

AHA Happenings



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As we begin 2009, AHA/Asperger Syndrome and High Functioning Autism Association looks at the large white board in our office with awe and at the projects we are involved in. And we want to offer thanks to so many people who helped us get here. We would like to offer thanks to our members, the volunteers who give so much of their time, and the generous random people who fall into our path and whose spirit sustains us. Thank you all.

Yes, we are 20 years old. But, until two and a half short years ago we were working out of basements and bedrooms. We were able to answer 1000's of hotline calls, present two outstanding conferences yearly, produce an outstanding quarterly newsletter, *On The Spectrum*, and maintain an informative website – www.ahaNY.org. Yet, with the move into offices within the Fay J. Lindner Center for Autism we have become even more of a magnet for important initiatives within the autism community.

AHA services families, individuals and professionals affected by Asperger Syndrome (AS), High Functioning Autism (HFA), Pervasive Developmental Disorder and related conditions for ages approximately three years old and up to individuals in their 60's. The statistics for youngsters are getting brighter as more researchers are concentrating their efforts on Early Intervention although those with

AS/HFA typically do not get diagnosed until they are closer to 10 years old. But the spotlight is on that age group.

As our population ages, many who were not diagnosed, or diagnosed later in life, the prospects for employment are dim. That is why we are so excited about the initiative called JUMP. JUMP/ Jobs are Us Mentoring Program, which I wrote about last year as it was getting its start, is having an informational meeting on January 22nd at our Commack support site which you are all invited to. JUMP's mission is to create and maintain competitive employment opportunities for the many individuals on the autism spectrum who are capable but heretofore unable to interview well, cope in the first weeks of a job, get started or maintain employment with the usual supports. Learn about JUMP through a video we produced with the assistance of Cablevision at:

http://www.ahany.org/re_jump.htm and join us at the meeting.

We are excited to report on another project that AHA has been working on: the development of Westbrook Prep, a residential school on Long Island. We became involved because no other residential school in New York State targets teens and young adults with high functioning autism, Asperger Syndrome and related learning issues. Presently, these fragile learners are educated as homeschoolers or in residential settings in Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and even farther away. Over the past two years, a number of us have participated in the committee forming the school, including Maureen

Holohan, administrative staff, May-Lynn Andresen, advisory board member, Faith Kappenberg (parent and professional in the field of ASD), John Kappenberg (parent and school administrator), and Judy Cohen (Professor at Adelphi University). New York State Education has approved Westbrook's funding and is working closely with the overseeing agency SCO and our committee. We have visited model programs out of state to bring "best practices" to our program. An exemplary program in Connecticut, the Glenholme School, will be consulting. Glenholme is known for its behavioral model and for addressing transfer of treatment between home and school, enabling the students to succeed across environments. Fifty local students who are qualified to receive residential placement in this age category are currently out of state or homeschooled. The goal is to educate these students closer to home. We are in the midst of securing a property, plans, approval from the state and hope to be open in the fall of 2009 for over 35 students.

Because we are known for our expertise in conference planning and so much is needed in this area we are being asked to assist other universities and agencies with their upcoming conferences in the area of Asperger Syndrome and High Functioning Autism. Libraries, universities as well as our own spring conference at Adelphi University on May 9th with the newest member of our advisory board as keynote, Dr. Temple Grandin. All in all a busy spring ahead but one filled with what we want to do. Educate about autism. We are more than ready. Happy New Year.