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Puzzlethon Raises Autism Awareness

Jacqueline Kelleher, Sacred Heart University
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Students Geana Salerno and Nicole Trommelen at this year's Puzzlethon.

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A group of Bridgeport residents and Sacred Heart University education students connected by solving puzzles at this year’s SHU Puzzlethon on April 12. The event raised awareness and funds for children and families affected by autism.

One in 68 children are diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), which is characterized by social impairments, communication difficulties and restricted, repetitive and stereotyped behavior patterns. The word “spectrum” refers to the wide range of symptoms, skills and levels of impairment or disability. A puzzle piece is the symbol for autism.

Solving puzzles is an activity that all ages can enjoy. Students and community members used their problem-solving skills and tried their hand at solving jigsaw, crossword, Sudoku, word searches and other puzzles, said Jacqueline Kelleher, a professor in the Isabelle Farrington College of Education at SHU.

Kelleher, who teaches courses on special needs, coordinated the event. “The fundraising supports the Connecticut autism community by providing financial support for Autism Services and Resources Connecticut (ASRC) programs and services. Universities can play a partnership role by serving as hosts and supporters,” she said. “My students have been outstanding stewards of the university in how they represented us and executed this event.”

This was the first year the undergraduates hosted the event. It is also the first time the event was held on site at the College of Education.