  

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Susan Risdon at (214)226-6741 [susan@redmediagroup.com](mailto:susan@redmediagroup.com)

**91% of Children Who Drown in the U.S. are Children with Autism, Children with Autism May Run Back into Their Home Even if the House is Burning Down & 49% of Children with Autism Wander from a Safe Environment**

***Autism Society of Central Texas, Williamson County EMS, Round Rock Fire Dept. and Round Rock Police Dept. Team Up to Release an Autism Training Video for Law Enforcement and First Responders to Save Lives During Autism Awareness Month***

**Round Rock, TX (April 5, 2016)-** The Autism Society of Central Texas today released a ground breaking training video that is going to be provided for free to educate law enforcement officers and first responders about the signs to look for when encountering a person with autism. The video features local teens and young adults with autism as they interact with police officers, EMS workers and firefighters. The vision for the training video came from Charles Chester, a long time law enforcement who has a son with autism and owns Chester Security Group.

Most people don’t know the alarming statistics about children and young adults with autism. The National Autism Association reports that 91% of children who drown in the U.S. are children with autism. A fire emergency could be another unique challenge for individuals with autism who may retreat deeper into a burning home to avoid the noise of a smoke detector. Some children with autism run from firefighters trying to save them or refuse to leave the home because their senses are overloaded. 49% of children with autism wander from a safe environment.

According to a national study by the FBI in 2001, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are 7 times more likely to come into contact with law enforcement than those without a disability. The **Autism Law** **Enforcement and First Responder Training** video will help law enforcement and first responders better understand individuals who are impacted with autism in an effort to de-escalate a potentially volatile situation. Law enforcement officers and first responders undergo a substantial amount of crisis intervention training and interacting with mentally ill individuals. Autism, however, is not classified as a mental illness, so further training is necessary to increase awareness of this condition. First responders may face children with autism who run back into their burning homes, bolt or wander away from their homes, are attracted to water and can drown, do not make eye contact and can sometimes have extreme meltdowns if situations are handled the wrong way.

“It’s about saving lives,” said Suzanne Potts, Executive Director of the Autism Society of Central Texas. “I think it’s important that we let a larger community know about autism, especially our first responders who during intense crisis situations with our families when awareness is really important that they need to know if kids or young adults are anxious or having an outburst that they could be a person with autism.”

Autism is a developmental disability that usually appears in the first three years of life. Autism is a “spectrum disorder” meaning that it looks different in different people. In general, though, people with autism typically have severe difficulties with communication, behavior, and social relationships. The incidence of autism has increased in recent years to an approximate occurrence of 1 in every 68 births.

“One of the fastest growing needs for us is how to properly interact and be able to handle different types of situations when dealing with individuals who have special needs,” said Capt. John Collins, Round Rock Fire Department.

“The training allows our officers to continually improve safety measures and better serve everyone, especially those with autism,” said Round Rock Police Chief Allen Banks.

When law enforcement and first responders encounter an individual who has autism, they will most likely do so unknowingly, as most people with autism do not exhibit any overt symptoms initially. However, some with autism who are over stimulated may exhibit symptoms similar to someone who is intoxicated.

The 30-minute video includes information about autism to educate and inform various first responder groups who may encounter individuals with autism in their community. The Autism Society of Central Texas worked with the Williamson County EMS, Round Rock Fire Department, Austin Fire Department, Smithville Police Department, Red Media Group, Chester Security Group, In-Focus Video and local teens and young adults with autism to make the training video. It is recommended to show this video and then use the National Autism Association (NAA) Big Red Safety Toolkit to further educate law enforcement officers and first responders about autism.

<http://nationalautismassociation.org/big-red-safety-box/>

###

**The Autism Society, the nation’s leading grassroots autism organization, exists to improve the lives of all affected by autism. We do this by increasing public awareness about the day-to-day issues faced by people on the spectrum, advocating for appropriate services for individuals across the lifespan, and providing the latest information regarding treatment, education, research and advocacy.**