



Barbara Walczak stands in the kitchen with her daughter, Anna Walczak in Hamilton, Ont. Anna was adopted from the Philippines in 1996 and later diagnosed with Autism.

GROWING PAINS

In 1996, Barbara Walczak, along with her husband, adopted a baby girl from the Philippines. Only past a year old, Anna was swooped up into the arms of two loving parents and along she came to Canada. A year later, Anna was diagnosed with autism.

On a Sunday afternoon in a cozy living room sits Barbara Walczak. With a light Polish accent hosting her words she smiles as she holds a photo album of last summer's photos.

"Here is Anna. She's riding a bike with a friend she made on the street."

Flash forward to Barbara on her couch, recalling memories of their most recent vacation. Anna is now 19 and Barbara is single. The marriage between Barbara and her husband fell apart. Although her ex-husband still helps out with parenting, Barbara is the main caregiver. Barbara has built a life with Anna nurtured by love and an immense amount of patience.

Autism is a spectrum of neurological disorders that range in a variety of functioning conditions. Individuals with autism can be classified as high functioning or low functioning and the umbrella of autism is complex and multi-faceted.

Now edging on 60, for Barbara is facing the reality that she won't be able to take care of Anna forever.

There are options in Ontario for children with autism. A child is eligible for therapy, they can be enrolled in Intensive Behavioral Intervention therapy. IBI is practiced 25-40 hours a week with a therapist, working one-on-one

with a child in a private space or at home. Over the last decade Ontario has increased its spending services to \$186 million according to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services.

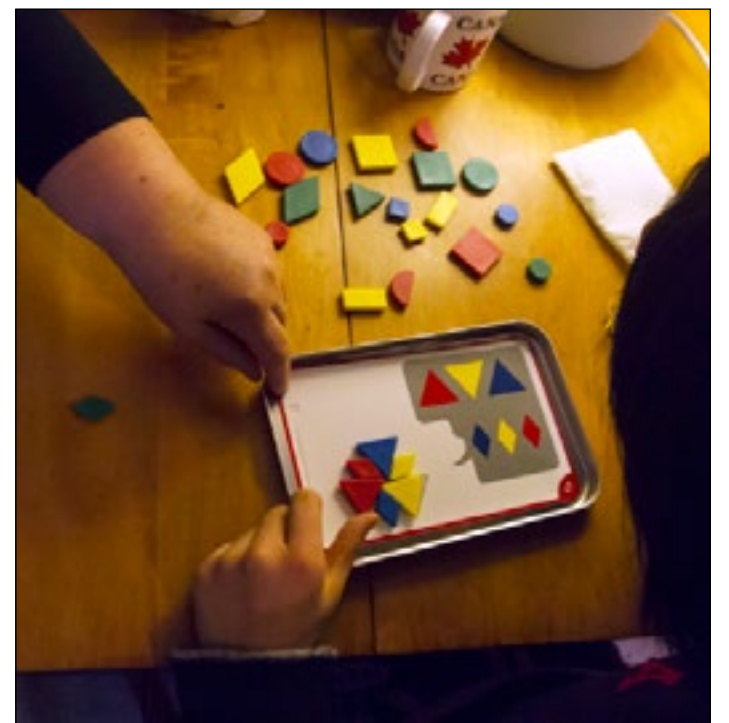
Unfortunately, this doesn't come close to the demand. As of last June there were more children on the waiting list than in treatment.

Once autistic children turn 19, they lose all privileges of being a child with autism in Ontario such as pediatricians, publicly funded speech and language services, and behavior therapy. By age 21, they are no longer allowed to attend public school.

Anna is non-verbal but recently has been enrolled in a multitude of therapies in hope that someday she will be able to be more self sufficient, aiming to improve her communication skills. The main goal is to stimulate certain parts of the brain. This is known as neuroplasticity - the brain's ability to rewire itself and change the way it processes information.

Along with that Anna has been enrolled in dance and swimming so that she stays busy while also helping improve her co-ordination.

It's all about working with Anna and trying to let her the ability of her brain flourish.



Anna Walczak does puzzles at home everyday to further promote her work towards stimulating certain parts of her brain, with the help of her mother, Barbara.

Photos and Story by Julia Karpiuk.



Barbara does daily exercises with Anna to help her identify emotions. The exercise consists of flash cards with different expressions and emotions on them, Anna's is expected to identify the emotion.



Anna and Barbara sit in the waiting room while waiting for Anna's therapy. Barbara is observing Anna while she plays with a toy she found in the waiting room.



Anna attends therapy every week. The focus of her sessions is to work on her comprehension of letters and numbers.