

April designated as Autism month

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Five-year-old Spencer Riate wriggled in his mother's arms as more than a handful of other children scampered around the lieutenant governor's chamber yesterday just waiting to be photographed.

"Cheese," said Spencer Riate's older brother, Shawn Riate, who also has autism.

Parents, children and members of Autism Community Together, assembled in Lt. Gov. Mike Cruz's office yesterday for a proclamation signing designating April as Autism Awareness Month.

According to Evelyn Claros, president of Autism Community Together, there are going to be weekly activities arranged in April for families of those affected by autism to get together, as well as to educate the public on autism.

Autism is a complex developmental disability caused by a neurological disorder that affects the social interaction and communication areas of the brain.

Both children and adults with autism typically struggle with verbal and non-verbal communication, social interactions, and leisure or play activities. Autism generally appears before the age of three.

About 1 in every 150 children is affected by the neurological disease, said Cruz, whose nephew has autism.

"A cure for autism has not been found, though with assistance, persons with autism are capable of reaching their full potential," Cruz read from the proclamation. He said his



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Proclamation signing: Shawn Riate, 7, right, steals the spotlight during an Autism Awareness Month proclamation signing ceremony at Adelup yesterday. Lt. Gov. Mike Cruz, third from left, signed the proclamation at his office surrounded by autistic children and their families.

nephew is a "high-functioning" individual with autism, enrolled at a public school with a one-to-one aide.

According to Siony Riate, mother of Spencer, Shawn and Simon Riate, who all are autistic, having a consistent one-to-one aide helps in the autistic individual's growth.

At home, Siony Riate said she even keeps a strict schedule of when the

kids play, eat snacks and do homework. The routine helps her manage things smoothly at home, she said. Clothes, drawers and toys are labeled so organization is easier, too, she said.

Claros added there is a misconception that people with autism are "loners" or are antisocial, "but really it's part of the disability that makes it so they don't have that social piece

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

- ▲ April 10 — 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. family day of bowling at Whimsy.
 - ▲ April 17 — 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. display and fair at Agana Shopping Center. Open to the public.
 - ▲ April 23 — 4:30 p.m. wave at Skinner Plaza
 - ▲ April 24 — 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. family potluck at Cliff Hotel
- Call Evelyn Claros at 472-1484 for more information.

in them." Autism can manifest in a wide spectrum of symptoms and severity.