



2009 Autism Speaks Family Services Community Grants

Final Report and Results

EDUCATION

Autism Society of the Panhandle

Pensacola, FL

autismpensacola.org

Kids for Camp Summer Learning Lab

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The grant proposes to expand the number of trained teachers in the Pensacola area and provide extended school year services to students with ASD. After five days of formal training, Kids for Camp teachers will teach while practicing these methods with children with ASD for six weeks under the supervision of camp “coaches”. The coaches, behavior specialists trained in ABA, add an invaluable practical component to teachers’ learning. Five additional days of practical training during hands-on sessions with children will greatly enhance opportunities for growth in the children and knowledge of the teachers. Children with ASD are impacted to varying degrees in two major areas of concern: communication and social skills. Those impacted mainly in the area of communication will receive 1 to 1 instruction, while those needing social skills help will have a teacher to student ratio of 1:4. Campers will be those impacted by ASD from ages 3 - 22.

PROJECT STEPS

Lead staff were hired at the beginning of the project. Their duties included assisting with staff selection, training and assessment of campers during the first week of camp as well as consulting daily on programming for campers. Remaining grant funds were used for hiring some of our 10 Lead Teachers. These positions were filled by teachers who were highly skilled in dealing with children with autism. The next step was a training at the hospital led by a BCBA. Over 40 additional community professionals and parents participated in the training of our 30 staff. Beginning June 23, 2009 and ending on July 30, 2009, camp was held at two school district buildings on Monday through Thursday for a total of 24 days. (Building use was donated by the school district.) Friday July 10, staff received additional training. Staff also consulted daily with the lead BCBA and both lead coaches. Parent informational trainings were held at least once each week allowing parents the opportunity to learn about area resources as well as to consult with staff on applying the principles used.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

The two lead teachers enrolled in BCBA programs both conducted a study and produced a research project using data collected during camp. The lead coaches provided data on student progress to parents and to our board. Staff was evaluated weekly and increased their ratings significantly over the summer. Follow up surveys will be conducted this fall to determine carry over into the classroom by both teachers and students. Parents reports

overall satisfaction with camp through surveys. In addition, at least five staff members decided to enroll in BCBA courses as a result of camp.

*Click [here](#) to view a slideshow report on Kids for Camp 2009.

CHIME Institute

Woodland Hills, CA

www.chimeinstitute.org

Paraprofessional ASD Training for Inclusion (PATI)

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

This project will enhance the skills of paraprofessionals working with students with ASD in addition to expanding the field of trained professionals. Specific objectives are:

- To develop a model training program for paraprofessionals to effectively support students with ASD in inclusive early education, elementary, and middle school programs.
- Increase the capacity of service providers in the local school districts to provide high-quality educational programs to students on the autism spectrum.

PROJECT STEPS

Steps to achieve the first objective included:

An Autism Specialist was hired in June 2009. A review of the literature and of available materials and curriculum was completed. Current paraprofessional training resources being used in the field were reviewed, along with evidence-based practices in paraprofessional training and teaching strategies for students with autism in inclusive settings.

Planning sessions with project staff took place and timelines were established for each phase of the project. The core competencies were developed prior to implementation, and training modules were organized to address these.

Research took place to identify the technology needed for a web-based format for trainings. Due to time constraints and the need to begin training when school started in September, it was decided to postpone a web-based format, but to create materials that could be implemented online in the future.

Thirty-three paraprofessionals were recruited over the spring and summer and participated in the fall training, through advertisement in job-posting message boards, and through advertisement in local colleges and universities.

In planning the implementation of the training modules, our planning team identified the challenge of a high turnover rate between the spring and fall semesters as a significant barrier to implementation in the spring. For this reason, we decided to use the initial phase of the grant period for development of materials, and begin training in the fall with a new cohort of paraprofessionals that are expected to participate in the training for the full 09-10 school year.

Evaluation tools were developed, which consisted of attendance monitoring, fieldwork completion, and pre-and post-tests that corresponded to several training modules. Following completion of the full training program at the end of the school year, paraprofessional trainees, teachers, and administrators will complete a survey regarding implementation and outcomes of the training program.

Training modules were developed that allowed paraprofessionals to complete a “beginning” program of 15 training sessions in the fall of 2009. 21 paraprofessionals successfully completed this program, with a minimum of 80% attendance and completion of all requirements. These paraprofessionals received a certificate that represented their completion of the requirements, and these certificates are considered in evaluations and eligibility for a raise at the CHIME Charter Schools. Twelve of the paraprofessionals who began the program either did not continue to work for the schools throughout the entire semester, or did not meet the minimum requirements for attendance or fieldwork completion. Seven of these 12 paraprofessionals who did not receive a certificate attended the majority of the trainings, and chose to continue to attend during the Spring semester.

To increase the impact and facilitate integration of key skills into their practical work in classrooms, each training session included a “field assignment” component, which needed to be completed during the week in between training sessions. Due to the high rate of turnover between the fall and spring semesters, new paraprofessionals that were hired for the spring semester were able to participate in the beginning training, which was offered for a second time in the spring. The trainees who successfully completed the “beginning” modules are now attending as part of an “advanced” training group, and those who continue to work at the charter schools in the fall will act as mentors to paraprofessionals who are newly hired for the 2010-2011 school year.

Direct training sessions were held on Tuesday mornings at the CHIME Charter Middle School and on Friday mornings at the CHIME and lasted approximately 1 hour for each session. Training materials were developed by the Autism Specialist in collaboration with general and special education teachers, related services providers, and faculty from California State University, Northridge. Sessions were implemented by the Autism Specialist, elementary school principal, and special education teachers. Each session included a review of the previous field assignment, some direct instruction, and an activity to reinforce the objective of the session. Informal training consisted of mentorship and direct application of skills by supervising special and general education teachers throughout each trainee’s time spent during their work assignment at the school site.

Steps to achieve the second objective included:

Recruitment: As stated above, thirty-three paraprofessionals were recruited in the spring and over the summer of 2009 and participated in the fall 2009 training. Recruitment consisted of advertisement in job-posting message boards, distribution of flyers in local

colleges and universities, and informational meetings with current CHIME employees regarding the new training opportunity.

Although the original objective was to train 60 paraprofessionals in the first year, our ability to meet this objective was impacted by several factors:

- Due to the high turnover rate between the spring and fall semesters, it was decided to begin training in the fall semester and continue through the end of the 2009-2010 school year. Paraprofessionals who were hired after October 2009 (n=7) were placed in a new training group that began the “beginning” training program in January 2010.
- In collaboration with the Director of the CHIME Early Childhood programs, it was determined that the unique nature of developmentally appropriate instruction in early childhood required a different training program. For this reason, it was agreed to focus attention on training paraprofessionals at the two charter schools, where the largest number of students and paraprofessionals might benefit.

Thirty-three paraprofessionals participated in the beginning training program in some form, with 21 completing all requirements for a certificate. These paraprofessionals will continue to receive additional training through an “advanced” training program to be completed in June 2010.

As an element of the training program, all paraprofessionals participated in a “debriefing” meeting after school at least two days per week. In this meeting, trainees worked with general and special education teachers, as well as related service providers to refine students’ educational programs, and received feedback on performance and collaboration skills.

Over the year since this project was originally funded, CHIME has facilitated the hiring of three trained paraprofessionals in local area schools. It is anticipated that at the close of the school year, we will be able to assist more paraprofessionals to take on jobs in local schools, and will begin recruitment efforts for trainees for the 2010-2011 school year.

Within one year following completion, it will be possible to determine how many students with autism have been supported by PATI-trained paraprofessionals in local area schools. Currently, 26 students who receive special education services under the label of autism have been supported by PATI-trained paraprofessionals during the 2009-2010 school year.

The steps for developing the PATI training materials and systems have been shared with teachers, parents, and administrators from local area schools who visit the CHIME schools to gain strategies for including students with autism in general education classes in their local schools.

The steps for developing the materials and systems, as well as sample materials and activities were also disseminated through a presentation at the Cal-TASH conference in February, and will be shared at the Fullerton Autism and Inclusion conference in April.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

Training materials for 30 modules of paraprofessional training, consisting of a beginning and an advanced program, have been created to meet the needs of paraprofessionals serving students with autism in inclusive settings, and can be used to train future cohorts of paraprofessionals by CHIME-trained facilitators.

- The training content and objectives were determined through surveys of parents, paraprofessionals, administrators and teachers regarding areas of need, as well as a review of research on paraprofessional supports and evidence-based practices for teaching students with autism.
- Trainings are designed to proactively teach necessary skills, and revisit key competencies over time.
- Each training includes a field assignment designed to facilitate reflection and generalization of skills learned.
- Each trainee was provided with training materials and materials for field assignments. These can be replicated for future trainees.

Twenty-one paraprofessionals have completed the 15 weeks of training, field assignments, and supervised work experience that constituted the “beginning” training, and have moved on to the “advanced” training, which is in progress. Seven recently hired paraprofessionals began the “beginning” training program in January 2010.

Although formal evaluation of the program will take place after the initial cohort of trainees have completed both the beginning and advanced components at the end of the school year, preliminary results indicate:

- Increased sense of “buy-in” from paraprofessionals, through decreased absences from work/training and improved timeliness compared to previous school years.
- Teachers report that field assignments have helped them become familiar with training objectives, and have facilitated dialogue between paraprofessionals and teachers about how to improve upon individual students’ educational programs.
- Supervising teachers have commented on skills in prompt-fading and social facilitation.
- More consistent use of data collection formats by trained paraprofessionals to monitor daily progress toward IEP goals. While data collection forms were completed as at a rate of approximately 40-50% during the 2008-2009 school year, approximately 80% of data collection forms are completed on a daily basis.
- Supervising teachers report more consistent monitoring and implementation of behavior support plans for individual students.

NEXT STEPS:

Now that training materials have been developed, training will be implemented using these materials at the CHIME Charter Schools on an ongoing basis during subsequent school years, with CHIME staff as facilitators.

Upon completion of the school year, and one year following the initial implementation, additional surveys of paraprofessionals, parents, and teachers (outlined in the project proposal) will be conducted to determine whether the training effectively met the objectives set out by this project, and to guide ongoing revisions to the training curriculum.

CHIME will continue to gather data and monitor information regarding student outcomes related to training through data collection forms monitoring student progress toward IEP goals, as well as through periodic interviews with supervising teachers.

Further use of family perspectives is needed within the program, and a module focused on family perspectives will be added to the current training modules.

Families of students attending the CHIME schools are often unaware of the level of training received by paraprofessionals. Information about the training program will be provided at upcoming parent meetings, and key parents will be invited to attend training sessions and provide feedback on the content.

Hurst Wood Education Foundation & Clear Horizons Academy

Provo, UT

www.clearhorizonsacademy.org

Parent P.R.E.P. (Pre-School Readiness and Education Program)

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The Parent P.R.E.P pilot will create a formalized, hands-on training model that aims to educate parents with children (ages 1-3) in a school-based and home setting. The first objective is to reduce the lag time between diagnosis and attending pre-school. The second objective is improved behavior. The last objective is in the creation of a replicable training module.

PROJECT STEPS

Before starting up, we created a comprehensive plan for the program. We determined we would start a new session every six weeks. The first two weeks included lectures on specific topics such as behavior, sensory, language development, IEPs, etc. These were done in groups to encourage parent support, group interactions and collaborative discussion. The third week offered home visits in which the teacher visited each child and family in their home for one hour. Modeling, coaching, suggestions and ideas were all implemented during this home visit which allowed the teacher a clear picture of ways to support the home/family environment and the educational environment. For some parents, video of the teacher or parent working with the child was recorded so parents could review the information and training again later. Weeks four and five were used for on-site visits in which the child and their caregiver(s) came in to the site to see ways in which educational techniques, relationship tools and interactional patterns could be increased to help their child. As with the home visits, activities during these hours included coaching, modeling, suggestions and ideas specifically tailored to that family and their educational and interactional goals. The last week was a close-up lecture that discussed options in the area and gave tools on how to find and enter programs and help their child succeed in their educational placement. A school tour was given to show how educational settings may accommodate their child. Time to speak one-on-one to answer questions was offered to each parent at the end of the program as well.

As each session progressed, materials were sought out and created to better support the needs and interests of that group. The Parent P.R.E.P. “library” expanded with each group and resources were made available online. All of these resources have been put in the training modules and on the website and distributed to parents to allow further referencing and resources for these families and the community at large.

As stated above, the program was implemented as planned, with some minor variations that were included to ensure program efficiency, effectiveness and support in the community. The biggest difference was the choice to allow some older ages into the program. We found that many of the early intervention families with kids from one to three years old were interested in the program, but were already overwhelmed with their

child's diagnosis and other training, introductory or early intervention programs offered. There was a great deal of interest, but it took word of mouth or a friend to encourage those struggling with their child's diagnosis to utilize the program. A lot felt very intimidated by the one-on-one help and struggled to commit to a program with so much face-to-face interaction. However, those who had received the diagnosis a year previously and had struggled in getting their child the right programs, settings or services they needed were the ones that were most interested. These parents asked to join to learn more. They asked to be involved, to be coached and modeled through things and to gain as much information as possible. We quickly allowed them to join and were pleased to see them immediately implementing things they had learned, supporting newer parents and becoming a strength to the program and the community.

We also found that each group of parents was interested in different topics. So, even though there was a specific curriculum, there were times when PowerPoint presentations and resources were adjusted or changed to better fit the group being taught. All resources were made available to everyone, so even if a group went into different topics, they could access other information online later. Topics added included a more intense communication and language presentation, anxiety and mental health disorders and including siblings in home therapy programs.

We had many attending the program. As stated above, this is one of the biggest differences and challenges we faced. Although the program was originally designed to service those early intervention ages, we found that the need was much bigger than early intervention. Many of those families just receiving diagnosis were already involved with the school districts or other early intervention programs and adding an extra program in the early stages seemed to quickly overwhelm. Some parents thrived on getting as much information and help as possible while others were quick to reach their limit and would drop out of the program early even when support was tailored to their needs. Most families that stayed involved were ones that had family members, friends or associates that had relationships with those teaching the program and continued to support and encourage attendance and participation in the program.

On the other end of things, many parents of older children received the information through conferences, pediatrician's offices, online postings, etc. and called requesting any information available. Many of those in the six to 12 years old range were having new problems in school settings as well as unfamiliar and complex situations (i.e. siblings, puberty, mental health, etc.) that were creating a whole new need for information. These parents were interested in learning more, getting coached and receiving modeling or support in ways that seemed overwhelming to newer parents. One session was done primarily for older kids (six to 12 years old) in order to hit those topics specifically. The older session became our "focus group" in which families were able to see the way the program ran for early intervention and, while receiving information relevant to them, were also able to give us specific feedback on what to change for those families participating in the early intervention groups. A survey was given to all "focus group" families to help guide our program and to help us make relevant changes.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

A folder was kept on each family attending including information on medical, diagnosis, attendance, assessments and other notes and concerns. All teachers could access and use the information to help guide their teaching and resource materials given to each family. Personal reports and observation notes were included by teachers involved in order to help communicate and track information needed to help families individually.

Each teacher did a pre- and post- ICDL checklist on any children they were working with. The pre- ICDL checklist was based on parent observation and feedback as well as the first home visit. The post- ICDL checklist was based on more parent observation and feedback and further site visits. Growth was seen in many of the families even within a short six-week period.

Each parent was surveyed at the beginning and end of the program. The ending checklists were difficult to have parents complete and return, but those given back were very telling of the program's positive effect. According to the checklists we found much improvement as each family worked their way through the program. Please see checklist report below.

Lastly, we had a survey given to the parents of our focus group. This helped us get feedback from the parents who had been through early intervention to help us analyze retrospectively if the program could be changed or improved for early intervention services.

To analyze the success of Parent PREP, we had the parents fill out a simple assessment at the beginning and the end of the program to assess improvement in understanding and confidence. We broke the survey into three categories to analyze. Six statements in each category were analyzed on a five-point scale. The results were then determined by how many points the parent's score went up or down from the first assessment to the last assessment.

1. The first category was a general understanding of autism, their child, and what resources are available to them. The statements rated in this section included:
 - a. I know a lot about autism and other developmental disorders.
 - b. I understand basic sensory challenges and how to help my child.
 - c. I understand basic communication challenges and how to help my child.
 - d. I understand basic behavior challenges and how to help my child.
 - e. I know about and am aware of different models and approaches that may benefit my child.
 - f. I know where and how to access information and community resources to address my child's needs.
2. The second category dealt with understanding the needs of and being confident in supporting the social aspects of their child. The statements rated included:
 - a. I feel confident in knowing and understanding what my child needs.
 - b. I feel powerful in helping my child progress at home.

- c. I understand how to work with my child to fill their own individual needs and strengthen their skills.
 - d. I feel I can help others better understand my child.
 - e. I feel supported in my journey to help my child grow and learn.
 - f. I feel I can support my child socially.
3. The third category was confidence in helping their child in their educational goals. The statements included the following:
- a. I feel powerful in helping my child progress at school and in the community.
 - b. I know what an IEP is and my role in helping the schools plan, support, and follow through on them.
 - c. I feel I can make relevant and appropriate decisions regarding my child's progress, intervention, and education.
 - d. I feel I can select and support an educational program for my child.
 - e. I feel I can support my child educationally.
 - f. I feel I can help my child make a seamless transition into an appropriate educational or therapeutic program.

The attached table at the end of this report shows the post-analysis data. There are 30 points possible in each category. Of 21 parents surveyed at the beginning and end of the program only four parents ranked themselves the same or lower in one area when compared with their initial assessment. Seventeen parents reported feeling an increase in their abilities and understanding in all areas when compared with their initial assessment. Three parents surveyed (15% of the total) stayed the same and only one parent (3% of the total) scored themselves lower than the initial assessment. In summary, the program analysis indicates a 97% success rate among surveyed parents.

Kentucky Valley Special Education Cooperative

Hazard, KY

www.kentuckyvalley.org/?page_id=22

Strategies for Teaching Based on Autism Research Initiative

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the Strategies for Teaching Based on Autism Research (STAR) initiative is to increase teacher knowledge and consistent implementation of instructional methods appropriate for students with autism spectrum disorders. Specific objectives are:

- The participating teachers will demonstrate knowledge of developmental curriculum content appropriate for children with autism.
- The participating teachers will demonstrate knowledge of curriculum-based assessment techniques for baseline and progress monitoring.
- The participating teachers will learn to use applied behavior analysis (ABA) lesson plans.
- The participating teachers will demonstrate the ability to teach children with autism using the discrete trial training method.
- The participating teachers will demonstrate awareness of the method of pivotal response training and corresponding research.
- Participating teachers will display knowledge of teaching children with autism to be independent and to generalize skills learned in discrete trial and pivotal response training within their daily functional routines.
- The participating teachers will be able to identify the critical skills students with autism need to learn.
- The participating teachers will learn to teach communication skills, academic skills, and social interaction & play skills to a variety of children with autism.
- Participating teachers will display entry-level ability to conduct implementation of the STAR program within the model classroom setting.

PROJECT STEPS

The following steps were undertaken in accordance with the objectives:

- Kentucky Valley Special Educational Cooperative committed two staff members to serve as regional STAR coaches.
- The grant was reviewed with the fifteen directors of special education who are members of the Kentucky Valley Special Educational Cooperative. This was completed in a monthly meeting with the special education directors and via email.
- STAR presenters were scheduled from STAR Autism Support in Organ to conduct training and room set-ups.
- Member districts appropriately identify teachers who serve students with autism to attend the two-day comprehensive STAR workshop. This workshop promoted awareness of the program region wide.

- Fifteen member district special education directors were invited to submit applications for set-up of model STAR classroom sites.
- The organization had allotted space for five applicants to join the project. Only three applications were submitted.
- Three sites were selected as model STAR classroom sites.
- The 2-day comprehensive STAR workshop took place in Hazard, KY. Regional teachers participated in the workshop. The workshop took place on August 17 and 18, 2009.
- Immediately following the 2-day comprehensive STAR workshop, three classrooms were set up within the Kentucky Valley Special Educational Cooperative service area as model STAR classrooms. This was accomplished with under the direction of the STAR presenters for Organ. This was completed in two days of additional training for the teachers of the model classrooms. Kentucky Valley Special Educational Cooperative district STAR coaches were also in attendance for this additional training. Day one was comprised of STAR training staff working with the teachers of each of the three classrooms for set-up. The following day consisted of the STAR trainers providing each individual teacher with hands-on training and room set-up to promote implementation of instructional techniques. Under the STAR initiative, each of the three model classrooms were supplied with a STAR program combination kit, a penny token board kit, a positive reinforcer kit, and STAR Autism Program learning DVDs. Model classroom districts also purchased several thousand dollars worth of materials to ensure project success.
- Progress was monitored via regular on-site visits, e-mail, phone and electronic surveys by the STAR coaches. The STAR presenters for Oregon were also available by phone and e-mail. Administrative feedback was also a strong asset for the project. The administrative staff in all schools were especially willing provide all needed materials and support.
- A second follow-up visit from the official STAR presenters from Organ to each of the three model classrooms will occur in May. This visit was delayed due to illness and inclement weather. This year has been especially problematic for schools closings. During this visit, a follow-up with the classrooms will be completed to ensure appropriate implementation. The end result will be three classrooms effectively implementing the program and two regional STAR coaches trained on the implementation process.
- The model classrooms are available for on-site visits as requested by regional educators.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

This project has positively impacted students with autism spectrum disorders, and has provided teachers with training that reviews curriculum content to teach students with autism. The project will be sustained for many years beyond the funding period. Both STAR coaches will remain active in all three model classrooms. The Kentucky Valley Special Educational Cooperative has committed to providing personnel to sustain the project, and the district coaches will be in place at Kentucky Valley Special Educational

Cooperative for many years to come. After the STAR initiative is completed, the coaches will have the training and the materials to conduct on-site training and support with new staff and new model classrooms. This will result in increased capacity/sustainability of the program on a regional level. Another method for promoting sustainability/increasing capacity for the STAR program is the model classroom visitation. By allowing visitation to model classroom from staff at other Kentucky Valley Special Educational Cooperative member districts, the existing model classrooms/teachers will be a vehicle for promoting sustainability of the STAR initiative. The following survey was completed to determine if the program objectives were obtained by the STAR model classroom teachers. It shows pre-STAR results and post-STAR results. The results are identified by percentages below:

STAR Initiative Objectives Survey Results	
1.) The participating teachers will demonstrate knowledge of developmental curriculum content appropriate for children with autism. Have you met this goal? Please rate yourself.	
<u>Pre STAR Results:</u> Strongly Agree: 0% Agree: 33.3% Disagree: 67.7%	<u>Post STAR Results:</u> Strongly Agree: 67.7% Agree: 33.3% Disagree: 0%
2.) The participating teachers will demonstrate knowledge of curriculum-based assessment techniques for baseline and progress monitoring. Have you met this goal? Please rate yourself.	
<u>Pre STAR Results:</u> Strongly Agree: 0% Agree: 0% Disagree: 100%	<u>Post STAR Results:</u> Strongly Agree: 100% Agree: 0% Disagree: 0%
3.) The participating teachers will learn to use applied behavior analysis (ABA) lesson plans. Have you met this goal? Please rate yourself.	
<u>Pre STAR Results:</u> Strongly Agree: 0% Agree: 0% Disagree: 100%	<u>Post STAR Results:</u> Strongly Agree: 67.7% Agree: 33.3% Disagree: 0%
4.) The participating teachers will demonstrate the ability to teach children with autism using the discrete trial training method. Have you met this goal? Please rate yourself.	
<u>Pre STAR Results:</u> Strongly Agree: 0% Agree: 0% Disagree: 100%	<u>Post STAR Results:</u> Strongly Agree: 100% Agree: 0% Disagree: 0%
5.) The participating teachers will demonstrate awareness of the method of pivotal response training and corresponding research. Have you met this goal? Please rate yourself.	
<u>Pre STAR Results:</u> Strongly Agree: 0% Agree: 0% Disagree: 100%	<u>Post STAR Results:</u> Strongly Agree: 0% Agree: 100% Disagree: 0%
6.) Participating teachers will display knowledge of teaching children with autism to be independent and to generalize skills learned in discrete trial and pivotal response training within their daily functional routines. Have you met this goal? Please rate yourself.	

<u>Pre STAR Results:</u> Strongly Agree: 0% Agree: 0% Disagree: 100%	<u>Post STAR Results:</u> Strongly Agree: 33.3% Agree: 67.7% Disagree: 0%
7.) The participating teachers will be able to identify the critical skills students with autism need to learn. Have you met this goal? Please rate yourself.	
<u>Pre STAR Results:</u> Strongly Agree: 0% Agree: 33.3% Disagree: 67.7%	<u>Post STAR Results:</u> Strongly Agree: 67.7% Agree: 33.3% Disagree: 0%
8.) The participating teachers will learn to teach communication skills, academic skills, and social interaction & play skills to a variety of children with autism. Have you met this goal? Please rate yourself.	
<u>Pre STAR Results:</u> Strongly Agree: 0% Agree: 33.3% Disagree: 67.7%	<u>Post STAR Results:</u> Strongly Agree: 100% Agree: 0% Disagree: 0%
9.) Participating teachers will display entry-level ability to conduct implementation of the STAR program within the model classroom setting. Have you met this goal? Please rate yourself.	
<u>Pre STAR Results:</u> Strongly Agree: 0% Agree: 0% Disagree: 100%	<u>Post STAR Results:</u> Strongly Agree: 67.7% Agree: 33.3% Disagree: 0%

Youth Development Clinic

Newark, NJ

www.ydcnj.org

Hands-On Training for Autism

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

This project was inspired by YDC's work with the Irvington Board of Education in New Jersey to expand in-district autism-education programs for pre-school children. Prior to the implementation of this project, children with autism spectrum disorders in Irvington were often sent to out-of-district education programs at enormous cost to the district and significant inconvenience to the children and their families. Working with Irvington, YDC has been able to establish a classroom that currently serves eight pre-school children with Autism. The enthusiastic reception and success of this initiative highlights the current lack of educational services for students with autism in the Newark-metro area, particularly with respect to staff training and on-going support. The goal of the Autism Speaks grant is to encourage other communities in the Newark-metro area to develop their own in-district autism education programs by providing them with evidence-based training, support and guidance.

PROJECT STEPS

In the initial grant proposal, the Youth Development Clinic proposed a plan that would address the need for highly qualified school personnel in the Newark-metro area who could develop, implement, or expand in-district special education programs for children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). To accomplish this, YDC outlined a strategy, which included the organization training seminars for educational professionals who are looking to develop, implement or expand their in-district autism education services. The training model was based on the HANDS in Autism program developed by Dr. Naomi Swiezy at Riley Hospital for Children in Indianapolis, IN. The evidence-based model goes beyond the usual didactic, lecture format of workshops and incorporates a laboratory classroom experience where trainees are able to interact with actual children with ASD.

Our training was designed around the special needs of the participating school districts due to the fact that the participants reported different levels of knowledge and experience in this area and some districts sought to initiate a program at different educational levels (high school, elementary, etc.). All of these factors were incorporated in the training to maximize the benefits and usefulness for our partners. We proposed two four-day training sessions, the first focusing on pre-school and elementary programs, and the second session on middle and high school programs. School districts were expected to pick the session that best addressed their needs and plans. Once the school districts completed training and began developing, implementing, or expanding the programs in their respective districts, YDC staff was available for scheduled consultation and support for three months.

During the course of the grant year, the Youth Development Clinic (YDC) encountered unforeseen difficulties in implementing the grant as initially designed. These obstacles included the need to account for school district budget cycles, staff availability and school closings. While these factors have caused YDC to make adjustments to the original timeline and program design, we are happy to report that we have still successfully met our proposed objectives with the support of the Autism Speaks grant. YDC has successfully initiated training seminars within the Hillside, East Orange and Irvington School Districts, which are located within the Newark-metro area. At the time of initial contact, the Hillside School District aimed to integrate higher functioning students with ASD into their kindergarten to second grade regular education classes. The East Orange School District aimed to enhance and expand the services they provided as part of their in-district program. The Irvington School District aimed to add a kindergarten to second grade autism classroom.

Final Timeline:

Below is the timeline that reflects the milestones that were achieved during the grant year.

Timeline	Milestone
Within three months of grant award	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YDC marketed the training program to school districts in the Newark-metro area.
Within six months of grant award	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YDC made contact with the Irvington, East Orange and Hillside School Districts and received statements of interest from each district. • YDC secured training locations, materials and equipment for the Irvington School District
Within nine months of grant award	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YDC conducted needs assessments within the Irvington and East Orange School Districts. • YDC initiated training and consultation services within the Hillside School District.
Within one year of grant award	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YDC conducted needs assessments, training and consultation services in the East Orange and Hillside School Districts. • YDC supported the development and expansion of school-based programs for pre-school children with ASD in the Hillside, East Orange and Irvington School Districts.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

Project evaluations are an important aspect of programs because it enables providers to measure progress. As proposed, the YDC project evaluation consisted of a needs assessment, training evaluation, observation and consultation, and a three-month follow-up evaluation. Prior to participation in the training, school officials completed a needs assessment describing their current knowledge and resources in developing, implementing, or expanding their in-district educational programs for children with ASD. Due to schedule limitations a pre-assessment questionnaire that detailed their current knowledge and skills at providing educational services to pre-school children with ASD could not be completed. However, all participants were given the opportunity to complete a questionnaire after the training, which detailed their knowledge and skills gained, and also their level of satisfaction with the training program. Approximately three months after the training seminars, when the school districts began to develop their autism-

education programs, school personnel were expected to complete an evaluation detailing their self-efficacy and comfort level in providing educational services to students. Due to the fact that adjustments were made to the timeline to account for the fiscal cycles and staff availability of the Hillside and East Orange School Districts, the three-month feedback was obtained from the Irvington School District. YDC clinicians also completed an observation/consultation with the school staff identifying areas of strength, growth, and difficulty. Referrals for further consultation were made at that time.

Multiple benefits were experienced as a result of the relationships that were established with the aforementioned districts. Training that was tailored to the needs of each individual site allowed for the utilization of a blended approach inclusive of didactic and hands-on classroom strategies. Additionally, the training created an awareness of other areas of need within the district. For example, the Hillside School District recognized their need to develop a new Pre-Kindergarten self-contained autism classroom. This recognition led to contracts for additional services within the current school districts and inquiries from additional school districts aiming to enhance the effectiveness and quality of their staff and, as a result, benefit the students with ASD in their home districts.

*Click [here](#) to view the Youth Development Clinic report - *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: A Public School Classroom Model for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders*

RECREATION

Arthur Ashe Youth Tennis and Education

Philadelphia, PA

www.asetennis.org

Special Serve - Tennis and Life Skills Program

PROJECT OBJECTIVES:

Students with ASD will have the opportunity to learn a new sport from qualified staff that is experienced working with people with autism. Using tennis as an incentive, the *Special Serve* program works to capture the attention, interest, and potential of the children who take part in the program. The level of the tennis and life skills curricula is tailored to the needs and abilities of the students, who vary in their cognitive ability, motor skills, and verbal skills (development). Primary objectives of the program include:

- Introduce school-based tennis programming to young people from an inner-city environment who might not otherwise have such an opportunity
- Provide life skills instruction that encourages active student participation
- Provide a healthy, fun activity where family and friends can interact with special-needs children
- Improve fitness, strengthening, and application of motor skills through tennis
- Instill values that promote teamwork and encourage positive, healthy, pro-social behavior

PROJECT STEPS:

Working with ASD children is challenging but also very rewarding to the staff and teachers. Particularly with low-function children, we learned that it is necessary to be ready to adapt the curriculum so that the children are consistently able to achieve some degree of success. Our staff members also learned that it is vital to regularly introduce new, creative teaching methods, brainstorm new ideas, and share successful tips, techniques, and results to insure the greatest benefit to the children.

PROJECT OUTCOMES:

The Autism Speaks grant gave us the ability to provide indoor and outdoor tennis and life-skills lessons to special-needs students at thirty-five Philadelphia schools. During this period, the grant enabled us to serve 413 students with autism spectrum disorders each month. The ASD community in Philadelphia is relatively close-knit, and communication occurs primarily by word-of-mouth. Consequently, the program continues to grow, largely due to the positive experience of the participants, aides, public school teachers, and Ashe staff. Indeed, continuing growth of the program makes it necessary to seek additional funding sources. We are aiming to increase the frequency of our school visits from monthly to bi-weekly or even weekly. To do this, we will be

providing more in-depth staff training and will need to add more trained staff to maintain an adequate teaching ratio at 1:5 students.

*Click [here](#) to read “Learn to Rally and Play: Practice Plans and Tips for Coaching Kids Ages 5-17”

Best Buddies New York

New York, NY

www.bestbuddiesnewyork.org

Best Buddies LI Middle and High School Expansion Project

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The Best Buddies Long Island Middle and High School Expansion Project will enhance the lives of students with developmental disabilities by providing them with opportunities for one-to-one friendships with their non-disabled peers. The project will ultimately generate 660 new Best Buddies friendships and raise tolerance and awareness of students with developmental disabilities. These friendship programs, and the socialization opportunities they provide, help erase the invisible line that often separates individuals with Autism and other developmental disabilities from those without.

PROJECT STEPS

The following steps and activities took place during the course of the grant:

Leadership Training

Best Buddies New York provided leadership training to 150 Middle and High School students on Long Island dedicated to helping those with intellectual disabilities throughout their lives through the following activities:

- Best Buddies International's 20th Annual Student Leadership Conference: held July 24-27, 2009 at Indiana University. The Long Island region sent 11 students to Leadership Conference, including the region's first student with a disability who participated in the "Buddy Ambassador" portion of the conference. At the Leadership Conference, over 800 students attended sessions and workshops designed to develop important skills including, but not limited to leadership, campus recruitment, service, advocacy, fundraising and disabilities awareness. Buddy Ambassadors attend the Leadership Conference as well. They attend a track specially designed to learn how to promote, educate and inform audiences about the mission, philosophy and benefits of Best Buddies through public speaking opportunities. Four Buddy Ambassadors speak at corporate events, Best Buddies events, schools and other venues interested in learning more about the work of Best Buddies.
- Best Buddies New York provided a local leadership training day on Long Island to a group of 75 High School students and Faculty Advisors on Wednesday, August 19, 2009 at Commack Middle School. The training was facilitated by the BBNY Program Supervisor and sessions covered disability awareness, recruitment, program planning and quality of friendship matches.
- Best Buddies New York provided individual trainings to the chapter leaders of each Long Island Middle School throughout the fall semester. The trainings were facilitated by the BBNY Program Manager and sessions covered the same information [with slight adjustments made specific to the Middle School programs] offered at the local leadership training day.

Disabilities Awareness

Best Buddies New York continues to work to increase awareness of the abilities of people with intellectual or developmental disabilities to thousands of Middle and High School students and members of the community. This has been accomplished through the following activities:

- Best Buddies New York's program staff held individual Peer Buddy trainings with each Middle School and High School chapter
- Best Buddies Program Supervisor spoke at dozens of schools and S.E.P.T.A. meetings across Nassau and Suffolk Counties about Best Buddies programs and their importance.
- Best Buddies Program Manager gave a presentation at the Nassau County division of the Anti-Bias Consortium made up of Superintendents, Principals and Social Workers. Reaching this population of school administrators is essential in setting a tone of inclusion for any school.

Community Group Outings

Throughout the year, Best Buddies New York chapters plan and participate in community group outings involving student volunteers and individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities. Each chapter holds two or three group activities per semester. Across the state, Best Buddies chapters have sponsored over 300 group activities during the last year. Samples of these community group outings include:

- Best Buddies students, their buddies and family members attended a NY Islanders hockey game on January 19, 2009.
- On April 17, 2009 the Long Island office held the first Best Buddies High School Prom event at William Floyd High School. Over 100 participants with and without intellectual or developmental disabilities from across Nassau and Suffolk Counties danced the night away with their fellow Best Buddies' members.
- Over 300 students, their buddies, family members and community supporters participated in the 2nd Annual Best Buddies Friendship Walk held at Holtsville Ecology Center, Holtsville, New York.

Expansion

One of the Middle School programs decided to close their chapter because of their own internal budget cuts [which made it impossible for them to pay the club advisor stipends and provide afterschool busing]. Throughout the spring semester, Best Buddies staff recruited 3 new Middle School and 5 new High School chapters, bringing our total to 30 Best Buddies programs on Long Island. Best Buddies staff held individual trainings with each new program teacher/Advisors. Additionally, Best Buddies staff were involved in the interview and selection process held to select High School Chapter Presidents.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

Best Buddies Long Island has achieved the following measurable objectives throughout the course of the grant:

- Recruited 321 students with Autism and other developmental disabilities to participate in Best Buddies.
- Recruited 1229 students without developmental disabilities to participate in Best Buddies.
- Match 642 students in mutually enriching one-to-one friendships.

- Sent 11 students to 20th Annual Best Buddies International Leadership Conference. One of those students is a student with a disability –the first in New York to participate in the Buddy Ambassador session.
- Trained 75 high school student leaders at a local leadership training in August.
- Facilitated 250 group activities throughout Long Island Middle and High School chapters.

Carey Services
Marion, IN
www.careyservices.com
Face Place Theatre Project

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The overall goal of the program was to develop an applied theater curriculum for younger individuals, based on a successful pilot program involving older individuals. This curriculum would then be utilized to meet the following program objectives:

- Obtain Baseline Data to Measure program effectiveness
- Improve the overall social functioning of program participants
- Engage parents and teach ways to support participants in their applied acting and social skill development
- Recruit “typical peers” to serve as examples and to carry over relationships to other areas of life
- Build overall public awareness of Autism and of the positive impact of applied theater to individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders.
- Provide a positive experience to families and participants
- Share findings with others interested in using applied theater in this manner

In addition to the programmatic goals outlined above, individual goals were developed for each participant. As all of the students had unique needs and abilities, these had to be individualized, with differing interpretations of success. Globally, the following goals were developed:

- Current level of social skills will be determined for each participant.
- Current individual educational goals will be reviewed and identified for each student as deemed appropriate and applicable.
- Participant will identify areas of personal need as related to socialization.
- Participant will demonstrate acting skills (imitation, body awareness, working with others, interpreting language, peer interaction, motor planning, sequencing, shifting, and response time)
- Participant will demonstrate emotions with a verbal prompt.
- Participant will complete a scripted dialogue given verbal or written cue.
- Given a situation that typically results in expression of emotion/feelings, participant will respond appropriately.
- Participant will state name/type of expression as demonstrated by others.
- Participant will demonstrate appropriate social interaction and generalize learned skills with peers during class session.
- Participant will assist in production work and complete rehearsal for final performance.

PROJECT STEPS

In order to assure that the Jr. FacePlace project stayed organized and on-track, it was necessary to develop specific timelines for the implementation of the project. Monthly meetings between the principal partners were critical.

Prior to the development of the program, it is important to assure that the program development team possesses the skills and knowledge required to create a quality program. Expertise in drama, teaching, autism, and administration served the FacePlace project well. If not present within a single organization, partnerships with other groups can supply missing elements. As applied theater does not have a vast body of experience on which to draw, the following steps are merely the route used by Jr. FacePlace, and the ordering is not seen as required for success. These steps were followed over a 16 month time-frame in the case of our project:

1. Create a press release to announce the intent to create a program. This is helpful, as it can drum up local support and volunteer efforts in the initial stages.
2. Identify students who are appropriate for participation. This is best done through local schools or a special education cooperative. School buy-in is essential to motivate families to remain active in the program.
3. Assess identified students and pre-test their strengths and weaknesses to develop a baseline for curriculum development. A standardized assessment tool is recommended.
4. Develop a program model that fits the identified participants, leaving room to adjust as needs change. The model should be an overview, establishing the number of sessions, the overall goals, and how the program will change over time.
5. Create individualized goals and objectives for each participant, based on the assessment and baseline data. This will target specific deficiencies to address during the program.
6. Hold a parent meeting to make sure that parents are fully aware of what the program is and what expectations exist.
7. Recruit “typical peers” to act as examples and to assist in building friendships and opportunities outside of the program. Typical peers will attend each session side-by-side with other participants. Churches, youth groups, and volunteer organizations are good places to recruit responsible children to act as peers in the program.
8. Create a second press release announcing the launch of the program. This will again highlight the program in the community and build support.
9. Launch the program. Class size, learning speed, and intervention types will be determined as the program unfolds, and will change over time. Consistent program times and instructors are more important than rigid adherence to the curriculum.

10. Throughout the program, identify opportunities to increase awareness in the program. This can be through highlighting a student in the press, creating small-scale performances, or giving brief community updates when the opportunity arises.

11. Identify and coordinate a large-scale event for the end of the program. This will again improve community awareness, but also leave a lasting impact on the participants. In the Case of Jr. FacePlace, a Red-Carpet Event was held to premier a 20 minute movie starring program participants.

12. Complete a post-test for each individual to measure against the previous level of functioning.

13. Send out a satisfaction survey to determine opportunities to improve the program in the future.

14. Hold final event, accompanied by a press release. Get as much media to attend as possible. Hold a “wrap party” to celebrate the gains that each participant made, and give everyone a memento of their success. For FacePlace, this was a DVD of the movie and performance.

15. Finally, compare pre and post tests, measure satisfaction data, and use the findings to develop future services.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

All identified deliverables were completed as planned, and the project has been determined to be a successful endeavor. Participants attended classes that targeted specific deficiencies in the areas of group participation, turn taking, attending to a speaker, and understanding the intent of sarcasm. Activities focused on using the voice, the body, and the face to communicate with others effectively, and to observe others to determine the intent and meaning of each interaction.

Although measurable pre and post-tests were expected to give objective results from the FacePlace project, anecdotal evidence proved to be the primary source of information. The pre-tests were completed prior to entrance into the program, but the post-tests were given to families to complete and return. Only a small number of families returned the post test, although all were willing to discuss the gains they had seen in their children. A somewhat higher percentage of parents returned the satisfaction survey, and the results will be utilized to refine procedures for the continuing project.

Several press releases, as well as some national press coverage did much to improve the chances of continued funding. As the generous grant from Autism Speaks allowed for the purchase of equipment that will last for several years, future funding will specifically target tuition and program costs only. The Community School of the Arts and Carey Services will continue to donate time and subsidize program costs, and other grants and

self-pay options are being presently explored for next fall. It is anticipated that the program will be continued next year.

*Click [here](#) to view the press release: Jr. FacePlace Goes International

*Click [here](#) to view the JFP Movie Program.

Millard Public Schools

Omaha, NE

www.mpsomaha.org

Interactive Social Education Experiences

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The goal of the *iSEE (Interactive Social Education Experiences)* is to improve the quality of life for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders and increase acceptance of the students by their typically developing peers. Specific objectives included in this proposal are:

- 100% of students with ASD will initiate an average of five positive social interactions weekly.
- Social isolation felt by students with ASD will decrease by 50%.
- Typically developing peers will demonstrate a 90% increase in knowledge of social communication difficulties faced by students with ASD.
- Social acceptance of students with ASD by typically developing students in Friendship Groups will increase by 75%.

PROJECT STEPS

The following steps were taken in preparation for the program and during the program:

- A school psychologist and site coordinator were selected by the project director.
- The project director, the psychologist, and the site coordinator developed a rubric for Special Education department chairs to identify students at their schools who could benefit from the project. Each student recommended had to have a medical or educational verification of Autism and on a five-point scale of specific conversation skills be rated as having low communication skills.
- Students with ASD who met the specific criteria and demonstrated the highest need on the rubric were selected for possible project participation. The project director and psychologist contacted parents of the selected students to explain the project goals, objectives and activities to parents and discuss with them their child's possible willingness to participate and gather other information such as the parents' perception of their child's social skills.
- Counselors and other personnel at each of the high schools were asked to nominate typically developing students for the project by completing a rubric measuring social status (popularity and involvement in extracurricular activities), ability to easily make friends, and willingness to work with others in group activities. The project director contacted parents of each nominee to explain the project and gather additional information (such as whether the student's schedule would permit participation). Based on the rubric and information from parental conversations, the project director met with each nominee to find out if s/he might be interested in participating. Five peers with the highest ratings and greatest interest were selected. (One peer signed up for so many extracurricular activities this year that she dropped out of the project.)

- Consent forms were collected from parents of peers and students with ASD.
- The project director led a peer training session in which the students learned the characteristics of students with ASD, difficulties they face, and possible strategies they could use during the weekly meetings and monthly outings.
- Teaching staff was selected by announcing the project in Special Education Department meetings at each high school and requesting that interested teachers send a letter explaining their professional background and experience with students with ASD. In addition to certification through the Nebraska Department of Education, which is required in order to teach anywhere in Nebraska, teachers needed to have one full year of successful experience working with students with ASD, with priority being given to teachers with the most experience.

Project Implementation:

- A kick-off event (pizza party) was held for the students, their parents, project teachers, and district and building level administrators. After again describing the project, the director answered questions for parents while the staff directed a get to know you activity for students. The media was invited to attend.
- Workshops were held after school once each week while school was in session. They were located on a monthly rotating basis at each high school. When the project plan was developed, students were to be placed into five Friendship Groups consisting of two students with ASD, one peer, and one teacher. However, staff realized they needed to gain a better understanding of the students' social skills before they were divided into groups. Consequently, students engaged in large group activities covering basic communication skills for the first six weeks. For the remainder of the project the format was changed. Each workshop started with a large group activity and then students split into two groups based on need. Large group activities included team building exercises and ice-breakers. Group activities included teacher-led discussion of a social skills topic such as making eye contact, student selected communication skills topics, and activities such as role-playing, question-answer worksheets, and goal setting activities. At the end of each workshop, the groups came back together for announcements, social interaction, and snacks.
- To give the students with ASD opportunities to practice their newly learned social communication skills in a generalized setting and their peers the opportunity to interact with them on a more social basis, students and staff went on monthly outings to recreational locations via rented bus. At first, staff presented them with a list of activities from which they made a group suggestion. As the project progressed, students made suggestions on which the group voted. Locations included a skating rink, an outdoor snow skiing-sledding-tubing venue, a bowling alley, an amusement park, a pumpkin patch, a hockey game, a well-known community theatre, and a movie theatre. The end of project outing was held at a popular indoor water park.
- Each month staff met to plan lessons for the following month and discuss skills that needed to be addressed during weekly workshops, student successes, plan monthly outings, and score student social skills rubrics.

- The final workshop was a celebration of student success rather than a lesson in social communication skills. During the celebration, all students were awarded a certificate of completion and rewarded for their success with a gift certificate to a local movie theatre for a group outing they arrange on their own.
- Toward the end of the project, staff sent final evaluation instruments to students, parents, and staff. Completed evaluations were scored and analyzed by the project director and the school psychologist. Teachers and other project staff met to discuss what went well and what might be changed in the future to increase success for the next group of students selected to participate.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

In the early weeks of the project, students made an average four to five inappropriate or socially awkward comments during weekly workshops. Few conversations were initiated and most communication that was initiated was one-sided, with students with ASD focused on their own topic of interest. When asked to take part in conversation and activities, students with ASD frequently ended up either withdrawing or being rude to conversational partners. At times some students with ASD chose to speak to adults instead of their peers.

During the first community outing, four to five appropriate initiations of conversation were noted by teachers among the seven students present. By the third outing, one boy who was extremely socially isolated told a teacher that he was having fun with the group and his new friend. His mother later confirmed that he had no friends outside the *iSEE* group. As of the sixth outing, the number of conversations initiated appropriately by students with ASD had increased from seven to 15, and teachers noted a definite improvement in the reciprocal give and take that makes up typical teenage conversation.

During the December outing when a student was injured while snow tubing, students with ASD very openly expressed and demonstrated care, concern and empathy. During the next few days, several students phoned *iSEE* staff to express their continued concern for their injured friend. A student who was resentful about being included in *iSEE* throughout most of the project has become one of its biggest fans. He confided to a staff member that although he initially thought his social skills did not need to be improved, he now realizes the project helped him. He is now more willing to talk to others. Students involved in *iSEE* have shown a depth and breadth of growth that is apparent to all who know and interact with them.

Comments by:

Parent of Students with ASD

He has, on occasion, asked me how my day went, which he never used to do. He has made outreach to a couple potential friends.

More initiative in making social plans. Making more complex decisions about a person who should/should not be sought out as a friend.

I have noticed him initiating social interactions. Instead of waiting for someone to greet him, he will come up and greet the person first. He is talking more. We have opening activities every morning to start our day and he has been more willing to share his thoughts.

Parents of Peers

We saw an increase in his interaction with iSEE members. He took seriously the obligations he undertook when he decided to participate in the program. He has learned to interact socially with teens with autism. He has grown to understand the difficulties that those with autism experience.

She has more confidence in her social interactions with these young people and understands better why they may behave as they do. Having this experience has made her more aware of young people who are autistic and how better to interact with them. It has been a positive experience for her. Thank you for allowing her to participate.

Better understanding of kids that are different for a wide variety of reasons. I think he actually told friends who had kind of laughed about a child's behavior to stop.

Teachers

Since last August, he has tripled his comments/questions in class. His speech hesitations are less dramatic now than six months ago.

He is exercising and has lost weight. Smiles, makes eye contact, says hello, socializes more with peers. Just seems happier and more content.

He greets people in the hallway. Before he ignored people telling him hello and he never said hello first.

He seems to take responsibility for his action more this year. Decrease in altercations or outbursts. The intensity of his altercations may have decreased a bit.

I have seen an increase in interaction with him this year. During homeroom time, he seeks out others to sit with and interacts. I have noticed him leading the conversation. He also has been active in an after school organization. He is also active in his church with youth activities. He has made an effort to make more friends and is very loyal and defensive of his friends.

Increased social interaction, will approach me in PT (Prime Time) to tell me about things that have happened to her and her family.

When it became apparent the project was successfully changing the social communication behavior of the targeted students, the staff began thinking about the possibility of expanding the project at the high school level and extending it to the middle school level. They did not anticipate that a similar middle school project would be implemented this year at Central Middle School (CMS) in the Millard Public School District.

When approached by an Autism Team member at CMS, the project director and school psychologist eagerly provided information, shared materials, discussed how to align project goals with the curriculum, and worked with CMS staff to obtain project approval from the school's administration. The primary difference from *iSEE* is that the CMS project occurs twice a week for 25 minutes, at the beginning of the school day.

The project has so far proven highly successful. Two of the students have formed a reciprocal friendship, many initiate communication with group members in the classroom and hallways, most sit with one another during their lunch break rather than alone as they had previously, and the majority respond to adults and peers when greeted in the hallway between classes. General education and other staff now have a greater awareness of ASD and a better understanding of how to help students in the classroom, and both general education and special education teachers have seen an improvement in classroom behavior. *iSEE* staff also has been approached by a school psychologist and special education teacher of Russell Middle School (RMS) about starting a social communication skills project that will commence at the beginning of the 2010-11 school year. The *iSEE* project director and school psychologist will provide the same kind of assistance to RMS staff that they did for CMS staff.

Parents and Millard Public School staff alike have seen improvements in the communication abilities and behaviors of participating students with ASD. With substantial support from both groups, the Special Education (SPED) Department, with school district funds, will continue this demonstration project for the remainder of the school year. The SPED Department just received notification of full funding from another source for the 2010-11 school year. The SPED Department will seek grant funds for subsequent years, but intends to continue the program on its own if necessary. Some adjustments will be required, but parents have volunteered to provide transportation for community outings, donate all snacks and meals (that were paid with school district funds for the project funded by Autism Speaks), and anything else necessary to ensure project continuation.

Outdoors for All Foundation

Seattle, WA

www.outdoorsforall.org

Expanded Outdoor Recreation Experiences Customized for Children and Adults with ASDs

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Our grant with Autism Speaks addressed the following objectives:

In order to serve the multi-sensory needs and varying social abilities of this population, this proposal consisted of two requests:

1. Funding for a consultant with autism expertise to train staff and volunteers who work regularly with our participants, and help in some program design for new and existing programs,
2. Funding for a behavioral aide to join the staff of our day camp program and other year round programs.

These resources will improve the quality of our services for those on the autism spectrum-- currently comprising over 60% of our day camp population, by increasing the skills of staff to help participants regulate their sensory needs so that they can learn and enjoy outdoor recreation. These resources will also increase our capacity to serve more participants with autism.

PROJECT STEPS

After a thorough selection process we engaged the services of a special education teacher during the school year with experience in working with children with autism. Grant funding from Autism Speaks also enabled us to hire an Autism Aide who was directly engaged in our day camps throughout the summer on a daily basis. These two hires engaged in the following steps:

- In our summer 2009 day camps alone, we served 36 more campers with autism than the previous year. We credit this to the additional marketing we were able to do regarding our increased training and expertise in autism.
- Our two autism consultants provided many trainings to both our day camp staff as well as our winter season volunteers who work on a one-on-one basis with our participants.
- Additional trainings held were:
 1. • Pre-season training for seasonal summer day camp staff
 2. • In-season training for seasonal summer day camp staff
 3. • Pre-season training for summer volunteers
 4. • In-season training for summer volunteers
 5. • Training for Recreational Program staff
 6. • Training for Administrative staff
 7. • Pre-season training for winter volunteers
 8. • In-season training for winter volunteers
- Through the grant we were able to purchase significant amount of equipment to help us give children with autism a safe, fun time. Equipment purchased including

sensory hand toys, games, therapeutic sacks, and ear protection. Training was provided by the grant's autism consultants to staff and volunteers to help engage in the use of these adaptive tools and toys.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

In the period that our grant was deployed (March 2009 – February 2010), Outdoors for All conducted 29 weeks of day camp programming for children with disabilities up through the age of 21. Of the 317 campers who participated, over 62% self-reported a diagnosis on the autism spectrum, compared with 53% in our prior year. We had a 22.6% increase in participants with ASD, serving almost 40 more children with autism. More specific outcomes were:

- Day camp staff were given more in depth training on the Autism Spectrum. Day camp staff were given information about ASD, including characteristics, tendencies, challenges while working with children diagnosed with ASD, and tips and instruction in working with ASD.
- As the summer progressed, day camp staff became more comfortable in working with participants diagnosed with ASD.
- There was noticeable improvement among participants diagnosed with ASD who were consistent attendees in day camps throughout the summer. Throughout the summer, interaction amongst these participants consistently improved. This was because day camp staff members were aware of which participants worked well together and were intentional in keeping those who worked well together in the same groups and when possible separated those who did not work well together. This greatly affected the camps as a whole because each participant was able to have a positive experience with their peers.
- Participants were given the opportunity to form friendships and work on improving social skills.
- Day camp staff worked hard to ensure each participant was given the opportunity and prompted participants to interact with other participants.
- Therapeutic toys were purchased and utilized throughout the summer to assist participants and staff. These toys, puzzles, games and apparatus helped staff de-escalate participants if they were feeling over stimulated, upset, or frustrated.

*Click [here](#) to view the Instructional Arrangements & Strategies for People with Autism presentation by Blueprints.

*Click [here](#) to view the Autism Spectrum Disorder “cheat sheet” for trainees.

*Click [here](#) to view Tips for Working with Participants with Autism.

*Click [here](#) to view Social Stories for snow-related activities.

Easter Seals Metropolitan Chicago

Chicago, IL

chicago.easterseals.com

After-School Programs at Easter Seals Metropolitan Chicago Autism and Therapeutic Schools, Chicago and Tinley Park, IL campuses

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Autism Speaks awarded Easter Seals Metropolitan Chicago (ESMC) a \$21,250 Family Services Community Grant in January 2009 to 1) expand the number of children/youth with autism served by the After School Program at ESMC's Chicago-based Therapeutic School and Center for Autism Research and Autism Therapeutic School Tinley Park; and 2) enhance the After School Program through collaboration with Best Buddies Illinois (BBIL). The collaboration with Best Buddies provides greater acceptance and understanding of typically developing peers; and can be provided as a model for other after school programs.

PROJECT STEPS

ESMC partnered with BBIL to enhance our After School Program through the Best Buddies program model which matches individuals with intellectual disabilities one to one with non-disabled peers for individual friendships and group social events.

Following is a list of group activities conducted during the term of the Autism Speaks grant:

- July 13, 2009: Ten (10) BBIL volunteers (BBIL staff members and volunteers in the BBIL Citizens Program) visited with the 13 students enrolled in the After School Program for the summer. The volunteers and students spent time introducing themselves to each other. The group then played a game of kick ball on the ESMC athletic field and shared a snack together in the ESMC school cafeteria.
- July 20, 2009: Ten (10) BBIL volunteers joined ESMC students on an excursion to a local coffee shop where the students' art work was being displayed. The student art exhibit featured a project through which students worked with ESMC's Art Therapist to create "mail art" using envelopes, stamps, mailboxes, etc. The group then returned to the school campus to play Uno, Jenga and other board games.
- August 3, 2009: 10 BBIL volunteers and the 13 ESMC students enjoyed the beautiful summer weather together outside on the ESMC playground swinging on the swings, playing ball, and just sitting in the sun and talking. The group then had a snack and participated together in an arts and crafts project that resulted in each student creating a mosaic flower out of pieces of colored construction paper.
- August 17, 2009: Six BBIL volunteers (several BBIL staff members were on vacation this week) joined ESMC students on a walk to a nearby Baskin Robbins for ice cream. As this was the final summer engagement activity of the year, the volunteers suggested that they all keep in touch through a pen-pal program. BBIL

and ESMC staff met following the activities with the students and discussed transitioning to a full school-year program in September.

- October 26, 2009: As Halloween was just around the corner, this visit had a theme of "pumpkin decoration". After each student greeted their peer buddy, each was given a pumpkin to decorate using markers and stickers. Then a bag was handed out so the students could take home the newly designed pumpkin and any other treats.
- November 20, 2009: During this visit each buddy pair used their imagination to conjure an original creation using paper and markers. Once completed, they proudly revealed their artwork to their peers and staff. After the drawings were finished, games were made available to any who wanted to play.
- December 7, 2009: Upon arrival games were scattered throughout the room. The Easter Seals students and their peer buddies quickly found their game of choice and jumped right into action.
- February 22, 2010: Game night. Easter Seals traveled to LSC and, for the first time, a number of students from LSC were able to make it out to our campus. A variety of games was available from Uno and Bingo to Monopoly. Light snacks were served and everyone walked away with a prize.
- March 3, 2010: Game night at ESMC with activities that focused on board games which has become a favorite of the program participants.
- April 8, 2010: Best Buddies Block Party at Brookfield Zoo.
- April 16, 2010: Spring Fling Dance Hosted by the Latin School of Chicago.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

In line with ESMC's hope to pilot a sustainable collaboration with BBIL and given the great success of ESMC and BBIL programming from summer 2009 through spring 2010, ESMC is actively pursuing funding from additional sources to expand this contractual collaboration at its Therapeutic School and Center for Autism Research in Chicago and Autism Therapeutic School Tinley Park. ESMC's goal for the school year 2010 to 2011 is to double the number of students served with a staff-to-student ratio of no greater than 2:1 at its After School programs in Chicago and Tinley Park.

In addition, ESMC is looking to extend its After School program model working with BBIL to serve our students with autism at our Autism Therapeutic School Waukegan. In the spring of 2010, subject to DHS approval and additional funding, ESMC plans to replicate this pilot collaboration with BBIL at its Autism Therapeutic School in Waukegan, Illinois. ESMC will seek to contract with BBIL again and partner with a Best Buddies high school group in the Waukegan Region to match individuals with intellectual disabilities one-to-one with non-disabled peers.

Autism Delaware

Newark, DE

www.delautism.org

Expansion of the Brandywine Social Club

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

This proposal provides opportunities for adults with autism to participate in a local YMCA recreational program with the proper supports in place to make it successful. Autism Delaware will expand the Brandywine Social Club, a local YMCA recreation program for adults with disabilities, to include an additional 10 to 15 adults with autism.

PROJECT STEPS

Note: project is ongoing and unfortunately the membership still lacks in capacity. We had envisioned that at least 10 individuals would have become members by the 6-month mark. We are at 50% of this goal. We have attempted to disseminate information to our families through our website, Google groups and Rec4All calendar. We had hoped that Autism Delaware's Asperger's social support group would begin to attend but as a group they decided to do things with their group at this time. However, we will continue to increase membership and participation in the social group through various means. Autism Delaware is committed to providing information to our community about social/recreation opportunities. We will continue to post the schedule on our website, participate in the Rec4All committee, and disseminate information through our Google groups and newsletter. Staff will also provide information to transitioning students at provider fairs, school open houses and other gatherings. The hope is the hired staff will continue to support BSC and assist its members on the spectrum develop and facilitate social interaction while participating in the community activities.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

Although the partnership with the Brandywine Social Club (BSC) continues to progress slowly, it continues to be a positive experience for both the individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders and the existing group. The individuals we are supporting are actively participating in the group and are starting to bond with other members. Those who have attended continue to participate in the planning meetings and the activities that they prefer. We are continuing to encourage participants to attend as many activities as possible. The group has provided a great social opportunity within itself and the community for its participants.

The young men who continue to come to the group are now independently interacting with the other members in the group. They are comfortable starting a conversation and joining in with other members than those with autism. Two young men whose participation in the club had dropped off are now starting to participate in at least two activities month. Parents felt more comfortable knowing that a staff member was there to assist in facilitating conversation and who understands the uniqueness of their sons.

EQUIPMENT/SUPPORTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Developmental Disabilities Institute

Smithtown, NY

www.ddiny.org

Adult Assistive Technology Program

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

This project will provide adults with ASD the opportunity to sample AAC devices that may enhance their receptive and expressive language skills. The following objectives were outlined:

- To increase the communicative ability for 120 individuals who have been diagnosed with an ASD.
- To increase communication options for individuals with limited expressive and receptive language skills by adding at least 2-3 new options for each participant.
- Utilize new hardware/software to aid individuals with semantic and basic vocabulary development skills to communicate effectively, moving at least 30% of participants up to pre-reading skill level during the grant period.
- Decrease problematic behavior due to frustration from an inability to communicate effectively.

PROJECT STEPS

The following steps were taken corresponding with the above objectives:

- We are still in the process of trying out all the new equipment to increase our individuals' communication ability. This process includes exposing each individual to different hardware/software to determine appropriate matches that will increase their communicative abilities without creating undue frustration for them.
- This objective has been targeted through the use of the computers, software, and low tech communication boards to assist individuals in communicating their wants and needs. The speech pathology department has enhanced the effort by utilizing the communication devices acquired through this grant. By having several types of devices available, we have been able to screen many more individuals than in the past, and make more informed decisions about what type of system is most appropriate for each individual.
- For this objective, we have chosen computer software through which our individuals can learn semantic knowledge, with a goal of increasing their pre-reading skills. Because of Autism Speaks funding, many of our individuals can now navigate the web and visit multiple websites to increase this key component of language.

- With regard to this objective, we have had mixed results. Many of our individuals displayed a willingness to try new things, and reacted positively to the experience. This allowed them to develop other means of communication which have helped to manage problem behaviors. With others, there was difficulty in understanding the tools being shown to them, which increased their level of frustration and problem behaviors. Based on these results, our team developed an individualized introduction to the new technology, more attuned to each individual's ability to adapt and learn.

Some of the challenges we experienced at first were the result of making all the new devices available too quickly. When we had received all of the hardware and tried showing all the individuals the software, this proved to be sensory overload. Many of our individuals have not had the opportunity or the experience in using computers, specialized software and communications boards, so they shied away from using them (others refused). Based on these responses, we scaled things back by introducing different software and hardware applications one at a time, in the hope of increasing awareness towards using the new materials, and then to become more comfortable around them.

Another challenge was initially taking all the types of computer access (rollerball, switch click, etc.) and placing them around the computer for the individuals to try. This again led to frustration at too many options present, so we took them out and slowly started to re-introduce them one at a time. Currently, we have the switches in use in the communication lab in the speech office, where there are more computers, so individuals can gravitate towards the computers they wish to use.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

Toward expanding this program, all of the classrooms at our Meadow Glen Adult Day site now have computers. We are adding software programs acquired through the grant to all of them. The 70 individuals we serve at this site will have the capability to go on the internet, as well as have reading programs installed to help them learn basic word recognition.

Some of the gains we have seen have been gradual; some individuals gravitated towards using the software for "fun," but at the same time were increasing their receptive and expressive communication skills. (Intellitools Classroom Suite Version 4).

Another gain for some of the participants was the use of new software to enhance low-vision print, allowing them to visit different websites, which had previously been challenging. Of the initial group of 10 individuals, one can successfully navigate to different websites that he enjoys, as well as use the different software on the computer with minimal independence (a huge breakthrough). Toward decreasing possible frustration, this individual is asked to write what is bothering him if he can't express himself verbally. Also, with the software's ability to assist in creating lists, visual schedules can be now be used to help individuals deal with unexpected change.

The use of Boardmaker Plus to carryover speech therapy goals that we created for the individuals to use in the classroom has been another positive result. This software works well when creating communication boards and picture schedules, as well as having individuals locate picture icons.

The biggest improvement we have observed has been with the Speech Therapy Department and the AAC devices that we have received through the grant. With the new Mercury (our top AAC device) we have been able to directly see the different types of communication access, through the use of the pre-loaded communication boards included with the device. We can now evaluate, as well as troubleshoot communication breakdown for individuals by using the Mercury. It has the capability to make the communication boards very simplistic, which is a great tool when determining what type of communication device would be the most appropriate for each individual.

With the additions of the CHAT PC 4, the tech-talk, and the go-talk boards, the department has been able to grow leaps and bounds. We are no longer limited to trying to rent or borrow devices to initially evaluate their effectiveness for different individuals. We are now able to see more people to determine if AAC would be effective for their daily use to help communicate their direct wants and needs.

*Click [here](#) to view a presentation from DDI about the Adult Assistive Technology Program.

YOUNG ADULTS/ADULTS

Foundation for Educating Kids with Autism

Mt. Kisco, NY

www.fecainc.org

Vocational Training Education Program

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

This program seeks to provide strong collaborations with non-profit organizations and the ability to provide a successful roadmap for employment opportunities for individuals with ASD. In doing so, all participants will be placed in off-site employment locations by the program's completion; almost all will improve language, communication, computer, and socialization skills; two Life Skills/Job Coaches will be hired to plan and implement educational and behavioral programs for students with autism with a focus on community-based instruction and vocational training; and a "train the trainer" curriculum will be incorporated to create a career development path and retain quality staff for many years.

PROJECT STEPS

FECA has targeted 14 as the age at which students should have individual, non-paid vocational placements in the community. This age was selected based on the New York State Committees on Special Education mandate for school districts to begin to address transition planning beyond the academic years (post age 21). Some students younger than age 12 learn skills in the community, such as grocery shopping, although most younger students are in the pre-vocational program. Students learn to make copies, file and sort mail in the school's mock office. Students ready for the task are taught to use the internet for research and to send and receive e-mail. One very important outcome of this training is that students with autism who are able to use computers are engaged in behavior similar to their typical peer group, thus bridging the gap between children with autism and their siblings and friends. They learn food preparation, setting and clearing the table in the school's kitchen. When they're ready, students may begin to apply these same skills at a restaurant work site, for example. Using this same scenario as an example, for the students who are able, parents reinforce the same learned skills of setting and clearing the table at home.

To match students' abilities with vocational opportunities, the parents and staff complete a vocational preference inventory. This inventory serves to evaluate what type of job the student would enjoy, as well as what type of job the student has the ability to perform. Once this assessment is complete, a job that matches the criteria is found.

The Director works as a liaison between community partners and the school to create additional vocational training sites for students. He monitors the progress of each student and the effectiveness of the school's training as it is implemented in a work site. For example, students hone their vocational skills at many community non-profits such as Bethel Nursing Home, My Second Home, Food Bank, Muscular Dystrophy Association and The American Red Cross. Volunteers play an important role in each of these non-profit organizations, helping one another toward a common goal to improve the quality of life for others. There are also several for-profit companies which provide vocational training, most notably Mount Kisco Honda.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

The program now serves 33 (adolescents) of the 50 students with autism at DMLC who are on the most severe end of the autism spectrum, all of whom are age 12+, which is 100% of the eligible participants. New sites include Phelps Memorial Hospital, Westchester Planning Dept., Westchester Dept. of Public Works & Europizza, bringing the total number of work sites up to 21 different sites that provide 65 different placements for the students. (Most students perform their vocational skills at several different work sites / placements each week.)

Several vocational students' work site duties include computer skills, such as data input, spreadsheets, general typing, and other administrative tasks. One student, who is especially skilled at working with spreadsheets, performs a number of important reporting and scheduling tasks at his work site.

Students in the vocational program are taught to enter a work site and greet their co-workers daily. Socialization skills are repeated and reinforced at school with the students' teachers, therapists and the staff at DMLC.

Two Life Skills/Job Coaches were hired during the grant period and have been transitioning the five 21- and 22-year-olds to the new Supported Employment/Day Habilitation Program for Adults with Autism. The Life Skills/Job Coaches continue work with the students in the community when they are not at their work sites, and also accompany them to their jobs.

It should be noted that the grant from Autism Speaks helped FECA leverage several new grants from other organizations.

*Click [here](#) to read the FECA Program Model.

Asperger's Association of New England

Watertown, MA

www.aane.org

Destination Independence: LifeMAP

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Destination: Independence was designed to meet the practical needs of young adults with AS, who tend to be less mature than neurotypical young adults, are often stuck in their attempts to establish independent lives, and are less likely to be able to resolve their problems through traditional interventions such as “talk therapy.” Below are the goals and objectives we established for Destination: Independence.

- In a compatible group (or if necessary working 1:1 with a coach), participants will learn independent living skills in an explicit, hands-on manner.
- Concepts taught in the classroom will be reinforced one-on-one with a LifeMAP Coach after completion of the class.
- Participants will increase level of understanding about what is involved in various life tasks from the classes and with the assistance of a coach.
- Participants will increase independence in performing certain life skills and/or will make progress toward achieving practical goals identified between coach and client, in their first meeting.
- Embedded in the structure of each class is the opportunity for problem-solving, social interaction, relationship building, and opportunities to improve social pragmatic skills.

PROJECT STEPS

Participants were recruited for classes in three ways:

1. We sent out an announcement through Constant Contact to all adults with AS/parents of adults under age 40 in our database, living in Eastern Massachusetts, excluding Cape Cod and the islands—a mailing list of 1,150 individuals/families.
2. We referred adults we already knew, and who needed to learn the skills being taught.
3. When adults under 40 who were new to AANE came into the office to meet with an Adult Services staff member, and we felt they would be appropriate Destination: Independence participants, we put their names on a wait list for upcoming courses. Those adults interested in participating filled out application forms.

Each of the four courses met once a week for 2 hours for six weeks. AANE's Employment Specialist provided the curriculum and materials for all four classes.

Each class began with Introductions and an overview of the specific class. After the first course, “Budgeting and Money Management,” it was clear that it was important to provide a quick overview of Asperger Syndrome and its connection to the topic being presented. Participants had the opportunity to share their personal connection with Asperger's and their experiences related to the specific topic of the class.

Additionally, during the first session of each course, the group worked together to develop Group Rules and Expectations. Some suggested rules and guidelines included:

- Ask questions.
- Take turns talking.
- Stick to the topic.
- Support each other.
- Respect private information.
- Try to attend all of the lessons.

Each session was a mixture of lecture and activities to keep the participants working together and engaged with the material. Some activities included visiting a Laundromat to do laundry; planning meals and visiting a grocery store and preparing a meal; negotiating the choice of a restaurant, taking public transportation to a restaurant for a celebratory dinner (also incorporating budgeting). After each course, evaluations were completed by all participants.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

While Destination: Independence participants did make visible positive gains during the first year of the project, many adults with AS may need more time and additional support to make lasting and significant changes in their lives. In upcoming years we would like to continue to test and refine the Destination: Independence model by offering the classes and follow-up coaching to a *larger number* of adults so that we have a larger experimental population. We would also like to track participants over a *longer period of time* in hopes of seeing more statistically significant, measurable change in participants' level of independence and quality of life. In addition, we would like to disseminate this model more widely by writing articles, presenting at professional conferences, and training professionals at other agencies and in other states. (We have already received some requests for training.)

Overall, Destination: Independence was very successful. We can confirm that the combination of classes and 1:1 coaching was an excellent model. Participants learned valuable information and really began to incorporate practical skills and better habits into their lives. We also assert that for some participants, coaching alone proved very effective.

In addition, there were significant social benefits. Many of the participants became friends over time, as some participated in multiple classes. After participating in Destination: Independence classes, several participants contacted one another outside of AANE and got together. At the AANE Annual Adult Holiday Party one participant was heard saying, "I'm here with my friends from Destination: Independence." And it was true: six participants from the program were all sitting together at a table, looking very comfortable with one another and having very animated conversations. In general, Destination: Independence class participants were interested in keeping in touch with one another.

We continue to receive requests from former participants for next level or follow up classes and regularly receive requests from individuals who were on the wait list during the first round of classes or who have heard of the program and want to participate.

Careful selection of participants is very important. Class dynamics can be impacted positively or negatively based on the match of participants. We realized that repeat participation was helpful because previous relationships could be built upon and/or misunderstandings addressed and worked through in the safety of a relatively familiar group.

It became clear with some eligible clients that they were not ready for participation in classes but would benefit greatly from the 1:1 coaching offered through the LifeMAP program. There were four clients who received coaching without participation in the Destination: Independence classes but benefited greatly from the coaching model.

Client “buy-in” is important for both classes and coaching. Sometimes parents are more invested in both classes and/or coaching, but the clients themselves are not quite ready for these services. It is important for AANE staff to assess the readiness of applicants to participate in one or both aspects of the Destination: Independence program.

Depending on the client, it is sometimes recommended that the parent be involved or part of the team working with the coach and client, although the client is always at the center of the team and is the one whose goals are represented.

During coaching, goals were not always directly related to the Destination: Independence class. Sometimes a client had other priorities. Sometimes the goals changed during the course of the sessions to meet the more immediate needs of the clients. The LifeMAP program model has the flexibility to absorb and respond to those changes.

University of South Florida CARD

Tampa, FL

card-usf.fmhi.usf.edu

Learning Academy at the University of South Florida

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The goal of the Learning Academy at USF is to establish an authentic college experience on campus to serve individuals with ASD who have completed their education and have not been successful in their efforts in post secondary education or employment. Specific objectives are as follows:

- To provide a rich experience through coursework to enable students to enhance and advance their job seeking or college preparation skills
- To provide an inclusive, authentic experience for students with disabilities with age appropriate peers that provides classroom based and experiential learning
- To increase personal knowledge and technical skills of each participant that leads to successful adult experiences
- To provide experiential opportunities that lead to successful career and employment outcomes and to improve the ability of participants to gain college acceptance and social and academic success.

PROJECT STEPS

In order to achieve the established objectives, a timeline identifying critical activities was developed. It was determined that it would require five months of planning time to begin the program. The general activity areas identified in the timeline were outreach, students, mentors, staff, evaluation and logistics. A series of tasks were listed with an identified completion date. Many of the tasks were performed simultaneously.

In the area of outreach, a logo and brochure were developed early on. A power point presentation highlighting the program was also developed. An application process was established and disseminated to all of the individuals known to CARD-USF meeting program eligibility criteria. We created a mentor job description and began recruitment efforts through our internal USF resources (such as attending a campus part time job fair). Both student and mentor interviews took place and the selection of each group was accomplished by April. We also initiated a search for an instructor and selected someone meeting our criteria during this period.

Our team developed materials for orientation. We held an informative orientation for family members, students and mentors. We provided mentors with information about ASD, mentoring basics, and the goals and expectations of the program. Families received both information about the program and the USF campus. Student orientation consisted of program information and expectations, a campus tour, and opportunities to get to know one another. The highlight of the orientation process was a "speed mentoring" activity where each student got the opportunity to spend a brief time with each mentor and share

information about himself/herself. Students and mentors then identified their top three individuals they felt they connected with and mentor assignments were made.

Our team reviewed and modified a curriculum developed by the Institute on Disabilities at Temple University for a similar program for individuals with intellectual disabilities and customized it for individuals diagnosed with autism. The Learning Academy invited 12 professionals, family members and individuals to participate on an advisory board that would support the evaluation efforts of this project. This group assisted us in developing a sound system for evaluating the outcomes of this pilot project with fidelity and reliability. We administered the Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment Data & Reports (ACLSA) to each Learning Academy student and their caregiver. This provided us with a pre-test measure of the current life skills for each of the Learning Academy students. It is our intention to administer the assessment at the end of the final semester to assess growth and/or attainment of skills from both the participants and their caregiver's perspective. The ACLSA is a self-administered evaluation tool to help young adults discover their strengths and those areas where needs exist. It can be a valuable tool to help youth plan for their future. The assessment measures skills in seven domains including career planning, communication, daily living, home life, housing and money management, self care and social relationships. Most of these domains are aligned with and addressed in the Learning Academy curriculum. During this period, logistics included activities such as acquiring classroom space, the process for obtaining student ID's, ordering supplies and equipment and planning for the orientation process.

Semester 1 of the Learning Academy consisted of six hours of class time and six hours of mentor time for 10 weeks. Topics covered during semester 1 included: becoming knowledgeable about specific disabilities and how it individually affects a person's learning; discovering individual learning styles and becoming familiar with accommodations and supports that worked best for their style. Students also conducted research on famous people with disabilities and presented their findings. The difference between high school and college was explored and students learned about the important laws that could impact them in higher education or in employment. Self advocacy, stress management, time management and organizational skills were also covered.

Semester 2 consisted of four hours per week of class time and four hours of mentoring time for 15 weeks. This semester focused on career exploration and self assessment. Skills, interests, values, work ethic and preferences were explored utilizing a variety of self-assessment tools. Each student prepared a power point presentation of their findings and presented them to an audience of family members, friends and staff. Based on the information presented staff began to develop customized internship sites for each student that reflected their personal preferences and interests. Internships in writing, art, graphic design, animals, and library science, to name a few, were secured. One student put in motion specific steps to create a small business and will try out her products through participation in a campus weekly vendor market. Another student with a specific interest in history is providing a biweekly presentation to a group of senior citizens about significant dates in history during the week and leading a discussion. We have a student

interested in journalism researching, developing content and writing a monthly newsletter at an assisted living facility. He is also formatting and distributing the final product.

Internships began during Semester 3. Students keep a weekly journal about their experiences and discuss challenges and accomplishments in a weekly seminar. Staff maintains contact with the internship sites and provides ongoing support.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

The Learning Academy at USF has achieved all of the identified outcomes set forth in our original conceptualization of the program. Participants have specific knowledge of their strengths, abilities, and preferences and will leave the program prepared to capitalize on them. They will each have a defined plan with connections established with the appropriate organizations or agencies; an awareness of what supports and accommodations they need in order to succeed; and an electronic portfolio capturing their experience and characteristics with which to market themselves whether to an employer or an institute of higher education.

"I am beginning to discover what great experiences life has for me as I head closer to my career." Learning Academy Student

"Even with a job I love, I need to develop skills with handling stress and deadlines. I need to be ready as over-reacting could cost me a very valuable work experience". Learning Academy Student

Numerous examples illustrate the success of our objective to make this experience inclusive and authentic. Learning Academy students became acclimated to the sprawling USF campus almost immediately. Students received USF identification cards that provided access to most services, building and benefits. Students participated in campus activities such as football games, movies on the lawn, pool parties and art exhibits. Students were often seen out and about on campus at the library or student center or waiting at a Bull Runner bus stop.

I learned how to use the BullRunner, and learned about college life". Learning Academy Student

The Learning Academy was invited to participate in the campus annual disability awareness event. A student and his mentor were part of a panel of students asked to describe their experience at USF as a person with a disability. Students were also invited to present their experiences to a classroom of general education teachers studying inclusive education.

Our students were also embraced by the local community. One of our students with a gift in creative arts along with his mentor came upon a coffee shop that exhibited the work of local artists. After visiting a number of times and becoming acquainted with the owner, this student was invited to exhibit his art.

"I went to Beef O' Brady's, an art museum, and a concert at the Marshal/ Center. We went everywhere fun we could go. "Learning Academy Student

Mentor and student relationships have been very successful. Mentors have become a wonderful resource for our students offering guidance and friendship. Mentors have maintained contact with students after the semesters have ended, have invited students to share events with them and have introduced students to their circle of friends. The mentors report that the experience is equally valuable to them as it is for the student.

*"The best part of my mentoring experience was seeing William making connections at the coffee house and growing, and taking the initiative to work towards his goals, and learning from him as a person".
Learning Academy Mentor*

It became apparent as we continually stressed the importance of the independence of our students that the family members were in need of support as well. Family members indicated to us that they would like more information about the specifics of course content and information on topics that would be helpful for them once the program has ended. They also indicated the value of interacting with each other to share ideas, concerns and information. In response, a monthly parent group was initiated in the middle of the third semester. It is our desire to provide the information requested and include assistance on helping the families grow with their family member.

"Needs to be more communicative with parents, with regular feedback for students re: learning and internship."
Parent

"My son has increased both his socialization and communication skills. He's also developing independence faster than mom can keep up with. It's great!"
Parent

Finally, we are delighted to have been selected to present at the 31st Annual International Conference of YAI Network in New York City in April. This conference attracts an annual attendance of more than 3,000 people and serves as a major forum for the exchange of ideas and the introduction of new models and strategies that have a positive impact in the field of developmental and learning disabilities.

*Click [here](#) to view the Learning Academy brochure.

Autism Services Association

Wellesley Hills, MA

mysite.verizon.net/vze887ed

Employment and Community Accessibility for Young Adults and Adults with Autism Transitioning from School to Work

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The proposed program would provide for a broad array of job development services which would enhance attitudinal accessibility and increase employment for young adults with autism, in particular those transitioning from education to adult life. Specific objectives are:

- Increase job opportunities and placement of young adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) from very “high level” individuals, including those with Aspergers Syndrome to those who are considered “high need” individuals who may have challenging behaviors and communication needs
- Increase attitudinal accessibility for persons with ASD through education, information, networking and business advisory council.
- Increase community membership and community employment opportunities.

PROJECT STEPS

The Autism Speaks grant allowed Autism Services Association the opportunity to establish new relationships with area employers and ideally develop new job sites for Autism Services Association workers. To this end, we created a set of informational folders that we used as a recruiting tool and distributed to interested employers. The folders contained some newspaper articles about the Autism Services Association, a handout on WOTC tax credits, information about understanding autism and working with autistic individuals, and a cover letter. Typically, the cover letter was individually tailored to the specific needs of each company that received a packet.

In addition to the information packets, we used a number of different methods to search for job opportunities. We telephoned all of our current job sites that employ Autism Services Association workers and inquired about the possibility of increased hours or additional responsibilities. This method yielded the most success. We added another day to our job at the CVS Pharmacy in Natick. There are now three additional workers going to CVS every Wednesday with a job coach. Job duties there include stocking drink coolers and pricing items. We also obtained a Friday job at Norumbega Point Assisted Living in Weston. This job involves shredding documents and recycling newspapers and other items. We added a worksite in Wellesley at the Eastern Bus Company cleaning school buses. Finally, we temporarily obtained an extra day at Dick’s Sporting Goods for two clients who work there as retail associates. However, we did lose this day again after the holiday season ended. The job sites developed have allowed eleven workers to earn additional money and access the community each week.

Other methods of searching for employment have ultimately proven less successful. We found a number of potential job openings online by using various search engines. When a posted job seemed appropriate, we would attempt to contact the hiring manager to assess whether or not s/he would be interested in our services. Hours of availability would sometimes be an issue. For instance, we had nearly obtained a new position for two Autism Services Association clients at the Whole Foods Market in Wellesley. Unfortunately, the store manager decided that weekend availability and a variable shift were both necessities, and thus, they could not hire our workers. In some other instances, potential employers appeared interested at first, but were unavailable for further conversations. For a variety of reasons, we were unable to obtain any new positions through posted advertisements.

Another portion of the job development project involved the creation of a Business Advisory Council. The purpose of the Council was to help direct the project, network employment opportunities, provide job-seeking skills, and educate other community employers about the capabilities of individuals with autism. The council convened for one meeting, on June 30th. This meeting included a comprehensive review of the grant project to date, and recommendations for both direct placement and additional supported employment worksites. Council members gave us four companies to contact for further placement and job development opportunities. We promptly followed up on these contacts, only to learn that none of them had an interest in our services. While some were looking for full-time employees rather than part-time, other companies were simply unable to hire anybody due to budget constraints. Economic issues proved to be a commonly recurring theme in our search for employers. Many people we contacted over the course of the project were not hiring because they could not afford to do so.

The grant also provided Autism Services Association an opportunity and resource to provide a valuable service to a group of individuals transitioning phases in their life. We identified a significant need within the Autistic population, in that there are many individuals who have completed or are approaching the completion of their academic careers and are unsure how to broach the next step. Traditionally, Autism Services Association has striven to provide excellent supported employment opportunities for those with such needs, but through this branch of the grant project we were able to reach out to those individuals with different skills and goals who are reaching for higher levels of occupational independence.

We realize that while there are some clearly marked and well-traveled paths for Autistic adults with high needs, the resources for people not interested or entirely suited for a special needs program are not quite as visible or readily available. To remedy the needs of individuals who have fallen into this gap, we have designed a comprehensive program to motivate, educate and assist clients as they seek to enter the work force.

Our program commenced in February of 2009 with aggressive rounds of recruitment. We composed a database of special needs programs in public schools, rehabilitation clinics and other organizations devoted to providing services to the Autistic community. We sent out a general recruitment letter outlining the mission of our program and

followed up with phone calls. Through this process we established several contacts and generated multiple referrals. During the first two months we welcomed groups from Watertown High School, Mass Rehab Clinic and Asperger's Association of New England for information sessions at our facility.

Our recruitment process ultimately produced five new clients with varying interests, skills and career goals. Each new client was invited in for an initial assessment where we discussed history, past accomplishments, current activities, skills, and other elements gathered to compose an accurate profile. A specified program plan was generated for each client, modified to focus on areas of need. These assessments and plans are available upon request.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

To summarize, it appears as though our most effective resources for further job development are those individuals and organizations already familiar with our program. They are more apt to recommend us to other potential employers with which they have a relationship. In some cases, they might also be willing to ask us for longer hours and give us increased responsibilities at a pre-existing job. We feel confident that, given a healthier economy in the future, networking with current friends of the agency will produce many new opportunities for supported community employment.

*Click [here](#) to view the final report from this program.