



What's Happening By Ann Lyon

This past year has been a busy one with the Autism/DD team conducting trainings and presenting at conferences across the county. The team presented at the Autism Institute at San Diego University, the ASA conference in Scottsdale Arizona, AAIDD in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, NATTAP in Columbus, Ohio, and PAR in Lancaster, PA. YAP has been fortunate enough to do a number of trainings for Blue Mountain School District with plans for more school trainings in the future. One of our staff has begun support training for preschoolers in Mercer County, focusing on how we are all individuals and what autism means. In December the YAP team looks forward to presenting at TASH in Seattle, Washington. In continuing with staff development, we are looking into having Assistive Technology training in the new year as well as a continuing training on "Embracing Passions".

- Ann Lyon, PA Training Coordinator

Quote of the Month

"Strength-based service delivery is based upon one's ability to embrace and apply a set of principles and mission deeply rooted in the belief that all people and all families have within them the ability to create a better future for themselves. Service providers are not the answer; we are the pencil. We are the tool that allows others to write their own answers in their 'book of life'."

-Joseph Studivant, former Director, York County Advocate Program

YAP Pursuing COA Accreditation

Youth Advocate Programs (YAP) has begun a two year process that will lead to accreditation of its services by the Council on Accreditation (COA). COA is a not for profit organization founded in 1977 for the purpose of accrediting the full continuum of community-based behavioral healthcare and social service organizations. It has become the largest accrediting body for human services organizations in the world. There are currently over 1,800 public and private organizations serving seven million individuals in the United States, Canada, Bermuda, Puerto Rico, England and the Philippines who can display the COA banner.



The COA process is one of continuous improvement. Its standards range from the governance of an organization to the direct service it provides to youth and families. In order to ensure its accreditation, YAP has assembled a team of 50 employees from throughout the organization to study the 599 standards that apply. They will recommend changes to policies, procedures, and practices as needed. The team consists of all levels of employees from advocates to senior managers.

YAP began with a readiness assessment done outside the formal COA accreditation process. The Agency has since formally applied for accreditation and signed the contract to go forward with the process. YAP hopes to complete its accreditation by the spring of 2009. If you'd like more information, please feel free to contact Alan Kassirer, Chief of Quality Assurance and Outcomes at 717-979-2729 or by email at Akassirer@yapinc.org.



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A NEWSLETTER FOR PARENTS, EDUCATORS AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS

Autism Online eStore Set to Launch



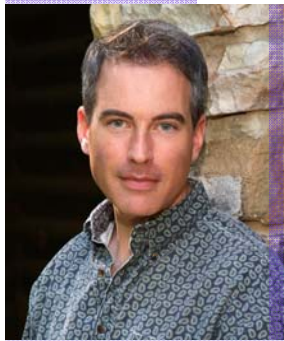
In its continuing endeavor to highlight the gifts and talents of self-advocates on the autism spectrum, Youth Advocate Programs has plans to soon debut its online store. The store may be accessed via the YAP Website, www.yapinc.org, and will feature exclusive products and original works created by individuals with autism. Items scheduled to be included are books and other publications, jewelry, photography, notecards, and artwork. All transactions may be completed online (through the use of PayPal), and fulfillment of orders will also be handled by self-advocates.

"Youth Advocate Programs' online store is yet another

example of a collaborative partnership that values what those with autism have to offer," said William Stillman, autism consultant and founder of the Pennsylvania Autism Self-Advocacy Coalition. "Where other organizations have not considered the possibilities, Youth Advocate Programs holds as its vision opportunities to exceed the possibilities by ensuring such collaborations occur at every level."

Further announcements on the official premiere of the online store will be made on the Youth Advocate Programs' Web site and in this newsletter. For information on contributing to the store (self-advocates only, please), contact William Stillman at Bill@williamstillman.com.





William
Stillman

The Importance of Having Passions

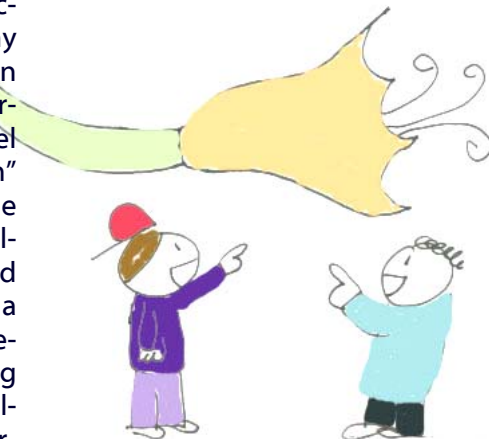
What do you enjoy doing in your spare time? Do you like to read books in a certain genre or by a particular author? Do you like to garden, or play a sport outdoors? Perhaps you collect something? Or do you paint, play a musical instrument, or create something using your natural gifts and talents? You likely engage in such activity because it pleases you, gives you a focal point in which to become absorbed, and you achieve satisfaction or pride in it. Many of us are already aware of our gifts and talents because they define what we do for fun, with whom we spend time, or how we make a living. We may call these pleasurable opportunities passions, areas of special interest, or hobbies.

But wait! How come you can have a hobby, but I have to have an *obsession*? Personally speaking, I know all too well of the stigma associated with having a so-called "obsession," and I've lectured and written about it in many forums. We are all more alike than different—so what's the difference? The difference is the label that creates an "us and them" paradigm. If you spend time watching NASCAR races and collecting memorabilia associated with your favorite driver, you're a collector and enthusiast; if someone with a different way of being does the same thing, it's a maladaptive behavior and an abnor-

mal fixation that needs to be extinguished.

What if we looked beyond labels in favor of recognizing our mutual similarities as simply passionate people? Then the difference makes *no* difference! Each person loves and enjoys NASCAR regardless of their way of being, period. Not only that, how does being involved in your most passionate of interests make you feel? Probably *really great* (otherwise it wouldn't be your passion!). You may even associate specific memories of happy events connected to your passion—if so, you have a history to draw from and stories to tell! Your passion can be an entrée into social dialogue with others (it's called breaking the ice). It may also aid you in learning something new by branching out from your passion into a related but unknown area or topic. More so, shared interests can even lead to friendships, or even romantic relationships! When we toss out antiquated and clinical stereotypes, and begin *valuing* people's passions, unlimited possibilities await us.

William Stillman is an adult with Asperger's Syndrome and author of special needs parenting books. His Website is www.williamstillman.com.



A Note from
Lori Burrus

Pennsylvania YAP presented a special education law and advocacy training on October 18, 2007.

The conference was our first statewide event. In attendance were parents, advocates, teachers, administrators and education lawyers. We had 100 attendees including YAP staff. It was held at the Holiday Inn East in Harrisburg, PA.

The presenters were Pete and Pam Wright. The one-day event focused on four areas:

- Special education law rights and responsibilities;
- Tests and measurements to measure progress and regression;
- Smart IEP's; and
- Introduction to tactics and strategies for effective advocacy.

WrightsLaw programs are designed to meet the needs of parents, educators, healthcare providers, advocates and attorney who represent children with disabilities regarding special education.

The Developmental Disabilities Council of PA provided a grant that allowed all parents to attend at no cost. Harrisburg Area Community College sponsored educational units for educators. We offered legal education units as well. A few vendors set up exhibition spaces, such as Special Olympics.

YAP staff volunteered their time to do the details. I would like to thank the group, David White, Jessica Carlton, Courtney Reimann, Jeff Boehler, Tim Carr, Ann Lyon, Craig Green, Melissa Knapik, April Habercker, Lori Ream and Erin Penniston.

How did participants describe the conference?... "Wonderful," "Great," "Excellent," "Informative," "Insightful"...

A Parent's Perspective

YAP Parents share their perspectives, insights and experiences from their hearts.

My son, Matthew, has been misdiagnosed for 15 years and we have seen numerous doctors since he was 3 years old. He has had 6 inpatient hospitalizations, along with day programs and support from Kidspeace. Matthew has been seeing a psychiatrist and therapist all of his life and has had an IEP since the first grade. Medication trials have been unsuccessful, and though I continued to try and find help for my son, I hit many road blocks. At the time he was not yet in the juvenile system, insurance wouldn't cover treatment, or he would be released after three weeks to three months in any given treatment program.

In February of this year my 20 year old son was diagnosed with Aspergers Syndrome.

Matthew started to get into some trouble two weeks before his 18th birthday and was placed on adult probation three months after his 18th birthday. He was charged with 1st degree felony burglary and theft related to an incident involving some peer pressure. The DA was not interested in any of his records, and was not interested in any deals. He seemed determined to see my son go to the state penitentiary for a year. If they succeeded, he would not have the treatment available to him for this last year before he turns 21 and is no longer eligible for Medical assistance.

Our family went to court on August 31st 2007. Michelle Miller and Lori Burrus of YAP attended court on their day off. They were not given the opportunity to testify however, having them there really made a difference. It

showed the support that is there for Matthew and hopefully helped educate the Judge. Our attorney stated that the people that normally get sent away on sentencing day are the ones who are there alone.

YAP is the reason my son didn't get sent to the State Penitentiary. The Judge and forensic psychologist who testified for Matthew were very impressed with the treatment plan and the support readily available from YAP. Matthew received 5 years probation.

Castles

As a mother of a 4-year old daughter diagnosed with Autism-PDD, I've come to realize the biggest accomplishments in life can come in the smallest increments. My daughter's name is Erica. At her current age of 4, she is just now starting to relate a word to an object. She does not talk in sentences yet, nor does she say two words at a time.

Erica has always enjoyed stacking things, as with any child on the Autism Spectrum. She has a daily routine to get her large LEGO blocks out and stack them very carefully. These blocks are stacked as high as they can go, sometimes they fall and she starts all over again until she has accomplished this task, that in the end, she calls a "castle."

A few months ago, Erica's father was putting a new concrete porch on for a friend. I decided to take Erica with me to visit him. As we got out of the car, Erica ran fearlessly across the yard, remembering that she had been there before and that there was a goldfish pond in the back yard. Amazed by the water, we had to look at the gold fish and walk around the pond for a few minutes. My husband called for us to come over to where he was working.

There he was, standing where a porch would eventually be constructed. Erica watched carefully as her father applied the mortar onto the cement blocks. Making eye contact with me, Erica looked up and said "castle." At that moment, I felt a warm feeling come over me, my heart skipped a beat and tears came to my eyes. I realized that something as simple to me as stacking concrete blocks to create a porch was more than that to my 4-year old daughter. For her, daddy was not just building a porch, he was building a castle, stacking block after block, something she must do every day of her life.

