

2007 Autism Speaks Family Services Community Grants

Final Report and Results

EDUCATION

Massachusetts Advocates for Children

Boston, MA

massadvocates.org

Autism Parents and Professionals Training Project

PROJECT OBJECTIVE:

This project addressed the education priority of training parents of children with autism spectrum disorder statewide, targeting low-income parents in underserved communities who face linguistic and cultural barriers with intensive training services. The project also provided workshops for professionals focused on key aspects of special education law. The goal of this training project was to enable parents to better advocate for the services and supports from the school district necessary for their children to reach their full potential and become active community members. In addition, the project had an even wider impact by training medical professionals, educators and other service providers on the special education law and procedures that will enable them to more effectively write reports, develop IEPs, and participate in the Team meeting process.

PROJECT STEPS:

The focal points of this project were threefold. They included the following:

- Providing culturally and linguistically appropriate intensive training to Latino and Haitian parents of children with autism regarding services and programs necessary for children on the spectrum to reach their potential and the legal right to obtain these services;
- Providing outreach, training and information to parents statewide; and
- Providing workshops for medical professionals and educators to address legal requirements and effective strategies to secure the full range of essential educational services necessary for children with autism to demonstrate competence.

In terms of marketing and outreach, three steps were completed:

- Project staff provided outreach regarding workshop opportunities to educators, physicians, and other medical professionals, working through medical centers, professional organizations, service organizations, teacher unions, post-secondary institutions, including medical schools, and teacher training programs.
- Project staff conducted statewide parent outreach activities, relying on requests from statewide autism support centers and, as resources permit, responding to request from individual Parent Advisory Councils (PACs).
- Project staff and consultants conducted home visits in order to more effectively overcome language and cultural barriers in reaching additional families.

OUTCOMES:

To date, over 1,000 parents and professionals have attended workshops provided by project staff, exceeding expectations. In addition, project staff provided 18 intensive training sessions which accommodate cultural, linguistic, and literacy barriers for 93 parents of children with autism from the Haitian and Latino populations. There have been 1552 website downloads of project educational material from the beginning of the grant period to date.

In addition:

- Project staff conducted 43 workshops (in 25 cities and towns) throughout the Commonwealth providing training to approximately 600 parents of children with autism.
- Project staff provided 20 workshops for approximately 500 educators, physicians, and other medical professionals.
- Project staff conducted an intensive workshop series for Haitian parents of children with ASD in a manner that addressed cultural and linguistic barriers.
- Project staff continued to meet monthly with the Parent Empowerment Group and developed and conducted interactive participatory workshops on parent-selected topics. In addition to general discussions about autism, the need for special education laws, and transition services, staff further developed interactive trainings about home services, independent evaluations, and understanding the service delivery grid section of the IEP.
- These workshops have helped parents gain competence and confidence with their understanding of special education terms and the legal process.
- In addition to presenting to the Parent Empowerment Group, project staff have developed and implemented training programs for the larger HAPHI parent group (over 25 parents of children with disabilities, the majority of whom have autism) periodically throughout the year.
- Project staff developed a new outreach strategy in the last part of the year, providing initial home visits to meet with a few parents and provide general information about the project, autism, and the special education process.
- Project staff conducted 8 workshops which included 25 Latino Spanish-speaking parents in Lawrence.
- Project staff prepared the parents for speaking with public officials by conducting a series of interactive trainings that included instruction on developing personal narratives, writing stories highlighting concerns for their child with ASD, and practicing speaking in public.
- Project staff arranged a meeting with a state representative, the parent group, and project staff to discuss parents' concerns with services for Latino children with ASD.
- Project staff then convened another training session with parents, to debrief and further focus on public speaking and strategies to advocate with public officials.
- In order to conduct additional outreach to immigrant Spanish-speaking parents of children with ASD, the project developed plans to hire a Lawrence parent of a child with autism (previous MAC client) as a parent consultant.

Southwest Autism Research and Resource Center (SARRC)

Phoenix, AZ

www.autismcenter.org

Educational Consulting

PROJECT OBJECTIVE:

The Educational Consulting Program was developed to support students in inclusive education programs and/or transitioning students from special education to general education placements. The program was geared toward elementary, middle and high school classrooms, and includes students, educators, therapists and parents with the intent to build the capacity for schools and districts to independently support the social, academic and behavioral needs of children with ASDs in inclusive settings.

PROJECT STEPS:

The following activities occurred during the course of the project:

- Consultation services were provided for 476 educators throughout 13 Arizona school districts, impacting 91 children with ASDs in 52 schools in those districts. Services were also provided to 22 school professionals at the Arkansas Department of Education. This equated to 3,787 individual hours of education and consulting services during the funding year.
- School district consultation services were also provided through 460 phone consultations and 630 email consultations.
- Training was provided to 647 education professionals, equating to more than 22,000 individual hours of training.
- The Playground Club was established, which supports social interaction skills and promotes health relationships between typical peers and students with ASDs during recess.

The Educational Consulting Process:

1. Announcements/letters sent to school districts throughout Arizona explaining the availability of the educational consultation program.
2. Schools begin contacting SARRC.
3. Appointments are made to meet with school staff to further discuss the program and evaluate the needs of the school and its students.
4. Meetings are arranged between SARRC and the school's special education director, special education teachers, school principal and possibly the support staff (paraprofessionals, school therapists, school psychologists, etc.) that have an interest in school-based services.
5. Services are outlined and are tailored to the specific needs of the student/s and the school. Consultation services may include any of the following:
 - a. Educational evaluations.
 - b. Functional behavior assessments.
 - c. Consultation for inclusion.
 - d. Consultation for self-contained classrooms.
 - e. School training.
6. Agreements are made between SARRC and the school.
7. Services are provided per the agreement.

8. Reports are developed based upon the services provided; reviewed by the school; and arrangements are made for further discussion, if necessary.
9. Follow up is provided as requested.

OUTCOMES:

Information on the Educational Consulting program has been disseminated through articles in SARRC's Outreach magazine, which is distributed to more than 20,000 local families, donors and community leaders.

Pathways for Exceptional Children

Montville, NJ

www.montvillepec.org

Project Win-Win

PROJECT OBJECTIVE:

Children with autism aged 3-21 in Montville Township and Union County, New Jersey will enjoy enhanced recreational and educational opportunities as a result of this project. In addition, other children with autism may benefit as a result of the applicant's outreach program.

PROJECT STEPS:

The programs and activities included: 1) Team sports and recreational activities, including baseball, tennis, bowling, golf, swimming, soccer and the like; 2) Acceptance and Awareness programs, including a 2-hour training for typically developing children that teaches them how to understand and work with their non-typically developing peers; 3) Learning through Life, a program that integrates academics and life skills for children with special needs (e.g., teaching math through a cooking project); 4) Magic of Reading, a program that matches each child with the reading strategy best suited to him or her; and 5) Statewide Outreach and Educational Reform, a collaboration with parents, schools and other locales to set up programs modeled on the applicant's.

OUTCOMES:

The parents were all highly involved and began new sports skills, tennis and basketball programs; as well as reading and art festivals. Parents also held a Casino Night which raised over \$10,000 for future programs. Another result of the Autism Speaks grant, mentor trainings were done that began to create a domino effect. Morris Plains, NJ received a \$2,000 grant from Pathways in addition to mentor trainings from the Autism Speaks grant. They are now well on their way to developing programs and becoming self-sufficient. The key component of success is the involvement of the children as mentors that then leads the way to the involvement of their parents and eventually the buy in of the entire community and their leaders. The model has created a “pay it forward” or a “win-win” for everyone.

Richard Solomon, MD, PLC

Ann Arbor, MI

www.aacenter.org

Training Respite Care Providers in the P.L.A.Y. Project Intervention for Autism

PROJECT OBJECTIVE:

The P.L.A.Y. Project is a practical application of DIR (Developmental, Individual-differences and Relationship). In this pilot program, respite care workers in the Lansing Area Parents Respite Center were better trained to care and work more effectively with children with ASD.

PROJECT STEPS:

Activities that Took Place :

- In January we began to coordinate with Lansing Area Parents Respite. We began to plan for a location as well as a date and time of training. Over many phone call and e-mail correspondences a plan started to take shape. At the end of January, Lansing Area Parents Respite informed us that they no longer wished to participate in the program. As the grant was being written it was understood that their entire staff would be trained. As they surveyed their staff to determine an appropriate date and time for the trainings, they realized that most would not be around for the entire year. Many of the staff members take a leave during the summer due to college schedules. They also felt that they did not want to invest in the staff hours needed to support the training due to a high rate of turnover in their staff. The training would be free to the staff, but we did not budget for the staff to be paid for their time to attend the training. We had assumed that would be an in-kind contribution made by LAP Respite or its staff. Due to the turnover in their staff, the predicted lack of interest and limited availability of the staff members, and lack of funds to pay for the staff members' time to participate in the training, LAP Respite declined their participation in the program.
- Next came the search for a new agency to participate. Through many phone calls and e-mails, and a presentation to their staff, it was decided that Livingston County Community Mental Health would participate. Families that had children with autism were identified and asked if they would like to participate in the training. Staff members that work with individuals with autism were identified and asked if they would like to participate in the training. Informational documents were prepared for the staff members and family members explaining the program. Staff members in various departments at Livingston County Community Mental Health discussed whether this program would benefit their staff and if they had room in their budget to pay for the respite care providers' time to participate in the training. Respite Care Providers were surveyed and asked which dates and times would work best with their schedules. Most of the respite care providers have second jobs as well. It was decided that two full days of training would best meet their needs as opposed to weekly two hour training sessions.
- Amber Masterson, Project Coordinator began researching materials for the training. A binder of over 100 pages was put together for each person trained. It contained information about autism spectrum disorders, information about The P.L.A.Y. Project, the six functional developmental levels, information on sensory systems, P.L.A.Y. ideas, articles, a glossary of terms, etc. A PowerPoint presentation was designed for the training. For the speech and language component to the training, the More than Words video from the Hanen program was ordered. The principles of the Hanen program are

very similar to The P.L.A.Y. Project. The video does an excellent job of providing examples of how to promote language and interaction. It was arranged for Robin Crumb, OTR to do a presentation about sensory integration and the P.L.A.Y. Project.

- With input from Jim Lyddy, Executive Director of The P.L.A.Y. Project, pre and post surveys were designed for the training.
- The two day training took place. The format of the training consisted of: PowerPoint presentations, video examples, small group activities, a presentation by Robin Crumb, OTR, discussion, role play and demonstration of play with appropriate engaging toys, The respite care providers learned about comfort zone, sensory motor profile, functional developmental levels, techniques and activities. They learned how to follow a child's lead, work on attention, how to engage a child and read their cues, how to wait for the child to initiate, how to promote interaction, problem solving, and pretend play, among other things. They learned about how their affect and pace of play affect the child. They learned about different styles of play. They also learned about available resources.
- More people joined the respite care staff so two-day training was held for them. The same material was covered during this training. After this training the respite care providers began to implement what they learned with the clients that they work with. Two of the respite care providers were able to continue with additional video supervision and one with 1:1 coaching.
- A second agency, CSTS, expressed interest in training their respite care providers. A one-day training was scheduled. The respite care providers were also given training binders and trained in a similar format as the described above. The information was condensed into a shorter time period and Robin Crumb, OTR did not present at this training. The written materials that she provided at the first training were included in the training binder.
- Surveys were collected and reviewed and the information compiled in the final report to Autism Speaks.

OUTCOMES:

The first training was held for 14 of the respite care staff and the second training was held for 3 newly hired respite care staff members. The benefit of having 14 and 3 at the training instead of original plan to train 40 is that smaller class size allowed each respite care provider the opportunity to present each client with autism that they work with (without mentioning names or identifying characteristics) and we were able to discuss P.L.A.Y. techniques and methods individualized for each individual that they worked with. The opportunity to individualize the training appeared to add to the relevance and effectiveness of the training.

We plan to make the respite training package available to our 200 home consultants in 25 states and 6 international countries and show them how to train respite care providers in their locations. Thus each community where there is a P.L.A.Y. Project could also extend their services through local respite agencies. The major benefit will be to the individuals with ASD who will receive increased hours of engaging care and to the respite staff who will experience more fulfillment in their work. It is also possible that we will replicate this program with other agencies that provide respite care beyond our direct home consultant network.

Behavior Solutions, Inc.

O'Fallon, MO

www.behsolutions.com

Educating and Training Providers on Effective Practices

PROJECT OBJECTIVE:

This proposal will increase the quality and quantity of service providers working with individuals with autism. Two major goals of the program are to 1) teach participants effective strategies they can use in their services provision that will improve the outcomes and successes of the individuals they work with and 2) to teach participants how to effectively train others on what they have learned in the program.

PROJECT STEPS:

With funds received from Autism Speaks we were able to conduct 2 rounds of our 5 week intensive behavioral training series. Each round of workshops consisted of one 4 hour workshop and one 6 hour workshop. Each attendee was then provided with up to 10 hours of on-site consultation from one of our Board Certified Behavior Analysts. In all, 19 parents and providers attended the workshops and participated in the consultation services. The 19 participants represented 11 individuals with autism. That is 4 of the teachers from round 1 worked with 3 children with autism. Therefore by attending the workshops, these professionals were able to receive training specific to 3 different children and help developing individualized treatment plans for each.

OUTCOMES:

As a result of the funding we were able to provide training to 19 professionals and parents who work with or care for individuals with autism everyday. The training they were able to receive has enabled them to become more effective as parents, teachers and professionals and better support the individuals they work with. Results from follow up surveys from another project similar to this one indicate participants retain the skills they have learned and are able to use them with other children they work with down the road. The effect is a lasting impact on the lives of individuals with autism.

EQUIPMENT/SUPPORTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Autism Project of Palm Beach County

West Palm Beach, FL

www.rlc2000.com

Project Lifesaver – Palm Beach County

PROJECT OBJECTIVE:

This project provides technology that will enable law enforcement officers in Palm Beach County to readily locate individuals with autism who wander and become lost.

PROJECT STEPS:

In 2008, the APPBC utilized Autism Speaks' grant to help purchase six emergency locator systems, a David Clark headset, and 34 transmitter kits for individuals with autism.

OUTCOMES:

Since the purchase of the above items, APPBC has been able to raise additional funds to purchase ten additional emergency locator systems and 20 additional transmitter kits. To date, they have had one full search and rescue under the Project Lifesaver program, which was a complete success – the participant was located in less than 30 minutes!

RECREATION

Mid-Island Y Jewish Community Center

Plainview, NY

www.miyjcc.org

Aspire – A Camping Experience

PROJECT OBJECTIVE:

This program provided inclusion opportunities by trained staff in a summer camp program for children from pre-school to pre-teen ages.

PROJECT STEPS:

The program included 20 children across the spectrum, and facilitated inclusion. The components of the program included a "train the trainer" model, based on adult learning theory, which states that people who train others remember 90% of the material they teach, and diffusion of innovation theory, which states that people adopt new information through their trusted social networks. Thus the Train the Trainer Project first develops a cadre of skilled community-based trainers, who in turn train others in their community or within an organization.

Campers met with the Aspire director prior to enrolling. From there, they were invited to try a social skills class where the director could observe the camper and determine if he or she would be successful in a larger group setting. This process helped streamline enrollment and eliminate the need for 1:1 shadows. Children enrolled in the Aspire program were able to function in a 1:3 ratio.

OUTCOMES:

The Aspire program has developed a positive reputation in the community. The parents of the campers in the Aspire program have indicated that their children are doing very well socially, especially when included with typical peers and that they feel that the summer program has directly influenced their children's success in school this year. Almost all of the campers are returning this summer, and we are near capacity at this time.

Acting Antics
Morgantown, PA
www.actingantics.org
Developing Social Cognition through Theater

PROJECT OBJECTIVE:

The basic premise of Acting Antics is to use live theater as a means to teach social cognition skills. Acting Antics instructors in two school districts implemented social skills instruction through drama. The goal was to train special educators in the school districts in the techniques, and to provide ongoing consultation for the trained educators in the school district.

PROJECT STEPS:

The Avon Grove program was implemented in the Avon Grove Intermediate School in the spring with 3rd and fourth graders, and in the high school with 10th through 12th graders. The program was completed in the fall of 2008. All special education staff participated in the staff training and received copies of *Acting Antics*, the instructional manual. District professionals who were then implementing the Acting Antics program in the schools utilized consultation services by the Acting Antics Director, Cindy Schneider.

Octorara Area School District requested that Acting Antics provide the direct instruction piece during their summer extended school year program. The program was implemented with 2nd through 6th graders in July 2007. In the fall, the staff training was then attended by over 30 professionals including special educators, regular educators, guidance and psychologists. The 20 allotted books were distributed and the district made arrangements to purchase 10 additional books for the remainder of the attendees. Consultation services were provided to the district social skills instructor and to teachers implementing the Acting Antics strategies in the district.

OUTCOMES:

We are happy to report that the districts are continuing to use the Acting Antics strategies in the schools, using an on-site educator acting as the district representative. Additionally, very positive feedback was received both from teachers and from parents of students who participated in the pilot programs in both districts. Progress was noted in the areas of self-esteem, reading of non-verbal cues, using non-verbal expressive communication and in peer relationships.

Bergenfield Public School District

Bergenfield, NJ

www.bergenfield.org

Not Far from Par Golf Program

PROJECT OBJECTIVE:

This project will double the size of a summer golf program (at a minimum) in Bergen County that successfully taught students with autism in a community setting. Through a teacher training program, it is hoped that other schools will be inspired to launch similar programs.

PROJECT STEPS:

Instruction each day alternated between practice at the high school field, the driving range and then at the actual golf course one day per week. Through pre and post parent surveys, Bergenfield School District learned that parents were extremely pleased with the “Not Far from Par” Program. Most stated that their children’s skills improved throughout the summer and 100% agreed that their children were learning important communication and social skills.

The Program Coordinator also reported the following successes which were documented by pre and post data and staff observations:

- On the average, students improved their ability to focus from five minutes to thirty minutes prior to needing a break. All students were able to focus for at least twenty minutes and many were able to focus for up to 40 minutes
- The students needed less prompting this year and learned skills at a quicker rate. Last year, at the end of the sessions, most participants were only able to putt. This year all students including the new students, learned to putt and chip.
- When the program started, most participants needed to be prompted to wait their turn, stay with their group, and to show appropriate golf etiquette. By the end of the summer session, students did wait their turn, stay with their group, and there was an 80% increase in appropriate use of golf etiquette.
- Staff invited community members to come and observe the program. The Mayor of Bergenfield visited as did local and county officials. All were amazed to see a group of children with autism taking turns, staying with their group, and exhibiting appropriate behavior. Some remarked that the students could also putt and chip better than they do.
- The program had an increase this year in the attendance of family members. On average, 55% of the parents were there on any given day. We were also fortunate to have had a larger group of volunteers this year. Some volunteers were not associated with any of the towns where the students lived, but they heard about the program thru the newspapers or other sources and wanted to be part of it. Attendance for program volunteers was over 99%.

OUTCOMES:

Through the “Not Far from Par” Program, thirty middle school and high school children with autism and their families participated in the game of golf as a means of strengthening their connection with others and with the community. August 2008 staff assessments and surveys of parents document that all objectives were met and that the “Not Far from Par Program”

positively impacted participants physically, emotionally and socially. Specifically, on an objective by objective basis:

- The program continued to demonstrate for the community that children with autism can successfully be educated within their home communities.
- The program provided a healthful recreational activity for teens with autism. One hundred percent of program participants reported that they had never participated in a “sport” activity in the past. Through one on one instruction, practice, and group play, students learned valuable life lessons that improved their motor skills, social skills, and communication skills. Golf proved to be outstanding lifelong physical activity that contributes to overall wellness and health. Students were able to compete against themselves in a safe setting and were proud of their daily successes.
- Activities assisted with increasing communication between teens with autism and their parents. Parents reported that the “Not Far from Par” program offered a unique way for them to bond with their children and to share many meaningful experiences. Most stated that they had been searching for some unique way to connect. The program enabled them to enjoy many laughs and good times.
- Golf instruction provided a unique behavior modification tool to assist children with autism with comprehending and practicing social rules. Through daily instruction, children with autism interacted with golf instructors, program aids, and non-disabled students serving as volunteers, adult volunteers from the community, and others. These opportunities increased student confidence, self esteem and a sense of security. According to the Program Coordinator, student golf skills also progressed much faster in Year II than they did in Year I.
- Observation by a Behavior Specialist documented other improvements. These included the ability of students to connect to their environment, their peers, their teachers and their parents. Also, aides tracked the ability of students to focus on the activities at hand and to apply appropriate social behaviors to a specific setting. Students seemed to react positively to the stimuli at each setting (sun, grass, wind, etc.)
- As a result of the successful marketing, 2008 enrollment almost doubled over last year’s program. From July 7, 2008 to August 5, 2008, thirty middle school and high school students with autism participated in the golf program five days per week from 3:30-5:30 PM daily.

Judson Center
Royal Oak, MI
www.judsoncenter.org
PALS (Peer Assisted Lunch Social)

PROJECT OBJECTIVE:

Children and teens with autism often do not receive the kind of social skills support they need. To address this issue, we will bring social skills intervention and staff training to ten local schools (elementary, middle and high schools) for one year.

PROJECT STEPS:

The intervention, a "Peer Assisted Lunch Social," used the research-based model of "integrated play groups" to integrate students with autism with their typically developing peers. School staff members were trained in this method by the applicant, so that they will be able to continue the intervention without assistance by the end of the year. Local schools, through word of mouth, heard about the program and requested it be brought to their schools, which greatly benefited more students.

OUTCOMES:

Altogether this program has served 65 children with ASD and 114 typical peers. Many participating schools have requested continuation of the programming into the next school year, using other grade levels and different children.

YMCA Camp Manitou-lin

Middleville, MI

www.campmanitou-lin.org

Weekend Respite Services for Young Adults with Autism in a Camp Setting

PROJECT OBJECTIVE:

20 young adults with autism will get to go away to camp for 10 weekends. They will enjoy independence, recreation and social interaction, while their families enjoy some respite.

PROJECT STEPS:

Participants in each of the weekends participated in arts and crafts, nature activities, high ropes course, canoeing, kayaking and swimming. Adapted water skiing was also provided one weekend by BLAZE sports of Kentwood Michigan. Participants were encouraged to participate in all activities at their own pace and comfort level.

Each weekend was staffed by two female counselors, two male counselors in the same age range as the campers. This provided peer interaction, and positive role modeling for the campers. Each weekend was also staffed by a special education teacher, who served as the activity director and provided behavior management and staff training.

Staff training for counselors and volunteers was provided in a one day in-service provided by the special education teacher, a physical therapist, and camp staff. This training focused on transitioning, sensory impairments, peer interaction, and variations in ASD. Staff were also instructed through the YMCA of Greater Grand Rapids in non-violent conflict resolution.

Our food service staff provided fresh healthy meals. In addition to a main entrée, fresh fruit and/or salad bar accompanied each meal. The menu was tailored each weekend to the needs of the campers to accommodate texture /sensory issues, and provide gluten/casein free food for those with food allergies. Snacks were also provided each evening and on Saturday afternoon.

Separate male and female housing was provided in our heated and carpeted cabins with private toilets and showers attached. Each cabin housed the campers, at least two staff at all times, and volunteers. Campers were encouraged to be independent in taking care of their belongings, and were given cues or assistance for hygiene as needed. Campers were also encouraged to assist with cleaning of cabins and the camp, providing real world experience for job training.

Therapeutic Horseback riding was provided each weekend through YMCA Camp Manitou-Lin's *SPIRIT FARMS* Therapeutic Riding Center. Campers were educated in stable management, tack management, horse safety, and riding technique. CHA/NARHA instructors provided both on and off horse activities to promote independence and learning in a safe, controlled setting. All campers provided physical forms from their physicians to allow them to participate in on-horse activities. Trained volunteers served as horse leaders and sidewalkers to provide safety and encouragement. Many of the participants were able to ride at the end of program with only supervision and brush and tack their horses with minimal cues. Several participants continued to take therapeutic riding lessons each week after being introduced to it in the weekend programs.

YMCA Camp Manitou-lin established a connection with Central Michigan University to provide volunteer opportunities for CMU's therapeutic recreation and outdoor education students. 2-3

volunteers from CMU attended each weekend and were able to get real-world experience for their classes. Three local high-school students were also trained as volunteers, and served as support staff to the counselors during each of the ten weekends.

OUTCOMES:

Parents reported high satisfaction with YMCA Camp Manitou-lin's Weekend Respite Program. One mother stated "I know my son is safe there, and it is so much nicer than the institutional type respites we have tried. He feels safe and encouraged to participate in activities he may not have tried before. He likes the staff, and feels respected." Another parent reported that the respite weekends provided them the only full night's sleep they could have all month, as their son does not sleep more than 4 hours per night. One camper's family also reported an increase in personal interaction in their non-verbal camper, and stated she also was self-initiating toileting more often.

YMCA Camp Manitou-lin will continue the Weekend Respite Program for Young Adults with ASD ages 19-26 throughout 2009. There are currently 6 weekends scheduled for 2009. Our summer camp program has expanded as well, to provide one week of daycamp for this age group during summer 2009. YMCA Camp Manitou-lin is thankful to Autism Speaks, for providing the grant money to initiate this program, and we look forward to providing services for families with young adults and children with ASD in our community.

YOUNG ADULT/ADULT SERVICES

Chapel Haven

Tucson, AZ

www.chapelhaven.org

Staff Training for Adult Autism Transition Program

PROJECT OBJECTIVE:

Chapel Haven West, a satellite program of Chapel Haven, Inc., opened on the campus of the University of Arizona in July of 2008. Our program served men and women, on the high end of the autism spectrum, in a two year residential program, followed by a transition to independent living in the Greater Tucson area, with support provided by Chapel Haven West for the lifetimes of its clients. All four core program components—life skills, academics, employment and recreation/leisure—were addressed.

PROJECT STEPS:

The training consisted of two phases: Phase 1--team building, program philosophy, overview of autism, discussions of effective strategies and Phase 2--understanding the specific components of the curriculum through a combination of lectures and classroom exercises; applying the program's philosophy and learned strategies directly to the curriculum components.

- The trainings consisted of highly credentialed and experienced professional staff and internationally known experts in the field of Autism and Asperger's Syndrome. The trainers included Michelle Garcia Winner, MA, CCC-SLP, Pam Crooke, PHD, CCC-SLP, Virginia Hodge, MA, CCC-SLP, Barbara Cook, MA, CCC-SLP, Dr. Mindy Malik, Marybeth Santiago as well as other Chapel Haven staff.
- Barbara Cook presented a two day workshop that provided an overview of Asperger's Syndrome and High Functioning Autism. Barbara covered topics such as empowering versus enabling, being direct but respectful, and critical thinking skills. As one of the authors to Chapel Haven's curriculum for adults with autism spectrum disorders, Barbara presented on the foundation and philosophy of the program.
- Dr Mindy Malik and Marybeth Santiago provided an indebt presentation on vocational success for those on the autism spectrum. This was followed by Virginia Hodge who held presentations on applications of social communication interventions, the hidden curriculum, and strategies for vocational programming.
- Michelle Garcia Winner and Pamela Crooke held a two day workshop on applying the principles of social thinking to those on the autism spectrum.
- A panel of family members, who have adult children with autism spectrum disorders, spoke with the staff about their experiences and challenges they faced as a family. This informal discussion allowed staff to have a better understanding of how autism spectrum disorders are viewed through the lenses of the family.

OUTCOMES:

Through the combined efforts of these highly credentialed and experienced professional staff and internationally recognized experts in the field of Autism and Asperger's, this complete training

program was a success and surpassed our goal to offer the most comprehensive training program offered to professionals who will work effectively with individuals with AS.

A two-month follow up session was held with all Chapel Haven West staff that participated in the training program. The purpose of this follow up was to investigate what training was helpful, what strategies are working, and what training is needed. This information was useful in determining the ongoing trainings that are necessary for staff development. As a result of the follow up discussion with staff it was determined that more support was required in the areas of social competency training. Chapel Haven has responded by hiring another speech and language pathologist to work closely with both staff and students in the program. All staff will participate in ongoing training on the latest techniques and strategies that are considered promising practices to teach individuals with AS.

The Cody Center, Stony Brook University

Stony Brook, NY

www.codycenter.org

Supported College Program Pilot Semester

PROJECT OBJECTIVE:

The primary goal of the Cody Center/SCCC program was to help commuter college students with Autism Spectrum and related disorders reach their greatest level of adult independence and self-defined quality of life, while living at home and attending college. This partnership makes accessible a public community college education with its affordable price to students with autism spectrum disorders, for whom the disability services office is not able to provide the more intensive services required by this population of young persons. The Cody Center/SCCC pilot program was the first of its kind to take place solely on a commuter campus.

PROJECT STEPS:

- Initially, twelve students identified as having an autism spectrum disorder were referred by center providers and the SCCC counseling center. Eight of the twelve students joined the pilot program, which started on August 26, 2008. The two female and six male program participants, who range in age from 18 to 21 years old, received special education services throughout their school careers, and were already accepted to SCCC before joining the program. Three of the eight students previously attended college on their own, unsuccessfully. Five of the program members were recent high school graduates who never attended college.
- In addition to registering with the SCCC counseling office, each student completed a program application and wrote an essay about his/her expectations, goals and motivation for joining the program. Project staff interviewed students individually and with their parents/advocates. Seven of the eight students signed consents to share educational information with his/her parents and necessary college personnel.
- We provided thirty, one hour psycho-educational student group meetings (2 per week) and five two hour parent meetings (1 per month) throughout the semester. In addition to the groups, we provided twelve hours a week of individual college life coaching/counseling and three hours a week of academic tutoring specifically for group members. The five program members who had never attended college were enrolled in a three credit Personal Growth class, offered by SCCC. Program staff remained in close contact with the Personal Growth professor and observed students in the classroom throughout the semester. This cooperative effort proved to be a great help in connecting program members with the campus community.

OUTCOMES:

At the end of the semester, we asked the parents and students to evaluate the program by completing an anonymous questionnaire based on the students' original goals and description of success in college.

All of the students reported that the three most important aspects of the program that added to their success were: the "safety net" it provided; the assistance with accessing services on campus and the availability of people to talk to while on campus.

The aspects of the program most important to parents were: helping their sons/daughters and families manage anxiety about college; providing a “safety net” on campus; and the on-campus support students had access to.

The overall satisfaction rating for both the parents and the students was 90%. Seven of the eight current students will continue to participate in the Cody Center program through the end of this academic year. (One of the eight students plans to transfer to a four year college). We have begun to receive new applicants for next year and will expand the student base beginning in the fall semester of 2009.

Parents Allied with Children and Teachers for Tomorrow (PACTT)

Chicago, IL

www.pactt.org/learning-center.html

Expanding Job Training and Placement Services for Young Adults with Autism - PACTT Vocational Services

PROJECT OBJECTIVE:

This project would expand vocational services for young adults with severe autism in the Chicago area. With the grant, PACTT was able to expand its adult division to serve more young adults with autism, provide more working hours, teach new job skills and add new employers to its roster.

PROJECT STEPS:

The year started with eight young adults with autism, with two more joining the program. In addition, we have a pilot transition program for 16 students ages 17-22 which is now fully operational. Students from PACTT's Learning Center and the Vocational Center train and work together for half days five days a week. Six other students from the Learning Center come to the adult Vocational Center once a week to scan and pack books for a local bookstore; work on projects for other PACTT clients; or train for specific jobs.

We use individual on-site education and job coaching, which includes an adult vocational manager and three full-time teachers. Every person on the staff also serves as a job coach.

In addition to our efforts soliciting new employers, we continually work to involve our clients with severe autism in the active life of the community. Even on days when they are not at an employer, our clients are out, engaged with the community. Every student is out everyday, shopping, recycling, making deliveries and running errands. Each month, after studying about a particular job category, clients go on field trips to local businesses for a "behind the scenes" tour and talk with employers and employees.

OUTCOMES:

With help from the Autism Speaks grant, PACTT has expanded and strengthened Vocational Services. As a result, we are collaborating with more Chicago-area employers, teaching new job skills and providing clients with a wider selection of work choices and more working hours per week. Every day at their worksites, the young adults served by PACTT Vocational Services are proudly proving that individuals with severe autism can become dependable, valuable employees working at a wide variety of jobs in the community.

Via of the Lehigh Valley
Bethlehem, PA
www.vianet.org
Customized Employment

PROJECT OBJECTIVE:

With this funding Via of Lehigh Valley will have the resources to customize employment opportunities for individuals with more significant levels of autism. There is the opportunity for best practices and replicable practices for other agencies.

PROJECT STEPS:

Via of the Lehigh Valley was able to partner with a larger grant from the Pennsylvania Bureau of Autism services.

The following steps were taken to get the program up and running and throughout the process:

- All of the employment partners cited in the grant application were solicited for referrals through presentation at IU Transition meetings, participation at Autism related public events such as the Autism Speaks Walk and the Lehigh Valley Autism Society's Spring Conference, and individual relationship building. Referrals were received from both IU20 and IU21, both Northampton and Lehigh County Offices of MH/MR, LV Autism Society, LV Autism Task Force, Nazareth High School, OVR.
- We featured the grant on our website and usually get about five calls a week from struggling families asking for help with employment services.
- One of the biggest obstacles is working with people with Asperger's with an IQ over 70. These people received services through the county mental health system that does not see Asperger's as a priority population and are usually not interested in paying for follow along job coaching after the grant is over. Although autism is such a hot topic with ever increasing funding it is almost always set up for therapies, and work with children. It is yet to be recognized that having a job works as a highly effective modality to improve the quality of peoples lives and decrease their need for other expensive services.

OUTCOMES:

Our original proposal was to work with six participants and by the end of the program we were working with 20. Seven of these individuals are now employed in highly individualized jobs. We have been able to complete specific staff training on Autism and Customized employment for staff, and training for parents of Customized Employment and person centered planning. We have been better able to braid traditional funding sources and use the grant to help us prepare for an ever increasing number of autistic customers requesting community based employment services. Every day more families call and are interested in leaving facility based services to work on a job in the community. It is also very clear that individuals with ASD do much better behaviorally when they are gainfully employed and in turn less expensive to provide needed services for.