

*Executive Director*  
Ms. Joanne Quinn

*Executive Board:*

Ms. Kathy Schlenz,  
President

Mr. Chris Perrotti,  
Vice President

Ms. Andrea Krupp,  
Secretary

Mr. John Quinn,  
Treasurer

Mr. Cary Coen

Ms. Joan Colwell

Ms. Nancy Merrill

Mr. Ken Pariseau

Ms. Beth Pinto

Dr. Anthony Regine

Mr. Timothy Gray

Mr. David Tassoni

Ms. Bernadine Sadwin

*Advisory Board:*

Ms. Cheryl Cotter

Ms. Barbara Dubois

Ms. Kat Felkner

Ms. Melissa Ferreira

Ms. Lore Gray

Ms. Melinda Jackson

Ms. Susan Morsilli

Ms. Connie Rinehart

Ms. Susan Sposato

Ms. Joanne Weaver

## The National Speaker Conference-Oct 20th,2004

The National Speaker Conference for 2004, "Social Skills and Children with Autism", is set for **Wednesday, October 20<sup>th</sup>** at Quiddnessett Country Club, North Kingstown, RI. Dr. Jeanette McAfee, author of Navigating the Social World, will be the keynote speaker. Dr. McAfee will also host one of the afternoon breakout sessions. Kat Felkner, OT, Renee Gannon, SLP and Lore Gray, Special Educator will host the other breakout, "Writing & Implementing Effective Social Goals". This promises to be a great conference, with ample opportunity for questions and answers, and brainstorming, during the breakout sessions in the afternoon. Educators, professionals and parents of children with Asperger Syndrome, High Functioning Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorder would benefit from this conference.

The Autism Project of Rhode Island actually reduced the conference registration fee from \$150.00 to \$125.00 for professionals, and \$75.00 for parents. The reduced price was established in order to make this conference more affordable to the many educators and professionals who work with children with autism spectrum disorders at school, at home and in the community. The fee includes a continental breakfast, lunch; and there is free parking. Members do receive a ten percent discount.

Take advantage of a great training opportunity offered at a great price. Register early; because this conference is proving to be very popular and space is limited!

For more information on the conference, check our website, (you can register online too!) [www.theautismproject.org](http://www.theautismproject.org) or call the office at 785-2666.

### A Few Words from our Speaker...

Since the recognition of Asperger's Syndrome in the DSM IV in 1994 and the ICD 10 in 1993, the number of individuals diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome and high functioning autism (AS/HFA) has increased rapidly throughout the world. Not surprisingly, the availability of specific programs to address the complex and multi-faceted needs of these individuals has not yet caught up with the increasing rate of diagnosis. Indeed, there has not yet been nearly enough time to adequately develop, investigate, and compare different treatment approaches. As a result, while parents and professionals can obtain a good deal of information about the diagnoses and general treatment approaches, it is much more difficult to find specific information on how to actually deliver programs tailored to the needs of these individuals.



When my daughter, Rachel (that's her with me to the right!), was diagnosed with High Functioning Autism at age ten, her doctors,

teachers, and I faced the same dilemma: we knew what her diagnosis was and we knew that she needed help with social skills, pragmatics, abstract thinking, and sensory issues, but none of us knew exactly what kind of treatment this would entail or even how to go about finding such treatment.

Thus began my search for the best treatment techniques that I could find or devise for my daughter. In the course of this search, I left my general pediatrics practice in order to have more time to focus on this project. Over the ensuing years, I researched the issue from every angle I could find. With the help of several specialists who work with children with AS/HFA (including a stint with Tony Attwood in Australia), on-going review of the current literature in the field, and most of all, the myriad lessons I have learned from my number one teacher, Rachel, I pulled together the best program ideas I could find or invent.

Equipped with this information, I first began writing programs that my daughter's aide and I could use in teaching her social, emotional, behavioral, and abstract thinking skills. Partway through this project I decided to broaden the programs to apply to other individuals with AS/HFA and related disorders. My main goals were to 1) write a curriculum that an aide or teacher with little experience in this field could use and 2) to break the individual skills down into small, incremental steps that could be slowed down to match the individual student's pace of learning. As challenging as it has been, the five years I have spent writing this book ([Navigating the Social World](#)) have been an exciting and energizing time that has filled me with hope for my daughter's future and for the future of others like her.

*Dr. Jeanette McAfee*

## From the Executive Director's Desk...

Dear Friends,

**W**e start the new school year with great energy and many programs and projects in the making or being launched! Following two great (and exhausting!!) weeks of camp, I'm surprised there's any energy left... but our terrific staff moves ahead. Congratulations to Connie Rinehart, camp director and Melinda Lemos-Jackson, operations manager for creating a remarkable experience for our children.

First on the fall calendar is our *Putting the Pieces Together*, Wine Tasting, Dinner and Silent Auction set for September 23 at 6:00. Full details are in our *From the Development Corner* article. Great food, wine and support for our programs all in one night!

Next, our National Speaker Conference, *Social Skills and Children with Autism* is quickly approaching and features the work of Dr. Jeanie McAfee, MD. We are pleased to offer a strong program that gets to the nuts and bolts of teaching social skills to children with autism both at school and at home.

To support our growing organization we are in the process of increasing staff at the office. Cheryl Cotter joined our staff as the part-time Training Coordinator. She will continue to consult, schedule classroom consultations and school-based trainings, oversee the *A Starting Point* program and develop trainings and programs as needs present them-

selves. Also, Bethany Korkuc, a second year Master of Social Work candidate from RI College is interning 20 hours/week in our office for the entire school year! Bethany will support the development of social skills groups, update our autism resources and lend support to our families.

It is exciting to be a part of this organization on many levels, but the most important remains helping children with autism and their families. We are so grateful to the many volunteers who support our organization. We can't do our programming or fundraising without you! If you find you have some extra time, we'd love to welcome you as a volunteer for a variety of projects, both ongoing or event specific. Call Mary Farhoumand at 785-2666.

Finally, acknowledging the death of a very important person is a difficult task that brings all of us great sadness. Barbara Coen, a long-time supporter of the Autism Project of RI and the **2004 Alice Oster Award** recipient for outstanding commitment to children with Autism in the State of Rhode Island recently passed away. Barbara and her husband Cary were instrumental in the development of the series *A Starting Point*. Cary also serves on our Executive Board. Always a kind word and great support for families with younger children with autism, Barbara will be missed.

Sincerely,

*Joanne G. Quinn,*

Executive Director

## Lessons in Learning...Home/School Communication

### A Strategy for Parents:

Now that the new school year is underway, many families are struggling with establishing new routines, adapting to new teachers and professionals, etc. It can be a difficult time of year for our children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) their teachers and families.

Good communication between home and school is an important part of any child's success, but it is even more important for our children with ASD. More formal methods of communicating between school and home compensate somewhat for the communication challenges facing people with autism. Many children have communication logs-notebooks-that go back and forth between home and school. This can be an effective tool, as long as someone at home and someone at school has the time to write a note! That isn't always the case.

Consider adopting a standard "Note from Home" that contains checkboxes and places for brief notes. You can preprint this form and have it available to complete each morning to include in your child's school folder. There is room for important information, like changes in dismissal time, doctor's appointments. There is also room to share information that may impact on your child's day at school, such as "Johnny had a terrible time falling asleep last night." You may include questions for the teacher regarding homework or school schedules.

Checking off boxes, adding a note and initialing this form is easier and less time consuming than writing out a complete note. Feel free to create your own version of this form and give it a try.

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher's Name (self-contained setting) \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher's Name (inclusion setting) \_\_\_\_\_

NAME OF CHILD \_\_\_\_\_

will take hot lunch today

will be picked up today by: \_\_\_\_\_

has \_\_\_\_\_  
after school

is late due to \_\_\_\_\_

has a dentist appointment at \_\_\_\_\_  
I will pick up at \_\_\_\_\_

has a doctor appointment at \_\_\_\_\_  
I will pick up at \_\_\_\_\_

changes noted at home:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

other:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Thanks so much!

**Parent's Name**

**Parent's Signature**

## From the Development Corner

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to Joe Rocco of RocJo Productions for once again selecting the Autism Project of Rhode Island as the recipient of their fundraising efforts at the Newport Comedy Series for the third consecutive year! Thanks also to Chris Perrotti for his help. Kudos to Diane Rocco for her donation of a Givenchy Gift Basket and Cardi's Furniture for their generous donation of the two recliners we raffled off at the event.

Congratulations to our winners

1<sup>st</sup> Prize: Pat Rollo

2<sup>nd</sup> Prize: Nick Zarra

3<sup>rd</sup> Prize: Don Troppzoli

### In Memory Of...

During a time of personal loss, families often find comfort in reaching out to help others in need through memorial donations. The Autism Project of Rhode Island gratefully acknowledges the very generous gifts we received on behalf of the family of Carmine "Tom" Occhiuzzo from:

Ms. Patricia Golden

Jack Lang

Ms. Deborah Winthrop

J.C. Sadler

Catherine Sadler

BNI Newport County

Mr. & Mrs. William Medeiros

We would also like to extend our gratitude to the family of Richard J. Mahoney For the very generous donations that were received in his memory from:

Mr. & Mrs. Tim McGarty

Mr. & Mrs. Donald Cotter

Mr. & Mrs. Ryan Connole

Mr. & Mrs. Brian Cotter

United Way Campaigns are underway in our workplaces during the months of September and October. We currently have a speaker's bureau in place and would love the opportunity to address your company at a kick off meeting. Please contact [Mary@theautismproject.org](mailto:Mary@theautismproject.org) if you would like to arrange a speaking engagement. Remember our **United Way Number is 8410**, Make your donation count!

**September 23, 2004:** Please join us for our annual silent auction and wine tasting event: "Putting the Pieces Together" at the Florentine Grille in Providence. Tickets are \$60.00 per person and can be obtained by calling the Autism Project at 785-2666. Seating is limited. The event features dinner, wine tasting and a silent auction.

## Discussion Groups

The Autism Project of Rhode Island continues to offer monthly Discussion Groups the last Saturday of each month from 9:00 to 11:00 am at our offices, 51 Sockanosset Crossroad Cranston. Graduates of *A Starting Point* or the *Intensive Summer Institute* may attend a Discussion Group to share their successes, discuss challenges and brainstorm in an informal setting. Discussion Groups are great for teachers and professionals who have implemented some of the Project's strategies, but have some questions or are looking for more information on a specific issue. Discussion Groups are also great for families who need some feedback on strategies they've implemented at home.

Each Discussion Group is facilitated by two of the Autism Project's Consulting/Training staff. There is no fee for Discussion Groups and pre-registration is preferred (just call 785-2666 to register). We look forward to seeing more graduates from *A Starting Point* or the *Intensive Summer Institute* at our fall Discussion Groups scheduled for September 25<sup>th</sup>, and October 30<sup>th</sup>. The November and December dates will be published in the next newsletter.



## Why Camp?

Our third annual summer camp program for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders, *Move, Think, Create, Communicate*, was a great success. Under the direction of Connie Rinehart, Communication Specialist, our camp staff welcomed children from 60 families who filled 80 camp slots for our two sessions of camp (August 16<sup>th</sup> through August 27<sup>th</sup>).

We returned to the naturally peaceful and beautiful Champlin Scout Reservation in Cranston this year. The swimming pool and the rowboats were a big hit.



Journal photo / Bob Breidenbach

Counselor Cara Valletta, of Riverside, right, helps camper

The walking paths through the woods were lovely. It was wonderful to see so many children with ASD, ages 5 through 17, have fun at camp. On our first day of camp, two of the “purple shirts” (campers in the 7-9 age group) eagerly greeted another child in their group as he approached. “Oh do they know each other from school?” a volunteer asked Dad. “No.”, he replied. “They all met yesterday at Orientation. This is a great camp.” We were so delighted to see how happy these three children were, how appropriately they greeted their new friend.



A favorite activity at camp was the campfire and marshmallows on Friday afternoon. The older campers (10-17 years old) built the campfire and roasted the marshmal-

lows for younger campers. Campfire songs were sung and faces were messy!



Our younger campers demonstrated amazing visual skills when building with Duplos© or KNEX © during afternoon choice time. The oldest campers, 13-17 year olds enjoyed the camp experience too. For many, this was the first true camp experience they had.

Camp also served as a teaching tool for pediatric residents and Fellows from Hasbro Children’s Hospital and students from area colleges including Brown University and Providence College. Dr. Gina Gargus volunteered for two full weeks at camp. “No textbook or lecture can convey what I learned by spending time with these special children,” she commented. Dr. Gargus, six residents and college students from related fields left camp with a new knowledge of our campers’ talents and strengths.

Why do we work throughout the year to create this unique camp opportunity? Camp illustrates the Autism Project of Rhode Island’s philosophy; our children can be successful and engaged in purposeful and meaningful activities when they have the benefit of trained staff, modifications and supports. Our children with ASD can enjoy a fun, safe, educational experience at camp with the emphasis on FUN!





Thanks to all who helped make *Move, Think, Create, Communicate 2004* a success.

United Way #8410



51 Sockanosset Crossroad  
Suite A  
Cranston, RI, 02920

Non Profit Org  
US Postage paid  
Providence, RI  
Permit #114

*Future Newsletters will be sent via e-mail so please go to our website and sign up with your e-mail address today!*