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The National Speaker Conference 2004 Is A Success

The Autism Project of Rhode Island's 2004 National Speaker Conference was a great success. Over 240 teachers, pediatricians, speech therapists, social workers, occupational therapists, related professionals, and parents attended the October 20th conference, "*Social Skills and Children with Autism*" at the Quiddnessett Country Club, North Kingstown, RI. Dr. Jeanie McAfee's keynote presentation was chock full of easy-to-do ideas and strategies, important references to research-based practices and lively anecdotes from her work with children with high functioning autism and her personal experiences with her daughter with high functioning autism.

"The breakout for goals showed me how to put the ideas into day-to-day activities," said a speech/language pathologist."

Our afternoon breakouts were chaired by Dr. McAfee and by the team of Lore Gray, Special Educator, Kat Felkner, OT, and Pat Rakovic, SLP. Dr. McAfee spoke about applying her strategies in greater detail, and welcomed audience participation. Lore,

Kat and Pat presented four case studies on implementing social goals across the academic day for children at different places across the spectrum and grade levels. The audience had ample opportunity for questions and answers during both breakouts, and many left the conference excited to try new strategies and tools with their students and children with autism.

The success of the conference came from the clear and applicable lessons educators and parents could use immediately. "This was the best conference I attended in the last five years," one special educator commented. "I've already started the Feelings Book for my students and I'm going to do a social skills group too."

Thanks to all who contributed to a successful conference, especially the Conference Committee, Lore, Kat and Pat, Melissa Ferreira and her volunteers at our bookstore, and the many others who contributed to this great opportunity to bring experts on an important topic to our local autism community!

RI Autism Coalition Formed and Operational

The first project of the newly formed RI Autism Coalition is a Calendar of Events for all the autism related area groups, agencies and organizations. The full Calendar of Events is accessible through our website at www.theautismproject.org on our Resources page. It will be updated every 3 months. If your organization has an

event, please send the relevant information to Amy Gratten at RITAP. Her email is ridoo899@ride.ri.net. The deadline for the next issue is November 17, 2004 and will cover event listings through April 2005. The Calendar of Events is currently only available electronically through different agencies and organization's websites.

From the Executive Director's Desk...

Dear Friends,

I recently learned that the RI Chapter of the Autism Society of America closed its offices and ceased operations. Jennifer Hanley has resigned from her position as the President, after serving in this capacity for the past few years. I'd like to take a moment to thank Jennifer and the many, many volunteers who worked along side her to try to rejuvenate the RI Chapter. Their commitment to children with autism and their families, their generous donation of time and energy, and the many volunteers who shared in the important work of support and advocacy made a difference.

The Autism Project of Rhode Island is committed to help fill this void and will continue to offer support to children with autism and their families. We offer *A Starting Point* training series for families of children newly diagnosed with autism, in addition to our monthly *Discussion Groups* for *A Starting Point* graduates. The Autism Project offers telephone support to families of children with autism. Parents are encouraged to contact our offices at 785-2666, Monday through Thursday, from 9:30 am to 2:30 pm, with questions or issues regarding their children with autism. We will support the RI Autism Coalition to create an autism specific resource guide that will be valuable for all involved with someone with autism, both personally and professionally.

Thank you to all who attended our fifth annual National Speaker Conference on October 20. Dr. Jeanette McAfee and our breakout speakers Lore Gray, Kat Felkner and Patricia Rakovic proved to great speakers with so many applicable ideas and lessons to use. A big thank you to our conference committee and Melinda Lemos-Jackson for organizing this important event. Well done!

Now, as we enter into the holiday season, one that can prove stressful for people with autism and their families, look to our *Lessons in Learning* for some strategies to help reduce your child's anxiety and understanding of the seasons' many different events and celebrations. We've included some tools for you to personalize for your family's traditions to help the child with autism know what to expect at a family gathering, but more importantly what to do if it gets to be too much.

And finally, during this season of giving, we are happy to be selected to participate in the **Allen Shawn Feinstein Challenge Give Away**. This is an opportunity for non-profits to align their Annual Campaigns with his matching program. (See Development Corner , Page 4) The support we receive from families, friends and community partners enabled us to outreach to and support so many more children in 2004. Here's an important opportunity for your donation to be even more powerful and beneficial for our kids.

I wish you all a healthy and happy holiday season. Thank you for your continued support and know that we are only a phone call away if you should need help during this busy season.

Gratefully,

Joanne G. Quinn,

Executive Director

Ahora Hay Informacion General Sobre El Autismo Disponible En Espanol

The Autism Society of America now has a link to resources in Spanish! Go to this site

<http://www.autism-society.org>

and click on the **En Espanol** button in the top left. The information ranges from characteristics of autism to interventions.

We are currently working to put the link on our website. Check out www.theautismproject.org's Resource page for an easy link to this information.

**Autism Society
of North Carolina
Bookstore
AFFILIATE**



Lessons in Learning...Surviving the Holidays

There are many strategies that help families with children with autism enjoy a more successful holiday season. The same strategies that are used in the classroom: visual supports, schedules, social stories and physical structure, support the children during family events. But, it means a bit of pre-planning.

Step 1: Think the event or party through in advance and think of as many details as possible and **ALL** from an autism perspective!

Step 2: Make two lists. The **Have To** and the **Forget About It** lists! The **Have To** lists contain what each family considers very important traditions that you would like to teach your child to participate in. For some, it's eating special foods, while for others is caroling or the lighting of candles on a Menorah. The **Forget About It** list is for those things that just aren't worth effort, or no matter what you do it just won't work. *And that's okay!* Not everyone needs to wear a bow tie and new shoes or eat Auntie's cooking. Our children aren't rude, we're just bringing along some other food choices and comfy sweat pants to help them to cope with all the other changes and demands that they'll experience during this busy time.

Step 3: Problem solve for the Have To lists. Put all of your time and energy toward the important items on your personal Have To list.

Here are some simple strategies for different items that may be on your Have To list...

- **Maybe a special outfit is a key to your holiday.** Consider washing everything a few times to break it in and having new shoes stretched-then try everything on before the holiday to "practice" for short successful periods of time. Play "Dress Up" several times before the big party.
- **Enjoying a long meal.** If your family gathers and there are many courses served on china and crystal you can limit your visit to coffee and dessert. Or, you may request a seat at the kitchen table or "kids' table" to avoid issues with fine dishes and expectations about behavior at the grown up table. Try to build in some movement breaks in between courses too.
- **Why is there a Gourd on my table?** If your child is obsessing over the centerpiece and candles, can they be moved for a while? Can the candles be blown out without Thanksgiving being ruined? One child so associated burning candles with birthdays that for several years his ex-

tended family allowed the candles to be blown out as they listened to his rendition of "Happy Birthday" before anyone could have dinner.

- **Dealing with all the relatives in a small space** This can be stressful for anyone! Even a few extra people can overwhelm a child with autism. Try to find a way to create a "quiet zone" or break area for your child before the company arrives or you get to Grandma's house. Also, bring along the things that will help calm your child. One hostess graciously allowed her autistic nephew's family to bring their small TV/VCR and a few favorite videos to set up in an upstairs bedroom. Imagine how surprised the mom was to find the host hanging out with her son watching a video. His response to her surprise, "Hey, I needed a break from all the people and noise too."
- **Preplanning is KEY!** Create a social story to tell your child what will happen, what is expected of him and others, and sequence the day's events. Social stories are very effective when they are written for the child from his perspective (*see the different versions posted to our website*). Social stories can help a child feel more comfortable in a strange situation. If your child with autism has siblings close in age, they may find his social story to be very helpful too!
- **Simple supports to bring along** Create a schedule of the event or party to help support your child. Keep it to her level of understanding, but most important keep it readily available for her at all times. Even if things are sailing along, keep the schedule and supports available to ease his anxiety and to support her when she begins to get tired or overwhelmed.
- **Keep it short and Sweet!** A shortened successful event is far more enjoyable for everyone. More importantly, these successes can be built upon year after year as your child learns more and grows to enjoy and participate in the whole event.

Breathe in, Breathe out and most important... enjoy the holiday season!

Go to www.theautismproject.org and click on our Newsletter page. There are five variations of Social Stories and schedules that you will be able to personalize.

From the Development Corner

Our **Annual Campaign/Membership Drive** will begin this November in conjunction with the **Feinstein Challenge Give Away**, in which the Feinstein Foundation has agreed to match all donations made to non-profits up to \$100,000.00 from 11/15/04-12/31/04. What better time to renew your membership and help us support our programs designed exclusively for children with autism? Remember your membership will entitle you to a 10% discount on all our programs including Camp.

Our **Annual Silent Auction** held on September 23rd at the **Florentine Grille** in North Providence was a **huge success** and raised more than **\$11,000.00** to help us support our programs. We would like to express our sincere appreciation to Michael Andoscia, of Waddell & Reed, Nick Ianucilli and Jeffery Merlino from The Florentine Grille as well as Jeff Korecky from Copley Distributors for hosting this event. We would also like to thank both our chair Bethany Tassoni and our honorary chairs, Dr. & Mrs. Anthony Regine as well as those wonderful volunteers who assisted us that evening; Roberta Zimmerly, Sue Sposato, Cheryl Cotter, Ellen-Ann Bradshaw, Audrey Poore and Ginny Byrnes.

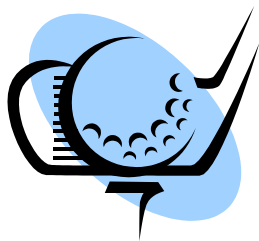
Rumor has it that The Florentine Grille may be hosting another event for us in December, if you would like your name placed on our event notification list, please email mary@theautismproject.org

Special Gifts

Many Thanks to George Russell and the Telecom Pioneers who hosted a golf tournament this summer and donated \$2,000.00 to the Autism Project.

Hats off to Mr. Nickolas Janikies who recently named the Autism Project of RI as one of his **favorite charities** with a donation of \$1,000.00!

And a special thank you to Mayor Laffey and the City of Cranston for hosting a dress down day that benefited the Autism Project and raised \$263.00.



Holiday Discounts Available one night only at Providence Place Mall for **One Enchanted Evening**. Shop Providence Place Mall with your friends on a special Sunday Evening, November 21st from 7pm to 10:30pm with a \$5.00 donation. Almost every store will host special sales and discounts for non-profit shoppers. Parking is only \$1.00 with stamp. For tickets contact Mary@theautismproject.org

Imagine Walk and Family Fun Day: We are hosting our 3rd Annual Imagine Walk on April 10, 2005 at Goddard Memorial State Park in Warwick. We will begin planning the Walk this month, anyone interested in volunteering please contact Mary@theautismproject.org. First meeting will be held December 6th, 2004. We are in need of Corporate Team Coordinators, School Coordinators and a Volunteer Coordinator for this event. We are pleased to announce that NBC/10 will once again sponsor the event!

New Staff Members

The Autism Project of RI continues to grow as we work to add quality programs and resources for people with autism and their families. We added two part-time employees and an intern this Fall. Here's a brief introduction to our most recent hires.

Welcome to all!

Cheryl Cotter Joins Our Staff

Beginning in September, Cheryl Cotter joined our staff in the role of training coordinator. Cheryl will oversee our 20 consultants, *A Starting Point*, workshops, development of new training opportunities and work in schools supporting students and teachers.

Cheryl worked for Autism Project as a consultant for two years and is highly qualified for the new position. Currently a candidate for a Masters Degree at Providence College and a graduate of TEACCH Level 2 seminar Cheryl is an expert on all areas of autism and a great resource in the area of Asperger's Syndrome.

If you have any training questions or would like to schedule a series for your school, contact Cheryl at

Cheryl@theautismproject.org.

(Continued, Page 6)

In Memory Of...

The Autism Project of Rhode Island gratefully acknowledges the very generous gifts we received on behalf of the family of Richard Langevin. Due to the generosity of these gifts we are able to support our programs that touch so many deserving children and their families.

Alan Hassenfeld

Amity Services

Attorney Mark Morse

Bertha Norek / Helen Ziochouski

Colleen Beirne

Donna Golemme

Ellen Collins-Frazier

Fleet Intranet Development Team

Jean DuPree

Jennifer Pascoa

Kristin Nicholson & Nathan Beaver

Major Gen & Mrs. John Kiely

Marianne Beirne

Marie Laudini

Michael Brophy

Mr & Mrs. Chester Williams

Mr & Mrs. Ernest Martin

Mr & Mrs. Henry Santagini

Mr & Mrs. John Malloy

Mr & Mrs. Vincent Palumbo

Mr. & Mrs Edward Stahowiak

Mr. & Mrs Edward Fracassa & Family

Mr. & Mrs Kenneth Wild Jr.

Mr. & Mrs. Amedeo Merolla

Mr. & Mrs. Bryan Mullin

Mr. & Mrs. Donald Schiarizzi

Mr. & Mrs. George Langevin

Mr. & Mrs. John Carney Jr.

Mr. & Mrs. John Sinnigen

Mr. & Mrs. John Zuena

Mr. & Mrs. Lewis Antin

Mr. & Mrs. Michael Carney

Mr. & Mrs. Richard Labrie

Mr. & Mrs. Richard Souza

Mr. & Mrs. Robert Langevin

Mr. & Mrs. Ronald Cellucci

Mr. & Mrs. Sheldon Sollosy

Mr. & Mrs. Stephen M. Brusini

Mr. & MRs. Steven Upham

Mr. & Mrs. William Lister

Mr. Paul Hossfield / Maxine Wolfson

Mr. Y Mrs. George Henry

Ms. Charlotte O'Donnell

Ms. Elisabeth Spooner

Ms. Joanne Coppotelli

Nancy Beatie

Patricia Miller

Paul & Linda Hughes & Arnold Paolino

Rhode Island AFL CIO

Rita. Curtis

Roger Dufour/Dufour & Schmitt LTD

Salvatore & Pauline Catanese

The Connor Family

The Fern Family

The Mellor Family

The Sincere's

The Terrace Social Club

Tri-Town Community Action

(Cont. from Page 4)...

New Staff Members:

Meet Our New Office Administrator/Bookkeeper

Melissa Cornejo joins our organization, as a much needed Office Administrator /Bookkeeper. Melissa is working hard to organize our office (and us!) and to develop the bookkeeping end of our programming. Melissa is also bi-lingual in English and Spanish and will help us in our outreach to Spanish-speaking families and their support workers.

A huge thank you to John Quinn, Treasurer of the Autism Project of RI, who volunteered countless hours for the last FIVE years to do all our books, checks, deposits, etc! We are forever grateful for his organizational skill and commitment to the Autism Project from its infancy. We could not be where we are today without his expertise and attention to detail. Thank You, Thank You!

RI College Intern Supports the Project

Bethany Korkuc, currently completing her master's degree in Social Work at Rhode Island College will be working at the office through May 2005. Following a tremendous experience last year working in one of the Autism Project's demonstration classrooms, Bethany asked to be placed with us again for her final year of internship.

In collaboration with everyone here at the Project, Bethany is participating in the creation of many new and exciting programs for children as well as parents. A few of these include a parent support group, as well as fun social skills "clubs" for adolescents.

Bethany is also conducting a survey of parent perception of special education services in Rhode Island. She is interested in hearing from parents as far as their feelings and understanding of the services their children currently receive. This information from parents can be powerful in promoting change and in the development of future educational programs. If you would like to participate, Bethany may be reached at 785-2666.

United Way #8410



51 Sockanosset Crossroad, Suite A
Cranston, RI, 02920

<p>Non Profit Org US Postage paid Providence, RI Permit #114</p>
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Notification of future newsletters will be sent via e-mail so please go to our website and sign up with your e-mail address today! www.theautismproject.org