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May Institute, MBTA Team up to Promote Autism Awareness

Campaign Launches with Support from the National Autism Center and United Benefit Services

Boston, Mass. — Throughout the month of April, MBTA subway, bus, and commuter rail passengers can learn more about autism spectrum disorders (ASD) thanks to a powerful new public awareness campaign unveiled by May Institute and the MBTA today at South Station in Boston. Headquartered in Randolph, Mass., May Institute is a national nonprofit organization that serves individuals with autism and other special needs.

The campaign – *What Does Autism Look Like?* – coincides with Autism Awareness Month and includes more than 100 T platform posters visible in dozens of subway and commuter stations in Massachusetts. It also includes hundreds of car cards that will be displayed in subway cars and buses throughout the MBTA system. The campaign will be launched on April 2, World Autism Awareness Day.

The campaign is made possible through the generosity of the National Autism Center and United Benefit Services, a full service employee benefits brokerage firm. The National Autism Center is a Massachusetts-based nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting effective, evidence-based treatment approaches for autism, and to providing direction to families, practitioners, organizations, and policy-makers.

“For decades, May Institute has worked to increase public awareness about autism, a disability that has become a public health crisis,” said Institute President and CEO Walter P. Christian, Ph.D., ABPP. “Increased awareness results in earlier diagnosis and treatment, critical components for the future success of children with autism. We are delighted to partner with the MBTA on this initiative, and so grateful to the National Autism Center and United Benefit Services for their generous sponsorship.”

“We embrace these types of partnerships,” said MBTA General Manager Dan Grabauskas. “Educating ourselves on health issues, whether on developmental disabilities such as autism or on initiatives that can improve our overall health, is very important. This month-long initiative is a great way to share information with the thousands of commuters who ride our system every day.”

What Does Autism Look Like? is inspired by the award-winning *Faces and Voices of Autism* exhibition created by May Institute and the National Autism Center. The public awareness campaign features photographs of children and adolescents with ASD, excerpts from personal stories about each child, and important facts about autism.

“We are confident that May Institute’s campaign will help people better understand the complexities of autism,” said Susan M. Wilczynski, Ph.D., BCBA, Executive Director of the National Autism Center. “The campaign comes at a time when research, advocacy, and treatment have never been more critical.”

“I am so proud that our organization is a part of such an important autism initiative,” said Stephen H. Peck, Managing Director at United Benefit Services. “These children and their stories will touch communities across the state in a much more personal and compelling way than statistics alone.”

Autism is a developmental disability that occurs in at least one in every 150 children. It is a neurological disorder that affects the development of the brain, causing difficulty with communication, learning, and social interaction. It is more common than childhood cancer, juvenile diabetes, and pediatric AIDS combined.

To complement the public awareness campaign, the *Faces and Voices of Autism* exhibition will be displayed at various venues throughout Greater Boston during the month of April, including South Station and the Prudential Center. For more information about locations and times, call 800.778.7601 or visit www.mayinstitute.org.

About May Institute

May Institute is a nonprofit organization that provides educational, rehabilitative, and behavioral healthcare services to individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and other developmental disabilities, brain injury, mental illness, and behavioral healthcare needs. Headquartered in Randolph, Mass., the Institute also provides training and consultation services to professionals, organizations, and public school systems. Since its founding over 50 years ago, May Institute has evolved into an award-winning national network that serves over 25,000 individuals and their families annually. The organization operates four May Center schools for children and adolescents with ASD and other developmental disabilities. Another school serves children with brain injury.

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