



AUTISM AND DEVELOPMENTAL DIFFERENCES TODAY

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 1

MAY 2009

A NEWSLETTER FOR PARENTS, EDUCATORS
AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS

Origins of Identity: A Study in Autism by David Pluta

What I remember from the age of four was knowing little of what life had in store for me. Very little was known about autism back in 1983, however, there were teachers in special education who were prepared for any type of challenges. Most of the leading experts on mental disorders were starting to take a serious look at autism and its cause.

Even though I was remotely aware of what was going on, I knew that I had to go to school. Careful consideration was given to children with special needs at this time. Teachers who were trained in this field had to have a keen sense of what was going on in the child's mind on a psychological as well as an emotional level. As I discovered on my own, studies have shown that children with special needs who take up arts and crafts have better motor skills and this also gives them an advantage to learn how to pay attention to a task. I myself leaned early on that crafts have a way of making sure that the diagnosis would not be bleak.

I was most fortunate to have some really good teachers who not only helped and encouraged me, but who were a great support to my mother. Their approach was not to medicate, but to create a structured environment where I felt safe and could learn. I was also fortunate to have such services as mobility and speech. This was all crucial in defining my character as well as my abilities today.

Even though my elementary school years were uneventful and for the most part happy, my years in middle school were more than memorable. I felt the bottom had dropped out and students had a free reign to do what they pleased, despite certain parents' objections. My mother was one of these parents who objected to the treatment I was getting in the seventh grade. She knew I was facing a situation I couldn't handle myself. However, after all possible actions had been taken to address the problems with the public school as well as learning support services to resolved the mistreatment that my 'special needs class' received due to the prejudice behavior of not only the students but the teachers as well, my mother and grandparents made the decision that it was best for me to be placed in a private Christian School.

This is why I can't stress enough that parents need to be an advocate for an autistic child, because people don't understand and underestimate these children. But many school districts now are addressing these issues that were so swept under the rug, so of speak. I know first hand that bullying and emotional abuse can be devastating to an autistic teen. Many who are placed in this type of situation have repressed many of their emotions, which can erupt later on.

It took many years of therapy and time to acknowledge what had happened to me. Looking back I have seen that the failing of the school system wasn't at fault at all. It was people who took out their insecurities on others, so they wouldn't have (cont. **Origins**, page 3)

NEWSLETTER STAFF

Jeff Fleischer
CEO
jfleischer@yapinc.org

Mark Sawyer
National Director of
Behavioral Health
Programs
msawyer@yapinc.org

Janet Crawford
Vice President,
PA and Ohio
jcrawford@yapinc.org

Jessica Carlton-Humenik
Pennsylvania Director of
Autism and Developmental
Differences
jcarlton@yapinc.org

Ann Lyon Branning
Coordinator of Autism
Training and Development
alyon@yapinc.org

Brandon Dameshek
Editor
bdameshek@yapinc.org



Autism Team Announces 2009 Endowment Fundraiser

That's right, football fans. The Autism Team is back again in 2009 to try and raise money with YAP offices for the endowment fund. This year, though, we will be using NFL football as the theme. The Autism Team would like to thank all the Central PA offices for participating in the 2008 baseball fundraiser with the Harrisburg Senators, Reading Phillies, Altoona Curve, York Revolution, and Lancaster Barnstormers. Out of nine YAP offices who participated, a total of \$4,009 was raised and presented at the annual 2008 PA staff retreat. This was a great team accomplishment!

This year with NFL football, we'd like to try and expand the fundraiser throughout **ALL** YAP offices in PA and perhaps Ohio and Maryland, if interested. The main goals (just like last year) are to 1) raise money for the endowment fund, 2) unite staff in offices and even other offices by having staff get-togethers to watch the NFL games (more information on this at a later time), and 3) have fun and support our favorite NFL football teams.

How does the fundraiser work?

This year the plan is to have staff in interested offices pick and pledge for their favorite NFL team. If they don't have a favorite team or don't like football, they may give a flat donation. The staff that decides to pick a team will place a certain amount of money on a sign-up sheet (that will be eventually distributed to each participating office) for each WIN their team achieves during the 2009 season. That staff may or may not choose to keep pledging in the post-season and this will be documented on the office sign-up sheets when they sign up. In an NFL regular season, each team plays a 16-game schedule. If a team makes the playoffs, it could possibly play three more games (provided the team keeps winning). If the team wins all three post-season games, the team will make the Super Bowl. In total, a team could possibly play 20 games if it makes it to the Super Bowl.

Example: Matt Gromis picks the Baltimore Ravens to support for the 2009 NFL season. Matt decides to pledge \$1 for each win the Ravens achieve during the regular and post-season. The Ravens go undefeated winning all 16 games, fly their way through the play-offs winning all 3 games, and then bring home the Super Bowl trophy. Matt's total pledge owed would be as follows: 20 total games won x \$1/win = \$20. If Matt decided to stop pledging during the post-season his total would only be \$16. Autism Field Support Coordinators will each

be given supporting offices. They will be in contact with directors and staff with all the information they need in time to sign up before the season starts. We plan on doing staff meetings like last year so we can show staff first-hand all the information. There may be other means of communication this year to get offices the information they need. This is TBA. ASD Field Coordinators will also keep track of how many wins each office has from the staff that participated. There may be a prize for the office that has the most wins by teams picked from the staff who participated.

New features for staff with this year's NFL fundraiser!

Staff will have the opportunity to check weekly updates on information involving the NFL fundraiser on a website called "League Line-up." The website will have updates in total wins per NFL team/per YAP staff pledged, pictures, contacts, and much more. A **FAN OPINION FORUM** will also be available to ALL YAP office and non-office staff (TSS's, BSC's, etc.) to be able to talk back and forth about football and their favorite teams. There will be a lot more information to come about this fundraiser in the upcoming months. Directors, if you have any questions or are already interested in participating, please contact Dwayne Neff (717-318-9984 / dneff@yapinc.org) or Michelle Miller (484-955-8148 / mmiller@yapinc.org). An Autism Coordinator will get in contact with you in the upcoming months about staff meetings, signing up, etc. Thanks for supporting the YAP endowment fund!



Origins of Identity (from page 1)

to deal with it themselves. And parents shouldn't take a back-seat in their child's education, but better to make it a top priority knowing that they are making sure their child is the best they can be.

With the therapy, I also took Tai-Chi and Yoga as a form of holistic medicine. And in some ways it helped me greatly. Taking in consideration the fact that most of the therapy social surrogates were patient and weren't there for the paycheck, but were committed to helping children in being more connected with the world around them.

There has been a debate on the cause of autism, but mostly what I perceive it to be is a disconnection of the right and left brain. Although I could be wrong about that theory, I'm willing to have an open mind to see if there is another explanation for a cause. If the child has free reign to direct there will there shouldn't be a problem. Many who work with special needs youth know this for a fact and encourage a child to find there own individual strengths.

I'm not saying that the use of pleasant smelling herbs or teas can't be used as aromatherapy. Only that parents shouldn't have to be swayed by the system and free to try some of the holistic therapies on their own part of the time. Also get the neighborhood to help with this problem. It doesn't mean that if the parents who don't ask for help aren't trying their best, it only means that friends and family may be able to help them deal with autism in a positive way.

Usually if the child has other children helping them interact in a social situation this is a another benefit. This is only if these children have a sense of what the autistic child's needs are or if it is a higher functioning autism letting the child express himself or herself. This includes getting involved in school activities depending if the faculty is willing to participate.

From my own experiences finding the services to help me deal with all of my challenges can be of great help. This includes services such as Youth Advocate Program and the Mental Health and Mental Retardation services. Not to forget the therapy services of Lifespan. Most of the medical community agree that autism isn't one diagnosis. There are at least fifteen different types of autism which have a wide spectrum.

The following is a list of the autistic spectrum:

- 1: Autism
- 2: Asperger's Syndrome
- 3: Pervasive Developmental Delay
- 4: Rett's Syndrome
- 5: Childhood Disintegrative Disorder
- 6: Multisystem Developmental Delays
- 7: Landau-Kleffner Syndrome
- 8: Fragile X Syndrome
- 9: Moebius Syndrome
- 10: Williams Syndrome
- 11: Sotos Syndrome
- 12: Smith-Magenis

- 13: Motor Disorders
- 14: Disorders of Relating and Communicating
- 15: Severe Regulatory and Attention Disorders

In response to the listed above there are sixteen questions parents should ask. Or if all else fails ask for a second opinion. The questions listed below are key and crucial in the autistic child welfare and development.

1. What is the name of the medication? Is it known by other names?
2. What is known about the helpfulness with other children who have the similar condition to my child?
3. How will the medication help my child? How long before I see an improvement? When will it work?
4. What are the side effects that commonly occur with this medication?
5. What are the rare or serious side effects, if any which can occur?
6. Is this medication addictive? Can it be abused?
7. What is the recommended dosage? How often will the medication be taken?
8. Are there any laboratory tests(e.g. Heart tests, blood tests, etc,) which need to be done before my child begins taking the medication? Will any tests need to be done while my child is taking the medication?
9. Will the child and adolescent psychiatrist be monitoring my child's response to the medication and make dosage changes if necessary? How often will the progress be checked and by whom?
10. Are there any other medications or foods which my child should avoid while taking the medication?
11. Are there interactions between this medication and other medications, (prescription and/or over-the-counter) that my child is taking?
12. Are there any activities that my child should avoid while taking the medication? Are any precautions recommended for other activities?
13. How long will my child need to take this medication? How will the decision be made to stop this medication?
14. What do I do if a problem develops (erg. If my child becomes ill, doses are missed, or side effects develop)?
15. What is the cost of the medication (generic vs. brand name)?
16. Does my child school nurse need to be informed about this medication?

However, despite the debates and legislative delay, it is my philosophy that hope is crucial in this modern day quest for understanding of the human mind in all of it's mystery. I wish all the parents of those special children that hope. Without you, your child can never be that very special and unique person they were destined to be.

YAP Announces Self-Advocacy Training Module

Youth Advocate Programs is happy to announce that we will be developing a self-advocacy training module for persons on the autism spectrum who attend, or wish to attend, college. More and more adults across the spectrum are deciding that college courses and the college experience represent an important pathway toward the future they envision. Good self-advocacy and self-help skills are necessary so that this path does not become unnecessarily bumpy. To smooth the way, YAP has developed a survey through which our pioneers—adults with autism who have already enrolled in or graduated from college—can tell us what did and didn't work for them, and what future students should know about navigating the college world. We will combine this information with other research in the autism field to create a training resource that answers questions, makes suggestions, and gives directions. If knowledge is power, then shared knowledge can help to empower many people with autism!

This training module is funded by Pennsylvania's Bureau of Autism Services (BAS), which has allocated funds to three regional centers through the Assessment, Services, Education, Research, and Training (ASERT) grant. Youth Advocates will be working through the eastern regional center, which is made up of Drexel University, the University of Pennsylvania, the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, and Lehigh University.

Can you help by sharing information about your college experience with Youth Advocates? Individual survey forms will be kept anonymous and your name will not be used unless you request otherwise. To fill out the survey, please go to the YAP web site at www.yapinc.org. The survey should be posted by the end of April.

TSS Gives Big to 2008 Fundraiser

Chris Russell, a YAP Therapeutic Staff Support (TSS), was asked the following in regards to his pledge to the 2008 YAP Autism Fundraiser:

Q: What motivated you to pledge such a large sum of money for the 2008 Autism Baseball Fundraiser towards the YAP Endowment Fund?

A: I have had the honor for four years working with two clients with autism. In those four years I have taught little and learned much. I have had times where I have scratched my head and times where my head has been hit by clients. There have been times where I am mind boggled and wondering what my clients are doing or maybe what they are trying to say. I believe this is what many of the TSS staff for YAP has experienced over the years.



TSS Chris Russell

My job is unique at times and other times tough. However over the years my clients have taught me more than I could have thought. So, when the opportunity presented itself to give to your cause I jumped.

I believe that I have been given much so I can give. Whether it is of time or finances. Those who have much should give much. So if you find yourself having enough or more than you know what to do with. Find a way to use that to help those in need.

Josh Goes Fishing

By Joshua Williams

JOSHUA: I am Ready! Go! But...
How many Young adult fishes? 100!
How many Baby fishes? 101!
How many Young fishes? 194!
YES!
GO!

Hooray! I am Fishing! Maybe I know where, Go Fishing!!!
1, 2, 3, GO FISHING!

WOW! I Got Baby, Young adult, and Young fishes!
Now I hooking the fishes!
MOMMY: Back...Back...Back...Back...Back...Back...Back...Back...
Back.....BACK! Okay, Josh! Smile for the camera!

JOSHUA: CHEEEEEEEEEEEEESSSSSEEE!
MOMMY: Let's go cooking!

JOSHUA: Mommy?
MOMMY: What?

JOSHUA: But...
I'll have to eat Baby, Young adult, and Young Fishes! Yummy! Delicious!