ABOARD's autism **CONNECTION PA**

Inside this issue:

Executive Director	2
Autism Awareness for First Responders	3
Thank you's	4
Board Happenings	5
Organizational/ Corporate Partners	6
Autism Behind the Scenes	7
Support Group Happenings	8
The Nutcracker	10
Frostbite 5k	12

VISION:

We envision a community where people with autism achieve their maximum potential as they live, learn and work.

Spring Conference 2014

BRIDGES TO ADULTHOOD for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Presentor: Peter F. Gerhardt, Ed.D.

Thursday, March 27, 2014 8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel (Pittsburgh – Green Tree) 500 Mansfield Avenue Pittsburgh, PA 15205 412-922-8400

This conference will provide an overview of effective transition programming -- at any age — with the ultimate goal being a life of dignity, competence, and quality. To this end, an overview and practical suggestions for transition planning (inclusive of employment goals) will be presented along with issues related to community based instruction, employment social competence, sexuality and sexual safety, and quality of life concerns.

Peter Gerhardt, Ed.D., is the Managing Partner of JPG Autism Consulting, LLC. Dr. Gerhardt has more than 30 years experience utilizing the principles of Applied Behavior Analysis in support of adolescents and adults with autism spectrum disorders in educational, employment, residential and community-based settings. He has authored and co-authored articles and book chapters on the needs of adolescents and adults with ASD and has presented nationally and internationally on this topic. Dr. Gerhardt serves as Chairman of the Scientific Council for the Organization for Autism Research, is on the Editorial Board of Behavior Analysis in Practice and on numerous professional advisory boards. He received his doctorate from Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey's Graduate School of Education.

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Fee includes lunch, refreshments and handouts Parent, Family Member, Student, or Individual with ASD - \$65 Professional (without credits) - \$95 Professional (including credits) - \$145

For more information visit ABOARD's Autism Connection of PA's website www.autismofpa.org

Dear Readers,

possible.

Executive Director Message



Luciana Randall
Executive Director

We enter 2014 with the hopes of surpassing last year's activity level. Due to the overwhelming generosity of the Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre and the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust, the Pirates baseball organization, Three Rivers Rowing and other great friends, doing more than they collectively offered last year seems im-

Thankfully we were able to teach about autism and inclusive practices to 1,111 learners ranging from grandparents to teachers, police officers, caseworkers, and parents. Those were in addition to approximately 600 conference attendees and numerous others we hosted at weekend seminars. Add to that many support group members across the state, and we have literally "tons and tons" of people who benefitted from our mission last year.

Our funders, big and small, supported all of the above in record numbers during 2013. We were the highest earning charity in the Highmark for Healthy Community Walk for the first time, and had nearly 200 walkers. Picking up the pace. we entered a team in the Pittsburgh Marathon (24 runners) with an even bigger team registered for this year's festivities scheduled for May. You can join the Walk or Marathon at any time – so let's go big this year! Can we walk farther, run faster, grow our following? I think the answer to each of those questions is "yes!" due to the excellence of our phone staff, publication editors, special event and conference planners, (yes, all three employees) and the passion we have for our work.

Volunteers. They really were the wind in our sails this year. From our Gala "coat check queens" to run and walk helpers, volunteer numbers swelled to a final list of 112 theater "workers" who turned out for the Lion King and Nutcracker performances. Volunteer professionalism, compassion and calming demeanor were praised in every thank you letter we got for those events (total ticket buyers = 3375 patrons!)

So we welcome you to join us this year at conferences, outings, art happenings, or just call us to talk. We always work to do a bigger and better job for our autism community and hope you'll feel welcome to connect with us this coming year.

Sincerely,

Luciana Randall

"The
Autism
Connection
of PA starts
with you."

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's Autism

 $\label{thm:connection} Connection of PA \ \ has produced these cards and are available for FREE for individuals! Larger quantities are available for a small fee.$

To order Autism ID Cards, please contact us at (800) 827-9385 or at support@autismofpa.org

I Have Autism

by medical condition impairs my ability to communicate with others. As medical my prosource of the condition of the conditi



Autism Awareness for First Responders

By Scott Bailey

Ever since I spearheaded Allegheny County's first Autism Symposium in November of 2012, much progress has been made in educating our first responders about autism.

I, along with the Allegheny County District Attorney's office and WQEX, have produced a groundbreaking video directed to police and first responders on the importance of autism awareness. The video will be seen by all police departments in Allegheny County and is set for release this March. Along with the video, parents and guardians will be able to go to their local police station and receive alert stickers (an example of which can be seen below) and premise hazard alert forms. These will be used to help identify a person with special needs in the home or a vehicle. The forms will alert police, fire and EMS departments with your information and can be forwarded to the Allegheny County 911 Center (if living outside of Allegheny County, please check with your county's 911 center).

Lastly, I have asked State Representative Dom Costa to sponsor legislation HB 1842. This bill would give the option to an individual to register the status on their state I.D. or driver's license as a person with autism. This registration will be on a volunteer basis. I encourage everyone to look at the legislation as proposed, and contact your state representative. This designation will assist officers, when encountering a person with autism, to better identify and help with their needs.

The above mentioned actions are long overdue as we strive to make the world safer for everyone. I hope more progress can be made in our mission to bring autism awareness to first responders.



Scott Bailey is a police officer, 911 dispatcher and a father to two teenage boys on the autism spectrum. For more information, please email him at 2408bailey@gmail.com

Thank you to our Supporters!

Howard and Elizabeth Bachtel Patrick Boyle Jim and Terry Fugate Stan and Patricia Hasselbusch Wendy Hosking and Steven Sternberger William and Pauline Hosking Carol Javna Philip and Louise Kaczmarek Kenneth Mason Kerry O'Donnell Douglas Orr **Grace Peters** Stephen Rau and N. Lynn Kotys Donald and Mary Jo Smith Robert and Melissa Walls David and Irene Wilson **Daniel Zove**



Opus One Productions for Acouticafe's Beatles Tribute Night



Kappa Delta Rho Autism Walk at Pitt Johnstown CONSOL Energy Inc. Richard and Kimberly Degennaro Jeffrey Doran Donald and Ericka Giacomo Kappa Delta Rho Allan Walstad

Wellsboro Lodge #1147

Wellsboro Veterans Club

In Honor of Amy Persia and Troy Radencik Robert Hill

In Memory of Elsa Wilson John Rodella

In Memory of Laura Zibrat Kurutz

Lorraine Amorell

Juli Baumgarner

Ellen Benedetto

Cassie Budzilek

Joseph and Rose Castagnola

Gemma Cernetic

Mark and Denise Chisholm

Robert Croce

Barbara Cunningham

Arren and Nicole Cyganovich

Christine Dombrowski

Robert and Cynthia Feldman Kathryn Fung

Kevin and Cherie Gmiter

John Pedrotti and

Donna Gracev

David and Theresa Hickman

Dennis and Vicki Hill

Garnett Hoffmann

Lori Jo and Stephen Katich

John and Mary Liveratti

Pietro and Velma Liveratti

Starr Luteri

Diane and Craig Markovitz

Dorothy and Donald

Marszalek

Shawn McGill

Kathy and Kenneth Miller

Paula Reed

Midge Kennedy and Judy

Salvator

Henry Slaczka

Dr. Barbara Tomlinson



Board of Director Happenings

Thank you, Elliot and Stan!

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to two individuals who have served a collective 20 years on our board of directors. Each has stepped down to travel, coach, and to lend their energies and talents to other endeavors.

Stan Hasselbusch (President and CEO of L.B. Foster from 2000-2012) shared with us his wealth of business acumen, guiding us to initiate and implement a strategic plan which has grown our organization in many ways since we began the process in 2011. Stan continues to support our mission through his family's ongoing Highmark Walk participation and by advising us on various aspects of our plans. We consider him a great friend and hope to see him, his wife, Patti, and their family at some fun events this coming year.

Elliot Frank served as chairman of our board of directors for many years, overseeing the organization through many phases. His was a lively force in the regional autism community as he made partnerships, explored new areas of need, and as far as we can recall, never missed a board meeting! He attending many community meetings during our "lean years" in place of an executive director. Elliot is a great dad as his children are growing into young adulthood, and he and his wife, Melissa (Moon), have been terrific supporters. Elliot volunteered many hours each year keeping ABOARD (now Autism Connection) focused on mission, connected to the community, and moving forward as we greet new challenges.

Please join us in appreciating the volunteerism of these two remarkable board members!

Thoughts from our new board of directors chair, Jennifer Modell

I initially contacted Autism Connection of PA as a parent of a child with Asperger Syndrome seeking information about parent support groups. Later, I worked with the organization in my capacity as an attorney serving the disability community. I was impressed with the scope of services provided, its grass roots origins and its ability and willingness to respond to the ever-changing needs of its clientele.

Having served on the boards of several well-established non-profits, I was eager to serve on the board of an organization that was experiencing a significant growth spurt in terms of budget, staff and overall vision. I have served as executive director of two non-profit organizations as well as development director on another. As such, I have experience in the areas of fundraising, marketing, strategic planning and financial administration. While I have been committed to the causes of the organizations I have served, I have never worked with an organization whose mission is so near and dear to my heart. I have also found the board members to be similarly committed and I look forward to working with such an energized and talented group of people.

As a board member, I hope to learn more about forging partnerships with other non-profits, governmental entities and local corporations. I am very excited about expanding our vision to deal with issues such as transitioning to adulthood and employment and housing issues facing young adults on the autism spectrum.

My hope for 2014 is that the organization continues its strategic planning process so that all new programming is developed in accordance with the plan. I also hope to conduct great outreach to local companies and corporations to increase visibility and our funding base. It will also be important to work closely with our support groups throughout the region to utilize the expertise and resources to both group members and leaders. Lastly, I hope to expand the board of directors to bring in an even greater range of talents and experience to help the Autism Connection of PA to continue to grow and flourish.

Join!

2014 Organization/ Corporate Partners Membership

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.

Members will be acknowledged in our quarterly newsletter, a link on our website to yours, and discounted exhibitor rates at our conferences.

Contact
Jennifer Fulton at
412-781-4116 or
Jennifer@autismofpa.org
to become a member
today and start
experiencing the
benefits!

Thank you to the following Organizations for Partnering with Autism Connection of PA during the year 2013. Memberships for 2014 are being accepted!

Membership	3 101 2014 ale bei	ing accepted!
Abram's Bed maker of The Safety Sleeper	Family Behavioral Resources	Paula Teacher & Associates, Inc.
ACHIEVA	Familylinks, Inc.	Pediatric Therapy Professionals, Inc.
AERI Behavioral Health Services Alliance Health, Inc Allegheny	Farm to Table Pittsburgh Fayette County Behavioral Health Administration	Pediatric Therapy Specialists, Inc.
American Healthcare Group	Garland Agency, Inc.	Shamrock Solutions, Inc.
Associated Occupational Therapists, Inc.	Glade Run Lutheran Services	Southwestern Human Services
Augmentative Communication Consultants, Inc.	Goodwill of Southwestern PA Green Acres	TEIS TELI (The Early Learning Institute)
Barber National Institute	Contracting Co., Inc.	Total Learning Centers
Bayada Home Healthcare	The Integrated Care Corporation	Tri Medical Rehab Supply
Burns White LLC	InVision Human Services Ligonier Valley Learning	Value Behavioral Health of Pennsylvania
Brain Balance Achievement Center of Pittsburgh	Center Metz Lewis Brodman Must O'Keefe, LLC.	The Watson Institute Wesley Spectrum
The Children's Institute of Pittsburgh	Monarch Center of Autism	Services Western Psychiatric
Community Care Behavioral Health	New Story	Institute and Clinic Westmoreland Case-
Early Intervention Specialist	NHS Human Services	Management and Supports

PACE

Autism Behind the Scenes

C. Scott Wyatt

Stage and screen now feature characters with autism spectrum disorders, from the series *Parenthood* to the new theatrical production of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* at London's Gielgud Theatre. A number of actors and directors have also discussed their autism and Asperger's diagnoses, including Daryl Hannah and Dan Aykroyd.

We are more than characters or the actors portraying them.

Behind the scenes is a great place for some autistics. Autistics also write the scripts, construct the sets, film the scenes, score the music, and edit the final products. We are on the tech crews, the production teams, and work in the post cubicles.

People nod when they hear I am a tech geek. They understand an autistic person loving math, science, and computers. But when they learn I'm an award-winning playwright, they look confused. It's one thing to be like a character people have seen on the screen. It's another to be the person writing the scripts.

When I speak to groups, I've been asked how a writer and director can be "really" autistic. The implication is clear: if you have a successful career, especially in the arts, you must not be autistic. After all, autistic people lack empathy. Autistics communicate in concrete language. Autistics adhere to rules and patterns. You can't possibly be a dramatist with an autism diagnosis.

One parent assumed I must write about autistic characters, nerds, or geeks. Autistics should not be stereotyped, even though it seems acceptable to suggest we have a common set of interests, skills, and personality traits.

"What is your favorite play about?" she asked, her tone implying she knew the answer. "You probably just tell your own story, since that's what you understand."

My favorite play is a musical drama about an African-American gay gospel singer and his white partner. There's nothing about autism, science, or technology in the script. There are some great songs, chosen from the best of 1950s and 60s jazz.

The performing arts are inherently collaborative. After finishing the first draft of a script, actors gather for table readings. A good writer listens to the actors and others in the room, polishing the script. During the workshop and rehearsal process, dozens of people offer their suggestions. You learn to trust the judgment of set designers, lighting technicians, and the other experts on the team. Your "vision" as a writer or director is not the final word.

Being on stage or behind the scenes isn't for everyone, and autism does raise challenges. Some aspects of the work-place are difficult: bright lights, loud noises, and constant social interactions. You can't just take a "time out" when every minute on set or stage costs money. You need to learn how to relax and how to manage the challenges of autism to work in the entertainment industry.

I don't have an encyclopedic knowledge of film and I can't tell you who starred in the latest Broadway revival. I am merely another writer and director, doing what I love.

Support Group Happenings

ALLEGHENY COUNTY

Support Group for Partners/ Spouses of Those with Diagnosed or Undiagnosed ASD Rebecca Klaw rebeccaklaw@aol.com

Adult Social Group for Adults w/HFA/ASP

Heather Conroy, heather.a.conroy@gmail.com http://www.meetup.com/ autism-support-pgh/

TGIF Airport Area Adult Social Group AS/HF Terry Doughty TGIF.ASGroup@gmail.com

Discussion Group for Adults w/HFA/ASD/Squirrel Hill Aprilynn Artz aprilynn_artz@yahoo.com

Oakland Young Adult Aprilynn Artz artzae@upmc.edu

Asperger Teen Group "The Network"

Michelle Chapla mchelle.chapla@ myautismconsultant.com

Biomedical Support Group BIOMED BUDDIES Ronna Hochbein rvnmaiden@comcast.net

BioMoms Lori Scears Iori@biomoms.org

North Hills Parent Support Group/McKnight Lisa Gordon lisagord1@msn.com

Family Members of Adolescents & Adults on the Spectrum
Janice Nathan
janaz5@aol.com

FBR North Hills Family Social & Play Group Amber Lewis alewis@ familybehavioralresources.com

Vantage Point Parents of Young Children/ Shaler Library Johanna Taylor jtaylor@vpautismservices.com Jessica Scott jstaper@vpautismservices.com

FBR Monroeville Family, Social & Play Group Noelle Wian Monroeville@ familybehavioralresources.com

Ask-An-Aspie Phil Garrow & Caitlin Freeman phil@garrow.com

Wesley Spectrum's Parent

Advisory Committee/ Gibsonia Alicia Logue Alogue@wesleyspectrum.org

Parent Support Group: Special Needs Children/Sewickley Christina Meditch cameditch@gmail.com Jennifer Diemert jdiemert.rd@gmail.com

FBR Robinson Family, Social & Play Group Courtney Walsh robinson@ familybehavioralresources.com

FBR South Hills Family, Social & Play Group Dana English brentwood@ familybehavioralresources.com

AIM: Support for Families of Adults with Special Needs Linda Marino Imarino@jfcspgh.org I Matter Too Sibling Support Group Tammie Sauers tammiesa@gmail.com

East End Parent Support Group Jennifer Modell jennifermodell@hotmail.com

Super Teen Group/Gibsonia, Harmarville, Wexford Dana West pittsburgh_north_super_teensowner@yahoogroups.com

<u>ARMSTRONG COUNTY</u>

FBR Armstrong Family, Social & Play Group
Melissa Acorn-Ferry
armstrong@
familybehavioralresources.com

BEAVER COUNTY

FBR Beaver Family, Social & Play Group Courtney Walsh beaver@ familybehavioralresources.com

Parents of Kids with ASD & Learning Difference (BC PALS)
Jane Stadnik
jane.jschmitt@gmail.com

BEDFORD COUNTY

FBR Bedford Family, Social & Play Group Cassi Group bedford@ familybehavioralresources.com

Bedford County Autism Support Group Debbie Ott bcasg1@embarqmail.com

BERKS COUNTY

Adult ASD Social and Support Group Luci Schaeffer Ischaeffer@ unendingpromise.org

BLAIR COUNTY

Parent Support Group Terri Rossman BTNSCR@aol.com

Circle of Hope/Port Matilda Angela LaVanish alavanish@live.com

FBR Blair Family, Social & Play Group
Angela O'Brien
blair@
familybehavioralresources.com

BRADFORD COUNTY

PAUSE (Parents of Autism, Understanding, Supporting, Educating) Courtney Barnum pausebradfordco@gmail.com

BUTLER COUNTY

FBR Cranberry Family, Social & Play Group Noelle Herrick cranberry@ familybehavioralresources.com

FBR Butler Family, Social & Play Group Stacey Motonis buler@ familybehavioralresources.com

Cranberry CARES Mary Limbacher mary@parentsintoto.com

Autism Support Group @ Parents in Toto Catherine Lalonde clalonde@zoominternet.net

Freeport Area Autism Support Group Carolyn Van Cott cvcl@verizon.net

CENTRE COUNTY

Nittany ROAR Nicole Feaster nmfeaster@aol.com

Support Group Happenings Continued

Penns Valley ASD Support Group Angela Smith tdsmith.1@verizon.net

CAMERON, ELK, MCKEAN COUNTY

North Central Autism Support Group Mary Lee Uber maryleeuber@yahoo.com

CLARION & JEFFERSON COUNTY

Autism Rocks! Bobbie Freeman bigshirley100@hotmail.com

CLEARFIELD COUNTY

DuBois ASD Parent Group Kelly King seeking@cust.usachoice.net

COLUMBIA, MONTOUR, NORTHUMBERLAND, SNYDER, UNION COUNTY

CSIU Parent Support Group/Danville Kathleen Baas porkey72@aol.com

CRAWFORD COUNTY

Autism Support Group Amy Derlink aderlink@zoominternet.net

<u>DAUPHIN & LEBANON</u> <u>COUNTY</u>

Teens & Tweens Friendship Parent Support Group Patty Deutsch deutsch58@yahoo.com

ERIE COUNTY

Parents of Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (PAASD) jlane@kas-erie.org KaleidAScope, Inc.

<u>FAYETTE & GREENE</u> COUNTY

PAK-Parents of Autistic Kids Carla Guthrie charliebrown3464@gmail.com

INDIANA COUNTY

FBR Indiana Family, Social & Play Group Amy Flickinger Indiana@ familybehavioralresources.com

JUNIATA COUNTY

Mifflintown Autism Support Group Jessica Guyer Jessica@jrpphotos.com

<u>LACKAWANNA, NEPA</u> <u>AWARE</u>

Parent Support Group/ Peckville Elaine Jimenez Ejimenezsas@gmail.com

LAWRENCE & MERCER

Parent Support Group/New Castle Gretchen Murphy gretchen1618@yahoo.com

Comprehensives Support Dr. Ken Wallace autism@ comprehensivecfs.com

LANCASTER COUNTY

Support Group in Spanish/ Grupo de apoyo en espanol para padres de ninos con Autismo Emma Gutierrez & Alicia Ortiz grupobienaventuranza@ qmail.com

Lancaster County Autism Mommies (LCAM) Kim Shank Icamonline@yahoo.com

LEBANON COUNTY

Autism Spectrum Support-Diane & Gary Grumbine Diane@lebanonautism.com

LUZERNE COUNTY Supporting Autism & Fami-

lies Everywhere SAFE safeoffice@autismsafe.org

MCKEAN COUNTY

Kane and Bradford PALS Parent Support Group Christie Chesebro cchesebro@guidancecenter.net

MERCER COUNTY

PACT Parents of Autistic Children Together Bonnie Schaefer nojudge2000@yahoo.com

FBR Mercer Family, Social & Play Group Stacy Motonis smotonis@ familybehavioralresources.com

MIFFLIN COUNTY

Parents of Autistic Kids Melissa Maxwell mmaxwell@nhsonline.org

PHILADELPHIA COUNTY

Autism Sharing & Parenting Renee Henderson nasya06@msn.com

SNYDER COUNTY

Central Susquehanna Autism Support Group
Stacey & Mike Piecuch
piecuch@ptd.net
Susan Bolig
slb725@hotmail.com

SOMERSET COUNTY

FBR Somerset Family, Social & Play Group Colleen Patrick-Evans somerset@ familybehavioralresources.com

TIOGA COUNTY

Parent Support Group Sherri Summerson Autismangels_2013 @yahoo.com

Tioga Autism Support Coalition TASC Kathleen England sheep_2_ewe@yahoo.com

<u>VENANGO COUNTY</u>

Parent Support Group Amy Rankin rankinaj@verizon.net

WARREN COUNTY

Parents as Advocates Jodi Wilson wilsonj@wc-hs.org

WASHINGTON COUNTY

Hope4Autism Patty Neil patty.neil@yahoo.com

WESTMORELAND COUNTY

FBR New Kensington Family, Social & Play Group Jamie Tirabassi newkensington@ familybehavioralresources.com

Ligonier Support Group Mary Jo Sellmjsell@valleydairy.net

FBR North Huntingdon Family, Social & Play Group Lori Kerr northhuntingdon@ familybehavioralresources.com

FBR Latrobe Family, Social & Play Group Noelle Herrick latrobe@ familybehavioralresources.com

NHS Human Services – Greensburg/Parent & Sibling Support Group Stephanie Enciso SEnciso@nhsonline.org Winter 2014

The Nutcracker Experience

Lu Randall—Executive Director of Autism Connection of PA



Where would you expect to see countless dads with little boys? Reading the headline, I know you'll say - "the Benedum Center, for ballet?" Yes, of course! The crowd on Friday, December 27th was diverse, curious about what was going to happen, and big!

We routinely host events for people on the spectrum, from rowing practice to social groups, movies to bowling. Traditionally these have been more intimate get-togethers. And when the Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre approached us in January of 2013 to plan a ballet event, we said yes. And being a mom of three boys, who's also seen my share of autism event "excitement" at work (e.g. - young man laughingly dunks entire head in punchbowl at an open house in 1996) I approach big group events with some trepidation. Finally, though, I've found a remedy for my "ASD event PTSD" (post traumatic stress disorder) - the Nutcracker ballet!

With 875 ticket buyers stopping by the Benedum that afternoon, we set aside time for autism sensitivity refresher training for volunteers. Patrons then started trickling in about an hour before the show began. I noticed lots and lots of little boys with their dads holding one hand, toys in the other! Large family groups of several generations. Girls of all ages in fancy dresses. And supporters, funders, and people who care about those with special needs who wanted to experience the event.

My expectations of punchbowl-type issues were wrong, I admit it. I watched the beautiful performance unfold while noticing the crowd reaction. They clapped at all the traditional moments - and more! One mom needed to hit the restroom, but her young son was upset, scolding "Mom, they're not done yet!" and she turned around, grabbed an open seat, and honored his request to stay. Intermission came and I rushed to the lobby to support anyone having an issue, who might be a little hyper or need direction. And I waited. And I walked back into the theater to see extraordinarily calm people, lingering, wandering out slowly with seemingly no goal in mind. Ballet had mesmerized everyone, it seemed.

People from the Ballet (board members, administrators and event coordinators) were so impressed. Our audience followed the intricacies of the plot, responded to the emotional moments, and clapped twice as much as other audiences, and at all the "right" times, I was told. Our kids were engaged, calm, and happy. And I realized how lucky I was to be a part of it all.

So next time you see any event that makes you think "well, this will never work for us," it won't - unless you go and give it an open-minded try. If you're considering an event with us, please join! We promise a supportive, nonjudgmental, "keep a sense of humor" attitude. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to Alyssa Herzog Melby, Director of Education with Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, and fabulous intern Alyssa Brinberg who smoothed out details and created a flawless day. So many other Ballet board members, dancers, and office personnel were extraordinary in their outreach, flexibility and hard work to create amazing memories for so many. We look forward to our next Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre production knowing that it will be a similar huge success.

The Nutcracker (Autism-Friendly Style)

Jim Walter—an excerpt from his family's experience, for full text please visit his blog at

www.blogginglily.blogspot.com/

I wanted to make sure I mentioned our experience at The Nutcracker. The Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre (PBT) approached my friends at ABOARD (Autism Connection of PA) about putting together an autism-friendly production of the Nutcracker a YEAR ago. This is the first ever...in the country.

We purchased our tickets for the Nutcracker months in advance, and prepped Lily by DVR'ing an A&E production of the Nutcracker. She enjoyed watching it. It's pretty much right in her wheelhouse...music, dancing...should be a no-brainer.

We were, as a family, more prepared for this production. We knew, for example, that we wanted to get there a little earlier than we had to the Lion King. We knew where we'd park. We knew to get a booster seat. All these things served to make our "pre-event" stress less than it was for The Lion King.

What we did wrong was... No, that's not fair. What I did wrong, was I changed our seats. The front row was taken. I had snoozed and therefore I had loozed. And so I thought, wouldn't it be cool to see this from the balcony? Yeah. Yeah, it would. And the very first row of the balcony was still available. Bang. Done. Tickets purchased.

It's difficult to **know** that the balcony was Lily's issue, but she was upset and scared to go sit down in her seat overlooking the stage. I made several attempts, each time retreating to the bathroom or quiet room as Lily would say, "I have to go to the bathroom" in an effort to escape the seat (I think). After three bathroom trips, Leslie texted an aide from Lily's school who was also in attendance. She took Lily to see one of her classmates (also seated in the balcony section) and diverted her to the point where she calmed down before returning with her daughter to their seats prior to the show.

With Lily calmer, we retreated from the very front row to a safer distance from the edge, where Lily, if not happily, at least not miserably watched the entire show. At least she was after she requested and received M&M's from the concession stand, which I handed her, and she flung across the empty row of seats.

Again I really felt like staff and talent were well-prepared for their audience. I have never been approached by more smiles and offers to help in any venue as I was during my repeated sorties to the bathroom and back with an upset Lily in tow. The ushers were so laid back..."sit anywhere"..."don't worry about getting up and down"...etc. The stress I was feeling at calming Lily did not snowball as a result of getting additional stress from people targeting me with judgmental stares or scornful glances or, god forbid, "SHHHHHH".

Lily's trepidation had nothing to do with what the venue did to prepare for Lily's arrival. They did what they could. It's never going to be perfect, but they did absolutely everything they could to make it as close to perfect as possible. Fidgets distributed, social stories, lights dimmed instead of extinguished, lower volume, educated staff, performance modified to make it less scary/startling. Magnificent. Keep. Up. The. Good. Work.

I would love to think that both the Lion King and Nutcracker performances were considered successes and that more were planned for the future, because really, attending these my family was the source of much envy around the nation in locations that do nothing of the sort for their city's autistic population. I need this to work and catch on, and drive other places to do similar things that will similarly work and catch on. This stuff is awareness and acceptance brought into actual practical application! This is what everyone in this community WANTS.





Be sure to visit www.postitivemovementz.com to find more information, past event photos, and much more.

Thank you for your support!



Join Our 2014 Marathon Team

We are looking for runners and walkers for all events on race weekend, May 3-4, 2014

kids run, 5k, marathon relay, half marathon and full marathon As a part of the Autism Connection of PA team, we will provide you with a shirt for race day, a spaghetti dinner and free registration to the race of your choice (with fundraising minimum)!

Contact team coordinator Jennifer Salamon at autismrunpgh@gmail.com for more information



rightmark is an independent Licerose of the blue cross and olde Shield Association

The 2014 Highmark Walk for a Healthy Community Pittsburgh will take place Saturday, May 17 at Stage AE on the North Shore.

There will be 69 non-profit organizations benefitting from this year's walk. Come on out and support Autism Connection of PA!

Register at www.autismofpa.org



Behavioral Health Services

Grounded in research...

Committed to education...

Driven by hope.

Together, we will find the answers.

OUR MISSION

It is the mission of AERI Behavioral Health Services (AERI BHS) to be a leader in providing access to research-based services in order to assist individuals in reaching their ultimate potential.



For more information on how our services can be of support to you please contact us at:

1-866-727-AERI
e-mail: support@aerionline.com
www.aerionline.com

OUR SCOPE OF SERVICE

Assessment Training
Behavior Support Plans
Co-Teach Model
Home Consultation
Family Support Groups
Group Therapy
Crisis Prevention Intervention
Distinguished Speakers Bureau

Social Skills Groups IEP Support Certified Teacher Tolerance Training Individual Therapy Trauma Services Psychological Testing Advocacy Functional Behavior Assessments Screening for Mental Health Diagnosis Peer Mentor Individualized Supports Staff Training Emotion / Coping Skill Training Family Based Mental Health Services

Transition Supports





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:

Psychological Evaluations
Outpatient Therapy
Social Skill/Play Groups
Parent/Professional Workshops

Trauma Services
Family Support Groups
Focus Groups
Resource Packages for Families

Community Outreach
Sibling Support Groups
Trainings for School Districts
Summer Camps (STAPs)

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 us: 1-866-4-FBR-ASD; 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!

Nathan Speech Services

Janice Nathan, M.S., CCC-SLP Licensed Speech-Language Pathologist

Specialist Specialist Speech Therapy



IEP Support

Specializing in Individual and Social Group Therapy for Children Ages 3-14



412-363-8388

nathanspeech@aol.com

www.nathanspeech.com

If interested in advertising in the this quarterly newsletter please contact

Jennifer Salamon at 412-781-4116

AUTISM CONNECTION OF PA

35 Wilson Street, Suite 100 Pittsburgh, PA 15223

Phone: 412-781-4116 Toll Free: 800-827-9385 E-mail: news@autismofpa.org

We are on the web! www.autismofpa.org

MISSION:

The Autism Connection of PA provides a lifeline for families and individuals affected by autism.

We provide advocacy, education and support.

VISION:

We envision a community where people with autism achieve their maximum potential as they live, learn and work.

Education - Advocacy - Support



ABOARD's Autism Connection of PA is a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Your donation qualifies as a charitable deduction. ABOARD's Autism Connection of PA is registered with the Pennsylvania Department of State Bureau of Charitable Organizations. To receive a copy of the official registration and financial information, please call 800-732-0990 within Pennsylvania or visit www.dos.state.pa.us.

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Or click donate button online at <u>www.autismofpa.org</u>