

CARD



COMMUNITY CONNECTION

CENTER FOR AUTISM & RELATED DISABILITIES
at The University of South Florida

Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, Department of Child & Family Studies — Volume 13, Issue 1 • February 2010 - July 2010

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Executive Director's Message

I hope that you had a great holiday season and a happy new year. I would like to share some exciting news. Our own Mindy Stevens has been promoted to assistant director of CARD-USF. After devoting 5 years of service to our project, Mindy has demonstrated excellence in organizational and leadership skills. Please congratulate her the next time you speak with her!

CARD has been working hard to support the continuously increasing numbers of new constituents and professionals seeking assistance. With the budget cuts we received for this fiscal year, it has become an even greater challenge to manage our operations with the loss of two positions. The governor's Florida Autism Task Force has outlined several recommendations that place CARD in the position of taking the lead in developing regional collaboratives that would seek to reduce duplication in service provision and fill gaps that currently exist in the system. It has also been recommended that CARD be responsible for collecting statewide data on autism that could be used to influence system change and expansion. However, under the current funding, CARD would not be able to take on any new responsibilities. We have been stretched to our capacity. Our

families and professionals are priority one and we work to ensure that no one experiences any direct loss of services, so far. But if we receive another budget cut for next year, there is no doubt that this will impact our ability to provide services at the current level.

This brings me to ask you for your help to have legislators restore our funding to the 2006-2007 fiscal year level. Legislators need to know who you are, the stories of your lives, and how autism impacts you. As the only free resource with a high degree of expertise in autism, we ask that you either schedule an appointment with your local legislator or write a letter with family pictures telling your story and why CARD is important in your life. I have been told by several legislators that this type of contact with community members is what is essential for making a difference. You can find who and where your local legislators are by going to www.flsenate.gov.

I thank you in advance for your leadership in making a difference.

—Karen Berkman, Ph.D.



Dr. Karen Berkman,
CARD Executive Director

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Our Mission

The mission of the Center for Autism & Related Disabilities (CARD) at the University of South Florida is to provide support and assistance that optimizes the potential of people with autism and related disabilities. Our effort to achieve this mission is exemplified in the four “components of caring” that are the focus of our work:

- Direct Assistance – Providing individualized support for people with autism and related disabilities, and their families, in natural community settings.
- Technical Assistance & Consultation – Undertaking activities on behalf of programs (e.g., classroom, supported living residence, supported employment site, etc.) that serve people with autism and related disabilities.
- Professional Training – Providing instruction on autism and related disabilities through our workshops, conferences, in-service training, and college courses.
- Public Education and Awareness – Developing and disseminating information about people with autism and related disabilities.

As one of seven regional, university-based CARD sites, CARD-USF provides its services to individuals with autism and related disabilities, their families, related professionals, and the general public throughout a fourteen county catchment area in west, central, and southwest Florida.

Endorsement Policy

As a policy, CARD will not lend its name to the endorsement of any specific program, practice, or model that is offered for service to people with autism and related disabilities. However, the sharing of information and training opportunities are key functions of the CARD program.

Events, activities, programs, and facilities of the University of South Florida are available to all without regard to race, color, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, disability, age, Vietnam or disabled veteran status as provided by law and in accordance with the University's respect for personal dignity.

Autism Friendly Businesses Update!

Our autism friendly business initiative has really been a success! We have a few more businesses that contacted us and we have been working with them to become “autism friendly.” This was achieved through training staff and/or administrators, modifying materials, and environmental enhancements. This customized plan was completed by CARD-USF at no cost to the business. Becoming autism friendly can allow people with autism and their families to feel more welcome as customers in a business; opportunities for possible employment; and establish a support system for current employees who have a family member with autism. Businesses can choose which goal(s) they have that are best matched for their company diversity efforts. The following businesses are now autism friendly:

- MAXIM HEALTHCARE SERVICES, INC., Tampa
- CNS (COGNITIVE NEURO SCIENCES), Tampa
- COSI CAFE, Wesley Chapel

Several other businesses are in the process of becoming autism friendly. This process is family driven. If you know of a business who may be interested in becoming autism friendly, have the manager contact Dr. Karen Berkman at 813-974-2532. Please visit our website to learn more about it.

<http://card-usf.fmhi.usf.edu/business.asp>



CARD's 5th Annual Autism Community Leadership Award Goes “Autism Friendly”

CARD-USF is pleased to announce the 5th Annual Autism Community Leadership Award. This award will be given to an organization or business leader who has shown outstanding proactive leadership in making our community “autism friendly.” The nominee will have positive community relationships, demonstrate collaborative efforts with others affiliated with autism, model respectful and supportive leadership, and show an ability to unify and motivate others in promoting advancements for people with autism.

Businesses nominated for this award will demonstrate a commitment to promoting positive attitudes and perceptions of autism through recruitment and hiring practices, employee support, and strides to make their organization more welcoming to families living with autism.

The recipient of this leadership award will be recognized by his or her peers, family and friends at the 5th Annual *Fiesta by the Bay* event on April 23, 2010 to maximize public awareness and fun.

Springtime Fun! CARD's Egg Hunt & Freedom Playground's Touch a Truck

This year, two fabulous events will be combined into a wonderful day of fun for CARD families and the community. Freedom Playground hosts *Touch A Truck* for kids to get up close to some of their favorite vehicles: a fire truck, a garbage truck, and even an ice cream truck will be at the Playground this year! And bring your baskets since Carrots the Bunny will be leading the 3rd Annual CARD Egg Hunt too. Hop on over to Freedom Playground at MacFarlane Park in West Tampa on Saturday, March 27th.



Top: Carrots the Bunny entertains children.
Right: Christine Rover poses with son.



Autism Flash: Interview with Erica K., Creating and Posting Videos Online

Christine:

I heard that you like to post videos online. Why do you like to create and post videos? How many have you posted?

Erica: It makes me feel better. It's fun to make them. I get to see what people think about it. 293, well 294 by tonight when I finish this one. You can just say 293.

C: What kind of videos? Subjects?

E: I have a web show, Sonic X: A New Life. I have 5 seasons. Adventure, romance, drama, comedy.

C: Is your web show like iCarly?

E: Not like iCarly. Music videos and news about new characters. Things I recorded. I just record the really funny things. TV shows, funny things or video games.

C: Are they easy to make? What kind of camera do you use?

E: When I first made them it was difficult. My computer freezes up sometimes. I record using my Flip video 60 minutes. I go online to different places to add songs and videos. You need Windows Video Maker (wvm).

C: How long does it take to edit a video? Do you add special effects or music to your videos?

E: Depends how long the song lasts. Yes, many special effects and yes, songs make it seem longer.

C: Do you have a favorite group or band?

E: (After an exaggerated pause that indicates she can't possibly list ALL of them, Erica finally shares a few of her favorites.) They are Crush 40, Jonas Brothers, and Miley Cyrus.

C: Do you have a favorite video that you could show me?

E: (Logging onto her video account, Erica shares that "they're all unique" and shows me ONE of her favorites) The video is "I love ya (Hikaru Utada)."

C: Would you be able to teach me how to create and post a video? All the steps?

E: I guess. (She is not so sure of Christine's skills-or lack of skills!?)

SAFETY TIPS FOR POSTING ONLINE:

- Don't share your password
- Don't tell where you live
- Don't give your phone number

Check out our next CARD Newsletter to see how Christine progressed as a video student! We're also planning to post a video how to on our website with more online safety tips and ideas to create and share your own videos.

Christine Rover is CARD's Community Inclusion Coordinator. Erica is a 14-year-old contributor to the newsletter.

Lions, Tigers and...Haircuts, Oh My!

For some of us, just the mention of haircuts for our child with special needs makes our stress level jump! Why you may ask, because this experience is not only difficult for the child but can be equally as difficult for the parent. In other situations it may be easier for the parent because they are more in control of the circumstances and understand what needs to be done and can handle it in our own way. On the

of stress. Well I am here to help and give some tips on getting your child prepared for a haircut whether it is done by the parent or a stylist.

My name is Nydia. My son Keith is now 18 and has autism. I am also a hair stylist and my son did not enjoy getting a hair cut for a long time and after a lot of struggling and reading, we figured out what works better for him and I hope that some of these tips will help you too.

and what they do. Let them touch them while the stylist is in control of the tool so they can begin to trust this stylist and get the stylist to comb their hair to see how they do.

- When they begin to get used to all these things start to tell them that it will be their turn soon to get a haircut, make an appointment, mark the calendar and show them when it will happen. Every once in a while remind them of their haircut. It also would help for the parent to get them used to getting their hair brushed and touched so they can be more prepared.
- If it helps, have something they really like occupy their attention during the cut and/or something that they will earn if they are cooperative for the haircut.

The bottom line, you know your child better than anyone in the world. You know what they like and dislike; what they will and won't do and what makes them happy. Take all that knowledge and apply that to what you need them to learn or do. Just because we have children with autism doesn't mean we can't help them learn what they need to care for themselves the best way they can. Remember, they can do a lot; we just have to be brave, patient, and love them. It may take some time and they may not catch on the first time or even the first five times, but you can't give up on them. I know that it is hard, my son is graduating this year and when I think back on all the rough times, the tears, the doctors, the meds, and most of all the worrying, it is all worth it! Every last second, because he is our reward and I couldn't ask for anything more!

If anyone has questions or just wants to talk please call or email me.

Nydia

ncaraman@verizon.net
Cell-813-368-4414



other hand, haircuts are totally out of the parents' hands; this is a very public situation that usually means getting a stranger involved with sharp tools. Just because this is their job doesn't mean they will understand or be patient enough to cope with your special needs child. A haircut seems so simple, something that is a part of everyday life. Our children need to be prepared for this because it is a part of life, just as going to school, brushing their teeth, or taking a bath. As parents, we share the challenges of society's misunderstandings with our child as they go through life even more than those children without special needs. We bear the load of what our children go through and when your child has a special need, something as simple as getting a haircut can cause a tremendous amount

- Talk to your stylist about your child; see if they are patient and willing to work with you. Ask if they would be willing to do your child's hair after hours or when it was slow.
- Take your child with you and family members to get haircuts and talk about it with them during the entire process. Explain all the steps of getting a haircut and why it is important. (We always made silly references so it would seem fun or relate it to a favorite thing.)
- Bring them by for visits to the salon/barber shop just to get them familiar with the surroundings, sounds, and stylist. Ask to let them sit in the chair, go up and down and spin a little, tell them what all the tools are

Why is Literacy Important?

CARD-USF is excited about promoting literacy for readers with autism. Check out some of the interactive literacy materials we've recently been developing for both you readers and middle/secondary level readers at http://card-usf.fmhi.usf.edu/online_training.asp. Collaborative plans between the Hillsborough County Public Library System, the School District of Hillsborough County and CARD-USF are also in the works for a shared literacy event for families to be held early in May 2010. Details for the event and a specific date are still in development, though they will be forthcoming soon.

A growing body of research in the field of literacy for young children with severe disabilities indicates the great value of frequent and regular exposure to printed language and reading. Here are some of the reasons why early literacy should also be addressed as a priority for young children with autism spectrum disorders:



- It's a right for everyone. In today's society of immediate and constant access to information, the ability to access and utilize symbolic information is as much a right for all citizens as free and appropriate public education and accessible health care.
- It's access. Being able to read or express oneself through print allows the individual access to greater information, opportunities and understanding across their lifetime.
- It's communication. Recent research indicates that literacy and communication skills are mutually supportive, so that gains in one area will correspond directly to those in the other. This means that increasing a child's literacy skills can have a clear impact on their communication abilities.
- It's functional. Like many other important skills, literacy abilities are a natural part of an individual's independence. Therefore, the more successful a child becomes at utilizing print, the greater independence they gain.
- It's recreation. Getting lost in the details and illustrations of a good book is one of life's greatest pleasures for many people. Gaining the skills that lead to reading for pleasure can also mean a much wider range of recreational activities for readers with autism.
- It's intervention. Autism is a disability that impacts social and communication abilities. Additionally many individuals with an autism diagnosis also have cognitive challenges to some extent. Learning to interpret and utilize information through print can often lead directly to improvements in higher order thought processes and social understanding.

Get ready to read with your child!

Autism & Health Wellness SYMPOSIUM

Fit Beyond the Diagnosis

SAVE THE DATE!

March 27, 2010

Noon to 4pm

The symptoms of autism often occur with a variety of health issues such as obesity, poor dental hygiene, inadequate dietary habits, chronic sleep difficulties, and diabetes. Accessing health, dental, or community based recreation services is not always an easy task for caregivers without organized planning. The Center for Autism and Related Disabilities will be hosting the First Autism Health & Wellness Symposium to raise awareness, connect the community with recreation resources and provide attendees with current information to begin addressing issues such as poor sleep, food selectivity, and inactive lifestyles for individuals with autism spectrum disorders. CARD-USF welcomes all to join us at the **CW Young Joint Military Leadership Center located at the University of South Florida**. The event is free of charge.

*Please contact Shelton Gilyard
(813) 974-6441
for more information.*

REUNION HISPANA 2009



This article is an explanation of services available to Spanish speaking families

Reunión Anual de Familias Hispanas 2009

El Centro de Autismo y Condiciones Relacionadas de la Universidad del Sur de la Florida tuvo el gran placer de continuar con la tradición de la Reunión Anual de Familias Hispanas. Este año, la planificación del evento contó con la asistencia de un comité piloto de familias quienes fueron invitadas por CARD para identificar las necesidades e intereses de nuestros constituyentes de cultura hispana. Esta colaboración fue de suma importancia este año ya que nuestra facilitadora de habla hispana de CARD, Vivian Herrero, se encuentra trabajando a larga distancia fuera de nuestras oficinas locales de CARD. Vivian había sido nuestra anfitriona los pasados dos años y aún continua aportando desde la distancia.

Las familias del comité piloto identificaron la importancia de la concientización y el desarrollo de contactos con proveedores de servicio. Varios proveedores de servicio presentaron a las familias material escrito tanto en Inglés como en Español. Para este gran día, tuvimos de invitada a Millie Pou del Centro de Padres del Centro de la Florida para hablar de los servicios para niños con retrasos

en el desarrollo, incluyendo el autismo. Cristina Ortiz, quien es entrenadora para el programa HOT DOCS del Departamento de Salud de la Universidad del Sur de la Florida, también nos brindó su tiempo colaborando en este evento. Cristina ayudó en el reclutamiento de familias que asistieron a nuestra reunión y habló a los presentes de su experiencia como madre quien ha navegado el sistema de proveedores.

Nuestra reunión familiar brindó a las familias la oportunidad de conocerse, hacer contactos y compartir un almuerzo. Un resultado adicional producto de la planificación de este evento, fue la creación de un nuevo grupo de reuniones auspiciado por la familia Blotner a través del sitio en la



Ana and sons Sebastien and Christian

red meetup.com. Este grupo puede ser accessed a través del <http://www.meetup.com/autismtampa/> con el nombre "Hispanic American Autism Group."

Building Resiliency in Families with Autism: A Coparenting Training Model

The Center for Autism and Related Disabilities has collaborated with the USF Psychological and Social Foundations Department to develop a research project on a four-part educational series, *Building Resiliency in Families with Autism: A Coparenting Training Model*.

Families with a child with autism share unique experiences and challenges. Most family-based interventions for this population focus on teaching parents how to work with their children. (Feinberg, 2002) There are few interventions available to build resiliency among the parents themselves. The goal for the training series is for participants to benefit by demonstrating increased communication, better quality of life, increased resiliency, a more hopeful outlook, feeling healthier, and an increased sense of competence in working together as a cohesive, unified team.

The CARD staff wanted to utilize the data from the 2007 Family Unification and Empowerment through Learning

(FUEL) research and training project. The families involved in FUEL reported the training topics having the greatest impact for them were family history (tradition and values), communication, optimism and humor. In pursuing a renewed use for the FUEL study and training, a collaboration was formed with Dr. Linda Raffaele Mendez and her graduate student research group, who have been conducting research on the effects of coparenting for families raising a child identified with special needs.

The educational series ran this fall in the month of November with eight families attending the complete series. Current CARD constituents and parents who were involved in studies through the College of Education were invited to participate based on specific study criteria. We had a number of volunteers assist with supervising the participants' children in order for all coparents to attend the sessions. We look forward to reporting some of the results from the study when follow

up data is collected twelve weeks after the final training session.

It has been a wonderful experience for all the CARD staff to meet such amazing families and their feedback on the project will help develop a training series for building resiliency in families raising a child with autism.

The Fort Myers branch office of CARD-USF will be offering the 4-week *Building Resiliency* curriculum beginning February 20, 2010. For information about the program, contact Anne K. Allen in the Fort Myers office at 239-590-7771.

The Learning Academy at USF

The 3rd semester of the Learning Academy is underway. During semester 2, the students completed numerous activities and assessments to determine their career interests. Students conducted extensive research on a career of their choosing, and then presented the information at an end of the semester gathering of family members and friends. All were impressed with the hard work shown from each of the Learning Academy students. The presentations demonstrated their enthusiasm and creativity in planning for a successful future.

This semester, the students now have the opportunity to experience aspects of the careers they researched by participating in internships, both on campus and in the community. Internships were customized to match the specific interests of the student. Students will be practicing their skills in areas such as graphic

design, photography, writing and art. They will be completing a journal about their experiences and attending a weekly seminar to discuss the world of work and the issues that arise—both positive and negative - and problem solve together. Topics covered will include conflict resolution, workplace culture, time management, organization, and techniques to become a successful employee.

The valuable mentoring component of the program will continue throughout the semester as well. Students will continue to spend four hours each week with their mentor, taking part in USF events, activities, and enjoying college life with their fellow students. Mentors will also continue to assist and support students in their classroom work and assignments.

In the final semester, the students will continue to hone their employment skills and develop a plan for the future.

News & Notes

- **THE NATIONAL STANDARDS REPORT: EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS**
The National Standards Project recently published the *National standards report: The National Standards Project – Addressing the need for evidence-based practice guidelines for autism spectrum disorders*. The report is available online for free at:
<http://www.nationalautismcenter.org/index.php>

Students with the goal of employment will practice job interviewing and job search skills and become acquainted with agencies and organizations that can support them upon graduating from the program. Students anticipating continuing their education will be researching colleges and their programs and determining what steps are necessary for them to apply.

Although the grant funding for the Learning Academy has expired, CARD staff are researching various alternative funding mechanisms to keep this unique signature program going for a new group of students in the fall.

**Autism Society of America
(National Organization)**
Website: <http://www.autism-society.org/>

**Autism Society of Florida, Inc.
Florida State Chapter #131**
E-mail: webmast@autismfl.com
Website: <http://www.autismfl.com>

CHARLOTTE COUNTY

Autism Support Group
Meetings: 4th Thursday of the month
Time: 7:00 p.m.
Location: Gulf Cove United Methodist Church
Rooms 109/110 • 1100 McCall Rd • Port Charlotte, FL
Contact: Sue Charbonneau
Phone: 941-270-0996
E-mail: suelcharb@embarqmail.com

**Gluten Free / Casein Free & Other
Dietary Approaches Support Group**
Meetings: 2nd Saturday of the month
Time: 9:30 a.m.

Location: Natural Foods • Port Charlotte, FL
(Murdock Carousel Shopping Center between
Cochran Blvd & Forest Nelson Blvd)

COLLIER COUNTY

Collier County Autism Support Group
Meetings: 3rd Thursday of the month
Time: 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
Location: North Naples United Methodist Church
Founder's Hall • 6000 Goodlette Rd N • Naples, FL
Contact: Robin King
E-mail: CollierAutism@gmail.com

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

Asperger's Support for Men
Meetings: Every other Thursday
Time: 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
Location: 2901 Swann Ave • Tampa, FL
Cost: \$20-\$29 per session
Contact: Jason Tompkins, LCSW
Phone: 813-784-0153
*Males, at least 18 years old, with a confirmed diagnosis
of Asperger's Syndrome.*

Concerned Parents of Autistic Children
Meetings: Last Sunday of the month
Time: 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Location: 9631 Raiden Ln • Riverview, FL
Contact: Jim Evans
E-mail: jim.evans@sqldbhelp.com

Easter Seals THRIVE Program
Location: Thrive Office
10335 Cross Creek Blvd, Suite E • Tampa, FL
Contact: Tori
Phone: 813-988-7633 x-15119
Website: [http://fl.easterseals.com/site/
PageServer?pagename=FLDR_TBThrive](http://fl.easterseals.com/site/PageServer?pagename=FLDR_TBThrive)
Parents of children with autism.

Parenting with Special Needs
Meetings: Every other Wednesday
Time: 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
Location: Kid Pro Therapy
16546 N Dale Mabry Hwy • Tampa, FL
Cost: \$10.00 per person per session
Contact: Erica DuPont, LCSW
Phone: 813-966-7064
E-mail: Erica.DuPont@hotmail.com
Parents and caregivers of "special needs" children.

**Parents of Autism and Asperger's
Syndrome Support Group (PASS)**
Meetings: 1st Friday of the month September to May
Time: 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
Location: Campo Family YMCA
3414 Culbreath Road • Valrico, FL
Website: <http://geocities.com/thepassgroup/>
Contact: Lisa Neumann
Phone: 813-765-8644

**STAND (Statewide Advocacy Network
on Disabilities)**
Meetings: 3rd Thursday of the month
Time: 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
Location: Children's Board of Hillsborough County
1002 E Palm Ave • Tampa, FL
E-mail: advocate@standonline.info
Hillsborough monthly chapter meetings (all disabilities).

LEE COUNTY

*If you are aware of any support groups in Lee County,
please let CARD know.*

PASCO (NORTH)/HERNANDO COUNTY

**Hernando Autism Parenting & Personal
Experience Network (HAPPEN)**
Meetings: 3rd Wednesday of the month
Time: 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
Location: Pediatric Therapy Works • Spring Hill, FL
Contact: Leslie Bolen
Phone: 352-683-0209

PASCO COUNTY

AWARE 4 Autism – East Pasco
Meetings: 1st Saturday of the month
Time: 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Location: First Congregational Church
7900 Fort King Rd • Zephyrhills, FL
Contact: Johanna
Phone: 813-782-9431
E-mail: aware4autism@gmail.com
Caregivers of persons with an autism spectrum disorder.

Koolkidz Social Skills Group for Children with ASD

Meetings: Activities each Wednesday. See website
for current events.
Contact: Suzette
E-mail: suzette@koolkidz.mysite.com
Website: <http://www.koolkidz.mysite.com>
*Children with Asperger's Syndrome and high
functioning autism.*

NAMI Adult Mental Health Peer-Support Group

Meetings: 1st & 3rd Wednesday of the month
Time: 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
Location: Community Hospital of New Port Richey
Conference Room • New Port Richey, FL

PINELLAS COUNTY

**American Asperger's Association Support
Group – Autism and Asperger's Disorder**
Time: 6:45 to 8:15 pm
Location: Pinellas Park Library
7770 52nd St • Pinellas Park, FL
Contact: Kim
Phone: 727-586-0577
E-mail: fapprez@msn.com
Website: <http://www.americanaspergersassociation.net>

SINC (Sensory Integration: Networking for our Children)

Parent-Only Meetings: 3rd Tuesday of every month
Time: 7:00 p.m.
Location: Jason's Deli • Clearwater, FL
Open Meetings: 2nd & 4th Friday of every month
Time: 9:30 a.m.
Location: Panera Bread, Countryside • Clearwater, FL
(across from Country Side Mall)
Contact: Heather Stevens
Phone: 727-543-2859
Website: [http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/
Pinellas_SPD_Support/](http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/Pinellas_SPD_Support/)
*During open meetings, parents responsible for own
children. Online support group also available.*

POLK COUNTY

**A Differently Abled Parent Support
Group (ADAPS)**
Meetings: 3rd Tuesday of the month
Time: 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
Location: Family Fundamentals Building
1021 Lakeland Blvd. • Lakeland, FL
Contact: Kim Ellis at 863-701-1151 ext 152 or
Nicole at 863-686-1221 ext 228
*Families and caregivers of children with disabilities,
ages birth to 21 years.*

Circle of Friends Support Group

Meetings: Every other Thursday of the month.
Location: Alternate between Winter Haven Hospital
and Circle Building, Stuart Avenue • Winter Haven, FL
Contact: Mertice Fehringer
Phone: 863-679-2507

Parental Education for Autism in Children Everywhere (PEACE)

Meetings: 1st Tuesday of the month
Time: 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
Location: Family Fundamentals Building
1021 Lakeland Blvd • Lakeland, FL
Contact: Nicole
Phone: 863-686-1221 ext 228
E-mail: Nikki73170@aol.com
Website: <http://www.peacelakeland.com/>

SARASOTA COUNTY

Families Helping Families – Family Support Group

Meetings: 1st & 3rd Thursday of the month
Time: 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
Location: Venice Bible Church
2395 W Shamrock Drive • Venice, FL
Contact: Vicki
Phone: 941-544-0167
*Family with a child age birth to 22 years with any
behavioral or emotional difficulties.*

*Please contact CARD-USF via email at card-usf@fmhi.usf.edu with changes or additions.
Support Group listings are provided as a service
and are not an endorsement by CARD-USF.
Our website has the latest list at [http://cardusf.
fmhi.usf.edu/MK/support_groups.html](http://cardusf.fmhi.usf.edu/MK/support_groups.html).*

Kevin's High School PATH

In the fall of 2006, Kevin entered High School. Kevin's mom, Lynn had heard about PATH (*Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope*) one of many futures planning tools that can help individuals who have autism spectrum disorders and their families move into a more positive and possible future. Lynn had been trying for several years without success to have a PATH developed for Kevin. Lynn thought, with Kevin entering this new chapter and environment in his life it would be a good time to try again. The staff at Ida Baker High School in Cape Coral and The School District of Lee County were all in favor of developing a PATH for Kevin.

John O' Brien, Marsha Forrest and Jack Pierpoint of Inclusion Press in Canada developed PATH in 1991. It has been used to provide planning for children, families, organizations, education systems, recreation organizations, and advocacy groups. PATH values include respect for the person, community inclusion, and diversity.

The process includes eight essential components or sections. PATH asks all the questions in order. The first step starts with the end in mind. It is to *Touch the Dream*. The dream is a visioning process that provides direction to the whole planning process. Kevin has already realized some of his dreams such as going to California to watch the *Wheel of Fortune* and to Tropicana Field in Tampa. One of Kevin's dreams is to live independently and safely. So, when his team talked about step two, *Sensing the Goal*, the group looked at what was possible and positive and described the changes that would be made in Kevin's life as if they were real. Kevin's goals are based on what he needs to learn before he graduates so that when he does, he will be able to have a meaningful life for himself in all areas that are important to him.

The energy to follow a PATH comes from the tension between where a person is now and where they want to

be in the future. Step 3 is *Grounding in the Now*. In the fall of 2006, Kevin and his team saw much disparity between his dream and his reality. Kevin and his team have just finished updating his PATH for the third time. There is less tension now between his reality and his dream, but he and his team still have goals to meet. Lynn says, "Kevin's PATH has been a wonderful journey for both of us."

Along Kevin's PATH, there have been people needed to help achieve some of his goals. Step 4 is *Identifying People to Enroll*. Kevin has a love for music, football and bands. He wanted to be in the marching band at his high school. One year we needed to enroll a music therapist to assist Kevin in honing his natural musical abilities so that he could take percussion class at school and be a part of marching band. Kevin recently participated in a local parade with the marching band and plays at football games.

Kevin and his team have learned to have strength, endure processes, rely on each other, and know when to regroup and what to do to stay strong. They have learned these skills working together for three years. Each year the group discusses these issues in Step 5, *Ways to Build Strength*. After the group discusses their strengths, they are ready to begin their action planning for the year. Step 6, *Planning the Next 6 Months*, looks at

taking action toward what Kevin and his team want to create. One of these action steps each year for Kevin is to explore a career interest opportunity based on his preferences. Kevin likes computers and he likes to use tools to take things



Kevin takes apart a computer at work.

apart. He worked taking computers apart for recycling. Kevin enjoyed this job, focused while working, and received good feedback from his employers. Currently, his former employers are asking for him to come back.

Step 7, *Planning the Next 3 Months*: This step really focuses on action, what will you have to do, when and who will do it? In order to get started, Step 8 *Committing to the First Step* gets the group moving from thinking to action. This step requires a commitment to begin so each action step has a date and person attached to it.

Kevin's team has changed a little over the years but the commitment to help him reach his goals and dreams has not. Each year that his PATH is revised he comes a little closer to the possible and positive future he envisioned that fall day in 2006 as he entered onto his High School PATH. Lynn says this about the team she put together for her son, "all of you have been a perfect example of what can happen if we believe our kids can and I will never be able to express in words how grateful I am for your dedication and patience for both Kevin and me."



Kevin enjoys performing with his school band.

Letter from Jeffrey: *The Face of Success*

To those of you that don't know who I am, the name is Jeffrey Schmidt. At the age of 23, my life continues to reside at the University of Florida in Gainesville. Having Asperger's Syndrome has made a life a challenge with some remaining sensory issues and lack of tolerance for those that are not at an equal intellectual level. Most of the issues associated with my disability were overcome with finding alternatives as well as perseverance.

The past four years at the University of Florida have been challenging and very rewarding. Coming in as a Computer Software Engineering major, the required coursework involved a lot of time and energy. Persistence is without a doubt the key to success at the university level. Life was not smooth sailing however; for a couple of semesters the professors and the Disability Resource center did not comply with the basic elements of the personalized education plan. During these challenging times, a reduced course load was implemented in an effort to reduce the stresses and improve academic performance.

With two very difficult years behind, it was time for a change that would be more beneficial to my future career. In the summer of 2006 was truly the summer of opportunity. After a very stressful spring semester and working part-time at an on-campus restaurant, I was chosen to attend the 2006 AAPD Federal I.T. (Information Technology) internship program for 10 weeks in the heart of Washington, D.C. During the internship, there was an enormous amount of interaction with fellow employees at the Federal Railroad Administration which resulted in improvement of internal applications and streamlines systems integration. In addition the opportunity came up to take the subway to Fairfax, Virginia where I provided on-site support for a small-business firm. Due to the quality of service that was performed, the firm continuously is calling upon my services, flying me up to Virginia for on-site services such as establishing servers, as well as remote services from Gainesville.

Upon completing the summer of my dreams, my academic

concentration changed to Decision and Information Sciences under the College of Business Administration. The change would soon prove to be very beneficial academically and psychologically. In addition, a change in part-time work would soon change my life. After working 9 months in the food industry, I assumed the position of the IT Assistant at the J. Wayne Reitz Union (the student union of the University of Florida). During the second year of employment with the Reitz Union, the full-time webmaster resigned and the duties and responsibilities fell onto my shoulders. For the next eight months I served as both the interim webmaster as well as the IT assistant. In February of 2009, the full-time webmaster position was offered to me due to my previous experience with the Union website. Although the undergraduate work was not yet completed, the University of Florida offers a benefit to employees that allow staff to continue their education free of charge. This may have delayed the estimated graduation date of Fall 2009; however with the economy being as it currently stands it was logical to assume the position and have a guaranteed position.

Shortly after assuming the position as the Application Developer, it was time to make some personal changes. Making sure that my job was secure, I then purchased my first vehicle, a Honda Element. Shortly thereafter I signed the lease to my own brand-new apartment just west of the university campus. No more were the days of living with other roommates and living on a college budget. At this stage in my life there is a sense of completion and happiness. When I was younger my vision was to go to a university, then land a job with a new apartment. This milestone happened earlier than anticipated but it comes to show you that if you work hard and follow your dreams, anything is possible...

Act Early: *Know the Signs*

By Karen Berkman, Ph.D.

Recently, I attended the Act Early Summit in Atlanta, GA. as one representative of the Florida State Team. This regional summit included key state leaders from Florida, Mississippi, Georgia and Alabama. Our task was to design a state plan that would enhance Florida's capacity to deliver evidence-based practices for children with autism spectrum disorder and related disabilities. In addition, we were to look for opportunities to strengthen Florida's ability to respond to the increasing demand for early identification, assessment and service coordination for young children with ASD.

The Act Early initiative is

supported by the National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities at the CDC and Maternal Child Health Bureau at HRSA.

Excellent information about child development and growth can be found at the CDC website at www.cdc.gov/actearly. This campaign targets families and professionals with information about developmental milestones and children who may be at risk of developmental delays. This site is very easy to navigate and information is accessible in understandable terms. Please take a moment to share this site with a friend and spread the word about this helpful resource.

SAVE THE DATE!

April 23, 2010

5 *Center for Autism and Related Disabilities at USF*
Years of Celebration!

Fiesta

BY THE BAY

Join us at Gaspar's Grotto for great company, cool music and delicious food!
Doors open at 5:30pm

For Sponsorships, donations, or questions, please contact Christine at crover@fmhi.usf.edu or 813-974-9264





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Girls emPOWERment Retreat

Right now, 1 out of every 4 children diagnosed on the spectrum is a girl and yet, we continue to learn more and more that girls on the spectrum may present different characteristics than boys, making their needs different.

CARD-USF thought it was time we reached out to young ladies on the spectrum and their families to learn more about their experiences and to begin a dialogue about how they can best be supported by and connected to the community.

We are currently planning a retreat for young ladies on the spectrum, ages 14-20, and their female caregivers. The event will be an overnight retreat at a local hotel in Tampa on May 22nd & 23rd.

The retreat will provide caregivers a chance to unwind, recharge, and reflect upon the future for both



themselves and their special young lady. The young ladies will have a chance to socialize with each other, learn new skills, and set goals for the future. We made sure to include some fun events including a special pamper

time for caregivers, a movie time and social hour for the young ladies!

If you are interested in finding out more, please contact Angela Mann at 813-974-4720.