

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.

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.

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.

