

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”