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Autism Disorder Hits Close to Home for Metro's Chris Limon

- Wayside Systems Assistant Manager is raising funds for research into a cure that may be too late to help his children.
- [Learn more about Autism](#)

By NED RACINE

(Sept. 12, 2007) Chris Limon, assistant manager in the Wayside Systems Division, raises money for autism research. He has two small reasons to do so.

Limon, 30, and his wife Jennifer, 29, are parents to five children: Megan, 9, twins Kristin and Alexa, 7, and twins Brandon and Mariah, almost five years old.

Brandon and Mariah have been diagnosed with severe autism. Limon, who joined Metro in 1997, says he is doing everything imaginable to help find a cure for the neurological disorder. But, if a cure isn't found in time to help his children, "hopefully it will help someone else."

Limon became involved in fundraising for autism research through a 5K walk the twins' school held in April. He created his own team, Team Limon Twins, and raised \$1,100. Walkers included Limon's mother, Maria Hernandez, and cousin, John Limon, both Metro employees, and a friend from Division 20.

But Limon was disappointed in the response he frequently heard from family and friends: "They'll be all right" or "That's what the government is for." He knows there is no guarantee his daughter and son will outgrow autism.

Although estimates of autism's prevalence vary, the National Autism Association website quotes a 2007 Centers for Disease Control report that 1 in 150 children in America today have an autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Confirmed their suspicions

The Limons were concerned with the twins' development more than a year before the Eastern Los Angeles Regional Center confirmed their suspicions.



Mariah and Brandon Limon, 4, diagnosed with having severe autism, attend classes and therapy six days a week in an effort to discover their capability to develop.
(Photo courtesy of Chris Limon)

"Their development was very slow," Limon says. "They wouldn't speak. There was never eye contact. There was never an acknowledgement of what was going on around them."

Doctors suggested the twins were simply developing slowly, as some twins do. The Limons were skeptical, however, because they were already raising their older twins. "We told them this is totally different," Limon recalls.

For the Limons, hearing the diagnosis was a relief; it confirmed their suspicions and placed them and the doctors on the "same page." (Subsequently, the twins were diagnosed as also having mental retardation, which Limon notes is unrelated to autism.)

To learn if Mariah and Brandon will develop and no longer need special services, the twins have rigorous schedules of education and therapy Monday through Friday.

They attend Whittier's Ceres Elementary School from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. An in-home motor skills development teacher works with the twins from 1 to 4 p.m. After 4, they go to occupational therapy (to stimulate their muscles).

On Saturdays and Sundays the twins receive their in-home motor skills development lessons. "That's a lot of work we go through, and we still can't figure out how to manage them," Limon explains.

Feelings of Isolation

This all builds stress on the older children and feelings of exhaustion and isolation for Jennifer and Chris.

Particularly difficult for Limon is his inability to take all his children on outings. Because the twins throw a grand tantrum when they are taken to a new environment, a common trait of children with some forms of autism, Limon can only take them to his mother's house, his mother-in-law's house and his aunt's house.

The difficulty of integrating the twins into their own family also troubles Chris. Although Mariah is usually content to sit alone and rock in a chair, her occasional violence is a concern: Limon is the only family member who is large enough to control her.

And while Mariah does not acknowledge her older sisters, Brandon will try to join in their play. His father says Brandon will smile at them, as if he knows what his older sisters are playing. "He spins around a little bit and he thinks he's interacting with them."

"He's the kind of [kid] who will walk up to you and he wants to cuddle with you," Limon explains. "Really, really loveable."

Limon relishes his work time at Metro for the relief it gives him from his burdens at home. He contrasts that with the strain on his wife. "Her day never ends."

To Learn More About Autism

- National Institute of Mental Health has a wealth in information on autism at <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/autism.cfm>
- National Autism Association has a rich website with extensive information for parents at <http://www.nationalautismassociation.org/index.php>

- The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke offers an Autism Fact Sheet at http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/autism/detail_autism.htm

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