



# AUTISM AND DEVELOPMENTAL DIFFERENCES TODAY

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 1

MARCH 2008

A NEWSLETTER FOR PARENTS, EDUCATORS AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS

## Father of Child with Autism Praises YAP Family Clinic

*Gregg T. Clark, a member of the PA Army National Guard and father of an 8-year old boy with autism, sent the following letter to the Youth Advocate Program Family Clinic in Harrisburg, PA on January 18, 2008.*

To Whom It May Concern:



I am writing this letter to emphasize the great work that is being accomplished by the Youth Advocate Programs (YAP) in Harrisburg, PA. I have an eight year old boy, Kodi that has been diagnosed on the spectrum with autism. I have been bringing him to art therapy with Ms. [Diana] Matteson since 2004.

I am so excited that Kodi has shown a growing interest, appreciation, and skill in art. He looks forward to his sessions with Ms. Matteson and always has a wonderful time creating new masterpieces. Ms. Matteson has fostered a strong, positive relationship with Kodi and has become a true mentor. She has helped develop his self-confidence, organizational skills, emotional stability, and his commitment to stay on task.



Art Therapist Diana Matteson



Kodi was originally enrolled into the art program at the YAP because of his artistic ability; however, this program has not only helped develop his skills as an artist, it has greatly assisted with his personal, emotional, and socialization skills as a growing young boy. I am extremely happy with the progress and development that Kodi has shown due to the efforts of the YAP.

I realize that I only represent one family and one family member that actively participate in the programs at the YAP, but I can only imagine the great impact that this clinic provides the community as I attend the annual art exhibit in November of each year. There are so many gifted individuals of all ages that attend and this is an excellent forum for them to show off their talents as well as receive the education and support to better themselves as individuals.

Sincerely,

Gregg T. Clark

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William  
Stillman

See Me

*See me, feel me, touch me, heal me!*  
- The Who, Tommy

"IM NOT RETARDED IM SMART NOT A MENTAL GIANT BUT I AM INTELLGENT." These are the words that were communicated to me by a sixteen-year-old young man whom I was visiting in his rural high school classroom on a crisp and wintry January morning. Like most teens his age, he took classes in keyboarding and computers, and was a fluent two-handed typist. But his classroom was anything but typical. It was for kids in Special Ed, and my new friend was autistic and virtually mute, a man of very few words. And yet the words he conveyed upon our first meeting were a gentle plea to belie his physical appearance in favor of presuming an intellect intact.

It was a credo I had heard—or rather *read*—from countless others before him; those who felt the need to qualify their unconventional mannerisms, vocalizations, and assorted neurological blips, disconnects and misfires by imploring, in essence, "Don't trust your eyes. This isn't really me. See past my deceiving exterior, see beyond my label." And indeed, I always assure them that I see clearly their gorgeous humanity and profound potential.

The desire to simply be welcomed and accepted is universal to all human beings, but there are those among us that struggle

in the endeavor for worthiness—to be considered whole and complete and competent. This concept of presuming intellect is not exclusive to people with autism. Upon becoming conscious of it, we may realize that an assumption for incompetence of those with different ways of being surrounds us with glaring reality throughout each day. It shows in the way others publicly avoid the brightly beaming man with Down Syndrome; or the adult son who berates his elderly mother compromised with confusion; or the impatience with which people tune out the person who stutters; the small child everyone thinks wants to be tickled, swung through the air, hair tousled; or the individual, who is blind, that truly is capable of ordering her own meal instead of the server deferring to her companions, "And what will *she* have?"

Not surprisingly, the two most common communications I receive from those with autism, upon our initial meeting, are declarations of the extraordinary patience, tolerance, and forgiveness possessed by so many. The first statement is one of gratitude and selflessness: "I love you." The second—an affirmation of the human being within: "I'm not retarded."

In supporting persons on the autism spectrum, let's look beyond labels, and disregard physical limitations in favor of believing in the competence of each vibrant individual. And remember, we are *all* more alike than different. Employing this approach will better enable us to see and hear the truth of our collective humanity. Trust and believe, if you dare.

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*William Stillman is an adult with Asperger's Syndrome and author of special needs parenting books. His Website is [www.williamstillman.com](http://www.williamstillman.com).*



CIRCLES:  
A Note from  
Lori Burrus

Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. continues to enhance its commitment to innovative and user-friendly training materials. In 2008, YAP, Inc.'s Developmental Disabilities program purchased CIRCLES.

CIRCLES is a concrete, organizational paradigm for people within the disability community. It helps individuals learn to act and interact in self-enhancing ways. Its purpose is to teach individuals the social/sexual concepts of personal space, social distance and social/sexual boundaries.

The program uses six concentric circles to represent each social distance and level of intimacy. Starting from the center circle, which symbolizes the self, each colored circle represents behaviors, feelings, and actions appropriate to the distance from the center.

The program has been revised since its inception in 1983. The original developers, Markelyn P. Champagne, R. N., M.S.W. and Leslie Walker-Hirsch, M.ED, updated the kit with additional techniques and materials for teaching about personal space, social distance and relationships into the revised curriculum.

YAP, Inc. will offer training to those who are interested in hearing about the program.



## YAP, Inc. to Co-Sponsor Autism Arts Exhibition

On April 5, 2008, YAP, Inc. and KenCrest Services will co-sponsor Autism Arts in Action, a one-day exhibit with accompanying workshops and presentations. This exhibition will offer a unique perspective on the creative and entrepreneurial side of a diagnosis that was once mistakenly believed to indicate limited imaginative abilities.

Pennsylvania Speaker of the House Dennis O'Brien, whose work on behalf of improving information and services for people with autism and their families has won him nationwide recognition, will celebrate their efforts by kicking off the event on Saturday morning. Accommodations for this event have been generously donated by Holy Family University. Holy Family is educating the next generation of teachers and other professionals who will make the world a better place for people with developmental differences.

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The event will feature both visual and performing arts, including: paintings, drawings, photography, jewelry, music, poetry. Many works of art will be for sale. In addition to the exhibits, there will be workshops and presentations by local artists and arts organizations.

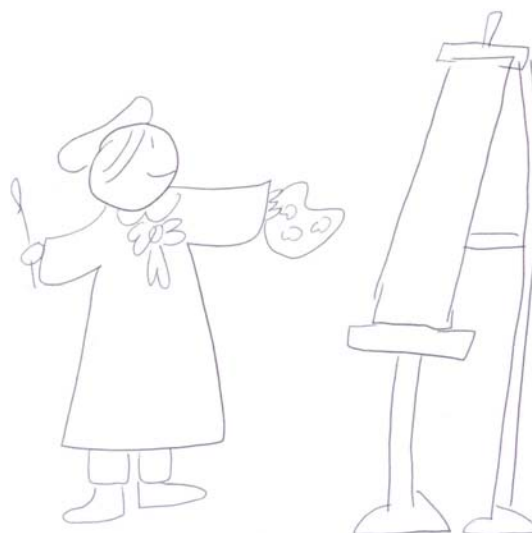
If you interested in exhibiting work at the Autism Arts in Action conference, visit YAP's website at [www.yapinc.org](http://www.yapinc.org) to download an application.



  
Youth **Advocate**  
PROGRAMS, INC.

IN CELEBRATION OF  
AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH PRESENTS

**AUTISM ARTS**  
**IN ACTION**



 CO-SPONSORED BY  
**KenCrest Services**

*April 5, 2008*

*Exhibit opens at 9 a.m.*

*Presentations begin at 10 a.m.*

*Event closes at 3 p.m.*

*Holy Family University*

*Northeast Philadelphia Campus*

## YAP Autism Online eStore Up and Running

In its continuing endeavor to highlight the gifts and talents of self-advocates on the autism spectrum, Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. launched its online store. The store may be accessed via the YAP Website, [www.yapinc.org](http://www.yapinc.org), and features exclusive products and original works created by individuals with autism. Items 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."



The eStore is currently featuring artwork by Len Benzi, Chris Dovey, and publications by William Stillman. For information on contributing to the store (self-advocates only, please), contact William Stillman at [Bill@williamstillman.com](mailto:Bill@williamstillman.com).

## Parents and Families Have a Voice

On March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2008, a budget hearing for the Department of Public Welfare was conducted in front of the House Appropriations Committee. One of the consumers and self-advocates providing testimony was Mrs. Alice Kell.

Mrs. Kell is parent of two children receiving behavioral health services from Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. in Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania. Alice is a mother who is also involved as a member of Access Plus Quality Management; a permanent member of the North-east Regional Advisory Committee; MA Consumer Sub-Committee; and Medical Assistance Advisory Sub-Committee.

At the budget hearing, Mrs. Kell was asked to testify as to how the DPW program effects her personally. Mrs. Kell reported to the MA counsel how her family has benefited from programming funded by Medical Assistance. She spoke about the benefits of the MA programs and services, as well as debunking stereotypes of recipients of MA and the importance of the programming and funding for her family and many others. Mrs. Kell reported specifically on the progress her children have made from services approved by MA based on "medical necessity" provided by Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. She included in her testimony that the needs of the children being served by these programs are also "medical issues" and are deemed "medically necessary."

Mrs. Kell became involved as a member of the MA Consumer sub-Committee two years ago, through Michael Camel, a counsel member, and met Sabrina Tillman-Boyd, Director of OMHSAS. Together they have been working on many of the issues and needs surrounding MA consumer programming and meeting the needs of consumers.



## Book Review

*Reasonable People:  
A Memoir of Autism & Adoption,*  
By Ralph James Savarese

Published in 2007, *Reasonable People: A Memoir of Autism & Adoption: On the Meaning of Family and the Politics of Neurological Difference* breaks historical, psychological, and philosophical new ground in our knowledge of autism. Author Ralph Savarese and his wife, Emily, have deliberately and knowingly adopted DJ, a son with autism. Savarese, who is a professor of literature and creative writing at Grinnell College in Iowa, and Emily, who is a special educator, are firm believers in inclusion. Furthermore, the book makes very clear their total acceptance of DJ as the boy he is, not a "broken doll that must be fixed." This is a stirring memoir of a family's journey toward understanding, with a total commitment to a fulfilling life for DJ.

I had the privilege of attending a book signing a few months ago in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where all three Savarese family members addressed the group in a local bookstore. DJ used facilitated communication and his mother Emily was his facilitator. All three were very impressive.

Ralph Savarese records in depth the sad history of FC in the last 15 years and the accompanying negative attitudes toward people on the autism spectrum. He explores the history of these attitudes and the defiant reluctance of many specialists to revise their views, especially their refusal to accept the fact that a lot goes on within the autistic brain even if others cannot see it.

Because DJ had lived in foster care and had suffered abuse, his story is even more com-



plex than that of most children with autism. However, like many others he emerges as a loving, thoughtful, productive person, eager to learn, communicate, and engage with his family and peers. This well written memoir brings hope to many families and reinforces the hope and satisfaction that many of us already live with.

I strongly recommend this book for anyone wanting to learn more about the latest thinking about autism. Also, I suggest you turn to the web page of the publisher, Other Press, [www.reasonable-people.com](http://www.reasonable-people.com), where you will find a link to an interview of DJ on CNN and another one on NPR radio.

*Review by Martha Ziegler, National Autism Consultant, Youth Advocate Programs, Inc.*



## Susquehanna League Supports York County Special Olympics

On the evening of Saturday, February 2, 2008 at the annual Susquehanna Baseball League Banquet, a very special guest, Ken "The Rocket" Kahler, addressed the group on behalf of his Special Olympics softball team. "The Rocket" was there to thank the league, and all of its 10 teams, for supporting the Special Olympics and for their 2007 donation of \$2,500. "The Rocket" was introduced by his coach, Dwayne Neff (Windsor). There has been a great interest in, and a lot of requests for, this presentation.

The picture (above left) and summary is something the Autism Team from Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. would like to implement starting in Central, PA this coming April. We will be attempting to get staff in different counties to make a small pledge amount (if interested) per home-runs hit during the 2008 season by four local professional teams (York Revolution, Harrisburg Senators, Reading Phillies, and Lancaster Barnstormers). The goal of this project is to get staff to donate small amounts of money for the endowment fund and support their local baseball teams at the same time. The proceeds will go toward the YAP endowment fund. Prizes will be awarded to offices that get the most staff to pledge and individual prizes to staff who pledge the most money per office. More information about this pledge will be mentioned in March before the season starts. More information about this pledge will be provided via the YAP website before the start of the season.

*Dwayne Neff, Central, PA Autism Field Coordinator*

## The Adams County Behavioral Health Program Speaks Out on YAP Clients

Nathaniel is a creative child that likes to draw and make things. He takes his time with projects and does not rush to get them done. He has a great sense of humor--one day telling his grandmother that the teacher made the class go outside and sit on the roof of the school. Nathaniel laughed and said he was just kidding. He also jokes with his TSS by giving him make believe sandwiches with "worms" in them! Nathaniel gets along well with his family and is always willing to share with others. Working with him is always fun!

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Cameron has greatly increased his social awareness over the last few months. Last week he played with another peer at recess. During the play session, Cameron verbally interacted with his peer and shared with him. A few months ago Cameron would not have engaged a peer in this way. It's wonderful to see him smiling and laughing with his classmates!

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Jacob sat quietly during a group activity on Tuesday. Both classrooms were together making vegetable soup. Jacob sat and waited his turn to open his can of vegetables and then put them into the pot. The teacher read a story during this time as well. Jacob sat through the entire story without whining. When the teacher finished reading the story Jacob said "good job" to the teacher.

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Jeremy is always willing to participate in any activity presented to him. He will complete tasks to the best of his ability. Jeremy will do yoga skills and enjoys the various positions that present a challenge. Jeremy is friendly and outgoing and does his best to please.

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Joseph really impressed his teacher last Tuesday when he raised his hand to ask if he could share some thoughts on Thanksgiving. The teacher said in a few minutes he could share. When the time came, Joseph said, "We all have so much to be thankful for." We went on to talk about how thankful he is for having a school, home, family, teachers, and a good TSS. His words made me smile.

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Jessica really impressed her mom and I with how well she has been getting along with the two children who have been visiting her family over the Thanksgiving holiday. The two children are a 10-year-old boy and an 8-year-old girl. Jessica has been playing cards with them and running around outside with them over the past few weeks. They laugh together about appropriate things and Jessica has been really good about sharing her things/space with them. If only they lived here instead of Florida so Jessica could maintain these blossoming friendships!

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Cameron had a great trip to the doctor on Wednesday. Cameron sat in the waiting room for one-and-a-half hours without any problems. He was good going to and from the doctor.



Isaiah initiated social contact with peers he did not know. This happens more often now.

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Shawn worked at learning bowling. The first time he went he had a tantrum when he lost at bowling. This time he had no problem losing at bowling. He interacted well with TSS and mother.

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James (Jimmy) has worked on pouring at home. He is doing the pouring independently now and starting to progress to other chores at home.

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The other week while working on a task with blocks Max began playing interactively with the blocks. He kept saying, "Keep playing" and would stack the blocks and knock them down. This was the first time TSS saw him actively play with the toys.

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Ashley noticed that I had four books she had enjoyed from the summer. She asked for them and began to read them, remembering words she had not seen in months! She then assigned me roles from the stories by pointing to me while stating the characters' names. She and I acted out the stories for a long time. Wonderful interaction and use of language!

...

Nathaniel helped a peer with a worksheet (cut and paste) by helping them put numbers in proper order before pasting them on paper. He participated in singing songs during Circle Time for 1st time last week!

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Trevor shared basketball with peers during outside recess. He completed all assigned work in time allotted.

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Jeremy knows the rules to most games and when taught new rules becomes very successful at the game. Jeremy really likes to play Uno and Mancala.

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Oliver is extremely good with patterns. No matter what the pattern is he is successfully able to manipulate patterns regardless of the design.

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Logan has improved his eye contact with others. He answers questions or asks with a glance and five to seven words with "Please." Logan has been following directions without prompting. He seems to be getting it!



## Junior High Students Square Off in Geography Bee

*This article, written by Jamie Musick, originally appeared in the December 24, 2007 edition of The Meadville Tribune.*

"I feel really good," said [YAP client] Jonathon Hess, an eighth-grader at Meadville Area Middle School. "I thought the questions were fairly easy because I'm just a wiz at maps."

Hess was one of 10 MAMS students in seventh and eighth grades competing in the school's recent geography bee at Meadville Area Senior High School. Hess, who was a first-time participant, proudly received his medal and certificate as school champion and even aspires to be a geographer in the future.

The bee was organized by the school's geography teachers under an educational program of the National Geographic Society. The National Geography Bee is a nationwide geography competition for U.S. schools with any grades four through eight, to encourage the teaching and study of geography.

MAMS students competed in classroom competitions in the beginning of December and 10 of them advanced to the school competition to compete for honors as school champion.

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The school winner takes a written test to send to National Geographic. In March, the top 100 students based on qualifying test scores are selected to represent their schools at the state level competition April 4. State winners then compete in a national competition May 20 to 21 at the National Geographic headquarters in Washington, D.C., for scholarships of \$25,000, \$15,000 and \$10,000.

...

"It's to make them (students) more geography-literate," said Karen Jamieson, a MAMS eighth-grade geography teacher. "They do get excited about it (the geography bee) because it's fun." This year's bee tested more knowledge on the United States than in previous years. "It's nice to see that they know that much about their own country," Jamieson said.

## Abigail L. Longenecker Memorial Foundation Funds Lancaster Parent Training

The Abigail L. Longenecker Memorial Foundation provides funds to local nonprofit organizations for specific projects that benefit children. All supported projects are through local organizations and 100% of contributions go to funded projects. Since 1998, the Foundation has contributed to over 50 projects, involving 20 local nonprofit organizations, and has distributed over \$50,000 in funding.

The Lancaster county YAP program was able to provide an autism-focused training to 25 parents of Lancaster County on January 23rd, 2008 through a grant from the Abigail Longenecker Foundation. Training included:

- Basic information about autism, including how a diagnosis is made and what characteristics children with autism display;
- Information about developing supports among parents and natural resources both inside and outside of the Lancaster community, lessening the need for more formal paid supports;
- Comparison of YAP's Relationship-Based Approach to other methods;
- Information about sensory issues, motor and communication issues in the autism population;
- Presentation of sensory toys and activities that support sensory integration;
- Discussion regarding "Challenges" and "Engaging Passions", ways to listen to a child with autism; and
- Questions and concerns.

This training was considered a pilot project for parents of children with autism in Lancaster County that will be replicated throughout YAP communities. YAP staff have continued to partner with the parents in attendance as they

develop relationships among themselves and

throughout the community. Each family also received resource packets and "YAPacks" containing sensory tools, activities and games.

