

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New Children's Book Teaches "Typical Kids" How to Befriend Children with Autism

BALTIMORE, MD, March 30, 2009 - More than ever before, children with autism are being included in classrooms with "typical" children. The increased incidence of the disorder and tightening budgets suggest that nearly every typically-developing school age child will spend time in a classroom, lunchroom, or on a playground alongside a child with autism. Unfortunately, most children will be unprepared and unsure how to engage their new peers. **The Friendship Puzzle: Helping Kids Learn About Accepting and Including Kids with Autism** (Larstan, February 2009, \$14.95) is one of the first books to address this situation.

The Friendship Puzzle is the story of Mackenzie Mackabee, a student at Brook Acres Elementary. Mackenzie is excited when she meets Dylan, a new boy in class, because she loves meeting new people. Immediately she wants to be his friend but for some reason, he does not respond to her attempts at friendship. As she goes about solving what she calls her "friendship puzzle," Mackenzie discovers that Dylan has autism. With the help of her teacher, Ms. Noonan, she learns how to be his friend.

The Friendship Puzzle is the result of collaboration among three Maryland women who saw first-hand the need for this type of educational tool. Author Julie Coe and illustrator Sandra Brassel, both mothers of young children, were inspired by their life-long friend, Jenny Maloni, who is raising two young boys with autism.

"A child with autism may look like all the other kids in school, but may exhibit behaviors that seem strange or different to other children. This can be confusing and create a situation in which "typical" children do not feel comfortable with or know how to reach out to children with autism." said author Julie Coe. "We owe it to our children to educate and teach them strategies for interacting with all children, even those who seem different."

In a lighthearted and fun way, **The Friendship Puzzle** opens up dialogue among children, teachers, and parents about how to react to and include children who may seem different. With a foreword by Dr. Rebecca Landa, Director of Kennedy Krieger Institute's Center for Autism & Related in Baltimore, and an activity guide that can be used by educators and parents, **The Friendship Puzzle** presents an innovative and useful new resource.

"As I watched other children struggle to befriend my sons, I realized that children must be taught the tools they need to interact with children with autism," said Jenny Maloni of Mt. Airy, MD. "I hope this book is a step towards raising a generation of children who understand, embrace, and include children like mine. If we give these skills to all children, as mothers and teachers, we can help grow a generation of friends."

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The creators of this book have generously offered to donate \$2.00 of every sale from SPEECH PATHways visitors to the SPEECH PATHways Foundation. Be sure to use the second BUY NOW button on the online order page at <http://www.friendshippuzzle.com/shop.html> to place your order.

About the Author and Illustrator

Julie Coe of Bethesda, MD is an avid reader with a lifelong love of literature who has always dreamed of writing children's books. She holds a BS in Journalism and a MEd in Counseling and Personnel Services from the University of Maryland College Park. The mother of two young children, Coe was inspired to write *The Friendship Puzzle* out of love and appreciation for the challenges faced by a long-time friend who was herself raising two young boys with autism. This will be Coe's first published work and a follow-up book is planned.

Sondra Brassel of Potomac, MD has been painting and drawing since childhood. She holds a BS in Design from the University of Maryland College Park and a MS in Urban Studies and Planning. Today a mom to two boys, Alex and James, Brassel was drawn to the important topic of teaching young children about autism. The Friendship Puzzle will be her first published work.

Read more about the author, the illustrator and the inspiration at www.friendshippuzzle.com.

About the SPEECH PATHways Foundation

SPEECH PATHways is the only comprehensive pediatric speech-language pathology clinic in Carroll County, Maryland, offering services since 1999. Owner Kimberly A. Bell, M.S., CCC-SLP, has been a speech and language pathologist for over ten years. She and her associates offer a wide variety of specialized pediatric programs in addition to traditional speech and language services. In 2007, Kimberly organized the nonprofit SPEECH PATHways Foundation in 2007 to help provide funding and speech therapy resources for those who might otherwise not be able to afford services. The Foundation awards grants to those unable to afford speech-language services and programs and provides parent and caregiver training through its free Pathways to Parent Support and Training group. For more information, visit <http://www.speechpathwaysfoundation.org>.

For More Information

To request a review copy of The Friendship Puzzle, to arrange an interview with Julie Coe or Jenny Maloni, or for additional information, email friendshippuzzle@gmail.com or call 301-922-3653.

The book will be available for sale at local events and online at www.friendshippuzzle.com.