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**VISION:**

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

## Annual Fall Conference

### “Discovering the Possibilities with Visual Strategies”

*Meeting the Communication, Behavior & Social Skill Challenges in Autism Spectrum Disorders*



**Linda Hodgdon M.Ed., CCC-SLP**

**Friday, October 26, 2012  
8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.**

**Four Points by Sheraton Pittsburgh Hotel, Mars, PA**

**Linda Hodgdon M.Ed., CCC-SLP** is a Speech-Language Pathologist who is internationally known as a pioneer in developing the use of visual strategies to support communication for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders and related learning challenges. Her training programs are packed with best-practices and effective ideas for using a range of low tech to high tech visual tools, including apps, video and tablets like iPads, to meet the communication, behavior and social skills needs of these students. A powerful and entertaining presenter, Linda shares practical information that inspires program participants to accomplish new goals with students immediately.

**For more information visit ABOARD's Autism Connection of PA website [www.autismofpa.org](http://www.autismofpa.org) and click Events!**

This edition brought to you by  
**The Edith L. Trees Charitable Trust**

## Executive Director Message

Dear Readers,

The experience of having Autism is a whirl of sights, sounds, feelings and ideas, and this seems to drive the pace and variety of our work. We routinely: answer phone calls and emails, speak to community groups, assemble e-blasts and newsletters, plan special events, arrange conferences, and obtain credentials. Our phenomenal volunteers and summer interns (one, a young man with autism) do database work, library entries, or help with special events. Our work gets done in bits and pieces that don't always seem to create a whole puzzle. So when we hear from families or adults who have benefitted from connecting with us, it's like hitting a home run! Those stories really bring our work into focus.

For instance, we had an outreach table at the Pittsburgh Pirates' Disability Awareness Celebration on Friday, July 6<sup>th</sup>, thanks to the great efforts of CEO, Frank Coonelly and Chaz Kellem, Diversity Manag-

er of the Pittsburgh Pirates who are so supportive of the disability community. As we talked to new families and taught others about autism, a mom stopped to say "thank you!" for helping her find her son's summer camp via our February All-Ability Camp Fair. As he cheerfully bounced up and down behind her, she said that her boy has also joined the Three Rivers Rowing dragon boat team after trying it out at our free May event. Best of all, he is the timekeeping drummer. He beamed when we told him how cool we thought this was!

Then there are the "thank you" emails we received from several families who happily spent three hours with us learning to kayak, wall climb, or practice yoga at Autism Outdoors. We heard from that often-powerful segment – grandparents – who were both relieved and pleased to see their grandchildren successfully paddling or climbing for such a long time. And people of all ages seem to get a big boost out of the Apple Autism App

Open Houses held in April and July at regional Apple stores. We owe great thanks to our community partners who help us do these kinds of outreach and who truly enjoy working with our kids and adult friends with autism.

Whenever I sit to write my message, I feel pressured to say something profound. But then I get real – who am I to think I have any of life's answers? And I realize that the most moving and lasting thing that matters most to all of us is that special look in the eyes of our kids, or an amazing insight shared by an adult friend on the spectrum, especially in response to a new experience we've provided. These reflect the true value of our work and are the most profound things of all.

Thank you for supporting us and participating in these efforts to make vital autism connections every day.

Sincerely,  
*Luciana Randall*  
Executive Director



*Luciana Randall*  
Executive Director

**"The  
Autism  
Connection  
of PA starts  
with you."**



## *Thank you to our Supporters!*

### General Donors

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### Goods Donated

Thank you for the donation of  
McDonald's Coupons used as  
incentive prizes for  
ABOARD's Autism Con-  
nection of PA Walkers at the  
Highmark Walk for a Healthy  
Community: Diane Catterall &  
Donna Enzerra

### Chinese Auction Hosted by Therese Tiger in Philadelphia

Michael and Frances Jones  
Dr. Marc and Robin Levine  
Murray and Tracy Greenfield  
Andreas and Bernadette Reist  
George and Therese Tiger

### 9th Annual Autism Walk Hosted by Kappa Delta Rho at Pitt Johnstown

Caleb Chiapetta  
Allan Walstad  
Linda Just

### School District Donations

Curwensville

### PNC Foundation Matching Gift Program

Dorothy Brailer

### Fundraiser in Honor of Autism Awareness

Hosted by the Supportive  
Services Club of the  
Community College of  
Allegheny County,  
North Campus

### 2nd Annual "Walk for Autism"

Hosted by the Greater  
Johnstown Christian  
Fellowship Early Education

### Company Donations

Nationwide Mutual Insurance  
William and Mary Gift Shoppe

### General Donation to the 12th Annual Gala

Limbach Company  
MCMP, Inc.

## **Thank you to our partners at East End Brewing for the 2012 KEG RIDE**

The 8th annual Pedal Pale Keg Ride sold out 600 registrations — after adding an extra hundred slots four days before the ride. Hosted by East End Brewing and organized by BikePGH, proceeds were

shared by ABOARD's Autism Connection of PA and BikePGH. Someone even donated \$250 to pull a keg!

Part of the magic of the Keg Ride is that the destination

is kept a secret, right up until the bikes pull over. Beginning at East End Brewing's new location on Frankstown Avenue, the procession mostly meandered through the beautiful neighborhood of Highland

Park, making a full loop around the reservoir. Then the 600 cyclists descended upon Station Street Hot Dogs where some kegs were tapped and hotdogs served.

The proceeds of the Keg Ride (\$4,510.38) was donated to ABOARD's Autism Connection of PA. Thank you so much to all who planned and participated in this great event!

**THANK YOU  
SCOTT & JULIE SMITH OF  
EAST END BREWING!**





## Recap of the 2012 Walk to Benefit ABOARD's Autism Connection of PA!

ABOARD's Autism Connection of PA participated in the Highmark Walk for a Healthy Community at Stage AE on May 19. The weather was perfect; there was entertainment, food, games and lots to see on the walk route. Thanks so much to those of you who came to Pittsburgh and walked with co-workers, family and friends. We really appreciate your time and efforts and hope that you had a great morning. And to the many of you who supported a walker or made a donation to the walk, we thank you!

In 2004 Highmark chose ABOARD as a representative of autism at the Walk for a Healthy Community. That year 12 organizations were represented at the walk 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, with 70 non-profit human services organizations participating, Stage AE was the new site of this event. Over 10,000 people registered to support these organizations. Highmark underwrites the cost of the walk so 100% of what is donated goes to these organizations.



Teams were an important factor in the success of this year's walk. Just dollars separated the totals of Team Becca Boo and Team Just a Lil Walk, while Team Crane, Team S & P and Team Ethan had their best years ever!

Money continued to be donated after walk day until the grand total, as of today, reached \$23,485, which was more than double our goal! This money funds programs that support families affected by autism here in PA.

ABOARD's Autism Connection of PA would like to thank all the Team Leaders and Teams that supported the 2012 Walk!

Team S & P  
Team Crane  
Just a Lil Walk  
Team Becca Boo  
Team Ethan  
Albinini's for ACOPa  
Team Freeport (Freeport HS)  
B.C.P.A.L. for aboard.org  
Happy's Penguins  
Benjamin's Buddies  
Hattman Walkers  
BIOMOMS  
Team Cynthia  
McMaster Clan  
Jones Family  
Team Nick (CCHS)  
Elias love  
Team Cory  
<3 Team Zoe <3



## THANK YOU TO OUR WALKERS AND DONORS!

Atticus Adams	CSC Insurance Options	H. C. Harrington	Steve Mozur	Laurie Strzalka
Nancy Albinini	Eleanor Cummings	Stan & Patti Hasselbusch	Marie Mucy	Lee Supply
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AJ Bessell	Donald Foster	Dan Knechtel	Pamel Robinson	Robert Wagner
Judith Bosack	Joy Foster	Eric Knechtel	Susan Rodarme	Ed & Paula Waling
Dorothy Brailer	Lee Foster	Joseph Knouse	Dawn Rotellini	Amy Wallace
Casey Brennan	Harvey & Melody Fox	Steve & Angela Kohler	Loretta Rotellini	Emma Walter
Julia & Ron Brewer	Alyson Frank	Renee Kotchman	Sam & Jamie Rotellini	James Walter
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			Lydia Stuart	

**Thank you to all that supported the walk!**



## *Support Group Happenings*



**ABOARD's Autism Connection of PA is the largest facilitator of autism support groups in Pennsylvania.**

**We currently  
have  
70 groups  
in  
44 counties!**



**GET CONNECTED TODAY TO  
A GROUP FOR ASD ADULTS,  
PARENTS AND SIBLINGS!**

### **ALLEGHENY COUNTY**

#### **NORTH HILLS PARENT SUPPORT GROUP**

We are a group that meets once a month to talk about what might be happening in our parents/children's lives from school, medical, home and even the stress in our lives. We are fairly unstructured because we want to allow people to have freedom to talk about what is going on today. We do not have a one belief system or treatment plan on what to do with our children. We don't endorse or bash any one protocol. If there is more information requested by a parent, we try & have another parent help them from their experience. We are nondenominational on all approaches on how to work & live with autism.

For information please contact:

Astrid Arroyo at  
412.358.0393  
la.bella@verizon.net  
Maureen Wirth at  
724.625.0284  
mhwirth@gmail.com

#### **THE BEHAVIOR CHALLENGED CHILD SEWICKLEY PARENT SUPPORT GROUP**

We have at any given time between 6 to 13 people in our group. We are still new and still learning as we go. We have had many people say how nice the group is and that they will continue to come. We are having a speaker come and join us this coming month regarding trusts for special needs children. We look forward to continued success.

For information please contact:

Christina Meditch  
412.716.6415  
cameditch@gmail.com

#### **I MATTER TOO SIBLING SUPPORT GROUP GIBSONIA**

I am the proud mother of two beautiful children. One of which is on the autism spectrum. I have found it to be difficult for my daughter, who is typical, to handle this on a daily basis. Through this group she has been able to understand about her brother's diagnosis and meet friends in similar situations. I

have come up with a lot of information as well as games and ideas that would be helpful in explaining the conditions and tools to use.

For information please contact:

Tammie Sauers 724.351.2582  
tammiesa@gmail.com

#### **TRACKS CONSULTING PARENT SUPPORT GROUP ROBINSON TOWNSHIP**

Do you have a child with autism who is school age? School is an important experience in a child's life and one that can provide many wonderful educational and social experiences. It's also true that supporting a child with autism in school often causes parents to have to answer tough questions and make difficult decisions. The TRACKS Consulting Support Group is run by three special education teachers who are dedicated to supporting families who are supporting school age children with autism. TRACKS Consulting encourages you to bring questions about IEPs, inclusion, and other topics pertaining to your child, when

## Support Group Happenings Continued

you attend. They look forward to the opportunity to answer your questions, share information and provide support! Hope to see you there!

For information please contact:

Natasha Dickson  
412.256.8722  
natashadickson@tracksconsulting.com

### **ADULT SOCIAL GROUP PITTSBURGH**

This group is for individuals with high functioning autism or Asperger's and meets once per month. This is an opportunity for them to participate in events like bowling, movies, going to dinner, visiting museums and amusement parks, or meeting for a pot-luck. The Social Outings Group is for adults on the autism spectrum who want to participate in social events in a friendly and supportive environment.

For information please contact:

Heather Conroy  
heather.a.conroy@gmail.com

### **ADULT DISCUSSION GROUP PITTSBURGH**

This is a group of 10-20 attendees who meet to discuss a variety of topics. For example, the discussion can focus on issues including the appropriate amount of 'stim', how family members respond to this, and the desire to see family and how to interact with family. They also discussed online dating along with shared a variety of experiences... both positive and negative.

For information please contact:

Rebecca Klaw 412.247.0599  
rebeccaklaw@aol.com

### **FBR Family, Social & Play Groups – Monroeville and New Kensington**

Family Behavioral Resources offers a Family Support Group and Social Skills/Play Group monthly for children with Autism Spectrum Diagnoses and their siblings. Families come together in an open forum setting to discuss various topics. Periodically guest speakers come into the group to explore special topics with the group. The social skills play group is open to children of all ages and is offered during

the time of the Family Support Group. Overseen by Behavioral Specialist Consultants and Therapeutic Support Staff, this group provides an opportunity for children to develop their socialization, play skills, and coping with each other's uniqueness and differences.

For information for the Monroeville group please call:  
412.824.005.

For information for the New Kensington group please call:  
724.337.1890.

### **BRADFORD COUNTY**

#### **P.A.S.K.A. (PARENTS OF AUTISM SPECTRUM KIDS & ADULTS)**

We are a BRAND NEW Parent Support Group. In May, when we started, we had 5 show up for an organizational meeting which was what I expected. Before then I set up a Closed Facebook Account for all parents in Bradford Counties and surrounding areas. This past meeting in June we had over 12 parents and kids for childcare. We are grateful to have this opportunity to spread the support in our county since we are few and far between.

For information please contact:

Alison Bard 570.882.8654  
alleyb4@verizon.net

### **BUTLER COUNTY**

#### **AUTISM SUPPORT GROUP @ PARENTS IN TOTO ZELIENOPLE**

We meet the 4th Thursday of the month, but we break for summer. Our next meeting will be Sept 27, noon to 2 at Parents in Toto Autism Resource Center, Zelienople. We usually have informal discussion about what is going on currently with the people at the meeting. Occasionally, we have guest speakers. We have a member who has been bringing her son's service dog that is in training. We have been talking quite a bit about transition to adulthood and housing.

For information please contact:

Catherine Lalonde  
724.538.4823  
clalonde@zoominternet.net

### **Continued on Page 13**

Call Marie Mambuca at  
ABOARD's Autism Connection  
of PA at 412-781-4116 if  
interested in attending or  
starting a support group!



# Join us for a **FREE** Family Day at



## The OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

The meadows, creek and forests of  
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**Saturday, August 4, 2012!**

**Anytime between 10:00a.m.-2:00p.m**



**Insect Safari - Creek Exploration**

**Nature Sensory Boxes - Unnatural Scavenger Hunt**

**Bird Sighting Nature Hikes - Camp Fire with Marshmallows**

**Bird Feeder Crafts & Other Nature Recycle Crafts**

**To register go to [www.autismofpa.org](http://www.autismofpa.org)**

**For more information contact**

**Rebecca Williams-Thomas 412-449-0165**





## "Celebrating Little Victories"

By Jim Walters



A meeting of the minds, or bashing of the skulls? It's a fine line.

I have two daughters, Emma and Lily. Emma is ten and 'typical' in just about every observable way. Lily is six and autistic.

I struggle sometimes celebrating Lily's victories or milestones, conflicted perhaps by some superstitious dread that I'll somehow jinx it, that a celebration of a week without any potty accidents, for example, will inevitably lead to a day with ten. I'm even worse at relaying celebratory stories to friends, because every story shared about Lily with my peers requires a recap of where she is now developmentally and where she's come from in order to frame the victory in the relative context of

what they might otherwise consider the tiniest of milestones without. It feels like a betrayal. I shared my older daughter's triumphs and tribulations. Why not Lily's?

I'm trying to get better at letting myself celebrate. It's not fair to Lily if I don't. When we celebrated her big sister Emma's milestones they were "typical" milestones, but no more valid or momentous to their relative developments. And it's denying me a little extra sunshine, and why? No rational reason that I can determine. I feel better when I allow myself to celebrate. It has to make Lily feel better too.

This morning Lily

stood very close to her big sister, just invaded her persona space, blundering happily over and standing uncomfortably close to Emma as she sat eating her morning breakfast. This is a physical closeness she rarely seeks out with anyone else unless thoroughly exhausted. Her big sister just smiled indulgently and let her hover, suffering the occasional awkward bump of heads or pull of her hair just to be close to her little sister for a while, joining our amusement, giggling good-naturedly at bonks and swipes. It was sweet, and wonderful, and I think we all allowed ourselves to celebrate a little.

I told Emma how Lily never does that with *anyone* and made a big deal of it, and I could sense her swell a little with the pride of being Lily's favorite. And when Lily started to get a little rougher, reaching up to grab Emma's hair, or pushing her fingers impulsively at Emma's face, I reached across her to ward Lily off. Emma just batted my hand aside reflexively, protectively, and said, "It's okay, Daddy," happy to share even this rough rare closeness

with her little sister.

It was a win. Tomorrow she may avoid us all like the plague, wrapped up in spinning or stimming or endless repeats of Barney or Victorious or the Wiggles. So we need to celebrate it now. Celebration doesn't mean the bar has been raised. It doesn't have to imply "one more milestone mastered." It's just a little victory. But with a little girl like Lily, every 'little' victory should be celebrated and embraced like a mastered milestone might have been for her big sister.

*Jim Walter is a married father of two daughters, one autistic, one not.*

*He blogs about his family's adventures (when permitted by his wife) under the title,*

*"Just a Lil Blog" at*

*<http://blogginglily.blogspot.com>.*

*Occasional swearing and frequent mistakes occur. . . hilarity ensues.*



*Grounded in research...  
Committed to education...  
Driven by hope.  
Together, we will find the answers.*

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

#### 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.



**1-866-727-AERI**

e-mail: [support@aerionline.com](mailto:support@aerionline.com)

[www.aerionline.com](http://www.aerionline.com)

#### OUR SCOPE OF SERVICE

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Individualized Supports  
Staff Training  
Emotion / Coping Skill Training  
Family Based Mental Health Services  
Transition Supports







**FAMILY BEHAVIORAL RESOURCES**  
FAMILY FOCUSED THERAPY



Family Behavioral Resources offers BHRS/Wrapperound 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](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!





## RIVER PEDIATRIC THERAPIES

[www.RiverPediatric.com](http://www.RiverPediatric.com)

**River Pediatric Therapies** is a private clinic in the Pittsburgh area that provides outstanding therapy to children of all ages. Our services include:

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Proud to work with:  
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Our Mission:  
We serve God, by helping  
children Surpass what  
others said they would  
never achieve.



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



412-363-8388

[nathanspeech@aol.com](mailto:nathanspeech@aol.com)

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



## 2nd Annual Autism Outdoors



As an ABOARD's Autism Connection of PA 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.

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

ABOARD's Autism Connection of PA provided our families some exciting and free outdoor activities at the 2nd Annual Autism Outdoors.

The event took place at Allegheny Commons Park at Lake Elizabeth on the North side of Pittsburgh in mid-June. Families tried kayaking, rock climbing, and other activities. There were lots of smiles and few, if any, meltdowns, probably because kids and young adults were too busy trying new things.

Thank you to the Autism Outdoors partners, sponsors and volunteers:

### Partners:

**BYS Yoga**

**Conditioning Kidz**

**Conflict Arts**

**Gymsport**

**Muddy Rose Pottery**

**Outdoor Classroom**

**Venture Outdoors**

**The YMCA Northside**

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\*\*\*\*\*

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## Support Group Happenings Continued

*Continued from Page 7*

### **LANCASTER COUNTY**

#### **SPANISH SUPPORT GROUP**

##### **“BIENAVENTURANZA”**

In January our group welcomed a TSS (Therapeutic Staff Support) professional from a local organization who gave a presentation to talk about the services and responsibilities of a TSS. All parents were able to ask valuable questions and share their own experiences with the group.

We are always trying to provide all information to our parents in Spanish. We keep close communication with IU13 and other professionals experts in autism in the area who come to our meetings and share information with our parents about IEP's, school to work transition programs, Power of Attorney for individuals with disabilities, etc. The ages of the children in our group vary from 6-19 years old.

Our meetings are the 1<sup>st</sup> Monday of every other month at Lancaster General Hospital “Dining Room 1”

For information please contact:  
Emma Gutierrez or

Alicia Ortiz 717.397.8308 or  
717.341.2980  
grupobienaventuranza  
@gmail.com

### **LEBANON COUNTY**

#### **AUTISM SPECTRUM SUPPORT GROUP**

We finished off our monthly meetings with 2 presentations by Karen Grammas, an autism specialist from Pattan talking about bullying and behavior. We held a family picnic on May 20th and then some of us went miniature golfing while the rest of us vegged out. We have a hiatus in June but will be holding swim parties in July and August.

For information please contact:  
Diane Grumbine  
717.838.7946  
diane@lebanonautism.com

### **MCKEAN COUNTY**

#### **KANE & BRADFORD PALS SUPPORT GROUP**

This month we are talking about Summer Safety. We will discuss ways to ensure our home is safe and have a fun 10 min. Family Backyard Safety Hike. We will talk about stranger danger and what a child should do if they get lost. Other areas of discussion include: pool, play-

ground, shopping, travel, and bike safety. We will take the months of July and August off for summer vacation.

For information please contact:  
Christie Chesebro  
814.362.6535  
cchesebro@guidancecenter.net

Check out  
**ABOARD's Autism  
Connection of PA  
support group  
resource page at**  
**[www.autismofpa.org](http://www.autismofpa.org)**  
or  
**<http://autism-support.org/autism-support-groups/pa-autism-support-groups/>**



***Caste Family 2nd Annual Masquerade Bowl  
Princess Lanes, Whitehall - Saturday, April 21, 2012***



Princess Lanes in Whitehall was the place to be on April 21, 2012, when the Caste Family hosted the 2nd Annual Masquerade Bowl to benefit ABOARD's Autism Connection of PA and the Caste Family Fund.

\$14,000.00 was raised as the 200 people who attended donned masks and festive cocktail attire to meet, mingle, eat, drink and bowl in a unique setting. The Lanes were transformed with candlelight, dra-



matic lighting by Gray Phoenix Design Co. and festive draping by Lendable Linens to create a lovely evening for all. Prior's Restaurant did a fabulous job providing hors d'oeuvres and pastries.

By the end of the evening, guests had danced, dined, bowled, and donated funds to help us provide a lifeline of support and information for families affected by autism in PA. Our deepest thanks go to the Caste

Family, event designer/planner, Bridget Little, all the volunteers of Project Linus that helped transform the space, and all of the sponsors, donors and guests! We look forward to next year's Bowl!

**Sponsors:**

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Pittsburgh Opera  
River Expeditions

**Thank you for your support!**





## Taming to Touch: Overcoming Sensory Issues

By Caitlin Freeman



As a person on the autism spectrum, I have struggled with sensory issues all my life. My mother describes that when I was a child, she needed to “tame me to touch like a wild animal.” When people would touch me, it felt like an electrical burning sensation. My parents learned that I could tolerate deep pressure, and I gradually grew accustomed to their touch. Unfortunately, everyone else’s touch was still so uncomfortable that as a child I would avoid other people and I would bite anyone who came too close. Predictably, this behavior greatly limited my social interaction. My extreme sensitivity to touch extended through my teenage years and into adulthood.

By my early twenties, I had severe sensory and social prob-

lems that I was determined to solve. The resources in my small town were limited, but there was one person there who taught a sensory integration method called the Alexander Technique. On the recommendation of a family friend, I started taking lessons in 2003. Because of my aversion to touch, I was initially apprehensive about taking Alexander Technique lessons, however my teacher’s touch was soothing, and I gradually learned how to calm my overactive nervous system. Over the course of that year, I also learned how to integrate my senses of movement and balance. Even more importantly, without my constant sensory distress, I became more aware of the social world around me. For the first time in my life, I

was able to make lasting friendships and even meet my boyfriend of the past seven years.

My success with the Alexander Technique motivated me to train as a teacher to work with other people on the autism spectrum. Being a person with autism gives me unique insight into the sensory issues that people on the spectrum face. Since I have had many of the problems that my students experience, I understand the way that they feel, and I offer solutions that address their specific issues.

*Caitlin Freeman currently has an Alexander Technique practice in Pittsburgh, where she specializes in pain management, movement coordination, and sensory integration for people on the autism spectrum. She is also an adjunct professor at Point Park University, teaching the Alexander Technique to performing artists. On Saturday, September 15, Caitlin will present a seminar at ABOARD’s Autism Connection of PA demonstrating the use of the Alexander Technique for sensory integration and pain relief.*





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As a local nonprofit 501(c)(3), ABOARD's Autism Connection  
of PA focuses every hour and invests every dollar in PA!

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

*A copy of the official registration and financial information of ABOARD's Au-  
tism Connection of PA may be obtained from the PA Department of State by calling  
toll free within PA, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.*

### ABOARD's Autism Connection of PA

35 Wilson St., Suite 100  
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For United Way Campaigns outside of  
Allegheny County, include our mailing  
address, & phone number on your  
pledge form to help your local United  
Way process your pledge.

## The Autism ID Card

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.

**I Have Autism:**  
My medical condition impairs my ability to communicate with others. As a result I may have difficulty understanding your directions, and I may not be able to respond to your questions. I may also become physically agitated if you touch me or move too close to me.  
Please do not interpret this behavior as a refusal to cooperate. I am not intentionally defying your instructions.  
© 2012 SEOPittsburgh.com Over>Please ➔

I am requesting that you contact the person noted below on my behalf; s/he will confirm my diagnosis and provide information you may need about my identity. Sincerely,  
  
My Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Contact Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
My Printed Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Contact Printed Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
My Printed Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_ Contact Printed Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_  
This Card Approved by the Allegheny County Office of the Public Defender, 505 Park Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15219

ABOARD's Autism 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](mailto:support@autismofpa.org)

## The Eureka Moment

by Marie Mambuca

There can be many eureka moments in a person's life. And there should be.

"EUREKA!" is used to express triumph upon finding or discovering something. I think a lot about eureka moments during my conversations with parents: When we hear of a new intervention, therapy, educational placement, or law that now may fix this, we feel elated.

Unfortunately, this feeling is often short-lived. And that is no one's fault. There can be no blame related to autism spectrum disorders. So for now we are sometimes obsessed with a new intervention, therapy, placement, or law that will hope-

fully help our child, our family and ourselves.

On one hand, we get to yell "EUREKA!" a lot... on the other hand, well....

My son is 20 years old. I have a lot of experience and history with autism. I've had to start exercising to reduce the stress from all the "EUREKA'S!" my body has had to withstand. And yet I still wake up each day ready for anything. I know I share that feeling with all the families and professionals I've ever spoken with. So, here's to those "EUREKA!" moments. Let's continue to feel hope for our child's future.

*For the past 12 years, Marie has been the Family Service Coordinator for ABOARD's Autism Connection of PA. She received her BA in Psychology from La Roche College and is pursuing a Masters in Special Education at Pitt.*

*Marie helps families affected by an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) diagnosis and the professionals who serve them. She provides them with information and resources including those related to therapies, services, support groups, and educational rights. She also manages our client database as well as the support group network.*

*What Marie enjoys most about working at ABOARD's Autism Connection of PA is that she can be herself...a parent of a child with autism.*

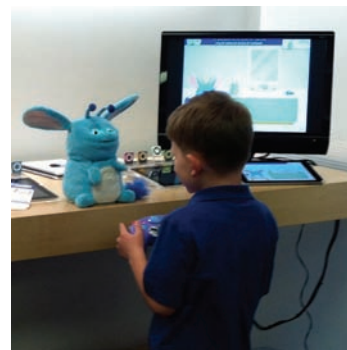
*Marie is a single parent of two children, one with and one without autism.*

## Apple Stores Open Houses

Thank you to Apple Stores located in Shadyside and Southhills for hosting ABOARD's Autism

Connection of PA families to explore all that the iPad can do to help children and individuals with autism. Apple experts were on hand to answer attendee questions. Advice was provided on how to get iPads covered through insurance, what are the best apps available and how to use the apps!

Stay posted for more Apple Open House Events coming to your area!





## Family Fun Day at Muddy Rose Pottery

Muddy Rose hosted ABOARD's Autism Connection of PA families for a day of fun at their studio. Each family got to have private time in the studio

and worked on the pottery wheel.

The kids got to spend time "playing" in the mud! Even families who worried about their child not enjoy-

ing dirty hands were pleasantly surprised how the kids joined right in!

Children's faces grew excited as they watched and felt the clay form around their tiny fingers. The wheel proved a soothing and mesmerizing tool that enabled everyone the ability to unleash their creative voice from within.

The kids also got to paint a special piece. Each one was created uniquely using different types of beads and a multitude of colors. It was great watching them ponder what was their special piece to paint and take home.

Everyone also received the "Muddy Rose Pottery Activity Book" along with snacks and drinks.

**Thank you to Muddy Rose Pottery for hosting this day for the ABOARD's Autism Connection of PA families.**

For more information on pottery benefits for special needs and Muddy Rose please contact:

Janelle Farrand  
Muddy Rose Pottery  
<http://muddyrospottery.blogspot.com/>  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mvc9XUyLrc&feature=related>  
412-583-0764



## Runners take your mark!

GNC, Pittsburgh Three Rivers Marathon Launch  
August 17 at 7 p.m. on Liberty Avenue



Run from 17th street in the strip to 6th street downtown Pittsburgh to an after party in Market Square.

**Participate in the race and get sponsors/donors to help raise money for ABOARD's Autism Connection of PA!**

Go to <http://www.libertymile.org> to register

Select Giving Back Mile Option

Enter Access Code: ABOARDMILE2012 on registration form.

For more information contact 412-586-7785 or [info@libertymile.org](mailto:info@libertymile.org).

## *Learn to Row and Paddle For Individuals with ASD*

It was a beautiful sunny afternoon on June 3rd, 2012, when Three Rivers Rowing Association hosted ABOARD's Autism Connection of PA family and friends.

By the end of the day, everyone got a chance to test out the indoor tanks and learn how to row and paddle, explore the indoor rowers, and use the equipment. It was all topped off with an exciting ride on the dragon boat which included listening to the drums beating to keep the rowers in sync while paddling up the river!

We want to thank all the Three Rivers Rowing associates for the work they did that day to host our families and friends!

If you are interested in the rowing program, there is still time to join. This is a great program geared for ages 12 years and older, including adults. All

functioning levels are welcome as individuals can move along at their own pace. Athletes have the opportunity to compete in local and national regattas. Some athletes choose not to compete and simply enjoy coming to the facility, making friends and enjoying the freedom found on the river.

Three Rivers Rowing has a very knowledgeable staff with many experienced volunteers providing 1:1 assistance during the regular program if required.

Contact:

Joy Nix

[joynix@threeriversrowing.org](mailto:joynix@threeriversrowing.org)

412.298.2315/412.231.8772.

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**Thank  
you  
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### **Take Your Favorite Autism Organization to Work Day! - Lunch and Learn Presentations for your office!**

Executive Director Luciana Randall, an experienced autism trainer, brings autism to the workplace. Why?

1. **Better Work - Life Balance** - autism weighs heavy on the minds of our families. Learn about autism, from brain difference to communication and behavior challenges. Help co-workers understand and be more supportive and better able to talk about this often-taboo subject.
2. **Learn about autism.** Find out more about this most mysterious and increasingly frequent disorder and how your corporate team can help!
3. **Early detection is key!** Learn signs and symptoms of autism and find out where to turn for your children, grandchildren, or neighbors who are showing concerning behaviors.
4. **"I think I might have this!"** is a common reaction to Ms. Randall's presentations. Learn best practices to weave the gifts and challenges of brain differences into the workplace, and how to support co-workers who are gifted yet a little quirky.

**CALL OR EMAIL TODAY! [lu@autismofpa.org](mailto:lu@autismofpa.org) or 412.781.4116.**





## ABOARD's Autism Connection of PA

Is Partnering With The

YMCA of Allegheny to Provide

**Programs for Families and Individuals With Autism.**



### **PHYSICAL FITNESS, SPORTS, CRAFTS, SWIMMING & FAMILY ACTIVITIES**

Stay Posted for more information to come and registration for our first family night, swim lessons and sports camp at the YMCA of Allegheny!

For more information contact Rebecca Williams-Thomas at 412.449.0165

or email [events@autismofpa.org](mailto:events@autismofpa.org).

# Join!

## 2012 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 for the year of 2012, a link on our website to yours, and discounted exhibitor rates at our conferences.

### Yearly Membership

**Dues: \$400**

### Prorated Membership From Mid-Year Until Year-End

**Dues: \$200**

### Contact

**Jennifer Fulton at  
412-781-4116 or  
Jennifer@autismofpa.org  
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today and start  
experiencing the  
benefits!**

## *ABOARD'S Autism Connection of PA Organization/Corporate Partners*

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***Thank you!***



## ***FALL SATURDAY SEMINAR***

### ***Registration is open!***

#### ***The Alexander Technique for Sensory Integration & Pain Relief:***

*A Novel Approach for Helping People with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their Caregivers*

*Presented by Caitlin Freeman*

***Saturday, September 15, 2012***

***10 a.m. - 2 p.m.***

*ABOARD's Autism Connection of PA Office*

*34 Wilson St. #100, Pittsburgh, PA 15223*

Many children and adults with ASD have sensory processing challenges. These individuals often have difficulty taking in information from their senses of touch, movement, balance, hearing, and vision and integrating this information into a meaningful whole. This presentation will explain these sensory issues from the perspective of an adult with ASD and Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD). Participants will learn simple, effective techniques for helping individuals with ASD and SPD achieve sensory integration. Parents, teachers, and therapists who work with individuals with ASD and SPD will benefit from these practical strategies. Individuals with ASD and SPD will also benefit, and are encouraged to attend.

#### ***The Social Scoop!***

*Promoting Social Competence*

*Presented by Michelle Lubetsky*

***Saturday, October 6, 2012***

***9 a.m. - 3 p.m.***

*Allegheny Intermediate Unit*

*475 E. Waterfront Drive, Homestead, PA 15120*

This session will address the needs of individuals with Asperger's Syndrome, High Functioning Autism, Non-Verbal Learning Disability, or related disorders to **evaluate** social situations AND **apply** appropriate social responses. Sample instructional tools will be shared. References include the works of Michelle Garcia Winner, *Think Social*, and Scott Bellini, *Building Social Competence*.

**Continuing Education Credits Available!**

**For more information and/or to register go to**

**[www.autismofpa.org](http://www.autismofpa.org)**

## AUTISM CONNECTION OF PA

35 Wilson Street,  
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Phone: 412.781.4116  
Toll Free: 800.827.9385  
E-mail: [news@autismofpa.org](mailto:news@autismofpa.org)

---

We are on the web!

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

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## MISSION:

*ABOARD's Autism Connection of PA provides a lifeline to support families and individuals affected by autism. We give hope and information to families and professionals by connecting them with each other, and to the resources that enable them to navigate their unique challenges.*

## 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.  
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sylvania or visit [www.dos.state.pa.us](http://www.dos.state.pa.us).*

Yes, I want to help ABOARD's Autism Connection of PA

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