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Announcing our new Community Education Room!

We are scheduling workshops, seminars and support groups:

- Thursday, May 15th, 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
MCHAT training with Dr. Joseph McAllister, Ph.D.
- Monday, May 19th, 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
Autism and Sexuality with Shawn McGill, MSW
- Friday, May 30th, 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
Thinking in Speech: Promoting Independent Problem Solving in Children with ASD with Janice Nathan, M.S., CCC-SLP
- Monday, June 24th (and every 4th Monday of the month following), 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Grandparent Group
- Thursday, June 26th, 11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
"I've Been Bullied Too" Group

**All events can be found at our website
www.autismofpa.org
with links to registration**

VISION:

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

Executive Director Message



Luciana Randall
Executive Director

**“The
Autism
Connection
of PA starts
with you.”**



ABOARD's

**autism
CONNECTION
OF PA**

You may know that the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust reached out to us early last year to begin planning the autism-friendly Lion King performance. One of their downtown neighbors, the Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, worked very closely with us on their own to create autism understanding amongst their ballet students, staff, board and volunteers in preparation for the first in the nation autism-friendly Nutcracker performance.

We often experience the stress of judgment – we pick up on people's glances, stares, or rude comments. We become so conditioned to feeling judged that sometimes it's hard to know if the slights are real or imagined, and sometimes we borrow trouble unnecessarily. So we entered the planning process cautiously, concerned about many things. We were being invited into some really fancy places by some well-meaning people. Did they know what they were getting themselves into? Were their volunteers or front-line staff on board? Would our families and adults buy the deep-discounted tickets, or would they “wait and see” how this went for others? What if we broke something in the fancy house called the Benedum Theater?

What if one of our patrons bolted into the street? What if...lots of “what if's” were in our minds.

As in many situations involving autism or other differences, sometimes you have to take a leap of faith. That seems fitting especially when you think about the ballet or the Lion King – there was lots of leaping involved all the way around. The Cultural Trust, the Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, and we all took leaps of faith.

As a result, we had two phenomenal and unique experiences. And moving forward, we are planning more.

One of my dreams is bringing people of all kinds together in meaningful experiences. So removing the cost factor, we had a first in the nation gallery crawl downtown. People on the spectrum and their families visited galleries, participated in a drum circle, watched a film in an arts movie house, and made their own art. Many of us do these things for fun – it's a cool, free, lively experience and we're so gratified that we have this awesome group at the Cultural Trust (now that they “know what they are getting into”) to help put it together with us.

The Pittsburgh International Children's Festival, May 14-18, will feature two sensory-friendly productions this year, Little Steps and Miracoco. This is another Cultural Trust event which we are more than welcomed to participate in – the red carpet once again has been rolled out for you, readers! Please take advantage of one of these special days and take a little leap, with support, knowing that the organizers really do “get” you and want to see you having fun.

Trust me, drop your skepticism, save up your nickels for future theater event tickets and go for an unforgettable experience – the positive kind. There are no guarantees in life, so there's no guarantee you'll have a bad time, even though many of us convince ourselves that will happen. But try to trust.

Sincerely,

Luciana M. Randall

FISA Foundation Grant

The Autism Connection of PA is proud to announce that we are the recipient of a FISA Foundation Grant.

Our award is to be spent on two projects.

1. Early autism screening in minority populations – research shows that babies and toddlers in minority settings are not identified as quickly as young children in other communities. Poor access to quality healthcare and biases on the part of clinicians keep those with autism from being diagnosed quickly, leading to more symptoms and delayed treatment. We will be assisting those who work with this population in providing screening tools and activities to support early detection and treatment. Our goal is to have 300 little ones screened this year through our outreach efforts.

2. Pilot film: How To Care of Myself, Part One – in collaboration with Pittsburgh Filmmakers, we are writing and producing a film featuring an actor with autism. He will describe the importance of good hygiene, and then demonstrate key steps in the showering process including: have a clean towel ready, keep the water in the shower (shutting a shower curtain or door completely,) using a proper amount of shampoo, etc. The camera will focus on and freeze frame, with captions, key images such as shampoo in the hand or scrubbing on top of the head. We'll keep it clean – most of the shots will be over the shoulder looking out, to support visual learners and a first-person perspective. Screenshots will be captioned and downloadable for printing and laminating for home use.

We are so grateful to our funding partners at FISA for giving us an opportunity to make the best autism connections possible – for the community at large, and for individuals with autism spectrum disorders.



The mission of FISA Foundation is to build a culture of respect and improve the quality of life for three populations in southwestern Pennsylvania: women, girls, and people with disabilities. During their long history, beginning with roots planted in the early 1900s, the organization's focus on these three populations has continually evolved to meet the changing needs of the community.

Thank you to our Supporters!

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Support Group Happenings

WPAL (Western Pa Parents of Autism and Learning Differences) Beaver County

Please Join Us!

We meet the third Friday (7-9pm) of each month at New Horizon School in Beaver, PA. Child care is provided. Refreshments will be served.

For additional information contact:

Jane Stadnik

724-462-7691

jane.jschmitt@gmail.com

You can also contact us through our Facebook page ~ Western PA Parents of Autism and Learning Differences (WPAL)

There will also be a NEW Sibling Support Group meeting at the same time.

The group is called SAME (as you and me)

Questions and information:

Elaine Carcaise

724-847-7849

ecarcaise@comcast.net

Circle of Hope (Serving Centre & Huntingdon County)

A connection for those touched by disability (developmental or medical)

Come celebrate the different abilities of those in the Special Needs Community!!

Location: Halfmoon Christian Fellowship Church
1776 Halfmoon Valley Road

Port Matilda, PA 16870

Pizza and Drinks are on us!!!

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**ALL FAMILIES, ALL CHILDREN AND ADULTS
ALWAYS WELCOME!!!**

Group Leader/Facilitator

Angie LaVanish

814-386-1826

alavanish@live.com

I Matter Too Sibling Support Group Allegheny County

Our group is designed for siblings of children on the spectrum. It allows the kids to feel understood and gives them a chance to share their frustrations and feel good stories among their peers. I also teach the basics of ASD. I try to touch on many of the spectrum diagnosis' relatable to the kids in the group. We meet at 3:00 p.m. the 2nd Sunday of every month at:
Precious Needs Sensory item and Respite Store
3625 Bakerstown Rd., Gibsonia, PA 15044
724-351-2582

North Hills Support Group for Parents with Children on the Spectrum Allegheny County

We are a small group of parents who have children ranging from 3 years old up to 18 years old that have been diagnosed with a form of autism. We support each other by learning what works for us and has been successful for our kids, whether it be behavior, diet, or therapies. We don't promote ONE single type of therapy /specialist/etc. We share information and ideas, and bring to the table a lot of resources from different conferences, forums, etc that we've attended.

Meetings are held once a month (every 3rd Tuesday) at North Hills Christian Church on Thompson Run Road in the North Hills.

To find out about upcoming meeting dates, please contact:

Lisa Gordon

412-443-0142

lisagord1@msn.com

Support Group Happenings continued

Local Autism and Related Disorders Support Group (Montour, Columbia, Luzerne, Northumberland, Union and Snyder Counties and Beyond!)

Our winter meetings were limited due to lack of attendance, but our parents, friends, siblings and affected individuals continue to visit in small groups, on the phone, online via email, the website and most often, via Facebook. One of our moms has organized a drumming class that is enjoyed by many (and who would have thought so many sensory fragile people would enjoy drumming?!)

We are in the process of sending out the registration forms for our 16th season of CampEmerge, A weekend Camp for Families Touched by Autism. CampEmerge is held at Camp Victory, a wonderful site in Millville, PA.

Interested families should contact: Kathy or Jerry porkey72@aol.com

We are always interested in getting more volunteers, too!

Autism Support Group at Parents in Toto, Zeligonople

Butler County

We meet the 4th Thursday from noon to 2 at Parents in Toto Autism Resource Center in Zeligonople. We have been having discussions about guardianship and housing. Discussion topics depend on what issues the members need to talk about. We don't meet in June, July or August.

Contact:

Catherine Lalonde
clalonde@zoominternet.net
724-473-0175

NEW GROUP!

Fayette County, HALO

Contact Kim Elayazra for more information.
halo4autism@yahoo.com
724-245-8489

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



Lily Walter, along with mom, Leslie, had fun at Bricolage, taking part in the drumming demonstration

First Annual Art March!

Families and young adults gathered in Pittsburgh's Cultural District on Sunday afternoon, March 30th, to visit current exhibits, try out their hand at drumming with a professional musician and teacher, and make their own artistic creations. Thanks to all who participated especially Pittsburgh Cultural Trust, Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, SPACE gallery, Vince Wallace (on drums!) Creative Citizens Studio, Toby Fraley, Fly Space, the Harris Theater, and Bricolage!

Autism Connection of PA staff members Marie Mambuca and Jennifer Salamon, along with volunteer Stacie Stonebraker, helped with the arts and crafts portion of the day





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Saturday, May 17, 2014

Stage AE on the North Shore

Registration and check-in begins at 7:45 a.m.

5k Walk: 9:00 a.m.

One Mile Fun Walk: 9:15 a.m.

Join us for a morning of fun,
prizes, food, beverages and music!

Register at www.autismofpa.org



Philanthropy at Phipps

14th Annual Gala

To Benefit Autism Connection of PA



Guests and Autism Connection supporters gathered on February 8, 2014, at the phenomenal Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens. Our fantastic gala chairperson, MJ Crane, coordinated the event which featured motivational speeches by Glade Run CEO and Grandin Award winner, Dr. Charles Lockwood, Pirates president Frank Coonelly, our honorary co-chair and Rona Nesbit, Executive Vice President of Community Champion Honoree, The Pittsburgh Cultural Trust.

(from left to right) Gala chairperson, MJ Crane; Autism Connection of PA Board of Directors Treasurer, Steve Crane; Honorary Chairperson, Frank Coonelly; Debbie Coonelly



(from left to right) Autism Connection of PA Board of Directors Chair, Jennifer Modell; Grandin Award finalist, Tricia Shelton, Ed.D.; Grandin Award finalist, Sharon Greene

Thank you to our tremendous Gala sponsors and generous friends who make autism connections possible all year long!

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Together, we will find the answers.*

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 MISSION

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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:

-  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!

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If interested in advertising in the
this quarterly newsletter,
please contact
Jennifer Salamon at 412-781-4116

"I Run Cross Country!"

By: Kathleen Strickland

Late in the spring of the year Ryan was in 7th grade, the middle school/high school cross country coach called his mother to ask if Ryan would be allowed to join the cross country team in the fall. Ryan's mom's first reaction was to make sure the coach was calling the right parents. Her Ryan, diagnosed with autism at the age of three, was built like a runner, tall and gangly, but Ryan didn't seem a likely prospect for a team. He ran with an unusual gait, and didn't really care for physical activity of any kind! Having had physical therapy for years, with communication the most challenging aspect of his autism, his mom had a hard time picturing him as part of a team. The coach assured her that he had the right Ryan, and said he had asked Ryan if he was interested, and although we know Ryan had no idea what was being asked, Ryan had agreed to give it a try. Ryan likes to please people, especially teachers, so his mom didn't want to assume anything, and although she was somewhat hesitant, she decided to encourage him to try.

Late that summer, Ryan began to train. His coach was patient, and the rest of the team was accepting, although after trying to engage him in conversation on several occasions and getting no response, they realized their new teammate was a young man of few words! The captain of the team, Clayton, had been in Ryan's class since elementary school, and he made sure he included Ryan in everything, from team huddles to end-of-the-season celebration parties. What a wonderful, natural opportunity for Ryan to be a part of a social group of peers.

At first, running cross country posed a variety of challenges. Ryan has many sensory issues, and consequently has always had a problem getting wet in the rain. To see him run to a car when a few drops of rain fell, he looked as if the raindrops hitting him were actually painful. Now he had to run in all kinds of weather -- rain, cold, heat, and mud. What amazed us is that when running cross country, Ryan handled all those weather conditions. We saw him soaked with rain, freezing cold, awash in sweat, and covered in mud, but he always finished the race. That's what cross country runners do!

In the first year Ryan ran, he usually came in close to last, but always to the cheers and encouragement of the spectators at the finish line. He felt uncomfortable in the crowd at the beginning of the race, so when the gun sounded, he would start off slowly to find a place separated from the others. It was a year before he realized, and only after his mom told him, that he could pass other runners if he was able. Rules needed to be spelled out and behaviors not assumed. In cross country, runners compete with themselves to improve their times, so no matter where Ryan placed, he didn't hurt his teammates' standings.

By the third year Ryan ran, he actually lettered in cross country! He now passed people, paid attention to his times, and usually came in somewhere in the middle of the group. Most importantly, he was able to tell people he is a runner, and he has grown not only physically to 6 feet tall, but he's grown socially as well. He rides the bus with the team, has learned to wait hours for his turn to run at tournaments, and attends the year-end banquets to accept his awards and certificates. Clayton is still his friend, and he includes Ryan whenever possible. Clayton even attends an ESY camp with Ryan in the summer as his "buddy."

Cross country running, a team sport that has a solitary aspect to it, has been a perfect sport for Ryan. Now, when people ask him what his hobbies are, he can say with confidence, "I run cross country!"

Kathleen Strickland is Ryan's grandmother and a retired professor and Dean of Education at Slippery Rock University. She is active in autism support activities and serves on the board at Glade Run Lutheran Services.



Thank you to the following 2014 Organization members with Autism Connection of PA. Memberships for 2014 are being accepted!

Join!

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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.

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
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AUTISM CONNECTION OF PA

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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

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