

# The ALL ABOARD NEWS



A Quarterly Publication from the Advisory Board on Autism and Related Disorders

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Volume XV— Issue 3

Summer 2011

## SAVE THE DATE



### Fall Conference 2011

**“How Sensory Disorders Impact the Cognitive, Behavioral and Communication Skills of Individuals with Autism”**

**Kathleen E. Morris, MS, CCC/SLP**

**Friday, October 21, 2011**

**8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.**

**Comfort Inn Conference Center**

**699 Rodi Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15235**

Kathleen Morris, MS, CCC-SLP, is a nationally recognized speech-language pathologist with more than 30 years experience in public school and private practice settings. She holds a Certificate of Clinical Competency from the American Speech-Language Hearing Association. Ms. Morris established the first sensory integration clinic in Dallas, Texas to address and educate people regarding sensory issues. She founded the Pediatric Network Foundation establishing the first and only preschool in Dallas for children with sensory issues. Ms. Morris is the founder/publisher of *S.I. Focus* magazine, the only magazine dedicated to sensory integration, with readers in 17 countries. She served as the President of the Pediatric Network Foundation and serves on the Advisory Board of the National Autism Association. Ms. Morris has presented workshops on child development and sensory integration for 25 years, both nationally and internationally. She volunteers in Russian, Romanian and Bulgarian orphanages helping to establish an understanding of how children are at risk for sensory and attachment issues when living with deprivation. She also speaks to adoptive families regularly and her article on sensory integration was published in *Adoption Today* in the United Kingdom.

## Executive Director Message

Dear Community,

So much has happened since our last newsletter in early Spring. Thanks to your ongoing support, we are able to provide outreach, support and information to many in need. Our great staff answered hundreds of calls from families and connected them to each other, and to professionals across the state. It has been a very active time in that regard!

While it is our focus all year, we recognized Autism Awareness Month in April. We spoke to many about autism and ABOARD at: The Pittsburgh East Rotary, the Womens' Small Business Association Entrepreneur Trade Show, Gateway High School parent meeting, the Autism Across the Lifespan conference, Get Involved! Morning Mix, and several state representatives' offices. We also kicked off our strategic plan, with services generously donated from L.B. Foster Company who is helping us plan ABOARD's development in order to best meet your needs. Shawn Magill presented vital information about Sexuality and Autism at a well-attended Saturday Seminar. We finished off April with an amazing night of blues at the Spring Fling for Autism, thanks to organizer and vocal artist Freddie Stover and her friends.

May was equally busy, as we visited the Westmoreland County Autism Conference to hear great speakers and meet new families and teachers. I provided autism training for Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Western PA, Venture Outdoors, Stanford Brown medical assistant classes, and recorded a webinar at ACHIEVA. We welcomed revelers at the Royal Masquerade bowl, walked at the Highmark Walk for a Healthy Community, and shared information with new families at the Autism Speaks walk.

Autism Outdoors! will be a major highlight for us. With 260 participants, plus dozens of others in attendance, we kayaked, biked, climbed and snacked as families and people with autism met each other at Pittsburgh's Lake Elizabeth. Venture Outdoors staff

were amazing with our guests. Following that, the Environmental Toxicity conference co-hosted by Duquesne University and The Children's Institute was also invigorating. It was great to see such accomplished researchers gather in Pittsburgh to share their work with a diverse audience from many disciplines.

We so enjoyed sharing the night with so many of our supporters at the Boyz II Men concert, compliments of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra's Community Partners program. Thank you to all who bought tickets and attended the show. The performance was a true gift!

In closing, here are some Boyz lyrics from "Mama," by songwriters Edmonds and Kenneth B, in tribute to all you parents and caregivers who are so important, whether or not your children have the words to tell you:

You taught me everything  
Everything you've given me  
I'll always keep it inside  
You're the driving force in my life, yeah

There isn't anything  
Or anyone that I could be  
And it just wouldn't feel right  
If I didn't have you by my side

You were there for me to love and care for me  
When skies were gray  
Whenever I was down  
You were always there to comfort me

And no one else can be  
What you have been to me you will always be

Lu Randall, Executive Director

## Thanks to our Supporters!

### Autism Awareness Fundraiser

Farrell Area School District  
Student Activities  
Intermediate Unit 1's Central Office Staff

### Chevron Humankind Matching Gift Program

Charles W. Gross

### General Donors to ABOARD

Joshua Maeulen  
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### Just Give.org Donor

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In Memory of Michele Gardner Dana  
Madeline Sharpe

In honor of Spencer Crane's 12<sup>th</sup> Birthday  
Edgeworth Elementary 5<sup>th</sup> Graders

PNC Foundation Gift Matching Program  
Margaret Richardson

## AUTISM OUTDOORS

This summer, ABOARD had the opportunity to join forces with Venture Outdoors, to provide our families some fun and free outdoor activities at AUTISM OUTDOORS.



The event took place at Allegheny Commons Park at Lake Elizabeth on the North-side of Pittsburgh. Kayaking, biking, rock climbing, geocaching were activities available to try to over 300 people in attendance. The Boys Scouts and ToppSoccer representatives were also on hand to talk about the opportunities they offered for individuals with ASD. ABOARD also had a fun tent full of activities!

As we continue our partnership with Venture Outdoors and other organizations, we plan to host more outdoor events for kids, adults, and families. We would love to hear your suggestions.

These events are a great opportunity to volunteer for ABOARD. If you love the great outdoors and want to help with this project, let us know. If you are a BSC, TSS or care aid and want to offer your experience and service to the team, ABOARD and Venture Outdoors will gladly help you get the training and skills required.



Venture Outdoors has many activities for all ages and skill levels. We are happy to announce that Venture Outdoors is offering a discounted family membership to ABOARD families. See below for more information about how to take advantage of this offer!

**We would like to THANK our partner on this event VENTURE OUTDOORS and the following Sponsors:**

Pittsburgh Water Cooler Services  
REI Pittsburgh  
Vitaminwater/Fuze  
Wholefoods  
East End Food Coop  
Pittsburgh Pirates

**Thank you to our Volunteers:**

Bridget Little  
Mary Fuentes  
Mitchell and Nichola Worobij  
RJ Mikalko

As an ABOARD Family, you have the opportunity to join Venture Outdoors at a 20% discount on the regular membership fee. Your \$40 (includes discount) VO Family Membership fee covers up to 6 people for an entire year so when you sign up include your TSS or Care Aid so they can assist you on the events you choose. (You will be able to update this list as TSS or Care Aids change). In order to take advantage of this offer, you must register your membership with Venture Outdoors on-line:

Log onto [www.ventureoutdoors.org](http://www.ventureoutdoors.org)

- Sign up for a membership and at the *check out* it will ask you for a *gift certificate or promo code*. Use the following promo code ABOARDmem for your new membership, Make sure you click **"Update Totals"**

**ABOARDmem – 20% Discount on Membership - \$40 for a family membership (covers 6 people)**

### Membership Benefits

- Discounts on Venture Outdoors trips and activities, including \$5 off per hour on any rental at Kayak Pittsburgh
- Invitation to members-only events and free member events!
- Venture Outdoors high-durability bumper sticker and variety of merchant discounts.
- Subscription to E-news and the Venture Outdoors newsletter

Thank you for joining the outdoor community! Your membership card(s) will be sent to your address within the next few weeks. If you do not receive it, please contact the Venture Outdoors Membership office at 412-255-0564 ex.28.

**We also recommend you contact the Venture Outdoor office when you register for an event so the trip leader can get to know you and your family for any special circumstances or needs you might have!**

## What a Great Day for a Walk!



If you walked with ABOARD at the Highmark Walk for a Healthy Community event at Heinz Field on May 21 you know what I mean! The weather was perfect, the music was great and everyone was having a fun time. Thanks so much to those of you who came to Heinz Field and walked with co-workers, family or friends. We really appreciate your time and efforts and hope that you had a great morning.

In 2004 Highmark chose ABOARD as a representative of autism at the Walk for a Healthy Community. That year 12 organizations

were represented and the walk was held at Station Square. Every year a few more local non-profits joined and by 2007 this walk had outgrown Station Square and was moved to Heinz Field. This year 68 health and human services organizations joined together for this great Pittsburgh event. Highmark underwrites the cost of the walk so 100% of what is donated goes to the organization that walkers choose to support. ABOARD is proud to be a part of this important event and thank all of you that supported us there.

### **ABOARD would like to thank all the Team Leaders and Teams that supported ABOARD!**

**Autin's Argonauts**  
**Becca Boo**  
**Community Outings Group**  
**EBII**  
**Hattman Walkers**  
**Hughs Homeys**  
**Meditch**  
**Oscar's Amigos**  
**Saint Scholastica CYM**  
**Sanford Brown**  
**Team Crane**  
**Team Ethan**  
**Team Freeport**  
**Team Swaz**  
**The Happies**  
**United Minds**



**ABOARD would like to o thank Heather Harbert and Emma Wright for volunteering at the ABOARD tent.**

**We would also like to thank Diane Catterali, Yolanda Collins and Donna Enzerra for their assistance in obtaining the donation from McDonalds Corporation of coupons for ABOARD walkers!**



## THANK YOU TO OUR WALKERS AND DONORS!

Jon and Nancy Albinini	Michael Dudash	Tammy Kerr	Patricia Presutti
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			Mary Zanolli

## Support Group Happenings

### **ALLEGHENY COUNTY ABOARD Adult Autism Advocacy Group Phil Garrow**

During this two month period, we have met several times and completed a number of tasks.

- \* We revised the Autism ID Cards to include ABOARD's contact information. These cards help people on the autism spectrum explain their medical condition to first responders in the event of an emergency. The Autism ID Cards are available from ABOARD, and on AutismIDCard.com. Currently over 1200 cards have been distributed.
- \* We continue to provide internet technical support to the teen and adult autism support groups that use Meetup.com. In optimizing social media web sites to manage the autism support groups, we are working to develop a template that will help with the management and promotion of other ABOARD groups. To this end, we have created clear documentation to help users join Meetup.com, which we have provided to ABOARD.
- \* Members of our group have also been active in providing autism advocacy information to educators, therapists, and parents, giving presentations at the McKeesport Public Schools and The Children's Institute, where our speakers were well-received and asked to return.
- \* Finally, we have been active in coordinating a joint Memorial Day event between ABOARD's adult autism group and another social group run by and for adults on the autism spectrum called S.M.A.R.T (Social Meetup for Aspies and Related Types). For those interested in learning more about S.M.A.R.T., visit SmartAspies.com.

### **Discussion Group for Adults with HFA/ Aspergers Rebecca Klaw**

The group meets at the Squirrel Hill Library on the 2nd and 4th Sunday of every month and has recently gathered anywhere from 15-35 folks each meeting. The participants come together to discuss a variety of topics, the most common of which is the differences between those with autism and those without. Neurotypicals (folks without autism) display some very strange behavior (like being indirect or coy and not just honest and straightforward). Neurotypicals also seem to expect some very strange behavior from others (like talking about the weather when you are not even interested in the weather). There is a lot to discuss about neurotypicals. Other topics up for discussion have included: How the heck does this dating thing work; When will I get a job; How do I keep that job once I get it; What to do with bad memories; Families; Philosophy, Photography, and What planet did you come from? For more information, contact Rebecca Klaw at 412-247-0599.

### **Just Us Parents – Autism Support Group Astrid Camille Arroyo and Maureen Wirth**

Find support, encouragement and help in your parenting of a child on the Spectrum Autism, PDD-NOS, Aspergers. Meet other parents; Support one another; Share information and ideas; Get resource information; Meeting the needs of those who attend. Feel free to join us! 7pm to 9pm, first Monday of the month.

Email [la.bella@verizon.net](mailto:la.bella@verizon.net) or [mhwirth@gmail.com](mailto:mhwirth@gmail.com)

### **BUTLER COUNTY Autism Support Group Catherine Lalonde**

The group is aimed at parents of children with autism, aspergers, etc. We have a guest

speaker occasionally; mostly we use the time to discuss any pressing issues for the parents who attend. Topics most commonly discussed are: IEP's, summer programs, getting started with Medical Assistance and BHRS services. We have some laughs while doing so! We meet the 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of the month, 12pm-2pm, at Parents in Toto, 143 S. Main St., Zelienople. We meet September to May. No meetings in June, July or August.

### **CLEARFIELD COUNTY DUBOIS ASD Parent Group Kelly King**

Our group had decided to celebrate National Autism Awareness Month by hosting a series of lectures at the local middle school and holding an Awareness Fair at the DuBois Mall where service providers were able to showcase their services. Events were well attended and the kids enjoyed themselves with crafts, balloons, games, and popcorn at the mall and a supervised open gym - with loads of sensory activities - during the lectures. Our sincere thanks to all who helped to make these events so successful!

### **COLUMBIA, MONTGOMERY, NORTH- UMBERLAND, SNYDER, UNION COUNTY CSIU Parent Support Group Kathleen Stropnick**

Our local autism support group met at our first-of-the 2011-season Camp Emerge on Sunday, May 29th from 10 am to Noon. We had 21 families touched by autism at camp, and most everyone stayed all weekend. The topics at Parent Roundtable were familiar -- transitioning, dealing with school cutbacks, getting a diagnosis, and even more of a problem -- getting actual help after the diagnosis. Bullying at all ages, even our adults by other adults, is a problem. As many of our long-standing Campers age, we are facing the problems of what to do after schooling is no longer an option. Supporting the social lives of young

## Support Group Happenings—Continued

adults with autism is a struggle for families. Parents, and in some cases guardians and grandparents, who are raising and living with the affected children and adults, were universal in their praise of the CampEmerge experience. Talk lasted well beyond the official Roundtable, held outdoors on this beautiful, if warm weekend. We would like more experiences like Camp throughout the year.

Kids -- affected and siblings enjoyed the bouncer, pool, paddle boats and fishing (a favorite of many). The game room was always busy, and some children showed much creativity with crafts. S'mores at the campfire, along with stories and songs led by various people as the spirit moved them (including many of our affected campers) made for a great Saturday evening. Many of our campers enjoyed the dress-up clothes, especially the pirate hats. (Who says kids with autism do not pretend?) The kids gave a thumbs up to the new addition to CampEmerge experiences, the zip-line. We are looking forward to our next camp with a different set of families July 4th weekend.

### **CRAWFORD COUNTY** **Educational Advocacy Group** **Gloria McDonald**

This group is formed to help ALL youth successfully and smoothly transition to adulthood. It is to include neurotypical youth as well as those with other diagnosis. Education, ability awareness, and an inclusive, integrated community is the goal of this group. The group will serve a cross-system approach in our county. This group will combine efforts in an attempt to promote change at the Federal, State, and Local government levels

### **FAYETTE & WESTMORELAND COUNTY** **Lisa Rizza**

This is not a traditional support group--I

meet with families one-on-one and we go out to lunch or have a glass of ice tea and talk about their individual needs. It seems to help out a lot---they get one-on-one attention and support. If you need further information please feel free to call me anytime! 724-600-9023 cell

### **JEFFERSON COUNTY** **PAK (Parents of autistic kids)** **Tammy Williams**

Our local support group is doing fantastic. As of now I have linked up with a couple of local chapters in the area to help support families as well. Over the next few months we will be discussing Life Trusts, and providing a couple of trainings for parents as well. Looking forward to helping parents who need it and providing anyone the resources and support they need. Our support group meets the first Tuesday of the month at 6:30 pm at the Behavioral Health Administration Bldg., 215 Jacob Murphy Lane, Uniontown. We plan many events and outings for our families throughout the year. Our main fundraiser is our "Theme Luncheon" that we have in July. Our kids and parents really enjoy all our PAK family time spent together.

### **LANCASTER COUNTY** **Lancaster County Autism Mommies (LCAM)**

Our mission is to form an alliance of mothers dedicated to creating circles of support that embrace families touched by autism. It is our desire to significantly impact all aspects of life affected by autism so that families may thrive in a supportive environment. United, we are empowered to promote growth and awareness, provide education and resources, and nurture relationships with each other, our children, our families and our community. For more information about membership or events visit our website at [www.lcamonline.org](http://www.lcamonline.org) or email us at [lcamonline@yahoo.com](mailto:lcamonline@yahoo.com).

### **LEBANON COUNTY** **Autism Spectrum Support Group** **Diane Grumbine**

The group has been busy this spring and is looking forward to monthly family activities over the summer. We finished up our school year monthly meetings with presentations about the GFCF diet, constructing a book that contains all the information a caregiver needs. Our monthly breakfasts are finished for the summer but will resume in September. Family activities have included a party at Paramount Gymnastic Center and a picnic at Knoebel's Grove Amusement Park. All events were well attended, especially at Paramount where we had nearly 60 children! **Saturday, July 23<sup>rd</sup>:** Pizza party at 6:30pm, followed by a pool party from 7:30-9:30 at Bethel Township's Lion's Park and Pool in Fredericksburg. Please bring a drink, chips, snacks or a dessert. **RSVP by July 20<sup>th</sup> to [Diane@lebanonautism.com](mailto:Diane@lebanonautism.com).** **Friday, August 26<sup>th</sup>:** Pizza & pool party at Lion's Park and Pool in Fredericksburg. We'll eat at 6:30 and the pool party will begin at 7:30 until 9:30. Please bring a drink, chips, snacks or a dessert. **RSVP by Tuesday Aug. 23<sup>rd</sup> -to [Diane@lebanonautism.com](mailto:Diane@lebanonautism.com).** **Tuesday, Sept. 20<sup>th</sup> 7-8:30p:** will be our first meeting of the new school year. Jennifer Bradley of McAndrew's Law Firm will speak about special education. Let me know what specific concerns you have regarding this topic. Save the date! More information to come.

### **WESTMORELAND COUNTY** **NHS Greensburg Parent & Sibling Support Group**

Our meetings are on the fourth Tuesday of every month at our Greensburg Office at 531 South Main Street, Greensburg. Babysitting will be provided. For more information, please contact Stefanie Enciso at 724-882-3825 or at [SEnciso@nhsonline.org](mailto:SEnciso@nhsonline.org).

**Continued on Page 8**

## Support Group Happenings—Continued

### WESTMORELAND COUNTY NHS Greensburg Parent & Sibling Support Group - Continued

- \* The goal of our Parent Support Group is to provide an environment where parents are able to meet and support one another emotionally concerning similar issues in raising a child with special needs. The group will also provide the parents with presentations and different guest speakers to facilitate an increase in resources and information.
- \* The goal of our Sibling Support Group is to foster a fun, interactive, and therapeutic environment that provides siblings with the support necessary to enhance their understanding of their sibling's needs, promote self-awareness, encourage peer support, and identify their thoughts and feelings.

### FBR North Huntingdon Family, Social & Play Group Lori Kerr

We have moved to the Norwin Christian Church on Barnes Lake Road in North Huntingdon due to massive growth with this group! Our North Huntingdon families enjoy the support of parents and caregivers that have attended our group for several years and provide mentoring to new families who recently began their journey through autism. The North Huntingdon group has benefitted from guest speakers on a variety of topics. A recent favorite topic was how to utilize yoga to address the special sensory needs of children on the autism spectrum as well as offer relaxation strategies for the parents. Other topics included unique safety concerns for children with ASD, and also understanding special education language and advocating for a child or adolescent in the IEP process. Join us the last Monday of each month from 6pm-7:30pm. Hope to see you there!

**ABOARD is the largest facilitator of autism support groups in Pennsylvania. We currently have 62 groups in 47 counties.**

**ABOARD owes a big thanks to the facilitators, who volunteer much more than the 2-3 hours at a monthly meeting. We are so grateful for their help in providing education, advocacy and support to the families and professionals in their community.**

**If you are interested in attending a support group or starting a support group with ABOARD, please contact Marie Mambuca, Family Support Director at 412-781-4116.**

## Families Helping Families & Raising Awareness

Our family was asked to represent K9's For Kids at a graduate level education class during a small group presentation. This would prove to be an adventure.

I told Alec we were going to the University of Pittsburgh with Tyson, his service dog, and we would be telling our story as well as demonstrating a few skills. We would go into a small class of students studying to be teachers. He was agreeable but said he was nervous because he had never been to a Pitt class before.

We took a deep breath and quickly moved through the campus to the class ready for anything. I say this only because Alec has panic disorder and bringing Tyson for the first time to this location is stressful for everyone. You may wonder why we would go out on a limb and risk an emotional melt down on week night. The answer is simple, we do this to experience life in public places as well as practice interaction with the general public.

The outcome was an extreme success! I told how the dog is trained in search and rescue, that safety is our primary concern, and how Tyson has learned to find Alec when he goes missing. I also elaborated on how the dog is so much more. Tyson is not a family pet but Alec's autistic service dog that can help with anxiety in crowds as well. As long as Alec knows Tyson will be with him he feels like he can go out into the community and try new things.

Alec sat at one of the tables with his hooded sweatshirt covering up his head and his back to the class and Tyson at his side for the duration. He did briefly talk about what ASD means for him. But, more surprisingly began to discuss the issues he's having with the district's anti bullying program and social clicks in the 3rd grade.

He had needed to get some things off his chest and used this time to do it.

The whole group began dialog about this. I was shocked that he had so boldly directed this class of adults away from dogs, kids, and autism. I suppose he knew he had an audience that could relate and possibly shed new light on his concerns. Amazing!

As the class discussion ended Alec gave an obedience demonstration of his choosing and a search and rescue demo with ease. We were invited to do this again in the future for different audiences. Alec kindly accepted. I am so thankful for opportunities like this one and hope to have more.

**Claire Rocas**





## PRESSLEY RIDGE SCHOOL FOR AUTISM

## Relocating its Education Program and Expanding Services for Autism



The new facility and additional space will allow for expansion of the school, extended school year and therapeutic social groups programs.

Pressley Ridge will move its school for autism into a 15,000 square foot state-of-the art facility specifically designed for educational purposes on Holy Family Institute's main campus in Emsworth.

The following will be provided at this new site:

- ⊗ Social skills instruction
- ⊗ Vocational training (horticulture, retail, office support and culinary)
- ⊗ State-of-the art sensory room
- ⊗ Sensory friendly classrooms
- ⊗ Anger/stress management counseling
- ⊗ After school social groups and ESY (Extended School Year)

**Pressley Ridge**

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For more information:

1-877-905-4291 or [www.pressleyridge.org](http://www.pressleyridge.org)

## **Nathan Speech Services**

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**nathanspeech@aol.com**

**[www.nathanspeech.com](http://www.nathanspeech.com)**

## Does Your Child Have An Oral Fixation?

Why do some children continue to have an almost obsessive need to put things into their mouths often past the age where it is deemed appropriate?

We refer to these kids as ones who have an oral fixation. All babies go through an actual oral stage in development which is quite appropriate - they suck on, bite, chew on and sometimes even swallow things like toys, clothing, paper, pretty much anything they find that they can get into their mouths. For babies, sucking invokes pleasure and can calm a hungry baby or comfort a teething baby. Mouthing and chewing for babies is also a way for them to explore their environment. However, there are some children who continue to engage in these oral type behaviors long after infancy.

These children seem to have a need or intense craving to put things into their mouths. They may bite their nails, chew their skin on their hands, suck their fingers or thumb, bite their clothing, chew on crayons, or suck on or chew toys and other non-food items. They may also be children who have poor oral motor

skills, may drool excessively, may have poor eating skills (under weight or over weight) and poor oral hygiene habits.

They may also be more socially immature and needy, and have more difficulty with separation from their parents.

If this sounds like your child, it is advised that you seek an evaluation from an early intervention occupational therapist or speech therapist who can assess the reasons behind the need for this oral behavior. Some children have an oral fixation due to being weaned too early or too late in the infant oral stage (with bottle, breast or pacifier). Other children may be under sensitive (hyposensitive) in their mouths and have a need or craving for more oral stimulation that they get by sucking or chewing on non-food items. These children, when eating, may prefer intense flavors like hot, salty or sour. Some children engage in these oral behaviors due to a diagnosis or developmental delay. For many children this is a sensory need. By developing a sensory plan that includes ways to appropriately satisfy their oral cravings, while teaching coping strategies and substitutions for inappropriate oral behaviors, we can

gradually get these kids on a successful path to reducing their oral fixations.

Therapists may use a combination of therapy tools to help your child overcome his or her oral fixation. Some examples are:

- Chewy Tubes
- Chewable Necklaces and Bracelets
- Vibrating Probes
- Grabbers

**By Tamara Guo, M.Ed. D  
evelopmental Specialist  
Therapeutic Early Intervention  
Services, L.P. (TEIS)**

Therapeutic Early Intervention Services, L.P. (TEIS) is an established Early Intervention provider committed to helping children, ages 0-3 years, reach their full potential. TEIS is located at 3 Parkway Center East, 2020 Ardmore Blvd, Suite 295, Forest Hills, PA 15221. Interested families can contact TEIS on 412.271.TEIS (8347) or call the Alliance for Infants and Toddlers at 412.885.6000 to inquire about services for your child.

## Student Spotlight!

During April of this year, Kyle Brunick a Shaler Area student competed in swimming tournaments through Special Olympics hosted at the University of Pittsburgh and Clarion University. He won 5 gold medals and 1 bronze medal. It was a huge accomplishment for Kyle a young man diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Along with swimming Kyle also participates in basketball and baseball offered through Special Olympics. Kyle will be a senior next year at school and plans on attending Community College of Allegheny County for Culinary Arts after graduation.

**Congratulations Kyle on your  
5 gold medals at the  
Special Olympics!**





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*Early Intervention in Pennsylvania is a system of services & supports designed to help families with children who have or who are at risk of developmental delays. In Allegheny County, coordination of services for children between ages birth to 3 years is provided by The Alliance for Infants and Toddlers, Inc.*

**Contact The Alliance to make an appointment:**

**412.885.6000**

[www.afti.org](http://www.afti.org)



## I wish I could be on the playground with you....

As the parent of an Autistic child, do you ever wish you could follow your child to school or anywhere else that they will be put in a position to be social? Do you find yourself longing to be nestled on their shoulder so you can quietly nudge them to say "hi" to a friend or ask for a turn on the swings? Don't you wish you could whisper in his ear the best comeback in the world when a mean spirited peer laughs at him? Your every instinct as a parent is to protect and help- and this instinct can be magnified when your child is Autistic. You are not alone, as a Speech Language Pathologist I often find myself ending a session by telling the parent "If only I could be there on the playground..."

When we are engaged in the natural turns and twists in life as adults we rely on our social language skills to get us out. We rely on the subtle facial gestures and body cues by the listener to know if they are interested in our story or checking out the conversation across the room. We rely heavily on social language skills at work to get new clients, contracts or promotions by simply being likeable and friendly. We rely on social language skills from ordering food the way we prefer in a restaurant to allowing a more hurried shopper to quickly roll their cart in front of our cart. We rely on social language skills to build friendships and to fall in love. Now, imagine how your day would be, down to the simplest and most mundane of tasks, if you could not use social language skills. How difficult would your life become? That is every day for an Autistic child and why teaching social language skills is a challenge for even the most highly trained professionals. Most people think of speech therapy as a way to improve a child's pronunciation, or to reduce their stutters, or simply for building the ability to use words period. However, many children with autism **do** have the ability to talk, and some do a great deal of talking, but almost all can benefit from speech therapy based on social language and communication. Since difficulty with social language is a

hallmark of autism spectrum disorders, literally everyone with an autism diagnosis will need some level of speech therapy. According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, people with social language issues may:

- Interrupt conversations with say inappropriate or unrelated comments
- Relay stories in a disorganized way
- Have little variety in vocabulary

In addition to speech therapy, parents need to know how important it is to talk to their child about their social experiences in order to enhance their therapy at home and further improve their social language skills. How, as a parent, do you approach such off-limit topics with your child on the spectrum? Simple! Just analyze what *you* did today that required social language skills. Did you get annoyed today when waiting in line at the bank and someone else very cleverly got in front of you? Tell your child about *your* experience so that they can learn from your social language skills. Tell your child how it made *you* feel. How did *you* respond? Confess that you did nothing and said nothing and held it all in. Tell your child what you wished you would have said! Give your child a couple very funny scenarios where you could have exploded or over-reacted. After bursting into laughter together, ask your child why that option might not work so well. Then ask him to come up with some creative ways to make the person know that it is not polite to line-jump.

After you discuss your social language experiences in which you felt awkward or uncomfortable, it opens the door for your child to feeling safe sharing his most vulnerable experiences he encountered at school today. Feel free to laugh and come up with absurd ideas on how he could have responded. Allow your child to try to think of solutions with you. Avoid saying things like "Haven't I told you to stand up for yourself?" That means a hill of beans to a child who

thrives on order, routines, and scripted responses. Autistic children can't just pull the words out of the sky to "stand up" for themselves. They need to be taught. They need to be told that we all feel awkward and search for the right way to say things even as adults. Autistic children need confidence knowing that their comebacks are funny and well-timed! Give your child specific examples of what he could have said in that situation at school. If you can't think of the right words (like you couldn't at the bank today) teach your child a gesture to brush off a peer's remark. Have them look in the mirror and practice things like shrugging their shoulders or making a "whatever" expression on their face. Practice makes perfect even when it comes to social language skills. Be sure to share your ideas and discussions with your SLP so she can carry them over during her session.

Also, remember that we all had to be taught social skills. Not one of us was born with the knowledge of each nuance of life-take manners for example; it is something we teach our children, they are not born with knowing how and when to say please and thank you. Autistic children just need a little more real-life help and encouragement. So, we may not be able to follow them onto the playground and whisper in their ear but we sure can share our own struggles with social language and allow our children to see that we all need to work on it.

### **Cherie River, MS, CCC-SLP Speech Language Pathologist River Speech & Educational**

**Services, Inc.** Cherie River is the Owner and Director of River Speech & Educational Services, Inc. She began her thriving private practice 10 years ago and now employs over 40 people with two locations in the Greater Pittsburgh area. River Speech & Educational Services, Inc. has been blessed to cultivate an outstanding reputation within the community and serves hundreds of children in Allegheny, Butler, Beaver, and Westmoreland Counties in their homes, schools, and clinics.



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## Spencer is 12 and has autism. And he's the coolest 12-year old I've ever known.



One of the things I look forward to most during the year is my annual grandfather-father-son trip with Spencer and my dad. It is Spencer's reward for putting in the extra effort necessary to make it through a tough-for-even-a-typical-kid school year. It turns out I get as much out of it as he does.

Our trips help us connect in ways that we just can't do at home. There's no TV. No computer. No checking Blackberry messages (ok, maybe after Spencer goes to bed!). Just us Crane boys unapologetically being Crane boys.

We started these trips in June of 2009. It was just me and Spencer. And billions of other people at the "happiest place on earth"...Walt Disney World. We had lots of fun, especially since Disney treats their special needs guests and their families like royalty. We got these red-colored passes that sped us to the front of what otherwise would be, on average, hour-long lines for 3-to-20 minute attractions. That was cool, but every time we went to the front of the line, we were reminded we were a special needs family. Not using the passes was an option, but waiting an hour to see a robotic Cap'n Jack Sparrow seemed like the

lesser alternative.

Last year, we tried something totally different. We brought my hiker/photographer Dad along with us and rented a house just outside of Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado. We were both worried how Spencer would do without all the stimulation of Disney-fied attractions and visuals. Would he be bored? Would he be anxious? And most importantly, would he listen to us on the trails to stay safe? Unlike at Disney, the dangers are real and help doesn't arrive 5 minutes after a 9-1-1 call. In fact, phones don't work in the mountains.

We shouldn't have worried.

Boys have a lot more energy and endurance than men. 10,000 foot air had zero impact on him. He was a natural at hiking, climbing, and navigating wet rocks across rushing streams. No fear. No anxiety. Complete focus. Calm joy.

It turns out that the combination of nature and movement proved quite therapeutic for Spencer. On the trails, he's like any other boy. Full of energy and full of life. The mountains and the trees and the rivers and the birds and the fish and the

chipmunks couldn't give a hoot if he scripts and stims.

After the trip, I asked him several times over several months which trip he liked better, hiking in Colorado or Disney World. Without hesitation, 100% of the time the answer was..."hiking in Colorado."

So this year, we set our sights for the Eastern Sierras of California. Whether it was navigating the rocks of the Alabama Hills, looking for the oldest tree in the world on a 4 ½ mile hike through the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest, hiking in the mountains, or exploring the ghost town of Bodie, Spencer continued to amaze us with his abilities, his patience (try hiking with two photographers), and his energy.

So why is Spencer the coolest 12-year old I've ever known? Because while he has a label that many people associate with limitations, Spencer is defined by what he can do, not by what he can't. And he's very cool with who he is and doesn't worry one bit who he isn't. I wish I could be more like that.

I love to be associated with ABOARD because that is how ABOARD thinks about our loved ones, too. I encourage anybody who has made it this far into this article to let ABOARD help you discover what that special person in your life is capable of doing. You'll be surprised.

By Steve Crane

Steve Crane has been a member and treasurer of the board of directors since 2006. He and his wife MJ help with many aspects of ABOARD, especially our annual Gala where MJ coordinates the best auctions we have ever seen. In addition to Spencer, they are also the proud parents of another son, Charlie, the author of "One Big Meatball."





## FAMILY BEHAVIORAL RESOURCES

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Family Behavioral Resources offers **BHRS/Wraparound Services** for children and adolescents with behavioral health needs. FBR is also proud to offer a **specialized program and Autism Team**, led by a **Board Certified Behavior Analyst** to treat children with **Autism Spectrum Disorders** in across Pennsylvania. FBR also offers:

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**FBR is now an approved provider of services under the PA Adult Autism Waiver.**

**In need of services? Contact us at [adultasd@familybehavioralresources.com](mailto:adultasd@familybehavioralresources.com)!**

**FBR offers Family Support Groups, Social Skill/Play Groups, and Sibling Support Groups in areas where needs have been identified. All support groups at FBR are proudly hosted in collaboration with and support from ABOARD.**

**For general questions about services for persons with Autism Spectrum Disorders, please contact:**

**Rick J. Murray, LSW, BCBA, Chief Operating Officer**

**Catherine A. Hughes, Family Support Coordinator**

**1-866-4-FBR-ASD; [autismservices@familybehavioralresources.com](mailto:autismservices@familybehavioralresources.com)**



**A CARF Three-Year Accreditation** has been awarded to **Family Behavioral Resources** for its Intensive Family-Based Services - Mental Health (Children and Adolescents), Outpatient Treatment - Mental Health (Adults), and Outpatient Treatment - Mental Health (Children and Adolescents). \*BHRS is accredited under Outpatient Treatment. **Ask us about CARF today!**

## **ABOARD'S 2011 Organization/Corporate Partners**

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<b>Autism Education and Research Institute &amp; AERI Behavioral Health Services</b>	<b>Pressley Ridge Autism &amp; Developmental Disabilities Program</b>
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**THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!**



## The Advisory Board on Autism & Related Disorders (ABOARD) 2011 ABOARD Membership Form

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Your membership has benefits! It supports our work in meeting the needs of Pennsylvanian families challenged with autism spectrum disorders. It also keeps your organization "front and center" in the minds of those very families. Membership at the \$300 level will include acknowledgement in our quarterly newsletter for the year 2011, a link on our website to yours, and discounted exhibitor rates at our conferences.

**Organization/Corporate membership dues: \$300**

Organization \_\_\_\_\_

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**Mail form with your check made payable to ABOARD or credit card info. to:  
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**phone: 412.781.4116 or 800.827.9385/Fax: 412.781.4122**

## A Royal "Bowl" was had by all at the 1st Royal Masquerade!



Princess Lanes in Whitehall was the place to be on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011 when the Caste Family Fund hosted the Royal Masquerade Bowl to benefit ABOARD.

Over 120 people donned masks and festive cocktail attire to meet, mingle, eat, drink and bowl in a unique setting. The Lanes were transformed with dramatic lighting, ethereal floral and feather arrangements, and festive draping to create a lovely evening for all. Prior's restaurant did a fabulous job providing hors d'oeuvres and pastries, and sponsors Italian Oven, Payroll Solutions, and Meyer, Unkovic and Scott, LLP named unique cocktail blends for bowlers.

By the end of the evening, guests had danced, dined, bowled, and donated funds to help us provide a lifeline of support and information to people with autism in Western Pennsylvania. Our deepest thanks go to the Caste Family Fund, event designer/planner Bridget Little, centerpiece designer Jen James, all of our sponsors and guests! We look forward to next year's Bowl!

**Thank you to the sponsors of the  
Royal Masquerade Bowl:**

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Kathy Service, Manager

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Dennis Scott, Manager

**THANK YOU FOR HOSTING THE  
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Caste Family Fund





## Spring Fling for Autism



Freddye Stover and Blue Faze, Pamela Bick and the Warehouse Band, The Rumpshakers, and Rozanne Matthews joined forces to provide amazing sounds on April 30<sup>th</sup> at Grazies in Wexford. Emcee Jim Franciscus was instrumental in keeping the crowd informed between sets, and helping the evening flow and the sound engineered by Greg Sejko was outstanding. Our thanks go to all the artists, guests, donors, and Ryan and staff at Grazies for joining us for this great evening of music and friends. Most of all, we consider ourselves so fortunate to have met Ms. Freddye and we continue to be amazed at her great energy and generosity in sharing time and talents to benefit others. Funds raised at the event go directly to support our outreach and information efforts for families dealing with autism's challenges. Freddye has already set the date of Saturday, April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2012 at Grazie's for next year's event. We can't wait!

**Thank you to the Bands for providing the entertainment for the night!**

The Rozanne Matthews Band

Pamela Bick and  
The Warehouse Band

The Rumpshakers

Miss Freddye and Blue Faze

**THANK YOU to Freddye Stover for coordinating the event for ABOARD!**

**Thank you to the following for donating to the auction that night:**

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**We're on the web!**  
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### Our Core Principles

ABOARD believes that because there is considerable debate throughout the autism community regarding therapies, inclusion, autism cause, vaccine impact, and the potential effects of proposed legislation, our policy is to inform. We trust individuals to assimilate the information and make the best decision for their children, clients and students!

We believe that families are entitled to accurate and timely information, require emotional and practical support from other families grappling with comparable challenges, and often need advocacy assistance and training to maximize availability and utilization of treatment educational and vocational possibilities required by law.

## The Autism ID Card

Helps people on the autism spectrum explain their medical condition to **Police, EMTs, and other first responders** in the event of an emergency.

In November 2009, Autism Speaks hosted a National Town Hall Meeting to address the needs of adults with autism. The number one priority agreed upon by the hundreds of autism service providers, parents, and people on the autism spectrum was improved training for first responders. To meet this need, SEO Pittsburgh, in collaboration with the Allegheny County Office of the Public Defender, have created an Autism ID Card for individuals on the autism spectrum to present to police, medical personnel, and other first responders in the event of an emergency.

**ABOARD has produced these cards and are available for FREE!**  
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