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West Virginia Autism Training Center at Marshall
University

Fall 2014

The West Virginia Autism Training Center @ Marshall University Magazine, Fall 2014

West Virginia Autism Training Center

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The West Virginia **AUTISM** *Training Center*
@ Marshall University

FALL 2014 ISSUE

Upcoming National
Conferences

How Can I Tell My Child
About their Diagnosis?

Nickie's Amazing
Senior Pictures

A Poem by Brooks

Rally for Autism 2014

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"The WV Autism Training Center provides support to individuals with autism spectrum disorders as they pursue a life of quality"



WVATC

@ Marshall University

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Greetings

From the Executive Director



Greetings, from everyone at the West Virginia Autism Training Center (WV ATC) at Marshall University!

It's been two years since we published our last magazine. In that time, significant changes have occurred within the center. Dr. Barbara Becker-Cottrill retired as executive director in August, 2013, after providing leadership for nearly a quarter century. Then, after serving as interim director for more than a year, I accepted the position of executive director.

Dr. Becker-Cottrill was an inspiration. During the years we worked together I traveled with her often to schools, and watched her work closely with teachers and paraprofessionals inside classrooms. Many times I observed her teaching students on the spectrum. Watching Dr. Becker-Cottrill teach – whether her pupil was an adult or a child – was a joy. In my opinion, teaching was what she did best. I certainly learned a great deal from her tutelage.

One of the most important lessons I learned from Dr. Becker-Cottrill is that collaborative relationships are necessary if we are to effectively carry out the mission of the center. We at the WV ATC are firmly grounded on that principle. We strive to maintain deep, meaningful relationships with those we support, and enjoy close professional partnerships with those with whom we share common goals.

This magazine illustrates our collaborative spirit. Look closely at the sections in which the magazine is divided – Training, Events, and News, Strengthening Supports, A Life of Quality, Creative Community, and Autism State Updates – and notice we are attempting to create a dialogue within the autism community about the goings-on across the Mountain State. This magazine is a shared vision: a joint effort between the WV ATC, those we support, and those with whom we share a professional journey.

Simply, it could not happen without you.

Marc Ellison, Ed.D.

Executive Director

The WV Autism Training Center

Sarah Shen Recognized for Outstanding Autism Support



Sarah Shen and Principal Nancy White of Spring Mills Middle School

The West Virginia Autism Training Center recently presented an award for Outstanding Autism Support to Mrs. Sarah Shen and her team at Spring Mills Middle School. Mrs. Shen and her team conducted data collection, team meetings, brainstorming sessions, and person-centered instruction to help students with autism achieve great things while still feeling safe at school. Hats off to the entire team at SMMS in Berkeley County!

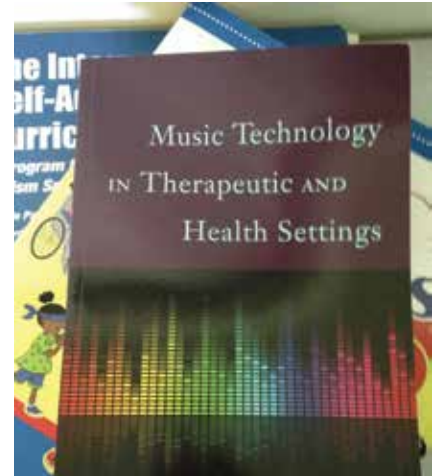
College Program Parents' Weekend



Marshall University Freshman, Annie Wiseman with her parents Brett and Nancy Wiseman

The WV ATC College Program for Students with ASD held its 9th annual Parents' Weekend on October 11, 2014. More than 150 people attended the event, which celebrated the upcoming graduation of 5 students. Parents' Weekend is a wonderful celebration of community, with folks traveling to Huntington, WV from all over the country. The event showcases student talent, and is capped off with a wickedly competitive trivia tournament.

News from the Autism Training Center Lending Library



Books, DVD's, and other materials are available to all ATC registered families at no cost

The Lending Library at the West Virginia Autism Training Center is a storehouse of information on topics related to autism. Brand new resources as well as classic texts and audio visual materials are available at no cost to families registered with the center.

New books and materials are always being added including a new text called [Music Technology in Therapeutic and Health Settings](#) edited by Wendy L. Magee (www.jkp.com). This new resource has a chapter titled **Engaging iPad Applications with Young People with Autism Spectrum Disorders** by Robert E. Krout that families may find useful. In the chapter, the author describes several music-based apps and their potential uses to improve the quality of life of individuals with autism.

To learn more about this book and other resources available through the lending library please visit <http://www.marshall.edu/atc/lending-library-books-videos/> or call (800)344-5115 to speak with librarian Whitney Lawson.

Meet the Autism Training Center Staff: *Bonnie Marquis*

Bonnie began working with the Autism Training Center in October of 2008, just over a year after relocating to the Huntington area. Her husband had joined the faculty at Marshall University as a professor of anthropology, and she had spent her first months working for a local child development center. Her background as a special educator and child development specialist lead that center's director to invite her to take over a classroom in which several students with autism were enrolled. "I really knew relatively little about autism at that point!" Bonnie admitted, but there was something about her perspective and understanding of development and behavior that the outgoing teacher saw and she personally selected Bonnie as her replacement in the challenging classroom.

"I knew my time there would be short lived, as I was focused on becoming a Birth to Three Provider. I just never expected to become so fascinated by autism or for it to get under my skin. But it did – in a good way!" Bonnie found working with students on the spectrum fascinating and loved learning about ASD and the strategies that could help. And it was through a therapist who visited the classroom that she learned of an open position at the Autism Training Center. When she learned the details of the various duties involved, working with teachers, parents and other professionals – she knew she had found the ideal job.

"While I have always loved working with and for children, my real passion has been working with parents and families. I remember thinking this job was the perfect culmination of all my past experience and was so excited for the opportunities here." And while the job of a PBS Trainer can be challenging at times, Bonnie thoroughly enjoys the chance to get out into the schools and communities and work side by side with a range of families and professionals. She finds every client and family completely unique and feels there is something to learn from each of them.

She also loves that she is encouraged to continuously engage with her colleagues across the state to advance the mission of ATC and enhance the services provided. "My own professional growth has really flourished here and for that I am forever grateful."

Looking forward, Bonnie is hoping to implement a skills group in early 2015 that focuses on comprehensive sexuality education for middle/early high school aged students. "Getting this information out to those we support is critical, not only to ensure opportunities for a full and meaningful quality of life, but also for their very safety." Emerging research shows large numbers of adolescents being incarcerated for sexually related offenses have an ASD (Sutton, et al, 2012). It's clear to those with an understanding of autism that this is, in many cases, rooted in a lack of skill and understanding related to sexuality and appropriate boundaries. And there is already ample evidence that those on the spectrum are at a greatly increased risk of exploitation and being targeted by predators, for many of the same reasons.

Bonnie points out that talking about the subject with individuals with ASD is a good first step toward addressing the problem. "Sadly, it is a difficult topic for people to talk about, but we are hoping to open a dialogue and present the material in a developmentally appropriate way and that it leads to the ability for the individual to discuss related matters with trusted individuals, both now and throughout life as these issues inevitably come up."



"My own professional growth has really flourished here and for that I am forever grateful."

PBS Trainer Bonnie Marquis



Upcoming National Conferences

SOCIAL THINKING CONFERENCE

Pittsburgh, PA
Embassy Suites Pittsburgh -
International Airport
550 Cherrington Parkway
Coraopolis, PA 15108
[www.socialthinking.com/conferences/
workshops/pittsburgh-pa-oct-23-24](http://www.socialthinking.com/conferences/workshops/pittsburgh-pa-oct-23-24)
412-269-9070

AUTISM: TRANSFORMING THE FUTURE

October 16 & 17, 2014
Center for Autism and Related Disorders
at Kennedy Krieger Institute
North Baltimore Plaza Hotel
2004 Greenspring Drive,
Timonium, MD 21093

OCALICON 2014

November 19-21, 2014
Columbus, OH
Greater Columbus Convention Center
<http://conference.ocali.org/>

12TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POSITIVE BEHAVIOR SUPPORT

March 11th - March 14th, 2015
Boston, Massachusetts
<http://www.apbs.org/conference>

Venturing Out With Bobby

by Cheri Smith

As the mother of an 8 year old son on the more severe end of the autism spectrum, venturing out into the world can be a great challenge. There are only a few public places that my son Bobby can go to without preparation. We rarely have issues at McDonald's, because, after all, they have his favorite thing in this whole world...the coveted McDonald's French fries.

Even though he loves French fries, there are a few obstacles that we face in order to get this great prize. First, we have to wait in line to order. Bobby has been working with a behavioral therapist on the skill of waiting and has come so extremely far in the past 3 months. So, if you see him out in public waiting in line and he is pulling on my arm, bouncing up and down and making noises, I just want you to know the hours of work it has taken him to get this far to where he can stand in line at all. You may think his behavior is horrible, but I am so super proud inside because he is waiting. It has recently "clicked" in his head what waiting means and how it works. That he is in line at all is such a huge accomplishment!

Once we have ordered, we still have to wait for the food to come to the tray and I then have to carry the tray with one hand while I hold Bobby's hand with my other. He has an extreme tendency to wander and if I don't keep one hand on him at all times, he will very likely run. I also have to make sure that Bobby doesn't take any French fries off of anyone else's table on the way to his seat. If he would by chance steal one of your fries I just want you to know how embarrassed that I am and that I will try and apologize as we are still moving on to our seats. But please do not be upset with him as he just wants a French fry and doesn't always understand social norms.

("Bless you" to the cashier who often says to me, "Would you like me to bring that to your table?" Yes, more than you can ever imagine, I would LOVE for you to bring that to my table. Thank you so very much! Once we are finally seated and he is eating, all is right with the world at least for a little while.)

Not all public places have this happy ending for Bobby. There are many places that he cannot tolerate at all. Certain superstores can be his biggest nightmare. Once every 6 months or so, we try it again to see if Bobby is ready for one of these huge, busy stores. We tried again last week and his answer was a big "No!" For anyone who saw him in the store on this day, you saw a boy trying with all of his might to get to the automotive department to see the tires and get out the back door. You also saw his father trying to keep hold of him while simultaneously trying to calm and quiet him down as they walked back through the store trying to find me and finally get Bobby to the car.

When you are the parent experiencing this episode you feel like everyone has stopped what they are doing and are watching you and the child. Maybe people are thinking: "Is the child being abused?" "Is the child a brat?" "Why can't they keep that kid under control?" Well, the simple answer in my case is that my son is totally overwhelmed. We aren't actually sure what the real problem is...maybe the lights or the sounds or the smells or a mix of them all. After all, he can visit certain large stores just fine



but not others. His behavioral therapist is also working with him on going out in public. So generally when we do go out, we are going out with a specific plan on how to make the whole experience less traumatic for our child.

We go out in public as a family far less than the typical family. We pass on many invitations that we would definitely attend if our family was in a different situation. We also go to events with Bobby knowing that we are only staying as long as Bobby can handle, even if it is just for minutes. We do this because sometimes we just never know how he is going to react in any situation.

Our favorite way to go out and do activities in public is with our group of autism families from our local support group. Our community has also started stepping up recently to help us with "autism friendly" activities. Our local mall has hosted Sensitive Santa and Sensitive Bunny events so that we can take Bobby to see Santa and the Easter Bunny without the stress of waiting in line and the crowds of holiday shoppers. One of our local swimming pools, which also has a great children's area, has for the past couple of summers, opened early on certain days throughout the summer just for people with special needs. These are times that we can take our special needs children out and do fun things that most other children can do without issue. It is so much more relaxing for me to go and let him play in the water without worrying if he is going to be inappropriate and offend someone. He is known to take off his swimwear to announce that he is "all done." Typically if he does this while in a group of other kids with autism, there are too busy doing their own thing to notice. Also, if an autism meltdown occurs, it is so much less embarrassing because we have all experienced them.

There are a couple of things that you should know about me when I am out in public with Bobby. I

tend to acquire a couple of autistic tendencies of my own when we are out. I am in my own world with all of my focus on Bobby. I may even look right at you and not see you, but I am not ignoring you I am just focusing on the most important thing to me at the time, which is making sure that Bobby is safe. I'm not going to stop and have a conversation with you if I am out with Bobby. He doesn't like to stop and wait. He wants to keep moving and in this phase of learning to walk around a store while holding Mommy's hand, we simply are not at the stage where we can stop and visit with you. I may not follow the social norms when I am out in public with Bobby. When we go to the doctor's office, I ask to wait in the exam room because it is just too much of a challenge to sit in the large exam room with everyone else, especially sick children. He has picked up sippy cups, taken snacks, licked walls – I just don't have the energy to chase him around the waiting room while everyone watches us. Some people may be upset that we get to go right back, but those people may be more upset if my child takes off with your baby's bottle.

Lastly, one of the most important things that I would like for you to know if we are out in public together...I am NOT, I repeat NOT offended by any questions that your children may have. Please don't be embarrassed if your child asks "what is that thing on his ankle?" or "why does he make those noises?" I will do my best to answer their questions on an age appropriate level and I am not at all upset with them. (The thing on his ankle is a Project Lifesaver tracking device that the sheriff's office can use if he ever gets lost and he makes those noises to calm himself down.) If the child is old enough I will start the conversation about autism awareness education and explain to them that Bobby has autism.



The mission of the Autism Training Center is to provide support to individuals with autism spectrum disorders as they pursue a life of quality. This is done through appropriate education, training and support for professional personnel, family members or guardians and others important in the life of the person with autism.

WV ATC FACTS

- WV ATC serves the entire state of WV
- WV ATC serves individuals of all ages
- WV ATC provides training in autism for approximately 1000 people annually
- WV ATC services are at no cost to registered families
- WV ATC, through Marshall University, provides autism teacher endorsement course-work
- WV ATC sponsors The College Program for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder
- WV ATC collaborates with the WV Department of Education Office of Special Programs and WV Birth to Three

How Can I Tell My Child About Their Diagnosis?

by Pat McCoy, PBS Trainer WV Autism Training Center



Parents often experience a range of emotions and questions when their child receives a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder. Siblings, grandparents, and other family members may also experience a variety of emotions. Isn't it reasonable to expect diagnosticians to take into the consideration the needs of the child and provide for him or her the age-appropriate information and support necessary to help them understand ASD?

Sometimes parents are conflicted about disclosing information to their child. Will their son or daughter be upset or depressed? Will they be able to understand or feel that they are failures? Will they begin to define themselves in terms of a label? Parents and family members may also question with whom, where, how, and when this discussion should take place.

In reading numerous articles, books, and internet blogs on the subject, it appears that many adults on the spectrum recommend that revealing the diagnosis to the child and supporting them in their emerging awareness is of utmost importance. But, what is the best way to approach the subject? Does it need to be a "BIG" talk or small talks that prepare us and take place over time?

In researching this topic, these key suggestions are mentioned most consistently:

- Start early to help your child celebrate the diversity in others. It is important for all children to value the ways in which we are different and unique. One writer suggests that, if children have difficulty understanding the differences between people, chose animals to explain individual differences. Favorite characters, selective interests, or specific talents could also be used. For example, Spiderman and Superman are both superheroes, but with very diverse powers. Thomas and Clarence are both wonderful trains, yet very different.
- Over time, point out how we are alike. In reality, we are all more alike than different. This discussion should include both our struggles as well as our strengths. For example: "You and Jimmy both like to ride the bus." "You don't like peas, I don't like carrots, but we both love ice cream!" Celebrating our individual differences and similarities can be noted daily in our individual or family discussions.
- Help them understand how their brains work. For example: "You are great at math and figuring things out." "Wow, you remember details so well," or "You tell wonderful stories about things that I can't imagine." Continue to emphasize their strengths and struggles at a personal level while trying not to be judgmental.
- Help your child list their individual strengths and weaknesses. Let them talk about what they do well and what they need help with. Drawing, writing a story, or looking at a list might be a useful way for the child to identify these areas.
- There is no best time to share the diagnosis with your child. After you are comfortable with the information you have acquired and your personal questions are answered, it may be time to move forward.
- If a child is asking questions, it might be time to open up the discussion. Listen to your child as she or he talks about the differences they see between themselves and peers. If they are talking, questions may have been on their minds for a long time.
- There may not be a need to use specific and technical terms, depending on the individual's level of understanding and maturity. But you may want to consider using the word "autism" as a part of everyday conversations. The word can be used unemotionally, as one would say "it's because I'm nearsighted," or "he has ADHD."
- Have these conversations when things are calm and there is time to talk. Following a meltdown or upset may not be the best option.
- There may be no right age to tell your child about autism. But, if he or she is near puberty or older, a direct conversation may be your best option. By now, they are probably encountering numerous issues regarding peers, infatuations, and other social difficulties.
- Help your child understand that they are not defined by autism, but are their own person. Knowing they are on the spectrum may help them understand how they see themselves, but it is just one part of who they are.
- Support them if they want to disclose or talk to others. Later conversations may include other family members and siblings, or close personal friends.
- Keep conversations as positive as you can. Answer any direct questions they may have, tell them you'll find out, or let them help you find the answers. Awareness unfolds over time for most individuals on the spectrum.

And, finally, be as prepared as possible. Sometimes a child will be completely comfortable with the information. Others may be upset or show concern. Seek help from professionals and others on the spectrum, if possible. Consider having a variety of pre-selected books, on-line information/websites, and videos available. The Autism Training Center has numerous books and DVDs in their library that can also help you in your mission. For more information on those resources, call the Autism Training Center at 304-696-2332.



Faith Community Inclusion



by Megan Pennington

PBS Trainer WV Autism Training Center

Sitting quietly for an hour in a room where sound reverberates off ornate stone walls is not usually the kind of activity most parents of children with autism spectrum disorders seek, especially when social pressures and the risk of being ostracized are so high. Nor do most families risk dropping their child off in a room with several other kids and an adult who may lack an understanding of ASD. Yet this is the scenario that often occurs on days of worship for faith groups everywhere.

In my role as a PBS Trainer, I've heard many families express hope that things could be different; that they could belong to a larger community that celebrates their spirituality. In my role as wife to a man in seminary, I also know that many churches do not always focus on ministering to those with special needs, whether because religious leaders do not know how or because they are not aware of the need to do so. Luckily there are resources to help both the families and the faith groups bridge this divide.

It is likely that many family members have already filled the role of advocate for your child in the school system, working with teachers to make the most out of your child's education. The same can be done in the community.

- If you want to become connected with your faith group, but have not made the initial step of attending the services, make a phone call. If you attend services and your faith group does not



know of your family's needs, see if you can schedule a meeting. Reach out to the leaders of your faith group and explain your desire to be involved, while also clearly explaining the needs of your family.

- During your discussions, ask about the structures already in place and compare those to the level of support your child

Continued on page 18

With a genuine desire to make a faith group inclusive, all families can feel welcomed and cared for. Resources, like the Autism Training Center, are available. Additionally, here is a short list of print and internet resources that may help both families and faith groups get on the road to celebrating differences together:

INTERNET

- <http://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/your-religious-community>
- <http://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/resource-library/religious-resources>
- <http://www.joniandfriends.org/>
- <http://theinclusivechurch.wordpress.com/>
- <http://www.lifeway.com/n/Ministries/Special-Needs>
- <http://orangeblogs.org/orangeleaders/category/special-needs/>

PRINT

- Leading a Special Needs Ministry: A Practical Guide to Including Children and Loving Families by Amy Lee Fenton
- Held: Learning to Live in God's Grip: A Bible Study for Special-Needs Parents by Sandra and Lee Peoples Jr.
- Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, and Congregations by Erik Carter
- Disability and the Gospel by Michael Beates

Tristan Loves "Sunshine"

By Cam Pulliam

PBS Trainer WV Autism Training Center

The Autism Training Center mission states: "The Autism Training Center supports individuals with autism as they pursue a life of quality." And this is quite true: we all work diligently to facilitate the development of active, positive teams comprised of people dedicated to supporting individuals in meeting their goals, increasing their ability to function comfortably, and live with as much independence as possible. However, sometimes teams are not solely comprised of family members, teachers, speech pathologists, para-professionals, or other people. No, sometimes we are happily joined by members of the animal kingdom. And on the team I'm about to describe, we were joined by 'Sunshine.'

I began our Family Focus Positive Behavior Support (FF-PBS) process with an adorable young man and his family during the summer of 2013. Tristan was 5 years old at the time. He was personable, inquisitive, and quite feisty. Tristan was diagnosed with ASD at four years of age but his challenges were enhanced by Attention-Deficit, Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Fetal-Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and the lingering effects of being born drug-addicted. Tristan's global skill deficits were obvious but the often random and very obsessive behaviors were an immediate concern. As we began to assemble our team of family and school staff we quickly became aware of another member who seemed to offer an alternative and hugely effective strategy. Welcome Sunshine to our team.

Tristan's parents, just prior to starting our FF-PBS process, had been actively searching for an activity, a program, a person, whatever they could find that would help ease some of Tristan's struggles. He was plagued by nightmares, an inability to remain focused or complete tasks, impulse control issues, and a variety of sensory concerns. Tristan expressed interest in riding "like a cowboy,"

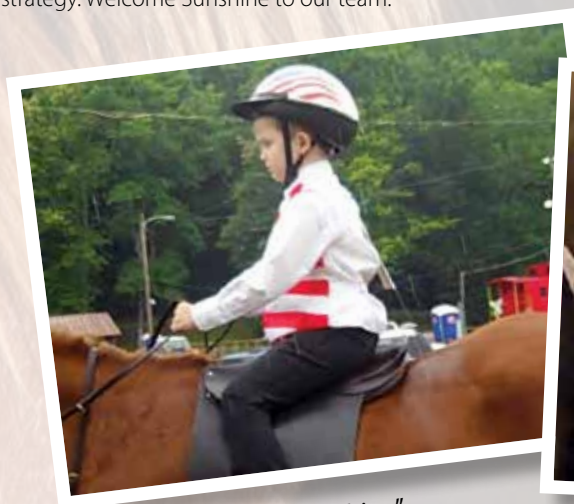
Yes, a horse named Sunshine became a productive and valued member of our Positive Behavior Support team. The strategies that benefitted Tristan while riding were duplicated in similar ways for home and school use so generalization of new and improved skill development could occur. Tristan's impulse control increased, obsessive activities diminished, attention

Riding lessons with Sunshine provided Tristan with a wonderful combination of physical fun and learning.

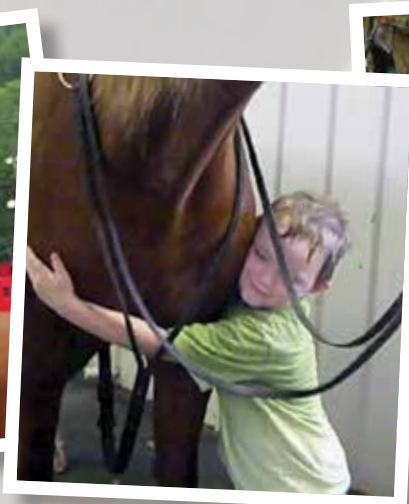
so the family checked into horseback riding lessons at Carousel Farms, a lovely horse ranch in Bluefield, WV. Tristan was scheduled to begin lessons in August. That is when he first met Sunshine.

Riding lessons with Sunshine provided Tristan with a wonderful combination of physical fun and learning. Initially, just sitting on Sunshine was a trial of balance and coordination but Tristan and Sunshine persisted. Slowly, but at a steady pace, Tristan learned to maintain his balance, improve his coordination and flexibility, and to follow-through more consistently when given multiple directives.

to task improved, and his nightmares have subsided. In fact, Tristan had made such tremendous strides that he and Sunshine recently participated together in his in his first horse show. They were awarded second place in their category! We are all so proud of Tristan and his well-earned success. But if asked, Tristan will simply say 'I love Sunshine!'



Tristan riding "Sunshine"



Tristan loves his friend "Sunshine"



Tristan and "Sunshine" win 2nd Place!



NICKIE'S AMAZING SENIOR PICTURES

by Bobbi Walls

Over the past few years, I have seen some awesome senior pictures and wondered if that experience would even be possible for my daughter, Nickie, a Nicholas County High School Senior who has autism. I worried that the experience would be too overwhelming, that her sensory system would not let her dress pretty enough, that she would not cooperate or understand what to do...

Well, I am overjoyed to report that the experience was possible, positive and enjoyable! And Nickie has some of the most amazing senior pictures ever!

NICKIE'S SENIOR PORTRAIT

In anticipation of this event, I noticed a lot of senior pictures last year and many of my favorites were taken at Howie McCormick Photography. Nervously, I called to ask if they would be willing to take Nickie's pictures. A few days later, we met for a consultation with Howie and Erica McCormick to tour the studio and review Nickie's Senior Survey, which helped them get to know her and plan for her session.

While reviewing her interests, Erica noticed that Nickie really likes Sharpies and suggested we plan a session around those with lots of color and fun. Howie agreed and said he didn't think they had ever done pictures with Sharpies, but seemed

interested. I shared that Nickie had a whole bunch of markers and they said to bring them all. We scheduled a session for two weeks later. In the meantime, Nickie and I chose some clothes that were fun, looked good for pictures, but were still comfortable enough for her. We took her OT's advice: each evening she modeled her clothes and I took pictures of her. In addition to her markers, we found some other really fun props like bubbles, confetti, and balloons. Sometimes it is difficult for Nickie to pose, but she has a beautiful, genuine smile when she is having fun.

Picture day came and we were anxious, but ready. Nickie had her pictures taken like a pro! Howie and Erica worked so well with

her and quickly realized she did best with short directions and being shown what to do. They let her relax and have fun during transitions and incorporated fun activity into the pictures, like spinning in a chair, shooting confetti around the room, and letting Nickie run and jump with balloons. At the same time, they kept the pictures stylish and age appropriate.

I am so thankful that Nickie had this experience and extra pleased that we have such "Ridiculously Awesome Senior Pictures" (well deserved slogan of Howie McCormick Photography) that look great and truly capture her personality.

The Wheeling Autism Group

by Peggy Hovatter

PBS Trainer WV Autism Training Center



Members of the group gathered at a recent autism event

In 2006, Anita Boston came to the conclusion that while there were great support groups for parents of children with ASD, support groups for people on the spectrum were few and far between. Not knowing any other families personally, she posted flyers in the Wheeling area to see if there were any other parents who struggled with the same dilemma that she did. Turns out there was...The Wheeling Autism Group has been going strong ever since, supporting forty-one people with ASD, ages 4 to 45, and their families!

This isn't a group that meets just once a month. Each and every weekend, entire families come together for swimming, movies, ceramics, hikes, theatre, parks, camping, amusement parks, skating, bowling, birthday parties, graduation parties or to just "hang out." They all agree that "we are family." Additionally, they have monthly meetings with specific topics, facilitated and supported by Anita and other parents. The kids talk about accomplishments and struggles that they are experiencing.

Ogie's mom reports that the group "gives kids friends that they didn't have." Ogie

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has opened up a lot more, and appears more confident. Ogie chimes in that the group had a significant effect on her life. "I came out a little bit at a time until I became comfortable. I am more social and more open. I even have a job now!" Another parent shared that not only has the group helped her child with ASD, it has even helped her other child with depression and anxiety.

David is a volunteer who has attended the group for the past three years. He is the author of *Be Unique, Be You and Live!* At age 38, after publishing his book, he was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome. David said "The diagnosis brought personal closure and added dimension to my mission to become a motivational speaker and advocate." He enjoys coming to the group to "see how people with autism interact and how they interact with the

world." He believes "all are individuals with talents and gifts."

Anita supports her group non-stop. The kids text her throughout the week to touch base or request advice. She is also a proud mother who's middle son Dylan is a college freshman. Dylan was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome and participated in ATC's FFPBS program in 2000.

What's next on the agenda for The Wheeling Autism Group? They are currently raising money to purchase a large home where adults with autism can be supported as they live, work and grow.

Why?
That's what families do!

Kathren Whitlock's Art



Kathren, on left, an artist since she was 3

I have been an artist since I was three. I used to watch my dad draw when I was 2. People looked at my art and I said I was doing techniques that are taught in college! My first painting or drawing was a vase with a dolphin design on the side. The vase had fruit in it. The picture is hanging up at my grandma's house. I even got an award for it!

My favorite drawing or piece of art is the flower that I drew (pictured to the right). In the past teachers would tell other teachers that they were lucky to have me in class. I got to skip a lot of art homework!



The feelings I get when making art are different. I look at things that are a part of my life and I want to draw them. I also like to draw pictures of future career ideas. Art just feels like a part of my life...it's what God made me for!

Kathren's art now hangs on the wall in the ATC's Eastern Panhandle satellite office.

Editor's Note: Kathren set the goal of having her art published in a newspaper or magazine while dreaming about her future through the WV-ATC FFPBS process.

A Poem by Brooks

I am wise and knowledgeable
I wonder about the entirety of the universe
I hear the time as it passes by
I see pieces of the broken puzzle together in my head
I want nothing for I know that I have everything I could want
I am wise and knowledgeable

I pretend sometimes that I do not see all that I do
I feel that there is still more to learn
I worry that what I know is not enough
I cry due to the pain of understanding that for which it is best not to know
I am wise and knowledgeable

I understand that knowledge is dangerous
I say how is it better to know so much when that knowledge brings only more pain
I dream of things of which should be spoken of
I try to help those I know while I still have time to spend with them
I hope one day to see the darkness go away and to see the world in perfect peace
I am wise and knowledgeable

Editor's Note: Brooks is a 9th grade boy who wrote this fantastic poem for his theatre class. He meets with a social group at lunch every day and every other Friday attends a group called "Foster"ing Friends. During lunch time he is also making valentine cards for the local nursing home.

WV Association of Positive Behavior Support Network Update

The WV Autism Training Center (WVATC) is actively involved in the WV Association of Positive Behavior Support Network, (WVAPBS,) a nonprofit organization committed to collaborating statewide to promote the philosophy, core values, and evidence-based practices of Positive Behavior Support (PBS). Members of the Network represent a broad range of systems and expertise with the field of PBS. The primary goals of the WVAPBS Network include implementation of PBS with fidelity across systems and dissemination of training and information.

WVAPBS recently held their annual membership meeting in June in



Charleston. New officers were elected to the Leadership Team and the Network identified committee goals for the coming year with facilitation by WVATC's Sarah Kunkel. Recent initiatives involve improving the quality of PBS services in WV by assuring high quality training through curriculum reviews, developing tools for evaluating PBS plans based on

standards of practice, and developing a PBS endorsement process for practitioners. In addition, WVAPBS is enhancing outreach by expanding its internet presence with assistance from WVATC's Luke Walker and developing resource materials with help from Gloria Sage and Angela Bryson of WVATC. WVAPBS is also providing recommendations to the Bureau of Medical Services for improved PBS service delivery and continues to collaborate with the international Association of Positive Behavior Support (APBS). Charlotte Hays, Program Coordinator at WVATC, recently had the honor of being nominated to the international Board of APBS.

West Virginia Team Autism Update

West Virginia Team Autism was formed in 2007 in an effort to build and maintain a statewide collaborative network to fully and appropriately support West Virginians with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) and their families. Realizing the importance of bringing together parents and professionals to strengthen services across the state, the team committed to meeting quarterly to engage in a variety of activities. Those activities include 1) updates on existing and new services available 2) identifying gaps in services and 3) working together in groups targeting specific activities that address needs. One of the great advantages of the team is the opportunity it creates for members to become informed about what services each agency or group offers. The tendency to work in "silos" when providing supports to families and people with ASDs is often a reality. WV Team Autism aims to work together



to develop a seamless system of services across the state. Members include representatives from West Virginia Birth to Three, the WV State Department of Education – Office of Special Programs, Regional Education Service Agencies, The WV Autism Training Center at Marshall University, The West Virginia University Center for Excellence and Disabilities and their Intensive Autism Service Clinic, the Mountaineer Autism Project, Bright Futures Learning Services, Autism

Society of West Virginia affiliate chapter in the Northern Panhandle, and family members.

The most recent effort of WV Team Autism is the development and maintenance of the West Virginia Guide to Accessing Services for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders. It is a comprehensive guide detailing the variety of services and supports that are available in our state with a special emphasis on helping families that have just received a diagnosis navigate sometimes complex service systems. The guide is available on most websites of participating agencies. It can easily be found at the WV Autism Training Center's website at www.marshall.edu/ atc. The newest version of the guide was updated in August, 2014.

RALLY for Autism 2014



The 13th Annual Rally for Autism was held Saturday, April 26, 2014 at Ritter Park in Huntington, WV. The Rally began in 2001 and continues to grow every year. This year 1244 registrants consisting of walkers, runners, and bike riders participated. All monies raised during this event are divided among three agencies, The Autism Society of River Cities, Autism Services Center, and The West Virginia Autism Training Center at Marshall University. The Rally is such a nice event that gives us an ample opportunity to spread awareness as well as a fun day for our community. For information regarding next year's event please visit www.rallyforautism.org.

*Kayla Wallace - took all shots of the rally for autism
Graphic Solutions (Huntington, WV) - created the red rally graphic.*



Autism Society of America – West Virginia Update

By Chris Fair, AS-WV President

The Autism Society-West Virginia Inc. (AS-WV) is a non-profit organization and a member of the national Autism Society. The Autism Society has West Virginia roots through Dr. Ruth Sullivan, of Huntington, West Virginia. When her son was diagnosed with autism at age 3, she began looking for help and found none. After networking with parents and professionals, including Dr. Bernard Rimland of San Diego, California, they came together in 1965 and founded The National Society For Children and Adults With Autism. The organization is now known as the Autism Society. Dr. Sullivan would go on to be the first elected president in 1969.

In the late 1970's, under the leadership of Dr. Sullivan, West Virginia had one of the first organized state chapters in the nation. Organizational purpose has remained consistent: to bring families



together for support, to promote awareness, to provide educational opportunities and to advocate for services for individuals with autism spectrum disorders and their families. The 1981 By-Laws for a State Society of the National Society For Children and Adults With Autism describe the state society as a composite of the state's local chapters, which comprise its membership. This maintains the community based concept of the parent organization.

It is my belief that community based autism groups are still the best way to meet the needs of West Virginians.

My goal as President of the AS-WV is to bring the groups together to work cohesively while having each maintain their own governance and identity so that they can best meet the needs of their communities by sharing information and resources. Thirty-one of West Virginia's counties are not currently served by an autism support organization.

If you have an interest in starting a group in your area, discussing the possibility is not a commitment! My contact information is on the AS-WV web-page: www.autismwv.blogspot.com

Faith Inclusion continued from page 11

needs to be involved in the community. This is also the time to clarify your goals. For example, decide if what you are seeking is respite, so that you can attend services while knowing that your child is safe, or if you want your child to be actively engaged in the faith community. Do you want your son or daughter to have responsibilities within the faith group if she or he is old enough for that? Having a clear vision will help you communicate effectively and will ultimately lead to better collaboration between your family and the faith community.

- Prepare to be the expert. If there are no supports in place, you will need to educate and support the leaders in your faith group while a program is built. Do not lose heart! Remember that collaborating to build an inclusive community benefits everyone, not just your child.

It is important for faith communities to recognize just how common ASD is, and to understand how best to support those living with ASD who are a part of the community. The prevalence of ASD is 1 in 68 people. The likelihood of someone in your congregation needing support is very high. Here is the good news:

- Creating an inclusive environment does not have to be cost intensive. Identifying people in your faith group who have the skills to help establish or grow supports is your first step. Are there teachers, therapists, counselors, social workers, or others in your congregation that either have an understanding of ASD or a propensity to help others? Build a team with those individuals on board.
- Do not think big. Think individual. What is the family telling you they need in order to be a part of the community? Identify what you have in place already and how you can expand on it, if needed.

Sometimes, it is as simple as creating a buddy system. People, not items or pre-packaged programs, are your biggest resource and asset.

- Preparation is key. A lot of people on the spectrum can be supported by giving them a heads up of what is going to happen in a given situation. Support can be offered by allowing the family to visit the building prior to a service so the individual can become familiar with the layout. Other ideas include creating a schedule of what is going to happen in the service, warning the individual of any bright lights or sounds that may come up, or letting them know if they are expected to perform any particular actions (such as shaking someone's hand, standing up, sitting down, etc.).

Scheduling a visit to the building before attending can help prepare families.



What is Autism?

Autism is a disorder of the brain. Symptoms of autism occur during the first three years of life, although an individual might not receive a diagnosis until much later. Individuals with autism have problems with communication and socializing with others. In young children, autism affects the development of "typical" play behaviors. Autism is considered a developmental disorder in that some normal developmental milestones, such as when a child says their first words, are absent or abnormal. Autism is considered a pervasive developmental disorder in that these developmental differences affect many aspects of life and may last throughout a person's lifetime. Currently, there is no one specifically known cause of autism and no one treatment. Early special education programs using behavioral methods have proven to be the most helpful treatment for persons with autism.

WHAT ARE THE EARLY SIGNS OF AUTISM?

Possible symptoms at 6 months:

- Not making eye contact with parents during interaction
- Not cooing or babbling
- Not smiling when parents smile
- Not participating in vocal turn-taking (baby makes a sound, adult makes a sound, and so forth)
- Not responding to peek-a-boo game

At 14 months:

- No attempts to speak
- Not pointing, waving or grasping
- No response when name is called
- Indifferent to others
- Repetitive body motions such as rocking or hand flapping
- Fixation on a single object
- Oversensitivity to textures, smells, sounds
- Strong resistance to change in routine
- Any loss of language

At 24 months:

- Does not initiate two-word phrases (that is, doesn't just echo words)
- Any loss of words or developmental skill

For more information on Autism, please also visit: www.marshall.edu/atc

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