

Spring 2018

The West Virginia Autism Training Center @ Marshall University Magazine, Spring 2018

West Virginia Autism Training Center

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The West Virginia

AUTISM

Training Center

@ Marshall University

Intersections

PLUS:

Gender Transition and Asperger's

Writing on the Spectrum

Autism Storytelling Series: ADD

Camp Connections

SPRING 2018 ISSUE

WV ATC FACTS

THE MISSION OF THE AUTISM TRAINING CENTER is to provide support to individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder as they pursue a life of quality. This is done through appropriate education, training, and support for professional personnel, family members, guardians, and others important in the life of the person with autism.

- WV ATC serves the entire state of West Virginia
- WV ATC serves individuals of all ages
- WV ATC provides training in autism for more than 2000 people annually
- Tier I, Tier II, and Tier III services are provided no cost to registered families
- WV ATC sponsors the College Support Program for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder
- WV ATC collaborates with the West Virginia Department of Education Office of Special Programs and the Autism Society of West Virginia

For more information contact:
WV Autism Training Center
Old Main 316
1 John Marshall Drive
Huntington, West Virginia 25755
Toll Free: 800-344-5115
All others: 304-696-2332



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WVATC

@ Marshall University

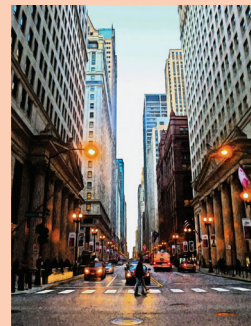
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*Cover Photograph was captured by
WV Autism Training Center
Business Manager, Beth Tappan*

*Date: March, 2015
Location: Jackson & LaSalle, Chicago, IL
Title: City Crossing
Artist: Elizabeth Tappan*

A photograph of Marshall University. In the foreground, a brick wall features a silver metal sign with the text "MARSHALL UNIVERSITY" in dark blue, serif, all-caps letters. Below the sign is a flower bed with pink, white, and blue flowers. In the background, a large, multi-story red brick building with white window frames and a prominent tower with crenellations is visible. The building is partially obscured by lush green trees and bushes. The sky is clear and blue.

MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

Greetings

From the Executive Director



From the Executive Director

Marc Ellison, Ed.D.

Greetings, from the West Virginia Autism Training Center!

Intersections – those crossroads we all encounter, eventually– have long been used as a metaphor for important aspects of life. Greek philosopher Aristotle is credited with saying: “At the intersection where your gifts, talents, and abilities meet a human need; therein you will discover your purpose.”

That’s as true today as it was 2,500 years ago.

Intersections are all about making informed choices as options are presented to us. Do I turn my car right or left at a four-way stop sign ahead? Should I ask that person out on a date, or not? Is taking that new job offer a good idea, or should I stay where I am? Should I help that stranger in need, or keep on walking past her?

The choices we make from options available to us affect our lives for good or for bad, and sometimes in dramatic fashion. It’s important to remember that the availability of choice is, perhaps, the most important part of making decisions. Most poor decisions can be corrected; living a life without choice, however, is akin to living a life imprisoned.

Without choice, one can never discover one’s purpose.

WV ATC’s Spring, 2018 magazine is themed on “intersections.” Invited authors reflect on topics that occur in everyone’s life: employment, sexuality, education, mental and emotional wellness, and the importance of feeling connected to a community. Along the way, too, you’ll get updates on what’s happening around the state in regard to autism awareness, acceptance, and services.

April 2018, when this magazine is published, is Autism Awareness Month. Awareness efforts have helped those who live day-to-day with autism have more choice than ever before. But perhaps we are at an intersection between awareness and acceptance. And to get to acceptance – true inclusion in our society – we have to cross that intersection.

Let’s do that together.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "m ellison". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Marc Ellison, Ed.D.
Executive Director
The WV Autism Training Center

Editor’s Note:

Dear Readers and Friends,

A quick note of thanks goes out to all contributors to this issue of the WV Autism Training Center Magazine. The honesty, courage, and artistry in your stories and perspectives are inspiring. We thank you!

We seek the stories, art, and ideas of our entire readership, especially those from individuals with ASD, and want to help contributors share those experiences. We welcome and support all communication styles and are ready to help new contributors dive into the fun of publishing!

As always, we strive to bring you the highest quality magazine experience possible. We want to hear from you and welcome any letters, suggestions or inquiries. Please contact the editor at nelsona@marshall.edu.

Thank you for reading and please keep in touch.

Andrew Nelson

Trainings, Events, and News

Autism Across the Lifespan Conference: www.marshall.edu/atc/2018-autism-across-lifespan

Our second annual Autism Across the Lifespan Conference will be held on the **Marshall University campus in Huntington, WV, on September 6-7!** See below for registration and session information.

Register at www.marshall.edu/atc/2018-autism-across-lifespan



September 6-7, 2018

Autism Across the Lifespan Conference

Featured Speakers

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Day 1 – Brenda Smith Myles, Ph.D.</p> <p><i>Session 1: Meeting All the Needs of Individuals with ASD: Comprehensive Planning that Leads to Optimal Outcomes</i></p> <p><i>Session 2: The Comprehensive Autism Planning System: Ensuring that Individuals' Needs are met in School, Home, and Community</i></p> |  |
| <p>Day 2 – Peter Gerhardt, Ed. D.</p> <p><i>Session 1 – Adulthood Begins in Preschool: Targeting Skills that Make a Difference in Adulthood.</i></p> <p><i>Session 2 – Sexuality Education and Individuals with ASD: What We Know and What We Don't Know</i></p> |  |

Additional Topics to include:

- ABA Programming
- Bullying and Autism
- Relationship Building
- Social Communication Training

- Early Bird Registration through May 15, 2018 AND Parent Stipend: \$75 for one day, and \$125 for both days
- Regular registration rate \$90 for one day and \$150 for both days



The College Program for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

High School Summer Transition Program



- Enroll in one college level 3-credit hour course with an individualized support plan
- Experience independent living in Marshall University's residence halls
- Navigate the balance between academic and free time
- Develop social skills during Discovery Group sessions and extra-curricular activities
- Create relationships with mentors and other students with ASD



Admission to Marshall University is required

Deadline for applications is May 1st!

For more information, visit www.marshall.edu/collegeprogram or 304-696-2332





WV AUTISM MENTOR TRAINING

www.marshall.edu/atc/2018-mentor-training

EARLY BIRD REGISTRATION UNTIL MAY 1, 2018!

The 2018 Autism Mentor trainings, sponsored by the West Virginia Autism Training Center, will take place in various locations on several dates in June 2018.

Register early as registration at some locations may be capped due to limited space!

Mentor I only: \$100

Mentor II only: \$100

Mentor I and Mentor II: \$200

- Eastern Panhandle – June 25-26 (Mentor I) & June 27-28 (Mentor II)
Blue Ridge Community and Technical College
13650 Apple Harvest Drive, Martinsburg, WV 25403
Time: 9:00am to 4:00pm
- North Area – June 18-19 (Mentor I) and June 25-26 (Mentor II)
Location TBA
Fairmont, WV
Time: 8:30am to 3:30pm
- Mountain Area – June 18-19 (Mentor I) and June 20-21 (Mentor II)
Erma Byrd Center, Room E34
300 University Drive, Beckley, WV 25801
Time: 8:30am to 3:30pm
- South Area – June 18-19 (Mentor I) and June 20-21 (Mentor II)
Bridge Valley Community & Technical College, Applied Technology Center
1200 Science Park Drive, South Charleston, WV 25303
Time: 9:00am to 4:00pm

Register by following the link above or calling 304-696-2332

Ruth Sullivan Rally for Autism®

www.rallyforautism.org

The 17th Ruth Sullivan Rally for Autism® will take place on **April 28, 2018 in Huntington, WV**. Please follow the link above for more information and to register!

*Participants are **highly** encouraged to arrive 30-45 minutes early to get your event packet and be ready for the start!*



UPCOMING NATIONAL CONFERENCES

50th Annual Autism Society National Conference

July 10-12, 2018

Empowering Us for the Future

Hyatt Regency, Bethesda Maryland & Capitol Hill, District of Columbia

www.autism-society.org/get-involved/conference

2018 National Autism Conference at Penn State

August 6–9, 2018

The Penn Stater Conference Center Hotel

State College, Pennsylvania

autism.outreach.psu.edu

OCALICON 2018

November 14-16, 2018

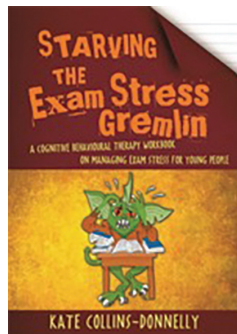
Greater Columbus Convention Center

Columbus, Ohio

www.conference.ocali.org

News from the Autism Training Center Lending Library

We recently added new titles to our lending library!

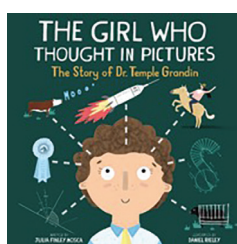


[Starving the Exam Stress Gremlin: A Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Workbook on Managing Exam Stress for Young People](#) by Kate Collins-Donnelly (2018, Jessica Kingsley Publishers)

www.amazon.com/Starving-Exam-Stress-Gremlin-Behavioural/dp/1849056986

Starving the Exam Stress Gremlin presents the reader with a basic understanding of why exam distress occurs for some students and not others, then provides helpful, practical solutions designed to help reduce stress and improve performance.

From the editor: "Stressed out by exams? Then the exam stress gremlin is in town! Exam fears and worries are his favourite foods, and the more of these you feed him, the bigger he gets and the more stressed you become. But he can be stopped! Starve him of stress-related thoughts, feelings and behaviours and feel him and your stress fade away!"



[The Girl Who Thought in Pictures: The Story of Dr. Temple Grandin](#) by Julia Finley Mosca (2017, Innovation Press)

The Girl Who Thought in Pictures, illustrated by Daniel Rieley, is a children's book designed to inspire young children who may question how their life may be affected by a diagnosis of autism, or who just want to know more about how autism may prove beneficial to exploring their interests. The book may also help neurotypical children recognize the value of developing friendships with classmates diagnosed with autism.

To learn more about this title and our lending library at the WV Autism Training Center please call 304-696-2332 or visit our website at www.marshall.edu/atc/lending-library.

Meet the Autism Training Center Staff: **SCOTT SHORT**



Title/Role: Family Coordinator
Liaison

How long have you worked with the WV ATC?

Roughly 5 + Years. Previously, I was housed at the WVATC as a satellite program working in the field of ASD and genetic research for about 8 years so I was already quite familiar with most of the staff.

How did you become interested in supporting individuals with autism?

I became passionate about supporting individuals with autism when ASD impacted my family on a personal level. I am the parent of an adult daughter on the autism spectrum. Since her diagnosis, I have been involved with ASD on both a personal and professional level.

What are your interests/passions regarding supporting people with autism?

I'm really interested in focusing on positive outcomes for families affected by ASD. Each family is unique and has their own personal goals they hope to see achieved. I want to be part of the process that will help motivate and support families and their loved ones

with ASD so as they may have an opportunity for the best quality of life possible. The scope of my professional and personal work concentrates on children with ASD becoming adults. It is imperative that we provide them with the appropriate tools and strategies to ensure as much success as possible to prepare them for independent living, competitive employment, and/or community integration.

What are a few things you like most about working for the WVATC?

I appreciate the vision the WVATC staff has in supporting families of individuals with ASD and the focus on providing services throughout the state of West Virginia. I admire the work of my colleagues and their dedication to making a difference for each diverse family that we support. It's great to be part of this process as the WVATC thrives and moves forward.

Any future trainings or workshops you write this question?

It was great having the opportunity to present and be a part of the first annual Autism Across the Lifespan Conference held at Marshall University last year. The presentation was geared toward supporting educational transitions and focused on adulthood outcomes. This year's Autism Across the Lifespan Conference at Marshall University is guaranteed to be even bigger with an amazing lineup of guest speakers. In June, my wife and I will be presenting on the same topic "Outcomes Matter: Supporting Educational Transitions" at the Milestones National Autism Conference in Cleveland Ohio.

Gender Transition and Asperger's

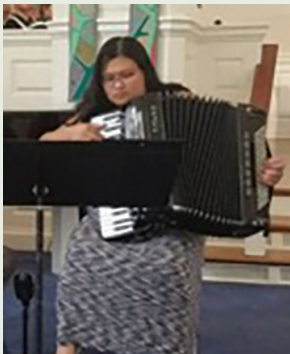
by Elizabeth Graham



At the age of 6 months, I was adopted by my loving parents. I was also born with Asperger's Syndrome. The diagnosis did not come until around my sophomore year in high school. However, it was clear to my parents early on in my childhood that I had different learning needs and had trouble

socializing with others, especially with my same-aged peers. My psychological evaluations done while I was in Montessori school revealed that I had learning needs that would not be best supported in a mainstream education setting. This prompted my parents to enroll me at The Lab School of Washington (LSW), a private school in northwest Washington, DC for students with moderate learning differences in grades 1-12. Upon learning of my diagnosis, everything made sense and I felt with this knowledge I could self-monitor and learn more about myself. Prior to learning of my diagnosis, I was afraid to ask why I was having social challenges and I was afraid of an answer and being labeled again, (since I was already at a special education school).

Throughout my years at LSW, as part of my IEP I received weekly group and individual sessions from the school's occupational therapists and speech-language therapists. As I was learning to



express myself with others, I also began learning to play music. My mom was a freelance musician, a freelance piano teacher, and a retired Sergeant Major in the U.S. Army Band. She instilled a passion for playing music in me at a young age and we connected through music. I started playing the piano, learning from my mom. Also, I began singing in my church's youth choir. I later switched over to the accordion in 1999 after seeing

my mom's colleague play the accordion and I learned from him. From 2000-2004, I competed in accordion competitions across the country and participated in master classes with world famous accordion players.

Even as I was realizing I was different from others, socially, I was also beginning to question the male gender I was born into, beginning around 8 years of age. Growing up I remember having more female friends over for playdates. I took tap dancing classes outside of school; I was often the only boy and that didn't bother me. I went to Disney World in Orlando twice; on these trips I remember seeing the actors dressed up as Disney characters and I mostly gravitated toward characters such as Cinderella and Princess Jasmine.

I didn't know how my family or friends would react to the fact I was questioning my gender identity, so I kept this a secret for a long time. When I had privacy at home, I would wear my mom's clothes and look at the clothing catalogues she received in the mail. When I was 11 or 12 years old, my mom caught me with her clothes in my room lying on the floor and she got upset. My dad was also upset. I felt too ashamed at the time to tell them the truth. For quite some time I didn't know any words to describe how I was feeling.



In her 50s my mom died in December 2004, from melanoma, in my freshman year of high school. As is common with teenagers, I didn't spend a great amount of time with my mom, especially in the weeks leading up to her death. I felt sad for not having said I loved her enough or expressed enough how I was thankful for the music lessons and trips to the accordion competitions (especially after she began hospice care) but that was probably due to my expression challenges with Asperger's (prior to diagnosis). The grieving process was a challenge because I wasn't diagnosed yet. It was also a challenge because I have no siblings so I felt alone. My dad and I went to a couple of bereavement support groups and I met other teenagers experiencing similar losses and this helped me realize that I wasn't the only teenager to experience this kind of loss.

In 2007 my dad enrolled me in the Georgetown University School of Continuing Studies College Preparatory Program, a non-credit summer program for high school students. It was from this experience that I realized I could use more preparation to transition into a mainstream school. I felt I could benefit from a full school year at a mainstream school as a stepping stone. After graduating LSW in 2008, I began my post-graduate year at a college preparatory boarding school in Pennsylvania, The Perkiomen School. At Perkiomen I began to involve myself in LGBTQ activities. I was among the founding members of the school's gay-straight alliance to promote acceptance and understanding on campus. (Today most of these groups are now called "gender and sexuality alliances" to reflect the growing population of people who may identify as transgender or gender non-conforming.) A few weeks before graduation at Perkiomen, I confided in a fellow classmate and friend that I was a closeted transgender woman.

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As is common with people on the autism spectrum, I trusted her completely; I shared with her some photos of myself in women's clothing. Unfortunately, those photos got into the hands of another student who sent the photos to the entire student body. I found out about this through the dean of students; he called me into his office one night during study hall and told me what happened and what was being done to handle the situation. I told him that I was not out to my dad and he respected my requested for discretion. As I walked the hallways back to my dorm, I could hear laughter from the other students.

Very soon, the student responsible for the spreading of the photos was identified and expelled. I am thankful to the dean of students, faculty, and fellow members of the school's gender and sexuality alliance who were kind to me throughout this situation. I have kept in touch with some of my former classmates on Facebook and saw some of them for the first time at my first Perkiomen Alumni gathering in Washington, DC in 2016; they all said that I was looking great.



Shortly thereafter, I was accepted to the College Program for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (CPSASD) at Marshall University for enrollment in Fall 2009. (I found the CPSASD while doing an online search, while at Perkiomen, for support for college students with Asperger's.) I majored in

Psychology and minored in Counseling, focusing on bereavement in people on the autism spectrum. I took counseling and sociology classes relating to death and bereavement. I also did a clinical observation at the local hospice as part of my counseling minor with patients, support groups, and a bereavement camp for families. My big project was writing a paper on bereavement in people on the autism spectrum, which I presented at the 2013 Marshall University COLA Conference.

At Marshall I was involved with different student organizations. During my freshman year, I was active in the student LGBTQ group, helping to educate the campus community on transgender issues and helped with safe-space training. I even performed my accordion in the drag show on campus in Spring 2010. Beginning my sophomore year, I became an active volunteer with the campus blood drives. I am a regular blood donor, influenced by my mom donating blood in the wake of the 9-11 attacks and seeing other cancer patients receive blood transfusions. I used this passion of mine to connect with other blood donors and establish the Marshall University American Red Cross Club (thanks to the help of WVATC's Marc Ellison, who is the Club's founding and former faculty advisor), and is still active. (I have found socializing and connecting with others is easier when there is an already-established mutual interest.) However, given my name being in the school newspaper a lot to promote the blood drives and the issues with blood donation with the LGBTQ



community at the time (and that I was not openly transgender), I kept my involvement with campus LGBTQ activities low profile. I was also involved with Marshall's chapter of Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) and served as the Secretary in my senior year. Shortly before graduation in May 2013, Dean of Student Affairs Steve Hensley awarded me with the Outstanding Service to Marshall University award.

Upon returning home to the Washington, DC area, I wanted to use my personal experience with ASD to support people with I/DD. In October 2013 I began working as a direct support professional at an agency that provides community-based residential supports to adults with I/DD; I supported adults who live in their own homes as well as those living in staff-supported group homes. At this agency, I also helped to lead a program that helps young adults with ASD and I/DD transition from high school to adult life through helping to teach cooking social skills classes.

While I was beginning my professional career, I was also considering my strategy for transitioning. In August 2014, I had moved out of my dad's house and began living with roommates; this gave me the time and space I needed to evaluate my decision to transition. In 2015, after seeing a therapist for a while, I decided that a new job would help me get a fresh start. Remembering my classmate spreading my photos and the reaction from my parents when I was young, I was weary of how people might react. I first came out to friends from church, high school, and college. I decided to come out to my dad on my 26th birthday in August 2015. He said he loved me and that he was not too surprised and he and my mom were having discussions with each other relating to this when I was younger. My dad said seeing Caitlyn Jenner's award speech in July helped him in understanding so I believe my timing was great.

I began attending a transgender support group and receiving hormone treatment at Whitman-Walker Health in Washington, DC, a clinic well known for supporting the medical and behavioral health needs of the LGBTQ community. I received and took my first doses of testosterone blockers and estrogen pills on Thursday, November 5, 2015. Whitman-Walker also provides periodic gender/name change clinics and helped me in 2016 with the documents and letters to update my name and gender marker on my federal and state documents. (To get a fresh new start, I decided to change my full name.) Attending the support group was helpful and helped me feel less alone in my journey. I also became active again in the church I grew up, Westmoreland Congregational United Church of Christ located in Bethesda, MD.

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My church has been supportive of me in my transition. I have spoken at a couple of church events about my transition; this helped with the church's decision in adding "gender identity" to its Open and Affirming statement. (Open and Affirming is the UCC's designation of a congregation being welcoming to people of different gender identities and sexual orientations.) I am also a member of the UCC Central-Atlantic Conference Potomac Association LGBT Task Force and I helped represent the group at the 2017 DC Pride Festival booth.

I was offered and accepted the position in November 2015 of Autism Waiver Service Coordinator (a Medicaid HCBS waiver for children with low-functioning autism) at The Arc of Prince George's County. Despite interviewing in September 2015 as my former male self, I came out to my boss in an email shortly after accepting the job offer to disclose that I was planning to begin my transition. To my relief, my supervisor and her supervisor said that my transition would be a non-issue.

In October 2017, I visited Marshall and my friends in the CPSASD for the family reception and breakfast during homecoming weekend. It was great to see my friends, professors, and mentors from my college days. It was also great to meet some of the current students and their families. Back when I was at Marshall as a student, I would dress up in women's clothes and walk around campus after dark, sometimes with a couple of close friends to whom I confided in. This was not only the first time returning as an alumna, but the first time since beginning my transition. It felt liberating to be back on campus as my true self; when I re-introduced myself to one of my psychology professors, he said he couldn't recognize me (a compliment to me). (Since I was not out to my dad and financially dependent on him while at Marshall, I wasn't open, and didn't want him to find out when on campus to help me pack and unpack my dorm through interactions with others on the campus.) I am thankful to my friends from Marshall for supporting me through my time in the closet.

One of the people from the CPSASD that has been supportive of me and respected that I was a closeted transgender woman,



is Erin Burkill*. She was my graduate mentor during my freshman and sophomore years. She was the first person at Marshall I felt comfortable in confiding to that I was more than an LGBTQ ally and what I was truly doing in my spare time. The two of us still keep in touch through Facebook and phone calls. Erin was very helpful to me on the day I came out to my dad; after I gave her the details of my coming out plan, she said she would be by her phone and asked me to call her after coming out to my dad and I called her with the great news.

Another close friend of mine from Marshall is Rachel Gilliams*, who came to Marshall after my freshman year. I remember her as the first person outside the CPSASD I came out to. Rachel has other friends ASD. She understood that I was a closeted transgender woman and sometimes would spend time with me on campus after dark when I would be out wearing women's clothes. She visits her husband's family in the Washington, DC area often and we get together as often as we can. I saw her back at Marshall (during daylight) in October 2017 for homecoming weekend. Rachel helped me post-Marshall when going out in public.

As I continue to help people with autism and I/DD and with my involvement with the LGBTQ community, I am constantly reminded of my own experience. I am reminded that there are individuals with I/DD and that are transgender that do not have the same early intervention and loving acceptance I've been blessed with. I'm very thankful to God for a wonderful and supporting family and group of friends.

*names used with permission

Gender Identity and Autism Readings

The Atlantic: *The Link between Autism and Trans Identity*

Bryony White (2016)

www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2016/11/the-link-between-autism-and-trans-identity/507509

Gay and Autistic Intersectionality

by Steven George



At age twenty-three, when I came out as gay, no one seemed to mind. I lost no friends and most of my loved ones were supportive and encouraging. If anyone did distance him or herself from me, I wasn't aware of it. My mother asked me if my feelings for my boyfriend at the time were serious and if I was certain about how I felt,

but neither she nor my father pushed me away. My transition from feelings of shame and guilt into feelings of strength and honor was easy. I became someone who could be proud of who and how he loved.

Others around me had questions and concerns, but I was willing to address them and put any worries to rest. I was happy with my sexual orientation, and my loved ones were happy that I was happy with it, and that I was courageous enough to open up. By fortunate coincidence, a *Newsweek* issue with a cover story about a son coming out to his parents was published the day after I had decided to come out myself. I gave the issue to several of those close to me and it addressed many points better than I probably could in my own words.

The only problem was that I still felt the same sense of emotional isolation that I always had, and I had the same problems with understanding how to interact with others. I half expected it to make a difference, but I was just as weird, lonely, anxious, obsessive, and depressed as always. It didn't become any easier to make friends and I found Gay men and women to be even harder to understand and relate to than the Straight people who had repeatedly rejected me.

Twenty years later, I was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Suddenly, every problem I had faced with communication, sensory issues, and social deficits made sense to me. After decades of being misdiagnosed with various disorders, I knew (again) who I was and (again) I wanted to spread the word to my friends. So, I came out (again), but this time as autistic, and the reaction was entirely different. I was happily expecting the same kind of support and encouragement for having "found myself", but instead I was met with mostly either awkward silence or skepticism. Two or three people who I disclosed to even thought it was a sick joke. One friend actually laughed and asked me how I could possibly not know that until now. There were several reasons why it took forty years, but that's for another story.

This time around I *did* lose people in my life, and at first, I couldn't understand why. Finally, I was completely happy with myself – all of myself, not just one aspect of it – and all but two or three people offered a disinterested shrug at best. At worst, they insulted me and cut me out of their lives. Luckily, I was seeing a therapist at the time and he was helpful in getting me past it. I began to realize the very thing that our mothers tell us from an early age: Those who can't accept



you as you are never were your friends to begin with.

But it was a tough fact to accept. Whether they were true friends or not, I had few of them to lose. If anyone asked me at the time, I probably would have said that I had no friends at all, but there were people I needed in my life to share feelings with on

occasion and it hurt that some of them would not accept me, when I was the same person they had talked to just yesterday, but a little better because everything that made me feel horrible now had a name. So why did they not want to hear about it?

It seemed that one of the primary issues was that, like many on the shallow end of the spectrum, I didn't *look* autistic. Yes, they would say, I was a little strange and had problems with making friends, and with dating ("who doesn't?"), but I certainly couldn't be autistic. Wasn't that like *Rain Man*? (Many of us on the spectrum blame the popularity of that movie for giving the world a false definition of what autism is and providing little more than some running jokes.) I had long-term relationships. I went to college and graduated with a 4.0 GPA. I was an exceptional writer, and I wasn't having meltdowns when I went to Wal-mart. So, many friends would flat-out refuse to take me or my diagnosis seriously.

A second reason was that most people then (and still now) did not understand autism. Everyone knew what being gay meant. Whether or not they had had a problem with it, they had a clear picture of what it was. I may have had to clarify for some what it meant for me personally and how it would affect my life, but same-sex relationships were clearly defined, while autism was not. I had come to realize that people tended to fear and reject what they didn't understand. While discussions of my relationships might be uncomfortable for some of my Straight friends, discussions of my autism left them confused and out of their depths. So, they opted to avoid it by avoiding *me*. Even if they had known me for years, they weren't sure if they were now discovering that their friend could be difficult to deal with or even dangerous at some point.

When I was first diagnosed, I thought that LGBT autistics had to be rare individuals because I had never heard of any. Even searching online, I could only find about a dozen people who openly identified as LGBT autistics and they were all lived far from me. Further, all of those I met online, without exception, were young and diagnosed in childhood. This led to another realization: There were probably thousands of undiagnosed autistic gay adults who have, like I once did, attributed their communication difficulties and social deficits to their sexual orientation. They believe it is being gay that makes them so unable to adapt and never bothered to pursue another cause, and that this can lead to a depression, substance abuse, and suicide is the true tragedy.

Writing on the Spectrum: A Steel Drum Life

by Brandon Stump



I stopped writing November 1, 2017, the day I defended my thesis for my MFA in Creative Writing. This is a pattern in my life. If I were on a self-help program on the Oprah Winfrey Network, Iyanla Vanzant would draw a line connecting all my decisions to flee or abandon situations that don't end perfectly and say, shaking her clasped hands, "Let's call a thing a thing, people!" When imperfection rears its head or the criticism is layered on as thick as cheap icing on a store-bought cake, Brandon runs for a new identity. I now label these moments: #spectrumlife.

After five years of practicing law, trying to navigate social interactions and various styles of supervising where bold men with little talent criticized my work and then claimed it as their own, I decided to flee the legal world I spent years getting into. At my last fulltime legal job, I spent my days watching documentaries on writers (this wasn't a job duty). Anything about Virginia Woolf. Truman Capote's various life exploits. James Baldwin's political raptures. Tennessee Williams and his downfalls. Since I was little, I've always had to know everything about something in order to do it. I can't go to a county fair and participate in a glass blowing demonstration; I need to spend thousands of dollars on access to a glory hole and glass color supplies. As a boy, I couldn't see a movie without reading every review, watching every star interview, and reading the book released by the studio. I can't just move to a new city, I

have to study the local news reports, wiki articles, and maps a year before moving. So it's not surprising that I spent the last year of my time as a practicing (poorly) attorney reading thousands of articles on writers and other artists. I was constructing a self. I thought everyone did this.

I taught myself to write the same way that I learned to read: by myself in a quiet room, words and language making their way inside of my mind and soul, attaching themselves to the foundation of my being. As a child I liked the sounds of words, even when they were without meaning. I can remember learning to spell, and finding freedom in the order of sounds and construct of language. To the elderly women at the table in the crowded local restaurant, "It's veg-E-table. That simple." Praise, delight, repeat. Or on a walk home in the first grade, eight years before I'd learn to poorly tie my shoes, I declared that I could spell the word "off" without any teacher requiring I learn to. "O-F," I said. The teacher's aides who walked us home explained I actually spelled UV not OFF. I argued. Makes no sense. Stupid rules and stupid people telling me I was wrong. I should have known then that sharing my writing, my spelling, my construction of the world that was safest to me, would only end in frustration and pain.

But for a verbal kid on the spectrum (albeit unknown at the time), words and language – a symphonic construction of beats and rhythms – was the only thing that kept me alive. As a teen, I used to pace the floor of our computer room, frustrated because no one in my family or school seemed to understand me or respond to me in ways that gave my heart the equivalent of oxygen to my lungs. My mind seldom stops or slows down. Topic connects to topic. And those topics spew from my mouth in hyperbolic language. Each word is a desperate plea: Listen to me. But there's only so much listening anyone can do, especially the parents of a kid who never turns off. Whenever my parents were

disinterested or silent, I believed they hated me, which was only exacerbated by the deep troubles of home with a military father who had grand and unmet expectations for a boy neurologically incapable of conformity. School was equally troubling. Friendships were in short supply, lasting for only a semester at most, and the word "faggot" was bandied about so often when I approached that someone might have mistaken it for my name.

There was a gun cabinet in that computer room. I'd lock the door and pace in circles contemplating if I should just make my mind turn off, end all the isolation, and dissolve into something else. I was only thirteen. One day, not long after seeing a steel drum concert at school, I found myself staring at the drums and focusing on the sound more than the hands and mallets that made the metallic rhythm. Out of everything/one in that room, the only things that could relate to me, and I relate to in turn, were the drums. I went home to write.

I wrote that I sat at the center of a steel drum, I explained, seeing my blurry visage, and hearing my tinny echo in the various dents, but I could never see or hear anything other than myself. From that moment on, I wrote to survive. I wrote and avoided the guns. I wrote and found mentors who found something special in my words – release of sounds. Because of this, I went to college and majored in journalism. I had very few friends in college, but in earnestness, I didn't need them. I needed the stories, and the interviews. I walked around with a yellow-pad and closed my eyes, documenting the smells in the air and the sounds of the passing traffic. I incorporated my senses, which had always been the driving force in my life, into my writing. Professors swooned, and being alone in the drum felt less like a tragedy and more triumphant. I documented the most minute of details for stories. The shape of faces. The color of fingernails. Nervous ticks. Lapels, collars. And in turn, my journalism reigned supreme at my school. I once wrote a story on a tailor who ran a dry cleaning company. I

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can still remember the smell of the steam and chemicals, “the industrial hum.” My professor asked, “How do you capture those things?” I always had. I was as much a sensation trap – the extreme aversion to pungent smells and tastes, the crying over fabrics as a child – as I was human.

Somehow, I made it through almost my entire journalism experience in undergrad with scant criticism. My sensory detail writing made me a boy wonder. As a boy more accustomed to making people wonder what was wrong with him, I stood in that glory. During my final year of undergrad, I wrote a profile on a retiring university president. I followed him all day, my favorite thing to do as a journalist, follow someone and watch them move. I liked the way people greeted one another. The way they ate, or the sound their lips made when they clapped together to form consonants. On that particular day of the profile, it rained. And the president placed his hand beyond the edifice of the building to judge whether he needed his umbrella. He did. And whoosh, it opened, a thick and heavy sound. It was the type of umbrella, well-constructed with indestructible metal parts that a university president would own. To me these moments mattered more than his career. I was more interested in the sounds of his life, the shuffle of it.

A grad student turned professor edited my completed work and referred to it as “intense” and “shit.” A meltdown ensued. I went into a rage, asked her to stop touching the document, told her I didn’t need to speak to her ever again, that we’d reached the end of our shared journey and I was okay with that. How could I have been wonderful and awful? I can only be one thing. There is no middle.

I went to law school, following another obsession with the Kennedys, C-SPAN, electoral maps, vote totals, and elections in states I’d never lived in. I even held midterm election parties (party-of-one) instead of going out with other humans. And eventually I became a practicing civil rights attorney, motivated by fairness and rules. But this identity never lasted. I could put on the suit and say the professional words, but holding together an artificial self came at a great cost. At my first legal job, my stimming behaviors, rubbing my mouth or legs repeatedly, as well as my failure to ask questions or maintain eye contact, got me called out by bosses for being distracting and for “not being a go-getter.” These same complaints followed me everywhere, and they only worsened after I was a victim of sexual assault. Because I had no ASD diagnosis at the time, I thought my entire life’s worth of difficulties, all the random singing and shaking and moving and dancing and collapsing and nervous laughter and lack of eye contact and obsessions and chewing on towels and banging my head off of the wall and showering in the dark and holding my breath around cold food was just my Andy Warhol Syndrome – a desperate creative type locked in an artificial life. Outside of academic success, something that I thrived in, jobs were normally horribly boring, so I must have been an untapped artist. Thus, I went to earn an MFA.

I couldn’t just be a writer. I had to go to school to be one. I had to read all the books that writers read. And I had to take all the classes. For the first time in years, the voice of the steel drum boy came back to life. In my first story for class, I wrote about a teenager who was caught romping around the woods

with his friend. The embarrassment and shame of being caught by his father caused him to scream and repeatedly hit his face, scratching at his skin until he bled. While I’ve never been caught in the woods romping around with any of my friends (there are so few this would be nearly impossible) I based the character’s reaction to stress to my own – my meltdowns. My class critiqued it. “Unbelievable.” “No one would act like that.” “Why would anyone scratch themselves until they bleed? Hit themselves?” It hurt. They were wrong. I had written about myself. So I toned it down. I wrote a story about a woman whose son wrote a children’s book about her but changed her race. The POV in the story shifts from outside to inside to outside to inside, cue Woolf. All of the story takes place inside the woman’s head – the struggle with understanding why her son would make such a decision. My professor responded, “Why would the POV switch? Not professional writing. Also not enough action, too internal.” I feel like everyone is looking at me while I evaluate myself. Seeing my sweat, any blemish, at the same time I feel my internal life, that deep hole that you could drop a penny in and wait for hours until it reached the bottom of my inside life. I had based these choices on my reality.

So I tried to be more traditional. I wrote a thesis that contained multiple stories. One detailed a man’s life after the discovery that his only friend from childhood and adulthood was a pedophile. The protagonist ruminates on his fear that he, too, given his proximity to his friend, might be a pedophile. My committee explained that this type of thinking wasn’t realistic. “No one will read this and believe it.” But I based that character on myself (sans pedophilia), having lived at the juncture of being required to move



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about physically in a world while tethered to fears and conversations that have repeated internally for decades. Another story featured a young boy with a "Diary of Sensations." "Too touchy feely," a committee member said. The diary documented the sound of a new cassette tape being unwrapped from its plastic: "NEW," I wrote. Touchy feely? Throughout my thesis defense, I pulled all of my energy and emotion to the bottom of that hole I described. And my face went blank. *Don't scream. Don't fight. Just pass. Pass and run. You don't ever have to write, again.* I said to myself, over and over while pinching my thighs and wiggling my legs. The program director explained that he couldn't tell if he was getting through to me because I was "stone-faced." I explained that was the face I made when I didn't like what was being said. I passed.

In the steel drum of myself, I know that the stories and the sound structures I plotted together with characters and language were the most beautiful pieces I've written outside of the visceral writings as a teen. But it's hard to be beautiful to yourself, alone, especially as autistic. I now know that my whole life, I've been writing on the spectrum, focusing on the details that an NT world dismisses as trivial, too much, un-relatable. At my most defiant, I remind myself that it is not my job to comfort all of you. I want you to read my stories and maybe someday a book, and live inside of that world for a while. I want you to ask what it must be like to live, echoing, alone, attached to the objects and the sensations that give people like me meaning rather than detailing the romantic dinner with the emotions of a breakup that feels about as boring to me as vanilla ice cream – let's be honest, it's just a canvas.

I know that writing as autistic is both beautiful and difficult. A friend in my creative writing program explained he'd never read such an attention to detail. I know that I wouldn't see the world this way if it weren't for my neuroqueerness. So I am grateful for this brain. Every day. But I also know that the criticism will cut so deeply that I'll struggle for months, attempting to create another persona brave enough to submit something or talk about my flaws – all while avoiding the gun cabinet feelings. I try to remind myself that just because some NTs might not get what I'm putting down doesn't invalidate it. It only means that those individuals didn't understand what I created and that my frenzied, high-definition life can only be viewed on some screens – some minds. Somewhere, there's an entire tribe of castoffs looking to find themselves in language and story. I'd like to be there for them.



ASD & Mental Health Disorders: Seek First to Understand

by Jim Harris

One of the fastest growing subcategories of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) research relates to the diagnosis and treatment of mental health disorders for individuals on the spectrum, especially in the areas of anxiety and depression. In the January 2018 issue of the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* an analysis of the health profiles of over 400,000 young adults 18-24 years of age found that individuals with ASD are more likely to have a mental health diagnosis when compared to peers with and without other developmental disabilities. In a 2011 study, researchers from the University of Amsterdam reviewed 31 studies that explored the prevalence of anxiety disorder in children under 18 years diagnosed with ASD. The review found that about 40 percent of children

with ASD had at least one comorbid anxiety disorder (Van Steensel et al., 2011). A study by Mayes and colleagues of 1,390 youth, of which 350 were diagnosed with ASD, found significantly higher rates and severity of depressive symptoms among youth with ASD as compared to typically developing peers and peers with other disorders. These studies clearly show that the assessment and treatment of mental health disorders for individuals with ASD must be an area of intense focus for researchers and practitioners alike. So why are individuals with ASD more likely to struggle with symptoms of anxiety and depression? That is a question that has a multitude of contributing factors. A good place to start the discussion is with the primary characteristics of the diagnosis itself.

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According to the American Psychiatric Association (2013), the primary criteria for the diagnosis of ASD are persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction as well as restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interest, or activities. The challenges in these areas must cause clinically significant impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of current functioning. As you dig deeper into the symptoms of ASD, the specific challenges related to executive functioning and processing sensory information create cognitive, emotional, and physiological burdens for those diagnosed with ASD. A quick glance into these challenges reveals how a person with ASD could be more at risk to struggle emotionally.

If you take a moment and think about the daily experiences of an individual with ASD, the possibility of anxiety and depression are not so surprising. An experience from my own life helped me gain a small glimpse of how it might feel to have a difference or disability that compromises one's ability to function. The first time I traveled internationally I was unbelievably nervous. I flew into Spain by myself and wouldn't be meeting up with anyone from my group for a couple of days. As I arrived at the Madrid airport and heard the announcements in Spanish, I immediately had a sense of anxiety related to my inability to understand what was being said, not knowing who might be able to help me, and worry about how different I thought I appeared. I sat with my luggage waiting for my next connection and found myself experiencing a feeling of fear that transitioned to paranoia. I became increasingly self-conscious and nervous about the intentions of others and whether they were able to notice that I was a foreigner. Behaviorally, I became withdrawn: I pulled my suitcase close to me as if someone might try to take it at any moment. I remember being acutely aware of the sounds, smells, and sites in the airport noticing the clear

difference from what I was used to at home. This collective experience was very unusual for me. I am typically a confident and prosocial person, but my missing skills and clear differences in the situation overwhelmed me emotionally. I remember my feelings of anxiety were so strong it was hard for me to think clearly. I began to obsessively check my itinerary and other documents trying to gain some sense of mastery and comfort. When I finally made it to my hotel that night, I was exhausted from day full of fear and anxiety. I remember just wanting to magically be transported home - back to the patterns and routines that made me feel safe and secure.



I recognize this is a profoundly weak and limited comparison to how it feels to live with ASD, but I do think it can shed some light on how someone with ASD would be more likely to struggle with anxiety and depression. When you go back to the core symptoms of ASD, you can see how struggling to understand and communicate in the social environment would obviously increase the presence of anxiety. You can see how if you struggle to communicate your needs or understand the needs or intentions of others it would bring a nearly constant feeling of worry. You can imagine how mentally and physically exhausting

this would be. You can also see how these feelings of worry and the resulting exhaustion could significantly impact your ability to think and solve problems. Imagine having this experience day-in and day-out and how it could easily lead to feelings of frustration and inadequacy that could transition to feelings of sadness and despair. These feelings could be compounded by the fact that you struggle to communicate these complicated feelings to the others around you. Now, imagine being told that these thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are a result of a life-long disorder. It is not surprising that an individual with ASD might feel overwhelmed, trapped and alone. Even as you read about such thoughts and feelings, I'm sure you can notice a sense of anxiety and heaviness in yourself. I know I did while writing it!

Too often we move too quickly from the identification of an issue or problem to brainstorming solutions. I want to ask you to resist that urge at this point in the article, but to take some time to allow yourself to really think about what it feels like to live day-in and day-out with ASD. I want you to truly allow yourself to experience the anxiety of trying to understand a world with a mind and body that sometimes seem to work against you. I want you to allow yourself to think about how it would feel to know that you are different and know that others notice it too. I want you to think about how overwhelming that must be.

The assessment and treatment of individuals with ASD struggling with anxiety and depression is an area in need of intense focus. We are already seeing promising outcomes with such interventions as cognitive behavioral therapy, skill building groups, parent education, and many more. There is still a lot of work to be done. This work must be done via a partnership of individuals with ASD, their families, and the professional community.

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Autism Storytelling Series: ADHD with Stewart Burton



WV Autism Training Center: *Tell us a little about your background.*

Stewart Burton: Hi. My name is Stewart Burton. I'm 32 years old and I live in Petersburg, West Virginia. My interests are sports, four wheeling, listening to satellite radio, and working out. I was first diagnosed with ADD in 1992 by the Kluge Center at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, VA. Throughout school I was an ADD student and I was in special education classes. Oftentimes, I'd be sitting in class not paying attention, looking out the window and stuff like that. The teachers were like "you need to pay attention more." I was getting terrible grades. Finally, they just said, "something's wrong with you. You need to get checked out." So, we did; we were referred to the Kluge Center and that's how I knew I was ADD. I was probably, let's see, I want to say seven.

WV ATC: *Do you remember that diagnosis making a difference in your life? Did positive changes happen at school?*

SB: It made a huge difference because then I was able to get the right accommodations I needed and get hooked up with people. I ended up with this one teacher. He was just wonderful with working with students. Another thing was I had a lot of problems with my temper in school. He was really able to help me get a lot of that under control. He was just good with the kids. He would take us out

to play basketball at recess and stuff like that. He was just a wonder to have as a teacher.

WV ATC: *How do you feel autism and ADD are related or intersect?*

SB: I've always viewed autism and ADD as kind of the same thing. So, they've pretty much been a factor throughout my entire life. Sometimes I will be in here talking about certain things to my family and I just get so over emotional about certain topics that I don't always have the ability to sit and listen to how they're perceiving or understanding what I am talking about. That sometimes causes misunderstandings. I'll be honest with you I don't really consider myself as having autism. I'm more ADD, at least that's what the doctors have told me.

WV ATC: *What would be one of the first things you would tell someone who just found out they have autism and/or ADD?*

SB: Everybody has kind of got to understand what ADD is and what it isn't so they can understand why that particular person may be behaving the way they are. Another thing is if people tell you that you are weird...I got picked on a lot when I was in school. I would tell them to just not worry about it. I would tell them just to have confidence in themselves.

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WV ATC: *What would be your advice to teachers who learn that one of their students has autism or ADD?*

SB: Well, they need to know to advise the parents to get the child checked out and make sure they get them the right accommodations. As I said earlier, another thing we need to do is educate educators more about what ADD is and how to spot it. Obviously, a lack of focus. A lot of times we tend to get emotional. I've had a lot of habits, a lot of nervous habits. I have certain habits I get into when I'm bored. My finances are horrible and a lot of that I do to fill a void in my life to get that stimulation. That's another thing. I do urge parents and those with ADD to seek treatment because a lot of times people with ADD can end up on drugs if those things aren't taken care of.

WV ATC: *Any other tips for teachers?*

SB: Number one: be understanding with the kids. Number two: always be there for them and be willing to go that extra mile to help them understand things. Develop patience. Sometimes they may take longer on tests. Sometimes they might get a little rowdy.

WV ATC: *Did you have a lot of friends with ADD growing up or others you could relate to?*

SB: Yes, I when I went into my special ed classes we had a whole group of kids who had ADD. A lot of times those special ed classes were designed because people with ADD focus better in a small environment. So, special ed classes were designed to get us out of the regular class and get us with a teacher who could work with us individually. I loved it a lot because you developed a lot more of a personal relationship with the other students and the teachers. I lived down in Virginia in Culpepper. One of the reasons we moved up here is because a lot of the schools were overcrowded and therefore the teachers had a lot less time with the students.

WV ATC: *What are your thoughts on self-advocacy?*

SB: Teaching the child how to deal with his or her disability comes into play. I've definitely had to do it a lot at work. I've had to tell my boss and supervisor that I have this disability or that disability so it may affect my ability to do certain jobs. Sometimes in school there have been times where I have had to speak up. I've had to say, "make

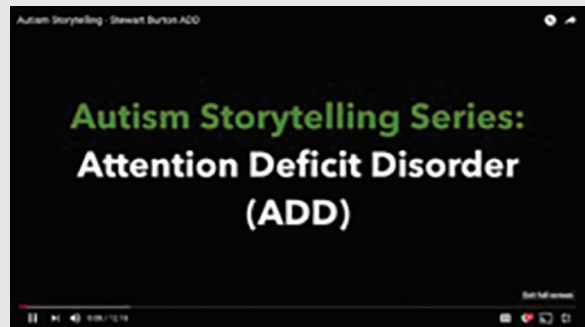
sure you give me more time on tests." More now so then there was when I started school. Back then there wasn't much knowledge about ADD as there is nowadays. People just kind of thought there was something wrong with you. That's another thing that people with ADD have to overcome. There are certain stigmas attached to it. People might think that you are dumb or not giving any effort.

WV ATC: *Are you happy with your quality of life now?*

SB: I'm happy. I've learned that sometimes being content with life is always a good thing. I always try to believe we each have our special gifts and destiny. I pretty much try to work along those lines. The biggest thing is I always try to stay positive no matter what happens.

WV ATC: *Any final thoughts?*

SB: Well, I just want to say that I hope this interview will help me enlighten other people on ADD: what it is, what sort of challenges are associated with it, and how they can help other people with ADD get through those challenges. I also hope it gives more hope to anybody else who is ADD out there.



For the full video interview with Stewart please visit:

www.youtube.com/user/WVATC

**Additional Autism and
ADD/ADHD Supports:
ADD and Autism @ Understood.org
www.understood.org/ADD**

Camp Connections

by Bonnie Marquis

One of the best things about camp, whatever the variety, are the friendships and relationships that develop and the inaugural WV Autism Training Center (ATC) camp was no different. While it may have taken a bit more intention and facilitation than might typically be necessary with young teens, the seeds that were planted over the summer have yielded some amazing outcomes for several of our campers.



The camp was offered last July with a target audience of middle school aged teens with ASD. Throughout the camp, participants were encouraged to share interests and offered some unique opportunities to explore a range of activities while on the Marshall Campus. The natural and interactive setting, coupled with the

understanding and acceptance that was established from the start, helped facilitate connections and laid groundwork for real friendships to develop. A focal point for a number of activities was the Marshall Recreation Center. In order to maintain a bit of the momentum from the week of camp, ATC staff followed up by proposing a “camp reunion” at the Rec Center. Here, the participants and their families could take part in any of the activities the center had to offer, including the pool and, the summer favorite, the rock climbing wall.

Interestingly, it was missing this reunion that was the impetus for two of our campers, Corey Cleve and Ethan Stough, to take the initiative to meet on their own. The two had planned on meeting up and when Ethan was unable to attend at the last minute, he was genuinely disappointed to miss seeing his friends, and Corey in particular. It also turns out that Ethan had more on his mind than just meeting up at the Rec Center.

As part of his person-centered Tier 3 direct services through the WV Autism Training Center, Ethan articulated several goals and his team felt that Corey was an ideal person to help achieve them. The first was one many of us share and that was to “get in better shape.” Discussions around this goal had led the team early on to Aaron Plantt. Aaron is a personal trainer at the Rec Center who was also an ATC trained Ally. ATC developed the Allies training in 2014 with the aim of helping others know, understand and support our friends with ASD. ATC delivers this training regularly to the broader Marshall community and beyond. Despite the reassurance that Aaron would understand his issues, initiating something so new and unfamiliar and making a commitment was at first too overwhelming and other more pressing matters put this action on hold. Stating a desire to get healthy is apparently easier said than done!

More pressing to Ethan was his desire create a video that would help explain his ASD to peers at his school where he had a range of typical social struggles. He felt a need to share why he had certain outbursts and difficulties and often experienced the isolation that comes with feeling no one understands.

However, creating a video was yet another “BIG GOAL” and easier to say than it is to make happen. Add to this fact that the whole team felt equally intimidated and out of their element – especially since

Ethan had the added desire to make it ‘cool’ and look more like a video game. We clearly needed to expand our team; and since most of life’s challenges are made easier with the support of friends the team reached out to Corey and asked for his help with the project. After a couple of meetings, one thing was clear: No matter how this video turned out the deepening friendship made all the time and effort worthwhile. But the team really really wanted to make their vision come true and knew they lacked this skills to make it happen.

Remembering the relationships created last summer when the campers got to tour the ‘magic lab’ and learn about the video game development here on campus, the team reached out to Professor Matt Mundell for ideas or suggestions. And he did not disappoint; he was able to connect the team with four undergraduate student game developers that were more than happy to help out! Several meetings took place to get some clarity and ideas for beginning to build the project. Still in development it promises to be a mix of direct video interspersed with scenes of avatars of Corey and Ethan in action. Voice over audio will describe the strengths and challenges of ASD, especially as they pertain to Ethan and Corey specifically.



Which brings us back to the Rec Center and Aaron. As part of the video, the boys wanted to get some footage of themselves in action at the Rec and working out. Time was a factor and the footage needed to be shot and shared with the developers. The

urgency of the task combined with the support of his friend meant Ethan was now ready to meet his personal trainer. And Aaron was every bit as supportive and encouraging as one might expect. Large, fit, and a former football player he was both formidable and friendly. He helped the boys discover a range of activities that were both fun and challenging. They were afforded access to the X-fit center and its equipment that is only open to personal trainers. And he promised to incorporate the rock climbing wall as part of future sessions. Best of all, both boys can’t wait to go back. Corey and Ethan will work together with Aaron and learn to set reasonable goals (reaching the top of the wall?). They will also get and give encouragement for the steps they take, no matter how big or small that put them on the path to achieving their goals.

From a chance meeting at a summer camp to potentially life changing experiences, the root to capitalizing on initial success is often dependent on fostering relationships. But social challenges and difficulties with initiations being a hallmark of ASD, this is not something that comes organically or easily to individuals on the spectrum. Those of us that care for and work with people with autism should understand our efforts to facilitate these relationships are not only necessary, but can be challenging and even feel futile at times. But with patience, creativity and persistence it’s evident that great things are possible.

Tele-coaching and Autism Support in West Virginia

by Andrew Nelson

Distance coaching and *tele-coaching* are terms used to describe the delivery of information, services, and supports over phone or video conferencing and web-based technologies. Tele-coaching is implemented in a wide variety of domains from life coaching to medical interventions. Face-to-face, in-person interaction will always be a central part of human knowledge transfer, but it is not always possible. This is especially true in rural and remote areas where access to services and supports is limited.

West Virginia is 24,000 square miles large and boasts some of the most beautiful scenery in the country (all personal bias aside, of course). The West Virginia countryside is rugged and remote, making in-person meetings difficult. Families and service providers often travel long distances to meet; the resource costs can be great to all parties. The West Virginia Autism Training Center (WV ATC) has used tele-coaching for nearly two decades to help families and individuals with autism. Angela Bryson, our recently-retired Intake Coordinator, facilitated thousands of hours-worth of family coaching sessions over the phone to help people work through important issues and concerns. Scott Short, WV ATC Family Coordinator Liaison, is now helping registered families connect with WV ATC staff who then provide tele-coaching to build skills and access resources. These virtual encounters help support teams overcome the challenges posed by distance and resource constraints.

The evidence supporting the use of tele-coaching for individuals with autism and their families is established and growing. Communication specialists use tele-coaching to help parents build functional communication training skills (Wacker, Lee, Dalmau, Kopelman, Lindgren, Kuhle, and Waldron, 2013). Parent training in general behavior support strategies and specific developmental milestones is also possible and effective via tele-coaching (Vismara, McCormick, Young, Nadhan, and Monlux, 2013). Tele-health makes training possible for parents with busy lives and tight budgets and schedules (Vismara, Young, and Rogers, 2012), and is especially powerful when local therapists or professionals are available to augment tele-coaching (Ingersoll and Berger, 2015). Developments in the realm of tele-health applications for adults with autism are equally exciting. Diagnostic assessment, for example, is possible via distance technology (Parmanto, Pulantara, Schutte, Saptono, and McCue, 2013). The autistic community has used tele-coaching to provide peer support and social connection for some time. One group, the Autism Aspergers Spectrum Coalition for Education Networking and Development (AASCEND), uses technology to host group meditation, employment discussions, and other virtual trainings.

Professionals at the WV ATC recognize the need for, and potential of tele-coaching to assist West Virginia residents with autism. Expanding our knowledge and techniques in this area is a priority of the agency. In the spirit of collaboration (one of WV ATC's Core Values), we recently partnered with colleagues at the Virginia Commonwealth University Autism Center for Excellence (VCU-ACE) to learn more about their programs and begin joint efforts

to explore new ways to provide tele-coaching in our neighboring states. Dr. Staci Carr, Josh Taylor, and Teresa Cogar met with members of our team to demonstrate their approaches to online learning communities and rural outreach to build autism support capacity. This partnership is just beginning. We look forward to the days, weeks, and months ahead as we work to increase training opportunities in our state of West Virginia.

Each individual with autism and their team has unique needs. The WV ATC strives to provide as many support and training options as possible. Some situations require in-person work; other situations may be well-suited for tele-coaching. We vow to continue to grow and improve our services in this area to help the residents with autism in West Virginia pursue their versions of a life of quality.



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Additional Distance Coaching and Tele-Support Information:

“Using Telehealth to Assist Families of Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Rural Communities”

by American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD)

Go to: aaid.org/education and click on “Education Archive”

Artist Profile – Tyler Puskas



When did you first develop an interest in creating art?

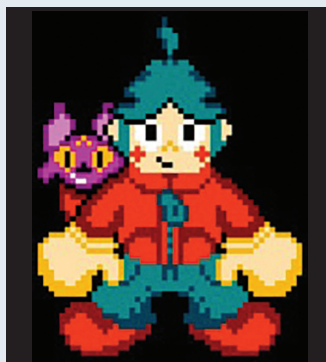
Ever since I can remember I've been wanting to create art. My father is an art teacher and his father before him. His mother was also a teacher and her passion for literature inspires my storytelling. My mom is quite talented as well and along with both grandparents on her side. I've always used art to express myself and have enjoyed it more than any other subject in school.

What kind of art are you most compelled to create?

HeartStrung was conceived as a concept for a videogame series. The name HeartStrung will make more sense as the story folds out. All I will say is that it will carry a lot of meaning.

Originally, it was called Doki-Mewie, after the boy and his cat starring in the series. That name was a nod to Banjo-Kazooie™, a 1998 3D platformer (like the recent Super Mario Odyssey) for the Nintendo 64. It has gone through a lot of renditions since 2015 when the first sprite was made. It has changed in both story and genre, jumping back and forth from 2D to 3D and back to 2D and at one point 2.5D with 3D environments and 2D characters. The latest designs are based on Nintendo Entertainment System graphics with the sprites being small in size with only 4 colors used in each character's pallet.

Concept Art by Tyler Puskas



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Which artists or styles would you say are your major influences?

I have grown to admire simplistic designs with characters built around simple shapes much like in the inkblot (1930's) age of animation. The characters are first designed to be recognizable by their silhouette and then given a unique color pallet to make them stand out from one another. Other influences include Super Mario creator Shigeru Miyamoto, anime pioneer Osamu Tezuka, and brothers Steve and Gregg Mayles of Rare Ltd. fame, fathers of Banjo-Kazooie and the Donkey Kong Country series.

Tell us a little about the concept art you have shared for this magazine?

HeartStrung takes place in a world where imagination has run wild, making the lands quite dangerous for normal humans to live in. As the dreams-come-true take over the outside world, the human race has been pushed into N.E.S.T.'s, sealed off colonies built by the mysterious Sandman Industries. Resources are running low in Doki's wintery home of Eggwhite Colony so he takes it upon himself to travel to leave the nest with his new companion Mewie the cat in search of the key to saving his people.

What are your plans for the future as an artist?

I want to move on past the comic series and develop HeartStrung into the video game series I intended it to be. I have the gameplay mechanics planned out and storylines to span several sequels and spin-off titles. I just need a team right now of any programmers, musicians, artists, or anyone willing to put in their free time to help. I don't have enough money right now, but any profits will be shared with the team members. If anyone is interested I urge them to contact me at TeamDreamMine@gmail.com

Do you have a website or artist profile where people can see more of your work?

The comic series will be hosted at patreon.com/DreamMine



Jerry's Movie Reviews



Jerry Westfall is a movie buff living in Preston County

Something for the Kids

Title: Zootopia

Release Date: 2016

Director: Byron Howard, Rich Moore

Main Actors: Ginnifer Goodwin, Jason Bateman, Idris Elba, Jenny Slate, Nate Torrence, Bonnie Hunt, Don Lake, Tommy Chong, JK Simmon, Octavia Spencer, Alan Tudyk, Shakira

Rated: PG

Rating: 3.5 out of 5

Brief Review: *Zootopia* is a Disney movie about a bunny cop who teams up with a scam artist fox to find a missing otter. I honestly thought the humor was dry and the story could have been done better, but the acting was okay so I gave it 3.5/5 stars. I felt that the plot was too confusing even by my standards. This movie will appeal to folks who like a light-hearted animated movie.

Something for the Whole Family

Title: Guardians of the Galaxy

Release Date: 2014

Director: James Gunn

Main Actors: Chris Pratt, Zoe Saldana, Dave Bautista, Vin Diesel, Bradley Cooper, Lee Pace, Michael Rooker, Karen Gillan, Djimon Hounsou, John C. Reilly, Glenn Close, Benicio del Toro

Rated: PG-13

Rating: 4 out of 5

Brief Review: *Guardians of the Galaxy* is a marvel comic book movie about a group of misfit superheroes trying to save the galaxy from a tyrant named Ronan. This movie had a great family-friendly story yet at the same time the humor was sometimes hard to understand. The acting was okay but I felt it could have been better. This movie will appeal to the comic book fan and family movie-goers alike.

Something for the Thriller/ Horror Fans

Title: Saw

Release Date: 2004

Director: James Wan

Main Actors: Cary Elwes, Danny Glover, Monica Potter, Michael Emerson, Ken Leung, Tobin Bell

Rated: R

Rating: 5 out of 5

Brief Review: *Saw* is a horror movie about a kidnapped doctor who must kill his cellmate in order to save his wife and daughter. I thought this movie had an interesting plot and surprise twist at the end. Tobin Bell did an excellent job as the serial killer, and Cary Elwes did an excellent job as Dr. Gordon. I was particularly impressed by the fact that it did so well with just a budget of \$1.2 million and grossing over 100 million. This movie will appeal to the horror fans that like a dark and complex story.

Autism State Updates

Autism Society of America West Virginia Update

 **AUTISM SOCIETY** *Improving the Lives of All Affected by Autism*
West Virginia

The 2nd annual Autism Across the Lifespan conference, presented through partnership between the Autism Society of West Virginia and the West Virginia Autism Training Center, will be held September 6 & 7, 2018, on the Marshall University campus. Dr. Brenda Smith Myles will headline Day 1 of the conference, which is themed on issues related to childhood. Dr. Peter Gerhardt will headline Day 2, themed on issues related to adulthood. Other sessions include information on ABA programming, bullying and autism, ASD and dating, and teaching social skills through drama techniques. Family stipends are available through the DD Council, and continuing education will be provided (currently in process for SLPs, SW, and educators). See specific information, and register now, at the following link: www.marshall.edu/atc/2018-autism-across-lifespan

WV Association of Positive Behavior Support Network Update



The West Virginia Association of Positive Behavior Support Network (WVAPBS) updated their PATH goals in December 2017 at the semi-annual Full Network meeting, held at MUGC in South Charleston. Several goals were added or expanded upon, including: creating a stronger digital media presence, offering Tier 1 trainings across disciplines, integrating

PBS in conference presentations and increasing involvement in the field of Mental Health. The Endorsement committee is also working toward on on-line application process for the PBS Endorsement. These goals are worked toward by individual committees. Committees meet by phone or Skype monthly to work on their specific goals and the Leadership Team meets monthly at MUGC or by phone call in. The current committees are:

- Endorsement/Fidelity committee (Chair: Charlotte Hays)
- Marketing Committee (Chair-Christine Dickson)
- Mental Health committee (Margaret Moore)
- Training Committee

Some of the activities of the WVAPBS Network during the last year include:

The Improving Behavior, Improving Lives conference was held on September 19-20th, in Summersville, WV. Working collaboratively were members of APBS, WV-APBS network, HCPBS network leaders, Seneca Health Services, WVU/Center for Excellence in Disabilities, Bureau for Behavioral Health and Health Facilities and the WV DD Council. The WV-APBS network successfully applied for and received the annual APBS Network for Event/Conference Support in retaining a nationally recognized expert in Positive Behavior Support, Dr. Meme Hieneman, for consultation and the opening keynote address. Dr. Hieneman provided the key thematic framework of

Positive Behavior Support philosophy, which was distributed to each presenter at the conference requesting that these themes be incorporated within the content of their presentation. Using her opening keynote address, the framework key themes of PBS was presented and the prior consultation encouraged the integration of the key themes, core values into content presented throughout this two-day conference. This was pivotal in ensuring the success of one of the first of its kind workshops. Over 145 professionals and vendors, across systems, attended the conference.

The Endorsement process continues to move forward with eighteen professionals who have now completed the Positive Behavior Support Endorsement process and their contact information is listed on our website.

Our website has been improved and we currently have active Facebook, Instagram and twitter accounts.

The next full Network meeting is scheduled for June 6, 2018 at MUGC. We encourage participation from stakeholders involved in positive behavior support services. For more information, please visit our website.

Check out the website at www.wvaps.com

Check out our Facebook: www.facebook.com/WVAPBS
Wvapbs is on Instagram and twitter too

WV PBIS



The West Virginia Department of Education Office of Special Education and the West Virginia Autism Training Center at Marshall University are collaborating with Regional Education Services (RESA) and Local agencies (LEA'S) to implement Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. The project is funded through IDEA

Part B Discretionary monies from the United States Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs.

WV PBIS Initiative partners include: The National Technical Assistance on PBIS, Don Kincaid (University of South Florida), the West Virginia Autism Training Center, West Virginia Regional Education Service Agencies (RESA), County Board of Education personnel, Office of Special Education, Office of Student and Community Support and Office of Accountability and School Effectiveness.

The mission of PBIS is to support school teams via training and technical assistance as they take a proactive systems approach for creating and maintaining a safe and positive school environment. The goal of PBIS is to make schools effective and efficient and provide equitable learning environments for all students. Decreasing aggressive conduct and bullying can occur through improving culture and climate, building relationships with students and staff, changing academic outcomes and increasing prosocial behaviors.

WV ATC's School Wide Positive Behavior Support staff have achieved many of the initial goals for this project, and continue to develop

new goals with timely deadlines. One new goal is to replace all existing training videos from other states with our own videos that highlight West Virginia administrators, teachers, and students. With the purchase of our state of the art video equipment this goal is coming to light. And with the help of a number of WV ATC staff, we recently finished our first training video, titled: Completing The PBIS Team Roster. It will also be available on our website for technical assistance. As we move ahead, we plan to create more training videos and start the interviewing process in schools implementing PBIS. This is exciting stuff!

WV ECPBIS



WV Early Childhood Positive Behavioral and Interventions and Supports (ECPBIS)

WV Early Childhood Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports is a collaborative effort between the WV Department of Education Office of Special Education and the WV Autism Training Center at Marshall University. Our mission is to provide training

and technical assistance to early childhood educators as they take a proactive and positive approach for promoting social and emotional development in early childhood settings.

You can find more information on our website at www.wvecpbis.org and like us on Facebook at West Virginia ECPBIS @wvecpbis

WV Project AWARE



WV Project AWARE hosted a third YMHA Instructor Course in WV in March certifying 16 additional Certified Instructors. Project

AWARE has greatly increased WV's capacity to implement Y/MHFA and now has a total of 70 that includes state and Berkeley, McDowell and Wood partnering instructors! Several other partners (WVDHHR/ Bureau for Behavioral Health and Health Facilities, LAWV's Family Advocacy, Support and Training Program are partnering with WV Project AWARE to implement Y/MHFA. State & LEA Instructors representing diverse systems including school personnel, RESA, child welfare, mental health, faith based, law enforcement, family advocacy, suicide prevention, and EMS. To date, nearly 2900 school and community individuals have been trained as Youth and Adult mental health first aiders. In addition, over 2900 school-aged youth have been referred by a YMHA or MHFA Instructor or First Aider to mental health or related services. For more information and training opportunities please join us on Facebook: Mental Health First Aid WV!

WV Project AWARE's demonstration counties of Berkeley, McDowell and Wood are partnering with local mental health providers, RESAs and numerous local agencies and are successfully increasing access to school and community based mental health services and supports. These efforts are building and enhancing infrastructure and capacity at the county level with focus on identified model schools to ensure multi-tiered systems of support for ALL students.





September 6-7, 2018

Autism Across the Lifespan Conference

www.marshall.edu/atc/2018-autism-across-lifespan

Featured Speakers

Day 1 – Brenda Smith Myles, Ph.D.

Session 1: Meeting All the Needs of Individuals with ASD: Comprehensive Planning that Leads to Optimal Outcomes

Session 2: The Comprehensive Autism Planning System: Ensuring that Individuals' Needs are met in School, Home, and Community



Day 2 – Peter Gerhardt, Ed. D.

Session 1 – Adulthood Begins in Preschool: Targeting Skills that Make a Difference in Adulthood.

Session 2 – Sexuality Education and Individuals with ASD: What We Know and What We Don't Know



Additional Topics to include:

● *ABA Programming* ● *Bullying and Autism* ● *Relationship Building* ● *Social Communication Training*

- Early Bird Registration through May 15, 2018 AND Parent Stipend: \$75 for one day, and \$125 for both days
- Regular registration rate \$90 for one day and \$150 for both days



The West Virginia
Autism Training Center





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