



NEWSLETTER March 2008

Issue #42

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Charitable Registration #
10691/3775/RR/0001

Our Mission Statement

To provide services and programs to families of children diagnosed within the Autism Spectrum Disorders to develop their child's behavioural, communication, and social skills, and to advocate for their ongoing needs.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

- Children at Risk
Annual General Meeting
– **June 4, 2008**
- Autism Community
Annual Family Picnic
– **June 22, 2008**

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Will this cold and the snow ever stop? Well the need for help and support with Autism never stops. Your Board is taking a major step forward by implementing a well proven volunteer board model as set forth by Board Governance expert John Carver. At our February Board meeting we had **Ron Jette from Adams Jette Marketing and Communications** present and explain the John Carver model. Mr. Jette was instrumental in securing funds for Children at Risk from Project Clear Skies and has volunteered at many of our events. He has been with The Lung Association, Heart and Stroke Foundation as well as other organizations. We thank Ron for all his help and guidance. By following this model, Children at Risk will be establishing event committees to head up our fundraising activities, proposal writing to Government and Corporations for funding and more. These committees will meet occasionally to plan and coordinate our events. Presently we are looking for individuals with organizational skills to volunteer for these positions. As well, with our Annual General Meeting in June, we will also be seeking a few dynamic people to sit on your Board. Presently, the time commitment is 1 evening per month for a few hours, with our goal to soon start meeting every 2 months. We look forward to seeing you at the upcoming Rockin' for Risk on April 12th.

Paul Lacroix

7th ANNUAL "ROCKIN' FOR RISK" 50S/60S/70S DANCE – Saturday, April 12, 2008

Rock and Roll is here to stay!

Join us for this annual event and boogie all night to raise funds for Autism!

Saturday, April 12, 2008, 7:00 pm to 12 Midnight
(doors open 6:30 pm)

Algonquin College, Building "D"

Featuring:

Live music from Intersection
Ottawa's Elvis, Shawn Barry (on at 7 pm sharp!)

MC "Brother Bob" Derro from OLDIES 1310

Door, Costume and Dance Prizes

Mid-Evening Sandwich Buffet

Tickets \$20 advance/\$25 door,

\$180 table of ten (advance sales)

(must be 19+ years)

Ticket info at www.childrenatrisk.ca or call 613-741-8255

Don't delay – get your tickets today!

*Volunteers needed – please email Paula Tam at rtam66@yahoo.com

See Page 16 for a poster you can post at work or in your community!

2007/2008 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President:	Paul Lacroix
Vice-President:	Marlene Steppan
Secretary:	Andrea Allingham
Treasurer:	Lesia Gilbert
Member at Large:	Ed Gratton
Member at Large:	Amanda Telford
Member at Large:	Hazel Smith

ALL THE BEST

Dean Ryan

For almost 3 years, Dean Ryan has been steering the financial end of Children at Risk as our Treasurer. With career and personal demands increasing, Dean will be stepping down this month. We want to express our sincere appreciation to Dean (and his family) for his conscientious efforts in maintaining day-to-day financial status, producing our financial statements and providing financial advice on an on-going basis. Dean continues to support Children at Risk by participating in our events and activities – the Ryan family holds the 2-year record for funds raised through pledges for the “Rollin’ for Risk” Bowl-A-Thon! Please join me in wishing Dean best of luck!

Donna Lahey

Children at Risk wishes to thank Donna Lahey! Donna Lahey has been maintaining the Children at Risk website for several years. Though not a member of the Autism Community or a parent, Donna had the professional expertise to give our site a fresh, new look. Many a time we received positive comments and feedback on our Website, especially important from potential donors looking to support a charity for children! As Donna steps back, we currently welcome parent Jason Dever as our Webmaster! Jason’s career has been spent working on and supporting websites and web-based data. Jason introduced the exciting option of our On-Line Fundraising Auction site with our Celebrity-Carved Pumpkin Fundraiser last October. We look forward to more exciting and innovative web ideas from Jason in the future!

WELCOME ABOARD

Lesia Gilbert

Children at Risk is happy to introduce our new Treasurer, Lesia Gilbert, as she joins our Board of Directors this March! Lesia is excited about this opportunity to volunteer with a charity in her community. She is also active as a volunteer for the Riverside South Community Association and the OCRI Reads Early Literacy Program. Lesia has been working with Raymond, Chabot, Grant & Thornton Chartered Accountants since 2003 as a Senior Auditor and will soon be acquiring her CA designation. Lesia and her husband are expecting their first child in June! Welcome Lesia!!

Welcome to our new Facilitators!

Susan Kirk

Hello my name is Susan Kirk and I am Co-facilitating the West End Typical Teens Program that is currently in progress. I am a Communicative Disorders Assistant (CDA) and have been working in the field of Developmental Disabilities for the past 16 years. Presently I am the Coordinator of the Speech and Behaviour Program with the Developmental Services division at Family and Children’s Services in Renfrew County.

Mary-Jane Slingerland

My name is Mary-Jane Slingerland and I work as a speech-language pathologist with people aged 18 months to thirty years of age who are experiencing difficulty with communication. I operate my own private practice but have done contract work for First Words, Ottawa Children's Treatment Centre, Thursday's Child Nursery School, Renfrew County Developmental Services and most recently, Children At Risk. My co-facilitator and I have almost completed our first Typical Teens Programme in Kanata with support from CAR. We are excited at the success we have found so far. It's been a lot of fun!!



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Submitted by Brenda Reisch

Where to start? Children at Risk is well into 2008 - with Fundraising events & activities past (Bowl-A-Thon, 67's 50/50 tickets sales) and coming (Rockin' for Risk on April 12, Raffle in May), Winter Social Skill Groups finishing and Spring Groups poised to start, event ticket donations coming in there is never a dull moment here!

As many of you are also aware, 2007 saw Children at Risk participate in several high-profile events and receive generous donations – with the view to using these funds to offer more services for higher-needs ASD children. Our charity has taken a very important step towards seeing this as a reality. Recently, several Board Members and community professionals spent a complete day as a Focus Group to identify the needs and how best to provide services. Many thanks to **Rod Lemmex** of the **Lemmex Group**, who donated his time to expertly facilitate this session. Along with funding from Autism Ontario's Realize Community Potential Program, this first planning session has helped to identify who needs these services, what the groups' content might be, as well as potential structure of the groups. We do realize that the wheels are turning slowly for high-needs groups, but please understand that most funding (although initiated over a year ago in 2006) only came through at the end of 2007. More meetings are scheduled and, if all goes well, we are hoping to launch Phase 1 this Fall!

I was also pleased to be part of a group who successfully lobbied the Ottawa School Board to continue (at least for this year) the July Summer Learning Program for over 300 ASD and physically disabled children in the Ottawa region. Interacting with parents from Clifford Bowey and Crystal Bay schools made me aware of one thing – that the Autism community has a strong voice and that this strength is now the envy of other disabilities. We have the ear of governments, we are in the public spotlight – and yet many ASD children still do NOT have adequate, available services and supports! Look to adult services and you will see even less. We need to keep this ball rolling and gather strength and supports where and when we can.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE (Cont'd)

Take every opportunity you can to ask your school, your community, your politicians, your city for MORE services and supports. Complacency "has no place" in the quest to provide for what your child needs. My motto for Children at Risk is that I can always ask – it does not always mean that support is given, but it can be guaranteed none will be forthcoming without making a request! Wishing you a warm and happy Spring – and hope that it comes soon!

FUNDRAISING UPDATE

Submitted by Brenda Reisch, Fundraising Chairperson

UPCOMING EVENTS/ACTIVITIES SINCE DECEMBER/2007...

What Happened:

Autism Ontario (Ottawa Chapter) & Children at Risk Annual Christmas Party

On Sunday, December 9, many families in the Autism Community enjoyed an afternoon of pre-holiday fun at the Pinto Valley Ranch. Thanks to Janet Kooiman and Rebecca Weaver for their excellent organizational abilities, as without which this party would not have happened. Also a thank you to Judith Starkey and her family for her tireless efforts, Carole who helped out immensely with the set-up and take-down, Christine Beer who made the cakes (yummy), our special visitor, Santa, who put lots of happy smiles on the kids, the Pinto Valley Ranch, especially Gail and Ernie, the bus driver who drove to the ranch.

Some comments from families who attended:

"I just wanted to say that my family had a great time at the AO and CAR Children's Christmas Party today at the Pinto Valley Ranch."

"My kids had a blast! So well organized and with lots of different things to do so there was no "downtime". Sincere thanks to all involved! Everyone I spoke to loved it! My favourite part was watching one enthusiastic rider yeehawing his way around the pony ring!"

"Congratulations to the organizers on a job well done, my family had a great time. From the pizza to rides and sliding, everything was A1. We're already looking forward to next year."

FUNDRAISING UPDATE (Cont'd)

Capital Chordettes Auction - & More!

On Saturday, December 1, the Capital Chordettes held their Annual Christmas Craft Auction & Concert. With Ken (The General) Grant as auctioneer for the Live Auction, a lovely afternoon of fundraising, tasty goodies and a mini-concert by the Chordettes unfolded. Children at Risk was presented with a cheque for **\$1,064.44** as part of the on-going support given by this philanthropic chorus of musical ladies. In addition, on December 12, I was invited to the Christmas Dinner of the Rotary Club of Ottawa and presented with a cheque of **\$1,000**, which the Rotary Club gave to the Chordettes in appreciation of a Christmas carol performance!

Just to give a bit of background, The Capital Chordettes Incorporated is a women's Barbershop Chorus who have been entertaining audiences in the National Capital region for over 45 years with their acappella, four part harmony. Among their performances, in 2007 they presented their bi-annual concert at CentrepoinTE Theatre called Hits, Glitz and Rock & Roll. They have consistently remained among the top 4 Medalist Choruses at International Harmony competitions since 1984 and have won the International Championship in 1984, 1988 and 1996. Last Fall, the Chorus proudly represented Ottawa as they placed fourth out of 25 competing choruses at the 2007 International Chorus Championship Competition of Harmony, Inc. held in London, Ontario on November 10, 2007. The Chordettes currently has over 60 members from National Capital Region under the direction of Carolyn Henderson.

Since 2004, The Capital Chordettes have embraced Autism and Children at Risk as their charity of choice, receiving (to date) **\$14,642.14** from their direct and associated donations! If you get a chance, their charity liaison representative, Penny Fennell, would love to receive any emails of appreciation to the Capital Chordettes for their on-going support, recognizing that Autism is not a disability that can be fixed with a one-time donation! Penny's email is plfennell@hotmail.com - I am sure that she and the other Chordettes would be delighted to know how much their support means to our families!

FUNDRAISING UPDATE (Cont'd)



2nd Annual "Rollin' for Risk" Bowl-a-Thon

On Sunday, February 3, 2008, families and supporters gathered once again to bowl, rock and have fun at Walkley Bowling Lanes, while raising funds for Children at Risk! Despite a slightly lower participation due to Winterlude and Super Bowl Sunday – the enthusiastic participants raised **\$4,000** for Autism!! Many thanks to Brother Bob Derro of OLDIES 1310 AM – who not only MC'd the event, but also brought his family as a Team to bowl, as well as "Ottawa's Elvis", Shawn Barry, who also brought his family and rocked the house with a mini-performance of hip-swiveling Elvis tunes.

Please join me in thanking our other sponsors:

Boston Pizza
Crabtree & Evelyn
Lincoln Fields Shopping Centre
Lone Star Restaurants
Minto Foundation
Ottawa Sports Gallery
Pelican Fishery & Grill
Pizza Hut
Rogers Television
The Disney Store
Villa Lucia Supper Club
Walkey Bowling Lanes

Entertainment Books

The 2007-2008 Entertainment Coupon books sales were down a bit, as some other retail locations were selling books for charities this year, as well. However, with the efforts of Quickie Convenience Stores, a partnering with Friends of Abandoned Pets and the many of our parents selling books, we managed to sell over 400 books, earning close to **\$4,500** for Children at Risk! The 2008-2009 Book will be out mid-August – don't forget to reserve your copy!!

FUNDRAISING UPDATE (Cont'd)

Ottawa 67'S 50/50 Ticket Sales

The Ottawa 67's Hockey Club and the Kiwanis Club of Rideau invited Children at Risk to again raise funds through selling 50/50 tickets for the month of March. We want to extend our appreciation to all the terrific volunteers who turned up for 4 games to help sell tickets – earning **\$1,544.67** for Children at Risk! Join me in wishing The Ottawa 67's "Good Luck" as they enter the OHL playoffs this week!!

What is On Now/Coming:

MacMillan's Frozen Foods Spring Campaign

Children at Risk will NOT be holding a Spring MacMillan's campaign fundraiser this year – but the good news is we are still planning for a Fall campaign, probably in November. Requests in the Spring have been low the past couple of years and we need to concentrate our efforts and time in other fundraising areas. However, you can contact me privately at reisch@rogers.com if you would like to put in an order and pick it up yourself. I will send you a flyer. We also would love to have someone come forward that could conduct the Fall campaign in terms of assembling the orders and organizing the deliveries/pick-ups – mileage will be reimbursed.

Ottawa Race Weekend – May 23-25, 2008

Once again, local runner, David Michaud, will be representing Children at Risk and raising funds for Autism in this year's race. On the race website, www.runottawa.ca, Children at Risk will be listed as an Endorsed Charity, with a hyperlink to our website. Runners can encourage supporters to donate to Children at Risk, offering an opportunity to raise pledges for Autism! If anyone is aware of any runners involved in this event, please encourage them to support Autism through Children at Risk with their pledges!!

13th Annual Children at Risk Raffle – May/June 2008

Tickets for this annual fundraiser will be ready early May. We will be looking to launch sales on Mother's Day Weekend with volunteers selling tickets at Carlingwood Shopping Centre on May 8, 9 & 10, 2008. More information TBA shortly!

FUNDRAISING UPDATE (Cont'd)

Newsletter Advertising Sponsorships

Starting in our December 2007 quarterly newsletter, we are inviting local businesses to "advertise" their services with us. We can accommodate a business-card size ad for only \$25 per edition. We ask that you electronically supply any graphics or logos, plus text that is to be included. Ads can be ready to place or we can construct a simple ad from text supplied. We recognize that many of our families in the Autism community have retail businesses and/or home-based ventures, and this advertising would not only offer them exposure as well as an opportunity to fund some of our newsletter mailing costs! (Note: Children at Risk mails 2 editions per year in March and September, and emails 2 editions per year in June and December to over 300 families). Our newsletter is also posted for public viewing on our website at www.childrenatrisk.ca.



For information on upcoming events check out AutismOntario.com.

DONOR'S CORNER

Riverside South Community Association Inc.	\$50
Ottawa Jewish Community Foundation	\$100
William Joe	\$100
In Memory of Mary Ryan	\$160
Elizabeth Park Protestant Congregation	\$200
In Memory of Elaine Black	\$245
City of Ottawa – Mayor's Office	\$250
In Memory of Hilda May King	\$1,000

SPA DAY THANK YOU'S

Children at Risk would like to thank Nancy and Autism Ontario's RCP Program for providing an outing to the Versailles Spa for one of our Social Skill Groups. Here is some feedback:

Spa Day

"Thank you for the Spa Day. I had a great time and would love to go again! They did a great job on my nails and hair, I loved it!!!" Jazmine Starkey

"Thank you very much for the Spa Day. It was a lot of fun. The best part was the manicure - it was cool. I sure hope we get to go again sometime." Miranda

"I just wanted to send a big to Autism Ontario/RCP, Elaine Bissonnette and Sheri for the GREAT afternoon I had at the Versailles Spa!!!! I got my nails painted a pretty pink and had my hair cut and styled. I look great. Thank you." Ashley Weaver

"In the past, when Ashley had nail polish on her very short nails it never lasted for more than a couple of hours before she would pick/scratch it off. Almost 24 hours have passed and her nails look as if she just came from the Spa - not one chip, or scratch. She is excited to show her tutor today and can hardly wait to show her teachers and friends on Monday. Thank you again for creating this opportunity. I think all the girls in the group will remember this day and how often can a girl say at 13 years old that she went to the spa with her friends for the afternoon!!!" Rebecca Weaver (Mom to Ashley Weaver who looks and feels special)

"I had a lot of fun at the Versailles Academy. My nails look really good, and I love the colour! I like it when I get my hair shampooed and then dried completely straight. I hope we can do this again sometime." Chip Lobay



Note: Check out more photos on Page 15.

TICKET DONATIONS THANK YOU'S

Children at Risk regularly makes requests for ticket donations to support our families. Below are a few notes of appreciation:

High School Musical

"I just wanted to email you to thank Children At Risk for the tickets we received to attend the 'High School Musical' - it was awesome ... we enjoyed every minute!!!!" HR

"Thank-you so much for the tickets to High School Musical. We all had a great time. The show was awesome ... a great start to the March break! Thanks again!" Linda Blick

"Thanks for the tickets. Einav enjoyed the show so much! Thanks to Rebecca Weaver, too." Ruthie Raz

"Thank you so much for the tickets! Simon loved it -- Kris and I enjoyed it too. It was great to see skaters acting as human beings rather than animals or cartoon characters (e.g. previous Disney on Ice shows). We also enjoyed the girl-screams, reminiscent of Beatlemania days. I really appreciate the great escapes you offer." Jocelyne Fabisiak

"We would like to thank Scotia Bank Place, Feld Entertainment and Children at Risk for the Tickets. After the "winter storm of a century" it was wonderful to venture out among 10 foot tall snow banks and snowy roads to trek to the Scotia Bank Place for a family outing. Michael, Sarah, Chris and I attended and we are very pleased with the show. Christopher has always enjoyed Disney on Ice, but this was by far his favourite. The background screen provided words to one of the songs which he eagerly followed along with, he loved the music, and the skating of course, and he has been asking for fireworks since New Year's Eve. Needless, to say, Christopher was just thrilled. It is amazing to see our special children (no matter how old they are) so thrilled and excited. The seats were great, the parking lot was well maintained and the staff directed us to the appropriate plowed parking area. Rebecca Weaver was right at the centre of the main doorway totally organized with tickets on hand thank you Rebecca. Once again, in this sometimes overwhelming role as a parent and sibling of a young man with autism, seeing his happiness melted all our hearts, it was a perfect evening. Thank you!" The Gibbons Family - Michael, Diana, Sarah & Christopher

THANK YOU'S (Cont'd)

High School Musical (Cont'd)

"We all had a great time. The show was very cute! Thanks to Field Entertainment!" Florence Rosenthal

"My 2 girls and I were thrilled to be the lucky recipients of 3 tickets to Disney on Ice. High School Musical is one of the favorite CDs of these 2 eleven year olds, and this show did not disappoint! The music was fabulous, and the skating absolutely magical! We were further delighted to be seated in the 100s section of the Scotiabank Place, with an excellent view of the skaters and the action. The fireworks at the end dazzled us. As a family with 11 year old triplets, and a child with autism in that mix, it is challenging for us to get out to do "fun" things, other than just speech therapy and all those other things that go along with ASD. Thank you for giving us a much welcomed evening off from all the "tough" stuff, and allowing us all to revel in "teenagehood" for that evening! Joyce Mortimer

"I attended the Disney on Ice – High School Musical with my family and we all enjoyed the performance. I would like to extend my thanks to Feld Entertainment to have donated these tickets and Children at Risk for having given us the tickets. Special thanks to Rebecca who kindly waited to give out the tickets at Scotiabank Place. It was a great way to start off the March Break. Thank you." Connie Michaud

"I also would like to thank the ticket donors for the donations. These tickets mean so much to our family. Being able to expose our children to a variety of experiences is so important for their development, especially that people with autism struggle with being able to cope in certain situations. This gives us an opportunity to practice skills and learn but it also is an opportunity to have fun, which sometimes, in our busy and stressful lives, can be lacking. Thank you!" Ania, mom to Rachael

"I would like to Thank Children at Risk and Brenda Reisch for giving my family tickets to see High School Musical on Ice. I had a great time and so did my brother Dawson and friend David. I saw a lot of friends there, it was a blast!!" Jazmine Starkey

THANK YOU'S (Cont'd)

High School Musical (Cont'd)

"The kids had an awesome time, Dawson was just in awe through the whole show. Thanks!" Judith Starkey

"We too would like to thank Children at Risk and Feld Entertainment for a wonderful time tonight! My daughters loved it and Zach did really well there! A nice way to start March Break!" Jodi

"Ditto! We also had an awesome time! Thank you Children at Risk for the great tickets. It was greatly appreciated!" Angele

"Thanks again for the opportunity to go to the show. My family and I really enjoyed it." Rebecca Weaver

Sens Skills Challenge

"The Sens Skills Challenge had many impacts on my family ... all of which were extremely positive! I was able to share this special event with my 12 year old son, as well as a friend and her twin 11 year old boys. Even though one of her boys is severely physically handicapped and confined to a wheelchair all the time ... we made this work for him! He was so excited at the idea of seeing the Senators that we were there before the gates opened at 11:30. One of the ushers offered her and her son seats in the handicapped/wheelchair area up high before the gates opened, but we chose to remain together in those wonderful seats down low close to the ice. She carried him down to our seats and he sat on her lap the entire 3 1/2 hours ... The usher in our section was great. She looked after locking up his wheelchair during the event and she returned before the event ended asking us when we'd like to have it brought back. The efforts of both these ladies added to the enjoyment of the day for all of us! Justin was able to see most of the action down in our end on the ice. When things were happening down in the red teams end, he'd look up at the screen. He was able to recognize many of the players on 'our white team' and took joy in waving the white pompom that was lying on our seats when we arrived. It didn't hurt either that the white team won the competition!! You have no idea the amount of joy this event brought to this child and the other two boys. Thank you so very much for donating these seats once again. Without your generosity, these boys would never have had the opportunity to share in the excitement of that day." Judy Brignell

THANK YOU'S (Cont'd)

Sens Skills Challenge (Cont'd)

"I wanted to thank United Way and Bell for donating tickets to us for the Sens Skills Competition on Sunday, February 10, 2008. My husband and I brought our two sons to see the competition. It was the first time they were in Scotiabank Place. They were amazed. Justin who is autistic usually does not sit for very long, but on Sunday he sat and watched for the whole two hours. He loved Spartacat and all the lights and music. Damien enjoyed watching the hockey players demonstrate their skills. My husband got to take great pictures of his favorite players. I was just so happy that we could enjoy an event as a family. It's so hard to find events that both kids will enjoy. We will be attending this event for sure next year. Our family thanks you again from the bottom of our hearts. We really appreciate the donation." Sandra, Joe, Damien and Justin Prelorenzo

"The Sens Skills competition was hugely enjoyed by our family! Because we have triplets and because everything is so expensive, it is rare that we can get out with just one child to enjoy an event such as this. I understand (as I was not the lucky one who got to go - I stayed home with 2 while hubby took the third) that the events were very entertaining, and stimulated a lot of "post-event" conversation ("wasn't that the most amazing slapshot???", oh, and Max Keeping was a big hit!). Thank you to Bell and United Way for this greatly enjoyed opportunity. United Way may recall that, 11 years ago, when our triplets were born, United Way assisted us by providing a few of the most amazing, experienced staff from "Visiting Homemakers". Not only were they highly experienced with taking care of preemie multiples in addition to housekeeping, but they set up and organized our household so that we could function on an ongoing basis once their time with us was up. When I look back at the photos of our "Visiting Homemakers" with 3 babes in arms at once, it is with great fondness, as they truly became part of the family during their time at our home." Joyce Mortimer

THANK YOU'S (Cont'd)

Sens Skills Challenge (Cont'd)

"The event was fantastic. My ten year old hockey crazed son had a blast. He and the others in his row also received Sens hats and a Bell Canada beaver doll. Seeing Mike Fisher come close to breaking the league record for the hardest shot was definitely his highlight. Many thanks to the United Way and Bell!" Paul Lacroix

67's Game

"Thank You, Children At Risk.

My husband took our son to a 67's game with tickets that we won. Normally, we would be very anxious, (and so would our son) to attend something like this. Since we hadn't paid for the tickets, we felt that there was no reason not to attend. At first, our son was terrified-all the noise and commotion ... quickly though, he settled in and started to enjoy the game. It was a big step for all of us, perhaps something that families who don't live with Autism might not fully appreciate. We are now going to more new places as a result. I can't thank you enough for giving us that little "push" that we needed!" Carrie L.

6th Annual Aspirations/

ASO Fundraising Variety Concert

The 6th Annual Aspirations/ASO Fundraising Variety Concert will be taking place April 25, 2008 at Mac Hall in the Bronson Centre.

Individuals with Asperger's Syndrome, family members and friends who are interested in participating - showcasing music, dance, comedy/stand-up routine, art-work, or photography - are asked to contact John Lloyd at 613-231-3425 or by email: carefulwiththatelephant@gmail.com.

For more information regarding this year's benefit concert, please feel free to contact John, or Lauren, Aspirations media person at email: lgillieson26@hotmail.com.

Typical Teens in the West End of Ottawa

Submitted by Mary-Jane Slingerland, Speech-Language Pathologist, Group facilitator of the West End Typical Teens Program Winter 2008

We have almost completed our 8 week pilot of a Typical Teen's Social group in Ottawa West. It has been attended by 7 students with a diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome, Pervasive Developmental Disorder or Nonverbal Learning Disorder. We also had 7 typical teens volunteer so a grand total of 14 teens have taken part. I (group facilitator) and my colleague, Susan Kirk (co-facilitator), have enjoyed the experience of jointly running the group for the very first time. We planned a different activity each night and sometimes at a different venue as well (glow in the dark mini putt, bowling, dinner or tobogganing). Each night we focused on a specific social skill (e.g. reading nonverbal cues, turn taking in conversation, personal space, and conversation skills) and the volunteers helped to model these skills for the other students to learn in a natural, relaxed atmosphere.

The group really connected early on and so the experience has been a good one and many friendships have been established. They are already talking about other activities they could do outside the group as they look forward to planning the party being held April 1.

RESOURCE CORNER

Submitted by Liz Schissler, Social Skills Group Facilitator

Super Duper Publications www.superduperinc.com

This website, based out of the USA, provides a large selection of programming resources for social skills, language development and play skills. Many fun and educational materials are available. The shipping to Canada is free, however there is a charge for duty. Free printable worksheets and handouts are also available which provide information for parents and educators. Many of the games, cards and other resources for the social skills groups have been purchased through this website.

RESOURCE CORNER (Cont'd)



Interactive Websites

Depending on the interests of your child, some of these websites may be interesting to explore together:

<http://www.nyelabs.com/>

<http://www.brainpop.com/>

<http://www.funology.com/>

<http://www.sfskids.org/templates/splash.asp>

<http://www.funbrain.com/funbrain/idioms/>



Books

"Simple Strategies That Work! Helpful Hints for All Educators of Students with Asperger Syndrome, High-Functioning Autism, and Related Disabilities" by Brenda Smith Myles, Diane Adreon, Dena Gitlitz

This book is available through amazon.ca for under \$15.00. It is a short (40 pages), yet comprehensive resource that outlines many effective strategies for parents and educators. This book is practical, positive and simple in its approach. It provides informative charts, tables and specific examples to help guide the reader through the implementation of the suggested strategies.

Note: Thanks to Liz for this new column – awesome initiative! We look forward to more to come.

2008 March Break Science Camp



Under the leadership of Elaine Bissonnette (Behavioural Consultant), Sheri Curkovic (Group facilitator & Science teacher) and Amanda Ayotte (school EA and group co-facilitator), Children at Risk offered a Science Camp for 10 children on the autism spectrum during the period of March Break. This specialized program was made possible by a grant approved by the Autism Ontario-Ottawa Chapter.

Feedbacks received from parents and participants were overwhelmingly positive. During this four half-day camp, children between the ages of 8 and 11 years of age participated in daily science experiments, sports activities, and board/computer games in an environment of positive reinforcement. Favorite experiments consisted of making slime/goop, learning about buoyancy, hydrometer, with a great finally of testing the time required for rockets to pop in the air. The kids also enjoyed playing floor hockey, air hockey, dodge-ball and the chance to play Wii games.

This camp was a great confidence building experience and an important stepping stone for future planning of camps. Here are some testimonials from parents:

“This group of “high functioning” kids, offers him an opportunity to work on the skills he lacks in a supportive setting with others facing the same difficulties. In “normal” play settings, he can be left out because he doesn’t know what to do or how to ask or he is “ignored” because he is only talking about one thing and the others are doing something else. With proper guidance, he learns how to interact, take turn and let go of his idea for the one of the collectives.”

2008 March Break Science Camp (Cont’d)

“Physically, he gets exercise. Socially, he learns how to share, take turns, communicate, and build confidence. Educationally, he learns new things, how to reason, etc.”

“Although my son functions in social situations it’s nice to have a “safe haven” where all the children are on the spectrum. Of course the facilitators can help. The children improve their social interactions which can only help in their everyday life and school. My son loves these groups that Elaine Bissonnette has offered over the years and it’s just great for us to take him to such a positive place. We really hope more similar groups will go ahead in future as far as we’re concerned it’s been a great success. Wishful thinking but hopefully in the summer we will have another opportunity. Thanks so much to the Sponsor for making this group reasonably priced.”

What is next? Well, the message is clear from the parents. There is a need for such specialized camps and programs. We will continue our efforts to secure additional funding to offer more programs. We encourage you to send us your requests to help us justify the needs for specialized programs to potential sponsors.

Marlene Steppan
2008 March Break Science Camp Coordinator



THE GUILT FACTOR

By Jene Aviram of Natural Learning Concepts (<http://www.nlconcepts.com>)

When a child is diagnosed with autism, parents develop a new vocabulary. Conversations contain words like ABA, receptive and expressive language, discrete trial training, eye contact, floor time and biomedical approaches. Parents share their joys, their fears, their strategies and their dreams. In fact, almost everything is easily discussed except one thing – THE GUILT FACTOR. While it's proven time and again that parents are NOT responsible for their child's autism, many parents have this nagging little feeling somewhere deep inside that they are to blame. If they don't feel they caused the autism, they typically feel that their child would be doing better and progressing faster if they just put more effort into it. One can only equate it to preparing for the Bar exam. No matter how much you study, you could always do a little more. Simple every day activities result in great emotional stress for an autism spectrum parent. It's not long before the "guilt factor" spills over into every area of life.

HOW THE GUILT FACTOR IMPEDES YOUR LIFE

Your autism spectrum child is interested in animals. In a completely "non-typical" method of conversation, your child names all the farm animals and wants you to repeat it back to him. Again and again and again! You do so and the guilt factor sets in. "This is so inappropriate" you think to yourself. "I should take this opportunity to teach my child how to converse appropriately." But you know that if you don't comply to your child's wishes he'll have a meltdown, and you're busying making dinner, your two year old is crying because she's hungry and your eldest needs help with her homework questions. Disheartened, you continue the banter with your child, blaming yourself for not doing a better job. The telephone rings and it's your friend. You're thoroughly enjoying the conversation but just then you notice your child repeatedly spinning the wheels on a toy truck while making a strange noise. "I shouldn't be talking to my friend. I should be teaching my child how to play with that toy" you silently berate yourself. Then your child begins to run up and down the hall and you silently reprimand yourself. "I must get off this phone. Time is precious and I should be engaging my child". Feeling discouraged, you're torn between hanging up on your friend and redirecting your child. When picking up your child from OT, you chat politely to the other parents. One mother mentions that her daughter has extra speech therapy. Another one talks about the social skills group she enrolled her son in. Another one declares that she just signed her child up for Karate with an aide to help him. Despair and guilt wash over you.

"These parents do so much" you think to yourself. "How do they do it? Where do they find the time? I should do more. Perhaps I should have signed my child up for Karate instead of swimming." As the guilt factor sets in, you shamefully accuse yourself of being a bad parent. It's been a long day and you're exhausted. You've been to work, dealt with tantrums, spoken to three teachers, rearranged your child's therapy schedule, cooked dinner, bathed your children, cleaned up and prompted your child through simple activities. As you plop on the couch to watch some TV, that feeling of guilt washes over you. "I shouldn't be relaxing." You say to yourself. "I should be re-writing my child's program. I should be researching new methods of treatment. I should be going over my child's IEP." But your brain can't take one more thought about autism and you guiltily sink into the couch and think "Tomorrow, I'll tackle it tomorrow".

KEEP IT IN PERSPECTIVE

Paradoxically, parents of autism spectrum kids are one of the most proactive groups that exist. While they commonly feel they're not doing enough, these parents should be honored and commended. They're able to cope with more in a day, a month and a year than most can conceive of coping with in a lifetime. Their resilience, creativity and persistence help their children progress and reach potential that nobody thought possible. The great strides that have been made in the autism community are largely due to parent driven establishment. The next time the guilt factor sets in, keep it in perspective and remember the following points.

THE GUILT FACTOR (Cont'd)

1. You're not alone

You are a great parent. You are your child's best advocate. You have a lot on your plate. Your days are often filled with a great deal of mental anguish and emotional stress. You help your child through small activities that most parents don't even think about. You fight for services for your child. You fight for the best class placement. It can be tiring. It can be exhausting. As you look around, you often feel that other parents are doing a better job. Realize they think the same of you. The guilt factor impedes their life too. Parents of autism spectrum kids have a common bond. They understand, they empathize and they spur each other on. If you declare "My 6 year old dressed independently today" they rejoice with you, because they too appreciate every milestone, large or small.

2. Organizations

Parents of children with autism have been the catalyst of some of the largest and most successful establishments for helping those on the spectrum. This is on a worldwide basis. A large number of autism schools have been driven by parents. Special education distributors and manufacturers often have parents at the helm. Researchers and educators are often parents. Increased services in schools and communities are the result of parent driven efforts. Non profit establishments have teams of dedicated parents who are committed to helping those on the spectrum. You might not be part of one of these establishments but you have made a difference. It's the combined unity of parents and a strong voice when advocating for your child that calls these organizations into being.

3. Relationships

When your child is born you are instantly a parent. The role of a parent is to love, educate and support your child. You provide your child with values, teach right from wrong, build their self esteem and guide them to become happy, independent adults. When you have a child with autism, you become a teacher. The role of a teacher is to educate a child. Whether it's a small task or a large task, teachers use every opportunity to educate a child. As a parent of a child on the spectrum it's difficult to maintain a balance. While you want your child to learn as much as possible, you also simply want to be a parent. The next time the guilt factor sets in because you're not teaching your child at every moment, release it immediately. Your child loves it when you're just being a Mom or just being a Dad. While it's perfectly fine to teach some of the time, a healthy balance leads to a healthy relationship between you and your child. Enjoy those moments with your child. Even if they aren't typical interactions, they're certainly fun!

4. Acceptance

On asking adults with autism "What's the single piece of advice you would give to parents of autism spectrum kids?" the answer is almost always a unanimous "Unconditional love and acceptance." For just a moment, view your child's perspective. Almost every action gets corrected. Almost every behavior is modified. Method of play is considered inappropriate. Self stimulatory behaviour is often halted. Your child is constantly being told to think, talk and act in a way that is foreign to his inner nature. It can't be easy to keep one's self esteem intact. I certainly advocate teaching as many skills as possible to help your child function in life. However, it's essential your child knows you believe he is perfect just the way he is. It's simply unfortunate that others might have difficulty understanding him. Your child should intrinsically know the reason he's learning new skills and altering his behavior is not because you want to change him, but because it will help others relate to him, grant him acceptance and allow him to lead a more productive life. The next time you feel guilty about not correcting your child's behavior or mannerisms, remember that delighting in your child's unique qualities is just as important as teaching appropriate actions. The next time the Guilt Factor impedes your life, simply acknowledge its presence. You don't feel guilty because you're a bad parent. You feel guilty because you're an outstanding parent. You're a parent who loves your child dearly. You're a parent who is so committed to helping your child learn that you feel bad taking time for yourself. Your hard work, dedication, energy and eternal giving are unbeknown to most and recognized by few. I acknowledge you and say "Well done! I know how committed you are and what it takes. You are an exceptional parent and I recognize your greatness!"



At 16, Edward King -- once a violent, at times suicidal, 11-year-old -- has become a person others can admire, as Shelley Page explains

Edward King, 16, has won with the Award of Fortitude, one of Scouts Canada's highest national awards. That's quite an achievement for an autistic boy who, just five years ago, had been suspended from school three times in three weeks.

The last time a story about Edward King appeared in this newspaper, he had just been suspended from elementary school -- the third time in three weeks -- for aggressive, unruly behaviour. That was five years ago, and the then-11-year-old with pervasive development disorder, a form of autism, was acting out because he'd lost the help of a full-time educational assistant. He was depressed and talked of suicide.

If any of us bothered to think past that day, past that story, we might have imagined young Edward, frozen out of the school system, receiving home schooling and a hodgepodge of tutoring, while his parents struggled to find a place where he could fit in. The only certainty, a dismal future.

Not so.

Just yesterday, Edward, now 16, sat at his kitchen table proudly showing off his Award of Fortitude, one of Scouts Canada's highest national awards. It is not given yearly, but only when a Scout of exceptional merit comes along.

Edward received the citation, signed by the Governor General, not just for fortitude, but also his "cheerfulness" and "willingness" to help out and participate despite his disability. This is not Edward's first such honour. J.H. Putman Middle School created the Edward King Award when he graduated from Grade 8. Edward was the first recipient and it now goes yearly to a student who has overcome major obstacles.

The boy who five years ago was kept out of school has not only found a way back in, he has found a way to thrive in his own unique way.

After that first story ran, he and two other autistic children in his class were given the full-time support they needed. Edward finished elementary school and now earns top marks in Grade 10 in the applied stream at Woodroffe High School.

This is remarkable for a boy who, at age three, doctors predicted might never speak, and who used to bite, kick, pull hair and rage. "I am really proud of myself," Edward says slowly, eyes twinkling. "It reminds me of when Forrest Gump got the Medal of Honor."

Gump, an unlikely American hero, possessed many autistic qualities, yet received the medal after saving members of his platoon in the Vietnam War.

During our interview, Edward begins reciting dialogue from the film, his favourite. He is not a savant, say his parents, he just has an amazing memory. He recalls the date and issue number of the 50 years worth of

A Scout's honour Chris Mikula (Cont'd)

Canadian Geographic magazines he has read, and regurgitates hockey statistics like a pro. He also remembers that jazz trumpeter Miles Davis died on the same day Edward was born in September 1991.

But just as Edward is proud of his achievements, he also wants people to know life is not always easy.

"I am bullied all of the time," he says. "Some people are really mean to me."

Edward is routinely hit, shoved, poked with pencils and fingers, sworn at and belittled. He's stormed out of classrooms to escape his tormentors.

Last week, when Edward's award was announced at the family's church, St. Michael's Anglican, there were tears of joy in the eyes of many in the congregation. "It was amazing for them to see that this little brat -- oh, you know what I mean -- with all his tantrums, had grown into this young, helpful, cheerful young man," says his mother, Christine King.

A similar announcement was made over the public address system at Woodroffe High School. While teachers and students congratulated him, there were also the sneers and jeers from those who can't help but pick on the underdog.

His mom says the school administrators try their best to protect him from the cruelty. This year, when three boys in his drama class made it their mission to humiliate Edward, the vice-principal gave the students an in-school suspension and had them prepare reports on bullying and autism for school administrators and the drama class. "It was a brilliant strategy," says Mrs. King.

While Edward gets down because of the bullying, he tries his best to roll with the punches. Now too old for scouting, he volunteers with his father, Larry, a Scout leader. He wants to go into the Scouts' Service Corps. And he hopes for an adulthood that includes meaningful work, marriage, and maybe children. "Children," Mrs. King exclaims. "I can't even quite imagine."

Edward succeeds in his community and school with the help of friends, therapists, nightly tutoring at home, and the support of teachers and administrators. It was a very proud Woodroffe vice-principal who sent out a press release about Edward's achievements.

"We have many angels in our lives," says Mrs. King.

At school, he has managed the soccer team. Last night, he was master of ceremonies at a talent show at his church. His parents have had to fight constantly to get their boy the support he needs.

"His successes have to be celebrated by the many communities that have supported him," Mrs. King says, smiling at her son.

For now, Edward is heading off to Rome for spring break with his church youth group. His parents aren't going. He seems a bit bewildered by the prospect. "I'll do great," he says, hesitantly. "You will," says his dad. "We've always told you that you don't have to be the best, but you have to try your best. And you've risen to all of the challenges that you've been faced with."

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