraise as much as she can now for the researchers, so by the time she's old enough to become a geneticist, they'll have the pieces ready so she can help solve the puzzle," says Kaylee's mom Lexy.

## Different Perspectives

Kaylee's actions, however, are not only centered around raising funds, but also to increase understanding for spectrum mates with more severe forms of autism. Kaylee says, "I wouldn't want people to ignore me if I needed help just because it looked complicated." Lexy adds that her daughter "has always accepted that, embraced it, and tried to learn effective communication with others."

John Fowler encourages people to educate themselves. "Kaylee and her spectrum mates may communicate differently or not at all in some cases, but they are still children of God," he shares. Developing

understanding and cultivating natural interactions are the simplest and best gifts to Kaylee and those diagnosed with autism.

Once on a family outing, the Fowlers saw a shirt that read "Asperger's: it's not a glitch, it's a whole different operating system."

The differences of her operating system have inspired her with proactive eagerness to help God's other little lambs. John says, "The beauty and innocence of the world that Kaylee sees and shares with everyone, at every corner, is nothing short of amazing. She has taught me that there is no excuse for not giving life everything you have, every moment of every day." **KM**

*CLARE JENSEN is a junior at Rice University majoring in English and history. She calls Katy her home and loves the community.*



*Kaylee was included in the nationwide list of "Top Walkers" at walknowforautismspeaks.org*




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