



Thoughtful House  
Center for Children

August 25, 2009

Dear Friends,

*As some of you may have already heard, the NBC television network is producing a special on Thoughtful House and Dr. Andrew Wakefield. We are sending along this note to make you aware of the extent of coverage on various programs and the scheduled broadcast date. First, though, we thought it was important to help everyone understand our decision to cooperate with the reporter, Matt Lauer, and his producer, Ami Schmitz.*

*In our estimation, there has not yet been any fair coverage in the mainstream media of Dr. Wakefield or the work of Thoughtful House. While we have a large community of supporters that know Dr. Wakefield's credibility and the accomplishments of Thoughtful House and our excellent physicians and clinicians, including Dr. Bryan Jepson, Dr. Arthur Krigsman, and Kelly Barnhill, CN, CCN, many of us in the Autism Advocacy Community spend most of our time communicating with people in similar situations. Our challenge has always been to reach out to a greater population that might not know or understand what is happening with regard to the autism epidemic and the lack of government research into potential causes, which includes looking at vaccine safety. We thought that if we ever were able to communicate with a fair-minded journalist working at a media outlet with both credibility and reach then it was likely to be worth the risk trying to tell our story.*

*We have taken that chance with NBC. While we initially declined their invitation for a story, we were persuaded to move forward when Matt Lauer was proposed as the correspondent. His reputation for being objective and thorough prompted us to reconsider and ultimately to open our doors. In March, TV crews from The Today Show, Dateline, and NBC Nightly News began gathering material at Thoughtful House in Austin. This involved taping long interviews with Drs. Wakefield, Jepson, and Krigsman, some of our therapists, administrators, and, more importantly, a few of our families. The crews traveled to London to report on the Lancet controversy and interviewed many of the central figures relevant to that part of our story. They also taped interviews, presentations, and families in attendance at the Atlanta DAN conference. Dr. Wakefield was flown to New York by the network and received what he described as a "tough but fair" interview in a one-on-one with Today Show host Matt Lauer. The person we have dealt with throughout the course of this project is Mr. Lauer's producer, Ami Schmitz. Ami has a long resume as a medical journalist and was formerly Dr. Timothy Johnson's producer at ABC News. In our assessment, she has been thorough and diligent in gathering information, documents, and asking the kind of detailed questions that have been glossed over or conflated in previous reporting. We believe, based upon hours and hours of working with Ami, she is writing an even-handed report, which will be narrated and hosted by Mr. Lauer.*

*Nothing is certain, of course, so we are taking a risk. However, we believe the potential reward is worth that risk; it's entirely possible this will be the first time this subject matter*



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*(autism, Wakefield, Thoughtful House, vaccine safety research) has been considered objectively in mainstream media. If that is the case, we have the possibility of communicating with millions of people and that will be nothing but positive for those of us dealing with autism in our own families. We will find out this Friday, August 28. A portion of Mr. Lauer's interview with Dr. Wakefield will be broadcast in an 8-10 minute segment on The Today Show. Either Saturday or Sunday, the NBC Nightly News Weekend will also broadcast a lengthy piece on Thoughtful House and vaccine safety. Coverage will culminate on Sunday night, August 30, at 7 pm EST, with an hour-long broadcast hosted by Mr. Lauer on Dateline NBC. This is scheduled to be adjacent to the Sunday night NFL football game on NBC, which means there is the potential for a large audience. In fact, the cumulative audience for all of these programs means there are likely to be no less than 5 million people who learn about autism and Thoughtful House and, quite possibly, as many as 20 million viewers will see the various broadcasts.*

*Consequently, you see the reason we decided to cooperate with NBC. The program might just be a game changer in the conversation we are all having in our communities with our governments, health care providers, insurance companies, and overall policies within our culture that marginalize families dealing with autism. We all started off several years ago on what many of us believe is the correct course for treatment and research and it has led us to this moment, and we believe we've made the right decision.*

*We would like to ask all of you that are active in the autism community to hold all judgment and wait to see the final broadcast. NBC has dedicated substantial time and resources to this story and the producer has made every effort to interview people from all points of view. Our hope is that a fair story will be told and you may submit feedback to the network after the shows have aired. Please do not attempt to contact them prior to the broadcast.*

*Please share this information with your friends, and if there are any last minutes changes, which we are told is always possible in the news business, you can rely on us to bring them to your attention.*

*Sincerely,*

*Anissa Ryland  
Director of Operations  
Thoughtful House Center for Children*