

Autism Speaks, Shafallah to strengthen partnership

AILYN AGONIA - DOHA The Shafallah Center and Autism Speaks announced their commitment to work together in the field of research to help people with special needs. Autism Speaks is the largest autism science and advocacy organisation in the US, which is dedicated to funding research into the causes, prevention, treatments and cure for autism as well as increasing awareness of autism spectrum disorders. The organisation was founded by Bob Wright, former CEO of the NBC, and his wife Suzanne, four years ago after their grandson Christian was diagnosed of autism.



Autism Speaks officially forged partnership with Shafallah last year to extensively promote autism awareness in the country. Among the major milestones of the partnership included intensified information dissemination in various media like ad campaign, posters, brochures and TV ad, setting up a hotline for autism enquiries and website as well as promoting awareness lectures in different venues in the country.

Bob and Suzanne Wright expressed their delight over having Shafallah as their first affiliate in the Middle East in promoting autism awareness. "Every campaign initiated by different countries is unique. We travel through many countries to raise awareness but the banners or building wraps on two of the main buildings in Doha, Ramada and Toyota, on autism awareness are the first in the world that I have seen. Even Qatar Airways' on-air promotion is extremely unique," Bob said.

Shafallah Deputy Managing Director Sameera al Qassimi announced that the activities for autism awareness this year included an art exhibition of young painters from Saudi Arabia and titled 'Let Us Draw', continued awareness lectures for community and organising specialised training lectures for specialist, therapist and parents. For 2010, the major advocacy programme will include holding one of Autism Speaks' major fundraising events in Doha, the 'Walk for Autism'.

Medical Director of Shafallah Genetic Center Dr Hatem el Shanti said that the two institutions were collaborating in research or identification of genetic and environmental causes of autism and development of their capacity for early identification of treatment.