

Full Spectrum

SPRING 2010

Transition to Adulthood Newsletter

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Summer 2010 Transition to Adulthood Training Series

Location: UM-NSU CARD, North Miami Beach Office, Nova Southeastern University,
1750 NE 167th ST, Conference Room A, 1st Floor,
North Miami Beach, FL 33162

Time: Tuesdays, 7:00-8:30 pm

RSVP to Deborah Chin: dchin@psy.miami.edu or 954-262-8555

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Date: July 6

Presenter:
Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

Description:
Overview of the process of applying for and receiving services from VR. Discover how these services can help teens and adults achieve their employment goals through vocational evaluations, training, job coaches, and other supports.

Preparing for College

Date: July 20

Presenter:
Diane Adreon, UM-NSU CARD

Description:
Participants will learn about the factors and supports that are important to college success. Find out what families with ASD children can do to start planning for college early.

Practical Planning

Date: August 3

Presenter: Deborah Chin, UM-NSU CARD

Description:
Participants will learn how to develop a functional plan to achieve goals in transition and adulthood. Planning templates, strategies, methods, and accessing community resources will also be discussed.

Self-Advocacy for Adults

Date: August 17

Presenter: Lizette Rivera, UM-NSU CARD

Description:
Learn how to help adults with ASDs recognize their needs and how to meet them. The discussion examines self-advocacy as it relates to issues such as disclosure, learning styles and requesting accommodations, interests and relationships.

SOFA: SOCIALIZING WITH A PURPOSE

Brian Roselione, UM-NSU CARD

UM-NSU CARD's Nova Southeastern University office opened its doors in January 1999. At the time Luis Grana and myself were the only clinical staff, assisted by a family support specialist. After about a year or so we started to realize the importance and lack of social activities for individuals with autism and Asperger Syndrome (AS). One day a close friend and father of a son with AS suggested we create a social group. That was the moment Teen Time was born. Due to a lack of formal social skills curriculums at the time we created a social experience group for teens to hang out with others, have fun and maybe meet some new people.



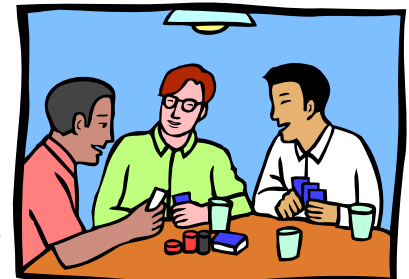
As the number of individuals with autism and AS grew so did the boys and girls. They literally became men and women. They were graduating from high school and moving into the real world we call LIFE! At the time we believed like many parents, that "after graduation life will be easier." No more stress and anxiety of dealing with bullying, homework, FCAT, and the list goes on and on. The grass on the other side looked green from afar, but up close it was brown. As one 25 year old with AS put it, "It was easier to meet people in high school than it is now. Now-a-days I might go weeks without opening my mouth to talk with someone."

After hearing this story over and over we decided to create an adult version of Teen Time and called it Social Outings for Adults (SOFA). The SOFA club in Broward meets once a month at the CARD office in Davie. We typically watch a movie, eat pizza and plan which activities we want to do over the coming month. Recently the format of the monthly meetings changed. The group is diverse on many levels and members range from 18 to 65 years old, married couples, and group members who are dating, singles, etc. Because of this diversity and the popularity of the group we have recently created smaller group activities. Now when we meet we still eat pizza (Thank You to Pizza Loft for the generous donations) but members can also socialize with each other around different activities like playing video games, card games (poker, blackjack, etc.), or 3 to 4 people might engage in an anime discussion. We still plan additional outings such as going to dinner and playing billiards; members have hosted swim parties and watch movies at Sawgrass 23 theaters, to name a few.

The SOFA club serves a number of purposes:

- Provides an opportunity to meet new people
- Gives adults something social to do
- Creates a setting to make true friendships
- Provides a place to be yourself and remove the mask

Over the years the majority of the group members have been individuals who were not diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome until they were out of high school. Many of the members come to the group frustrated and angry from years of not knowing, not understanding and most of all being told to snap out of it because nothing is wrong. SOFA provides its members with a purpose. When kids are in school their purpose in life is to get the heck out of school. Once you are out of school where does your purpose come from and how do you get it? One of the greatest opportunities that SOFA provides is a place to find your purpose in life.



WHAT IS YOUR PURPOSE?

JOIN THE CLUB

Easter Seals of South Florida is now home to the Next Chapter Book Club. This book club is open to adolescents and adults with developmental disabilities regardless of reading or ability level. There are multiple small groups and group members select the books they will read together. Book clubs meet weekly for one hour at local bookstores, coffee shops or cafes to read and discuss the book of their choosing.

In addition to reading together, the group is about learning, making friends, and having fun at gatherings throughout the community. Two trained facilitators lead each club.

For more information contact Karen Lopez at 305-547-4751 or klopez@sfl.easterseals.com

Visit our website: www.umcard.org to view our newsletter, training calendar, and access adult and transition resources. Sign-up for our weekly email blast to get the most up-to-date information on upcoming events.

UM AUTISM CLINIC OPENS

UM Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences

Prof. Susan E. Folstein has joined the UM Miller School of Medicine through a joint appointment in the Department of Psychiatry and the Hussman Institute for Human Genomics. Prof. Folstein will be treating adults and children on the autism spectrum who have co-occurring psychiatric symptoms or disorders at the University of Miami Autism Clinic. Additional services available at the Clinic will include diagnostic evaluations, genetic evaluations, and language evaluations. She is an accomplished researcher who has studied the genetics and genomics of autism and its clinical features, particularly as they relate to gene identification, psychiatric co-morbidity, and its relationship to developmental language disorder. She was also the first woman ever promoted to the level of Professor of Psychiatry at John Hopkins. She will be using her wealth of experience to treat psychiatric and behavioral disorders in adults and children on the autism spectrum.

The clinic is located on the University of Miami's Miller School of Medicine/Jack Memorial Hospital campus. To refer a patient to the clinic, for appointments and information regarding the clinic's operations and services, please call 305-301-8436.

EVERY SUCCESS COUNTS

Susan Morantes, Dan Marino Foundation & Andrew's family

For everyone who thought I couldn't do it.

Andrew was born in the Bahamas where his parents had emigrated from England for career opportunities in a warmer climate. As a second-born child in the family, initial delays were attributed to fact that since things were done for him, it allowed for laziness on his part. By 18 months, developmental delays were clearly apparent. Eventually, in the pre-school environment, more delays were evident; and so the journey began to find the cause. Each doctor's visit required a trip to Florida, and eventually, Andrew was diagnosed with Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified at 3 ½ years old. With both therapies and specialized schooling unavailable in the Bahamas, the family made the life-altering decision to relocate to Florida. At 4 ½ Andrew began attending the Baudhuin Oral School at Nova Southeastern University and never looked back. He finally had a place where he belonged and more importantly, a place where he was understood and could be helped. Within a week, Andrew who had been relatively non-verbal, began using verbal communication consistently. This changed everything in the family's life, and he began his assimilation towards social acceptance. Part of his treatment included services of a world-renowned neurologist at the Miami Children's Hospital Dan Marino Center, Dr. Roberto Tuchman.

*"For everyone who thought I couldn't do it.
For everyone who thought I shouldn't do it.
For everyone who said, 'It's impossible.'
See you at the finish line."
~Christopher Reeve*

Christopher Reeve faced great adversity, overcame it, and made other lives better because of it. The Dan Marino Foundation has been witness to many of our children and young adults with autism also overcoming great obstacles. One in particular, who wishes to be addressed only as Andrew, found ways to climb mountains thought to be impossible to vanquish.

For everyone who thought I shouldn't do it.

It wasn't an easy journey through preschool, elementary, middle and high school. Accommodations were suggested, fought about, and finally implemented, for the most part. While ingenious at math, reading was a weakness for Andrew who persevered and conquered this limitation with enormous dedication to learning, much like he has throughout his young life. He learned to drive, cook on his own, and generally oversee his own life.

For three summers Andrew participated in the Dan Marino Foundation's Summer Supported Training and Employment Program for Special Needs (Summer STEPS) program, funded by the Children's Services of Broward County. Since its inception, this ground-breaking program has given over 180 teenagers and young adults with developmental disabilities experience in a supported work environment, learning communication, social, and teamwork skills. Interns work 30 hours per week for eight weeks of the summer and earn a paycheck for their efforts. At present, 98% of the interns completed the program and some continued onto part- or full-time jobs. Furthermore, they all gain tremendous self-esteem and confidence, as well as the respect of their coworkers and employers. Andrew worked at a school in maintenance and landscaping and at Memorial Hospital West in several positions including one in which he particularly excelled – Central Supply – where he quickly became a favored and well-appreciated employee. After Summer STEPS ended, he continued on as a volunteer in that position.

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For everyone who said, 'It's impossible.'

The next step in his future was determined by his love and admiration for his father. His father, who passed away very suddenly last year, was a widely-respected executive in the luxury retail business of jewelry and watches. It was his knowledge of watches that transferred to Andrew as a potential career. As a child, Andrew was extremely intuitive and agile when it came to building models and dismantling and putting objects back together. He was always adept with manipulatives, in addition to solving puzzles before those around him had finished scratching their heads.

(Watch-making uses mathematically-based science, which has always been Andrew's strength. The program's examinations are practical, eliminating the need for excessive reading and writing, which are Andrew's weaknesses). This interest along with his father's influence led Andrew to the destination where he is now. His interest in watch-making and repair had inspired his father to explore the possibility of Andrew becoming one of the interns in a prestigious and highly-competitive program run by Swatch. Andrew made it in as one of the eight interns selected and started the internship in the program at the beginning of 2010. The program runs for two years, consisting of 3000 hours. The syllabus is broken down into four parts, beginning with micromechanics where the students learn to cut metal and file it to precise dimensions in order to make watch parts and tools. Phases 2 and 3 cover all knowledge needed to diagnose and repair mechanical watches. Phase 4 addresses advanced mechanical and electronic watches. Students are trained in the Watchmaker of Switzerland Training & Education Program (WOSTEP). By the program's end, they will be fully trained in after-sales service of Swiss watches.

See you at the finish line.

While the finish line is still a ways away, Andrew and his family can see it. At the Dan Marino Foundation, we celebrate the victories of our children – large or small. We celebrate a child who has just learned to say "Mommy" and the joy and tears on Mom's face upon hearing her most important name for the first time. We celebrate the elementary-school child who can finally read their favorite book, "Green Eggs and Ham" on their own. We celebrate the middle-school student who can finally relate to others in his or her peer group without the fear of being ridiculed or sitting by themselves in the cafeteria. We celebrate our teenagers and young adults who for the first time in their lives have tremendous self esteem from getting and KEEPING their first job and envisioning a time when they can live on their own. *We celebrate Andrew.*



Participants chop vegetables for jambalaya.

LIVING WELL

Deborah Chin, UM-NSU CARD

This spring UM-NSU CARD partnered with the Center for Independent Living of Broward County and FLIPANY (Florida Introduces Physical Activity and Nutrition to Youth, www.flipany.org) to offer Living Well Life Skills and Cooking Classes. The classes were offered one night a week for 6 weeks. Participants made friends while learning about life skills, wellness, how to prepare healthy meals and the group even went grocery shopping. During this hands-on experience the budding chefs also received free food each week with a challenge to prepare their own healthy meals at home.

TRANSITION FROM A PROVIDER'S PERSPECTIVE



Natalia Lavier, Community Habilitation Center (CHC)

Futures cannot be predicted and are never definite; the uncertainty of this fact can cause a sense of anxiety. This fear of the unknown is evident in the lives of parents of children with disabilities once their children graduate high school. At age 21, students with disabilities graduate from high school to "transition" into the real world. This transition is often feared by parents due to a lack of knowledge of the resources available to them. As much as Special Education teachers teach their students they must also educate the parents about the available and critical resources in the community. It is essential for the success of the students that their parents acquire the skills to navigate through a bureaucratic system filled with technical terms and complicated regulations.

As the Associate Director of Community Habilitation Center Inc. (CHC inc.) I witness the process of this transition often since our center is one of the few programs individuals with disabilities attend after they graduate. CHC inc. is a not for profit provider of Adult Day Training Services and Supported Employment. Adult Day Training is an adult daily program where individuals attend to acquire new skills to help them be independent and to reach their goals. CHC provides the following programs: Life and Work Skills, Transitions, Health and Fitness, Special Olympics, Music Therapy, Arts and Nature, Technology Lab and Community Based Education. Supported Employment is designed to help the individual who is interested in becoming employed in their community. This program provides the individual with an employment specialist who assists him/her with the job development process involved in finding a job. Once they are employed, ongoing job training is provided to help the individual maintain their employment.

The programs we offer are two of the services included in the Medicaid Waiver Program. Medicaid Waiver is a frequently used term among the families of individuals who attend our center, and it is an essential aspect of the life of the individuals we serve. This program is designed to provide funding and benefits to individuals with developmental disabilities and to help them live more meaningful lives. As a provider, there are a few recommendations we have for parents of individuals with disabilities as they are transitioning out of high school. Below is a list of our top seven recommendations to parents:

1. If you want your son or daughter to receive state funding for services, he or she must be eligible through the office of Adult Developmental Services of the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD).
2. Once your son or daughter is accepted through APD, Immediately request to apply for Medicaid Waiver funding since there is currently a waiting list to receive benefits.
3. Become familiar with your assigned Support Coordinator, who is the person who will manage your son or daughter's benefits. It is important to be well informed of all the services and do not be afraid to ask questions.
4. Attend all Individual Education Plans (IEP'S), especially transitional IEP's and ask as many questions as possible about your son or daughter's future.
5. Visit Medicaid Waiver service providers such as Adult Day Training programs, Supported Employment, Supported Living, Companion Services, etc. Many programs might have waiting lists as well.
6. Apply for Special Transportation Services (STS). This will be the method of transportation for your adult after high school, unless the facility has its own transportation services.
7. Become familiar with the legal differences between incompetent and competent adults. Educate yourself about the different guardianship programs which may help to safeguard your adult child's current and future services.

Natalia Lavier is the Associate Director of CHC. For more information on CHC please visit: www.chcmiami.org

University of Miami/Nova Southeastern University CARD does not endorse specific programs or points of view on developmental disorders.

This newsletter is an opportunity to share information, resources, and experiences. We welcome your comments and contributions. Send them to Deborah Chin at: dchin@psy.miami.edu or call 954-262-8555.