

Introducing Kelly A. Piacenti, 2017 Theresa Award Honoree.

When Kelly learned she was to receive this year's Theresa Award, she experienced a wave of emotions. She was happy and honored, of course, but this was coupled with a sense that she was not a worthy recipient. She is in awe of the work done by Vincent and Susan on behalf of children with special needs, and she felt her achievements paled in comparison.



Obviously, we disagree. As you will see, Kelly stands as a shining example of what the Theresa Awards are all about.

Kelly is, first and foremost, the mother of a child with special needs. Her son Nicholas stopped breathing during birth and had to be resuscitated four times. The resulting brain damage was so severe that doctors told her Nicholas had only a few months to live and recommended institutionalization. Kelly would have none of it. She and the rest of the

family insisted that Nicholas would be raised in the family home and receive the best possible care. Together, they proved everyone wrong. Nicholas is now 16 and a constant source of inspiration and joy to the entire family.

Kelly's commitment to serving others began while she was still in college. She worked in a group home and considered going into social work. Upon graduating in 1991, she took a position with MetLife, where she led the company's Center for Special Needs Planning. The birth of Nicholas strengthened her commitment to helping others and gave her the knowledge, insight and empathy to act as a mentor for families facing similar challenges. When asked if she had a mentor, Kelly replied, "Nicholas was and continues to be my mentor. He has changed my perspective on life. I no longer get upset about relatively minor problems or life's daily challenges and frustrations. Nicholas has also instilled in my other children a sense of humility and the desire to help others. We have grown closer as a family and are inspired by Nicholas each and every day."

Kelly is now an Assistant Vice President with MassMutual. She manages the MassMutual SpecialCareSM program, which includes over six hundred Special Care Planners. Kelly also oversees partnerships between MassMutual and the largest special needs nonprofit organizations across the country, including the Arc, United Cerebral Palsy (UCP), the Autism Society, the National Down Syndrome Congress (NDSC) and the Tuberous Sclerosis Alliance.

Kelly serves on the National Board of Directors for both the Arc and TASH, national non-profit organizations advocating for people with disabilities. She also serves on

the Advisory Board for the Academy of Special Needs Planners, as well as the American College MassMutual Center for Special Needs. She has spoken at dozens of industry conferences across the country and has been featured as a speaker on several radio talk show programs. Kelly has been published and quoted in numerous industry publications for the special needs community. In the fall of 2015, she was named a “Working Mother of the Year” by “Working Mother” magazine.

Kelly and her husband Frank reside in Chester, New Jersey with their four children Alexandria, Frank, Nicholas, and Olivia.