

Well worth the effort

While traveling and time away from home may be hard to manage, attending a conference like the AutismOne/Generation Rescue Conference 2013 is well worth the effort because it is so full of information. For parents who are new to the autism world, conferences like this open your eyes to all the possibilities out there and help you establish a plan of action for the future; and for parents who have been dealing with autism for a while, conferences like this renew your energy and give much needed hope to continue on the autism journey.

This year's AutismOne/Generation Rescue conference was held in Rosemont, Illinois, from May 22–26. One of the biggest and most well-known in the nation, the conference focused on the latest information on autism therapies, biomedical interventions, and cutting-edge autism research. It featured more than 100 speakers, four hallways of exhibitors, and numerous book-signing events. The conference wasn't all business though, holding many special events, including a ladies' salon night, dads-night-out bowling, White Sox game, parents' mixer, and a casino night with drinks and dancing.

In addition to the many physicians, scientists, and experts giving workshops each day, big draws to the conference were the celebrity and congressional panels and keynote speaker Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., JD, LL.M. A legal expert and advocate for the autism community, Kennedy spoke with enthusiasm about the controversial topic of toxins in vaccinations. Conference attendees showed their support and appreciation through standing ovations and showering Kennedy with applause throughout the speech.

On the celebrity panel, Generation Rescue president Jenny McCarthy played host to Alexis Wineman, an American beauty pageant titleholder with an ASD who was crowned Miss Montana 2012, and from the TV show *The Real Housewives of New Jersey*, Jacqueline and Chris Laurita who have a son with an ASD. The celebrities shared their experiences with the conference goers, many of whom could relate to the stories told.

The congressional panel comprised former-U.S. Rep. Dan Burton (R-Ind.), former-U.S. Rep. David Weldon, Jr., MD (R-Fla.) and U.S. Rep. Bill Posey (R-Fla.). They assured caregivers in attendance that they weren't alone in their fight to advance autism research.

Thanks to corporate sponsorship, this year's Autism One/Generation Rescue conference was free, except for the \$25 membership fee to join Generation Rescue. For this meager price, participants received up-to-date information on autism research from physicians who are performing studies across the globe, learned about new therapies and interventions that are helping many people with ASDs, sampled free products from vendors, enjoyed social activities, networked with other families affected by ASDs, and heard from politicians and celebrities who are advancing autism awareness.

—Cory Gilden