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The Beals Memorial Library Awarded Autism Welcoming Status After Training by Autism Alliance

Winchendon, MA (10/15/2024) – The Beals Memorial Library is pleased to announce it has partnered with the Autism Alliance, a program of Advocates, to become an Autism Welcoming and sensory responsive organization, to better serve individuals with autism and their families and caregivers.

After completing this certification, Library Director Manuel King commented, "The autism inclusion initiative, Seeing Beyond the Spectrum, developed and spearheaded by the Beals Memorial Library's Assistant Director, Alexis Chanthachack, has become an integral part of how our library operates. The library's recent accreditation as the state's first library to become a certified autism welcoming institution strengthens and expands our commitment to serving autistic, neurodivergent, and special needs individuals, and their caregivers." Other members of the community also responded to the news. "My family is so grateful to the Beals Memorial Library. My grandson, as well as some of my foster children, have ASD and are not always able to attend activities in our community. Since the library started sensory friendly programs, my kiddos can not only go to activities, they can also use the library like any other patron," says patron, Amy Simmers-Swanson. Trustee and parent Suzanne Rader also commented, "I've been attending the Walking Beside You Support Group since it began. My son was diagnosed as being on the spectrum as a teenager and at that time there wasn't any support groups in our area, just Worcester or beyond. I have become a better parent and an empathetic community member since being a part of the Beals Library's See Beyond the Spectrum."

Autism Alliance trained the Beals Memorial Library's staff to provide accommodations that allow people with autism and their families to have an inclusive and positive experience when visiting.

"The partnership between the Autism Alliance and local businesses increases quality of life for family caregivers and their loved ones with autism, and creates a welcoming, inclusive community for all," says Jeffrey Keilson, Senior Vice President of Strategic Planning at Advocates.

Autism Welcoming organizations make simple but impactful accommodations to their locations in order to better serve guests with autism and sensory sensitivities. Some of the accommodations the Beals Memorial Library offers guests with autism include: sensory friendly browsing hours once a month, sensory friendly programming as well as accommodations to help make other programs more comfortable for individuals on the spectrum, and sensory items that autistic and neurodivergent patrons may use or borrow through Sensory To-Go Bags. Additionally, the library staff have participated in additional training as part of the library's ongoing efforts to become autism welcoming, including an American Sign Language workshop taught by Catherine

Brown, and a Ways to Support Language and Learning training, presented by local special education teacher Jessica Marquis and speech-language pathologist Katie Pulnik. For more information, visit the library's website at bealslibrary.org/autism.

The Beals Memorial Library is Winchendon's public library. It provides a free and open environment where all may gather for education, culture and information. The library seeks to inspire and encourage literacy, growth, and lifelong learning. The Autism Alliance is a program of Advocates offering events, support, and resources for individuals with autism and their families. To learn more about the Autism Alliance or to make a donation, please visit www.AutismAlliance.org. Advocates provides a broad range of services for people facing life challenges such as addiction, aging, autism, brain injury, intellectual disabilities, and mental health conditions. With Advocates' help, thousands of individuals and families living in Massachusetts receive the supports they need to lead healthy, productive, and rewarding lives. For more information about Advocates, please visit www.Advocates.org.

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