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MAY INSTITUTE

In 1955, Dr. Jacques and Marie Anne May founded the May Institute in Chatham to help their twin autistic sons. They wanted to create a place where their boys would be supported, and where they could reach their full potential despite their disability.

Today, the May Institute, the nation's first residential school for autistic children, has programs in nearly 200 locations throughout the country. Every year, it serves 26,000 children, adolescents, and adults with brain injuries, mental retardation, and behavioral health-care needs. The clinical services offered range from home-based early intervention for infants and toddlers to daily programs for seniors with mental illness.

"We really span the life cycle," Dennis C. Russo, chief clinical officer, says of the institute's services. "Families who have individuals with handicaps face enormous challenges. The problems change (as people get older), but the demands to find the right circumstances are still enormous. For kids, it's finding the right programs, the right services. As kids get older, it's offering special education services. And when people are older adults, they need support for community living and vocational support."

During the last decade, as the number of autism cases has risen, many families have turned to May for diagnoses and services. (The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report one in 150 eight-year-old children in multiple areas of the U.S. have an autism spectrum disorder, but researchers don't know if the numbers are on the rise because of changes in the way the neurological disorder is classified or because prevalence is actually rising.)

At its headquarters in Randolph, May hosts the National Autism Center, which works to create national standards of care, improve the information available to families, and provide assessment and diagnostic services. Autism affects the development of the brain and causes difficulty with learning, communication, and social interaction.

The work of the May Institute, whose board of directors includes professionals in law, finance, real estate, and human services, has been frequently recognized. The U.S. Department of Education named the Chatham campus one of the nation's "schools

of excellence." Two years ago the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies lauded May with its Outstanding Training Program award, and this year the Society for the Advancement of Behavior Analysis bestowed on the institute the nation's most prestigious award in the field of behavior analysis.

In June, May officials announced the closing of the Chatham campus within two years, citing the high cost of living in the area and the inability to expand the facility. Families served there will be transferred to May's expansive state-of-the-art Randolph campus, but the institute will maintain a strong presence on the Cape, Russo says. Programs and services will continue in Mashpee, Hyannis, Harwichport, and other locales.

As Russo says, "We're going to continue the tradition of serving kids with autism on the Cape—in home and in school—and the whole spectrum of adult services."



Dennis C. Russo

The May Institute is the nation's first residential school for autistic children.

May Institute: 800-778-7601; www.mayinstitute.org