

## CARD Staff

Glen Dunlap, Executive Director  
 Don Kincaid, Director  
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 Bobbie Vaughn, Faculty Associate  
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 Mary-Kay Bunton-Pierce, Info. Coordinator  
 Jean Caldicott, Resource Librarian  
 Donna Casella, Training Coordinator  
 Dave Guido, Adult Services Coordinator  
 Beth Keeton, Support Specialist  
 Cristina Munoz, Support Specialist  
 Maria Patten, Support Specialist  
 Mary Reed, Support Specialist  
 Serena Samar, Support Specialist  
 Diane Wilson, Support Specialist  
 Tanisha Clarke, Intake Specialist  
 Sylvia Engh, Partnership Assistant  
 Carris Aikens, Clerical Assistant  
 Luisa Ramon, Volunteer  
 Frank Sansosti, Graduate Assistant

## Ft. Myers Staff

Connie Philbrook, Senior Secretary  
 Anne Allen, Support Specialist  
 Michelle White, Support Specialist

## Family Community Partners

Phyllis Guthman, Hillsborough County  
 Susan Magers, Sarasota County  
 Madeline Kuderick, Pinellas County  
 James Cracciolo, USF Campus

## Constituency Board

Sarina Adeni, Chair  
 Barry Cohen, Vice-Chair  
 Dennis Debbaudt  
 Dayna Nichols, Secretary  
 Ann Reynolds  
 Robert Swain

## CARD Update:

Each of the six CARDS has a Constituency Board that provides input and advice about the services and supports provided by the Centers. The legislation that establishes the CARDS includes a requirement for Constituency Boards of no fewer than six members. CARD-USF values our Constituency Board and even if there were no legal requirements for a Constituency Board, CARD-USF would still consider it a necessity to have their presence, assistance and advice.

CARD-USF strives to identify interested constituents across our 18 counties who are committed to the mission of CARD, have seen first-hand benefits of CARD, represent the geographic and cultural diversity of our region, and can meet with CARD staff to plan, review and provide feedback on activities. At a minimum, CARD

Constituency Board Members must meet on a quarterly basis and be available to give direction and advice throughout the year. The CARD Constituency Board approves and monitors our yearly work plan and then files an annual report with the President of USF.

Currently, CARD-USF has six Constituency Board members. We believe that CARD-USF and our constituents would benefit from having more Board



CARD-USF Constituency Board meeting discussion

members representing our large and diverse region. CARD-USF met with our current

*Get involved, meet other families dealing with autism, and have your voice heard – become a member of the Constituency Board*

Constituency Board in June and one area of discussion was to advance ideas for getting greater involvement from families and individuals with autism and related disabilities on the Board.

CARD-USF Constituency Board members typically meet the first Tuesday of March,

June, September and December of each year at USF. We know that involvement in a Constituency Board requires a significant commitment of time and energy from families who may already have limited time and energy. We are interested in hearing from you about ways to better support your interest and involvement with our Constituency Board. If you think that you might like to serve on the Constituency Board, please contact us at 1-800-333-4530 or by email at [card-usf@fmhi.usf.edu](mailto:card-usf@fmhi.usf.edu).



Put the "A" in autism darling by Brianna, Fox Hollow Elementary, Mrs. Palmgren's third-grade class in 2002



## Center for Autism and Related Disabilities

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Florida Mental Health Institute  
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Division of Applied Research  
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FAX: 813-974-6115  
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<http://card-usf.fmhi.usf.edu>

### 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 for 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 six 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 an eighteen 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, 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.*



Jennifer Weis, Autism Support Facilitator

## Stories from the Field

*Stories from the Field is a new section that will be appearing in our quarterly newsletters and will highlight successful practices of schools, agencies, and families working collaboratively with CARD staff.*

Earlier in the 2002-2003 school year, the exceptional student education (ESE) team at Cimino Elementary School in the Hillsborough District asked CARD to assist them in developing a special project that would help increase the social interaction skills of students with autism and also help build friendships. The Cimino ESE team includes Shannon LesPearance, ESE Specialist; Jennifer Weis, Autism Support Facilitator; Liz Waters, Resource Teacher for Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD), and Sylvia Corrica, Speech Language Pathologist.

After CARD met with the team and collaboratively determined the outcomes desired from the project, a **peer-mediated strategy** was chosen. In peer mediation approaches, typical peers are taught strategies to teach and reinforce specific social interaction skills of a child with autism. The typical peers are taught the strategies through role-playing with adults and are then coached by adults to use the strategies in natural contexts with the specific child with autism. Peer mediated strategies are powerful in that they teach the child with autism specific social interaction skills and allow the child to generalize the skills learned to other peers and settings.

CARD facilitated an initial planning meeting with the Cimino team and developed a model to train a cohort of four first-grade peers who would support a first-grade child with autism in an inclusive setting. The Cimino team would then replicate the model for other grade level cohorts. In this special project, CARD conducted the first peer training

*Peer mediated strategies are powerful in that they teach the child with autism specific social interaction skills.*

session with the first-graders so that the school team would learn how to do the technique.

The Cimino team project, called the "Cougar Paws Club," has been a great success! Jennifer Weis provided CARD with updated information on how the project fared at Cimino. The Cimino team trained three additional peer cohort groups. The cohorts trained included an additional group in first-grade, one in third-grade, and one in fourth-grade. Each cohort group contained between four and six typical peers. Although the special project built in several reinforcers to reward the typical peers for using the trained strategies, Ms. Weis said that the natural reinforcer of making friends appeared to be the most powerful. The peer cohorts have regular biweekly meetings to discuss how things are going. As the peers with autism meet the targeted social goals, additional goals (if applicable) are added and trained. Since the initiation of the project, Ms. Weis said that the inappropriate social skills of the targeted students have significantly decreased and the appropriate social behaviors have increased. Even more exciting, Ms. Weis has seen generalization to other settings. In addition, typical peers, who had not been in the cohort training, started to use the strategies that they had seen used by the trained peers.

Ms. Weis attributes the success of the project to several things. First, the peer cohorts approach the target child with autism as an "equal," rather than as the child's teacher. Second, each time the team meets with the first grade cohorts, additional role-playing opportunities are provided so that the peers become skilled in the strategies. Third, the team provides consistent facilitation and coaching to the typical peers as they use the strategies.

Next year, Cimino intends to continue the project by recruiting new peer cohorts. They also plan to broaden the project by targeting students with other disabilities who may have social skill difficulties. The ESE team at Cimino deserves the highest praise for its success and is a model team to be emulated by others.

*For further information about the CARD Peer Mediation Project, please contact Rose Iovannone at 813-974-1696 or [iovannon@fmhi.usf.edu](mailto:iovannon@fmhi.usf.edu).*

# Supported Employment Training Project

This article is an introduction to a new CARD-USF project that will benefit adults with developmental disabilities. The Supported Employment Training Project (SET), which is the short name for the Joint Training of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and Support Coordinators on Supported Employment Project, provides training and technical assistance for HCBS Waiver Support Coordinators and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors in order to better facilitate the connections between individuals with significant disabilities and community-based supports. The goal of the project is to increase the self-sufficiency and productivity of persons with disabilities through initiatives that increase access and promote success in the community workforce.

SET provides training on effective practices throughout the state of Florida, to Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and to MedWaiver Support Coordinators, in order to help create a network that will lead to employment for individuals with significant disabilities. The project collaborates with Vocational Rehabilitation Services, the Developmental Disabilities Program, the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, the Florida Association for Persons in Supported Employment, the Florida Association for Support Coordinators, and the Training Resource Network, Inc. for the purposes of developing the project curriculum and implementing the training. The Florida Developmental Disabilities Council is the funding agent for the project.

When individuals with developmental disabilities need employment supports in Florida,

they rely heavily on funding from Vocational Rehabilitation Services and the Developmental Disabilities Program. Vocational Rehabilitation Services Counselors, Developmental Disabilities Program and HCBS Waiver Support Coordinators are the first point of contact when an individual is seeking employment supports. Due to the nature of their positions, these organizations play a critical role in the linkage between individuals with developmental disabilities and employment. Because

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*The goal of SET is to increase the self-sufficiency and productivity of persons with disabilities.*

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of this vital role, it is imperative that VR Counselors and Support Coordinators understand how these individualized connections can best be achieved and community-based employment can be obtained while at the same time maintaining eligibility for other services and benefits necessary for the ongoing quality of life.

The University of South Florida Center for Autism and Related Disabilities will be developing and testing a curriculum that will be utilized when training the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and Support Coordinators in order to better facilitate those important connections between individuals with disabilities and the community-based employment supports. This training will complement and enhance current efforts by providing the opportunity for these two critical team members, to learn more about current trends, issues and effective practices in supported employment in relation to their roles. The project will make a concerted effort to collaborate with both the Training Resource Network, Inc. and the Florida Outcome Improvement Project to ensure continuity of the content and to ensure that efforts are not duplicated.



## Over the course of the next year, SET will accomplish the following:

1. **The development of a complete curriculum**, which can be utilized to provide statewide training for Vocational Rehabilitation Services Counselors and Support Coordinators in order to facilitate the connections between individuals with developmental disabilities and community-based employment supports,
2. **The establishment of a statewide technical assistance and training team**, through the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities, that is equipped to deliver the training and any necessary follow-up technical assistance,
3. **Two field test trainings** utilizing the curriculum, and
4. **An evaluation report** consisting of the number of individuals participating in the field test trainings, demographic information, effectiveness of the curriculum in increasing the level of and the participants level of satisfaction with the training.

## Developmental Disabilities Program Medicaid Waiver

When the new state budget was approved on May 27, 2003, \$279 million was approved for Medicaid Waiver funding, which means services will not be cut for anyone currently on the Waiver, and the program will serve about 30 new 'crisis' clients per month from the 12,000-person waiting list.

In addition, the Department of Children and Families is undertaking a comprehensive redesign of the Developmental Disabilities Home and Community Services Waiver (also called "MedWaiver"). When the redesign is implemented, it should be more beneficial for all plan participants.

The redesign is slated for completion over the next fiscal year and includes the following:

1. more consumer choice,
2. a new person-centered assessment,
3. an efficient billing process for providers,
4. a redefined role for support coordinators changing support coordination from a required service to a flexible service, and
5. a rate structure for providers (effective July 1, 2003).

# Trainings and Workshops for Families and Professionals



*“Parent workshops and trainings have helped me understand my son’s disability.”*

## Registration

All CARD workshops are free. We ask that you register prior to every training you wish to attend and provide contact information when you call.

The contact information will be used to let you know of any training changes or cancellations.

- Only registered participants will be guaranteed a copy of handouts on the day of training.
- Each person attending must have a separate registration.
- We need your name, and phone number or E-mail.

You may register in one of the following ways:

1. E-mail registration information to [card-usf@fmhi.usf.edu](mailto:card-usf@fmhi.usf.edu)
2. Call 1-800-333-4530 with the information ready and leave a message.
3. Fax registration: 813-974-6115
4. Mail to:  
CARD-USF, MHC 2113A  
Attention: Mary-Kay  
13301 N. Bruce B. Downs Blvd.  
Tampa, FL 33612

Title and Training No.	Date	Time	Location
<b>Collier</b>			
Effective Teaming Activities. #1479	Sept. 22	5:00 pm – 7:00 pm	Collier County Public Library Estate Branch, 266 Golden Gate Blvd., Naples
<b>Hendry</b>			
Understanding and Intervening with Challenging Behavior of Young Children (Managing Challenging Behavior). #1361	July 25	10:00 am – 12:00 pm	RCMA, 551 W. Cowboy Way, LaBelle
Helping Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders Learn to Communicate. #1362	Sept. 26	10:00 am – 12:00 pm	RCMA
<b>Hillsborough</b>			
Effective Teaming Activities. #1447	July 8	10:00 am – 12:00 pm	Shriners Hospital Auditorium, USF Campus, 12502 North Pine Dr., Tampa
School to Adult Life. #1440	July 11	10:00 am – 1:00 pm	Shriners Hospital Auditorium
Understanding and Intervening with Problem Behavior. #1448	July 22	10:00 am – 12:00 pm	Shriners Hospital Auditorium
Enhancing Communication Skills of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. #1449	Aug. 14	10:00 am – 12:00 pm	Shriners Hospital Auditorium
Promoting the Social Skills of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. #1450	Aug. 22	10:00 am – 12:00 pm	Shriners Hospital Auditorium
Supported Employment. #1441	Aug. 26	10:00 am – 1:00 pm	Shriners Hospital Auditorium
Asperger Disorder Introduction. #1444	Sept. 9	6:30 pm – 8:00 pm	Shriners Hospital Auditorium
Teaching Independence in Daily Living Skills. #1451	Sept. 11	6:30 pm – 8:00 pm	Shriners Hospital Auditorium
How Families Can Become More Involved with Schools in the Behavior Support Process. #1478	Sept. 16	6:30 pm – 8:00 pm	Shriners Hospital Auditorium
Guardianship & Estate Planning. #1442	Sept. 23	10:00 am – 1:00 pm	Shriners Hospital Auditorium
<b>Indian River</b>			
Enhancing Communication Skills of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. #1495	TBA	10:00 am – 12:00 pm	Indian River County Library, History Room, 1600 21st St., Vero Beach, FL 32960
Teaching Independence in Daily Living Skills. #1496	TBA	10:00 am – 12:00 pm	Indian River County Library, History Room
<b>Lee</b>			
Effective Teaming Activities. #1464	July 14	5:00 pm – 7:00 pm	FGCU Academic Bldg. 3, Room 102, 10501 FGCU Blvd. South, Ft. Myers
Guardianship and Estate Planning. #1402	July 22	6:00 pm – 8:30 pm	Cape Coral Public Library, 921 SW 39 <sup>th</sup> Terrace, Cape Coral
Understanding and Intervening with Problem Behavior. #1465	July 30	5:00 pm – 7:00 pm	FGCU Academic Bldg. 3, Room 102
Community Living. #1403	Aug. 5	6:00 pm – 8:30 pm	Cape Coral Public Library
Enhancing Communication Skills of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. #1466	Aug. 13	5:00 pm – 7:00 pm	FGCU Academic Bldg. 3, Room 102
Promoting the Social Skills of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. #1467	Aug. 20	5:00 pm – 7:00 pm	FGCU Academic Bldg. 3, Room 102
Teaching Independence in Daily Living Skills. #1468	Sept. 10	5:00 pm – 7:00 pm	FGCU Academic Bldg. 3, Room 102

# Workshop Descriptions

Trainings are geared toward targeted audiences of families or professionals working with the age that is listed within the descriptions; however, workshops are open to anyone who would like to attend.

## Adult Training Series

This is a five-part series of 3-hour information sessions that will cover various topics that are important to caregivers and educators of adult individuals with autism spectrum disorders. The series begins with an **Introduction to the Adult Service System** and will provide participants with information about The Developmental Disabilities Program, Vocational Rehabilitation, Third Party Benefits, ADA, and the Advocacy Center. Additional sessions in this series include: **Transition—School to Adult Life, Supported Employment, Guardianship and Estate Planning, and Community Living.** (About older teens and adults with an autism spectrum disorder. Information will be useful for individuals with other developmental disabilities as well.)

## Asperger Disorder Introduction

This workshop will provide information about the major characteristics of Asperger Disorder. Participants will also learn some practical strategies for assisting with challenges, such as social skills deficits and behavior problems, which are commonly faced by individuals with Asperger Disorder. (All ages.)

## Effective Teaming Activities

The training will assist families in planning for the future. We will discuss a step-by-step process that parents can use as a tool to achieve goals for their son or daughter. We will also be discussing the importance of teaming and tips on how to collaborate with others in meeting these goals. Bring your ideas, visions and dreams, and we can show you a way to put them in motion! (School age children.)

## Enhancing Communication Skills of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Families will learn practical strategies and techniques that will facilitate the development of an individual's communication skills in everyday environments. (School age children.)

## Helping Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders Learn to Communicate

Families will learn techniques and strategies to facilitate their children's communication and to help children better understand other people's communication to them. (18 months to 7 years old.)

## How Families Can Become More Involved with Schools in the Behavior Support Process

This is a new workshop. (School age children.)

## Promoting the Social Skills of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

This workshop will provide families with ideas and strategies that can be used to promote their children's social skills. (School age children.)

## Teaching Independence in Daily Living Skills

Families will learn specific information and practical strategies for teaching their children how to function more independently. The focus will be on daily living skills such as eating, getting dressed, taking a bath, combing hair, brushing teeth, and washing hands. This will be an interactive, experiential workshop in which participants will have the opportunity both to learn the information and practice using it through role-play. (School age children.)

## Understanding and Intervening with Challenging Behavior of Young Children

In this workshop, families will be taught the process of positive behavior support. This research-based method of behavior management is highly effective in reducing problem behavior and providing children with alternative skills to get their needs met. (18 months to 7 years old.)

## Understanding and Intervening with Problem Behavior

Families will be taught the process of positive behavior support. This research-based method of behavior management is highly effective in reducing problem behavior and providing children with alternative skills to get their needs met. (School age children.)

## What is Autism? Overview of Autism Spectrum Disorders

This workshop is the first in the Early Childhood Series and it provides an overview of the Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) and the behavioral and developmental issues associated with ASD. This is a very useful workshop for families whose children have recently received an ASD diagnosis. (18 months to 7 years old.)

Title and Training No.	Date	Time	Location
<b>Pasco</b>			
What is Autism? Overview of Autism Spectrum Disorders. #1485	July 15	10:30 am – 12:30 pm	Pasco County Schools, Admin. Bldg., Staff Dev. Room 1, 7227 Land O' Lakes Blvd., Land O'Lakes.
Helping Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders Learn to Communicate. #1486	Aug. 19	10:30 am – 12:30 pm	Pasco County Schools, Admin. Bldg.,
Understanding and Intervening with Challenging Behavior of Young Children. #1487	Sept. 16	10:30 am – 12:30 pm	Pasco County Schools, Admin. Bldg.,
2 <sup>nd</sup> Annual Family Involvement Conference. CARD registration not required. Hosted by FND. See their web site for info. <a href="http://fndfl.org/confs.html">http://fndfl.org/confs.html</a>	Sept. 20	8:15 am – 4:45 pm	River Ridge Middle/High School, 11646 Town Center Road, New Port Richey
<b>Pinellas</b>			
Asperger Disorder Introduction. #1445	Sept. 23	6:30 pm – 8:00 pm	Panera Bread, 2285 Ulmerton Road, Largo
<b>Sarasota</b>			
Effective Teaming Activities. #1469	July 10	6:30 pm – 8:30 pm	Sarasota School Board Bldg., 1960 Landings Blvd., Blue Awning Bldg., Room 219, Sarasota
Enhancing Communication Skills of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. #1477	Aug. 14	6:30 pm – 8:30 pm	Sarasota School Board Bldg.,
Promoting the Social Skills of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. #1470	Aug. 28	6:30 pm – 8:30 pm	Sarasota School Board Bldg.,
Teaching Independence in Daily Living Skills. #1471	Sept. 18	6:30 pm – 8:30 pm	Sarasota School Board Bldg.,
<b>St. Lucie</b>			
What is Autism? Overview of Autism Spectrum Disorders. #1454	July 2	10:30 am – 12:30 pm	Treasure Coast Medical Pavilion, 3496 NW Federal Highway, Jensen Beach
Effective Teaming Activities. #1473	July 16	10:00 am – 12:00 pm	Treasure Coast Medical Pavilion,
Understanding and Intervening with Challenging Behavior of Young Children. #1474	Aug. 4	10:30 am – 12:30 pm	Florida Atlantic University, St. Lucie West, 5000 NW California Blvd., Room TBA, Port St. Lucie
Promoting the Social Skills of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. #1475	Aug. 20	10:00 am – 12:00 pm	Florida Atlantic University, St. Lucie Room TBA,
Helping Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders Learn to Communicate. #1476	Sept. 2	10:30 am – 12:30 pm	Florida Atlantic University, St. Lucie Room TBA,



# Autism Support Groups

## Autism Society Meetings & Support Groups

### Hillsborough

#### KIDDs (Keys for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities)

Time: 2nd Thursday (monthly), 7:00-9:00 p.m.  
Place: Call for location in the Brandon area  
Contact: Phyllis Guthman, 813-677-0472 or Jean Reese, 813-661-3069

#### Asperger's Support Group of Hillsborough Co.

Time: 1st Thursday (monthly), 7:00-8:30 p.m.  
Place: Shriners Hospital Auditorium  
Contact: Diane Wilson, 813-974-6119

#### Grupo de Apoyo en Español

Hora: Por favor, llamen para obtener hora de reunion  
Lugar: Biblioteca de North Tampa, 8916 North Boulevard, Tampa  
Llamen a: Cristina Muñoz, 813-974-2297 o 1-800-333-4530 x42297

### Indian River

#### Autism Support Group

Time: 2nd Thursday (every other month), 7:00 p.m.  
Place: Central Assembly Church, 6767 20th St. (SR 60), Vero Beach  
Contact: Kelly Wilson, 561-770-1818

### Lee

#### Southwest Florida Chapter #555

Time: 2nd Thursday (monthly), 7:00-9:00 p.m.  
Place: Pilgrim's Church, Daniels Rd. and Freshman Lane, Ft. Myers  
Contact: Fran Swanson, 239-768-0723

#### Florida Autistic Society

Time: This group meets informally, please call for meeting times  
Place: Ft. Myers area  
Contact: Katie Cullen, 239-433-4929

#### Adonis Autism Center of Southwest Florida

Time: 3rd Thursday (monthly), 7:00 p.m.  
Place: Bashaw home, 1456 Lynwood Avenue, Ft. Myers  
Contact: Maureen Bashaw, 239-332-5395

### Pinellas

#### Asperger's Support Group of Pinellas

Time: 3rd Tuesday (monthly), 6:30-8:00 p.m.  
Place: Morton Plant Mease Wellness Center, 32672 US Hwy 19 N, Palm Harbor  
Contact: Diane Wilson, 800-333-4530 or 813-974-6119

#### Gulf Coast Chapter #134

Time: 2nd Wednesday (monthly), 7:00-9:00 p.m.  
Place: Abilities in Clearwater, 2735 Whitney Rd., Clearwater  
Contact: Filomena MacDonald, 727-789-0082

### Polk

#### Heart of Florida Autism Society

Time: Call for meeting time  
Place: Polk county area  
Contact: Angie Dawson, 863-294-6315

#### RACE (Reaching Autistic Children Early)

Time: 4th Thursday (monthly), 6:00-8:00 p.m.  
Place: Central FL Speech & Hearing Ctr, 710 E. Bella Vista, Lakeland  
Contact: Karla Dickson, 863-859-1477 x328 or karlajoy@aol.com; dhailey16@hotmail.com

### St. Lucie

#### Treasure Coast Autism Support Group

Time: Meets bi-monthly, 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.  
Place: The Community Center, 2195 SE Airoso Blvd., Port St. Lucie  
Contact: Kim at 772-878-7603 or lakamram@aol.com for meeting dates

### Sarasota

#### Asperger's Support Group of Sarasota

Time: Last Wednesday (monthly), 10:00-11:30 a.m.  
Place: 1960 Landings Blvd., Rm. 101 (blue awning), Sarasota  
Contact: Diane Wilson, 800-333-4530 or 813-974-6119

#### Manasota Chapter #535

Time: 1st Thursday (monthly Sept-May), 6:30 p.m.  
Place: See <http://saraweb.com/MAS/> or call for location  
Contact: Alicia or David, 941-361-3095

## Active Family Involvement

In recent years, several national reports and articles (e.g., National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center [NECTAC], <http://www.nectac.org>, and National Research Council, Dawson & Osterling, <http://www.nas.edu/nrc/>) have been published identifying effective practices for educating young students with autism. One practice that is consistently seen across all of the reports is active family involvement. All schools, with very rare exceptions, comply with IDEA-mandated procedures by inviting families to IEP meetings, setting the meetings at mutually agreed upon dates and times, and providing families with the opportunity to give input and make decisions regarding their children's educational programs.

Active family involvement goes beyond the mandate. Actively involved families are integral members of the educational team that supports their children. They have frequent exchange of communication and information with professionals. Professionals request input from families on a consistent basis. Ongoing consultation, information, and individualized problem-solving are provided to families. Regularly-scheduled family trainings teach families strategies for working with their children in the home so that their children transfer the skills learned in school to other settings.

### Actions for Schools

There are many things schools can do to assist families in becoming key collaborative members of the educational team.

- School districts can provide written information about autism spectrum disorders and effective practices to families of students who are newly diagnosed with autism.
- For families who are experiencing increased stress in parenting their children with autism spectrum disorders, regional family support and mental health resources (in the form of a guide or a resource booklet) could be provided.
- Provide and/or point out regional training opportunities for families to learn strategies for teaching their children new skills, enhancing communication, and reducing problem behaviors.
- Regularly communicate with families about school events in which their children may participate (e.g., field trips, assemblies, special programs, fund-raising drives, etc.). Be aware that children with autism spectrum disorders may not be able to spontaneously relay information from school to home.
- Ongoing consultation and individualized problem solving can be made possible by asking families which communication mode is preferred. During the school day, this may be by cell phone, pager, e-mail, work phone, or home phone.
- Involve parents in school activities that support the adults in their children's classrooms. Families can be recruited to create visual support tools, or to research and share information that may be helpful to administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals and/or therapists or to staff who have never worked with children with autism.
- Including information for and about students with disabilities in the school newsletter will go a long way toward making families feel a part of the school "culture."

### Actions for Families

- Be an active, consistent provider of important information. Let the teachers know if something happened overnight or in the morning that might affect a child's health, mood, or behavior at school.
- Share success stories and good news with the school.
- Share information or strategies that work in the home or community environment. If a visual schedule works well at home, send in a sample to school.
- Take pictures of important people, toys, pets, or places, and provide them to the teachers to help them have topics of communication and to help them become aware of family routines and activities.
- Ask for information on training opportunities for families within the school district. The CARD Newsletter provides a training calendar of workshops available for families.
- Attend trainings. Many agencies, including CARD, are starting to deliver on-line training opportunities allowing families and professionals the flexibility to access training anytime.

### Local School District Activities

In our catchment area, several school districts provide multiple opportunities to involve families in an active and meaningful way.

**Hillsborough School District** formed a steering committee to facilitate systemic improvement of their educational programs for students with autism. Many family members in the community are active members of the steering committee and help the district develop long-term action plans to improve supports and services. Hillsborough School district hires parents of children with disabilities as Family Liaisons. Parents holding this position assist other families by helping them prepare for IEP meetings, or provide information and resources that support the family. For more information call 813-837-7777 or visit on the web at [http://www.sdhc.k12.fl.us/~fdlrs/parent\\_services.htm](http://www.sdhc.k12.fl.us/~fdlrs/parent_services.htm)

**The Pinellas School District** meets monthly with families at Autism Society meetings. In these meetings, professionals listen to family concerns, provide information, and assess family needs. As a result, the Pinellas district provided two family trainings to provide factual information regarding autism spectrum disorders and effective practices. The district intends to continue trainings in the 2003-2004 school year.

**In Pasco County**, a Deer Park Elementary teacher offered a family training about visual supports so parents could learn to use effective classroom strategies at home. At the end of the training, families were asked about additional training needs.

Both **Pasco and Hillsborough School Districts** have been participating in a collaborative project with USF and Family Network on Disabilities called Family Involvement in Functional Assessment (FIFA). The goal of FIFA is to design a model that school districts can use to effectively increase the amount and quality of parental participation in the functional behavior assessment (FBA) process and the development of positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS).

Actively including families as integral members of the educational team makes sense. While professionals play an essential role in effectively educating students with autism, they come and go, whereas family members are permanent.

If you have knowledge of, or experience with, a great active family involvement success story or strategy, please tell us about it, and we will publish your stories in future newsletters. Send it by e-mail to [card-usf@fmhi.usf.edu](mailto:card-usf@fmhi.usf.edu)

# WALK F.A.R. for NAAR

Family & Friends for Autism Research



## Save the Date

Join NAAR's team in Charlotte County and help find the answers that research will provide ... step by step by step. To learn about the National Alliance for Autism Research you can visit their web site at <http://www.autismwalk.org>

The Southwest Florida Walk will be held on October 25, 2003 at Gilchrist Park in Punta Gorda. Walkers will be coming from Bradenton to Naples. Registration will be at 8 a.m. and the 2-3 mile walk will start at 9 a.m. There will be clowns, a bounce house, snacks, and lots of family fun as we raise awareness about autism and much needed research money.

To see how you can help, attend organizational meetings, or get information about the Walk, call 941-697-9772 or email [NAAR@mail2help.com](mailto:NAAR@mail2help.com)



**What:** Walk F.A.R. for NAAR  
Inaugural Southwest Florida Walk  
for autism research walkathon  
**When:** Saturday, October 25, 2003  
**Where:** Gilchrist Park, Punta Gorda, Florida

## **CARD** Center for Autism and Related Disabilities

Department of Child & Family Studies  
Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute  
University of South Florida  
13301 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MHC 2113A  
Tampa, FL 33612-3807

## Book Nook

CARD has received a mailing from the author of a new book titled, "And When He Didn't Come Home" by Ann Richard. The book is an account of the author's family experience with her son's autism. You can read more about the book and the author at <http://www.ann-richard.com>



The author has revealed many personal and difficult aspects of her family's experiences, and her own struggles in dealing with autism. Other families may benefit by realizing that complex emotional reactions or personal difficulties are not unique to their own families. CARD has not yet received or reviewed a copy of the book, but is making information about it available.

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