

Connections

The Newsletter of the Connections Program

A Partnership between the Health District of Northern Larimer County and the Larimer Center for Mental Health

Autism in Larimer County

By: Aaron Skalicky, Ph.D.

Autism Impacts our Community. Only a decade ago autism was believed to affect less than 1 in 1000 children. Now that more parents, health care professionals and educators are aware of autism's broad spectrum and early signs, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that approximately 1 in 150 children are diagnosed. This translates to roughly 400-500 children in Larimer County. If autism does not impact your family directly, statistics suggest that you are likely to encounter a child with autism in your neighborhood or at your child's school. Take a moment to educate yourself about the autism spectrum by visiting a reputable source such as www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism.

An informed community is best equipped to offer friendship to children on the spectrum and to advocate for appropriate educational and health care services.

Trust Your Parental Instincts. Since early intervention has proven value, parents should be mindful of autism's early signs. This is particularly important if there is a family history of autism or language delay. Some of the more common signs include: limited interaction with caregivers, problems expressing needs, difficulty transitioning from one task to another, echoing what others say, repeating actions over and over, and reacting strongly to the way things smell, taste, look, feel, or sound. If you are unsure whether a problem exists, consider it an opportunity to learn more about your child's overall development.

Schedule Evaluation with a Qualified Professional. Do not allow lingering questions about your child's development to go unanswered. If you observe signs of au-

tism, make an appointment with your pediatrician or a licensed psychologist who provides developmental evaluations. A thorough examination will answer questions about autism, and indicate whether other developmental needs should be addressed. There is a growing network of developmental health care providers in Larimer County. Parents of young children, in particular, are encouraged to utilize these diagnostic resources.

Successful Treatment Involves Teamwork. When a child is diagnosed with autism or developmental delay it is wise to begin interventions as soon as possible. Since difficulties tend to involve several related areas, such as communication, learning, sensory-motor skills, and behavior, effective treatment requires specialists to work together. The American Academy of Pediatrics recently published an article in support of this multi-disciplinary approach. Parents should insist that their child's therapists and educators work as a team.

Children on the Autism Spectrum Learn and Develop. Some children on the autism spectrum are effectively non-verbal when they reach school age. Others with higher-functioning autism or Asperger's Disorder may have a larger vocabulary than most of their peers, yet



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We encourage you to submit short articles (50-500 words) on therapeutic approaches, mental health topics, case studies, or therapeutic book/movie reviews, etc., & will publish them as space allows. We reserve the right to edit all submissions.

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To view Connections Newsletter and the
Professional Bulletin Board online:
www.healthdistrict.org/connections

Connections is published 6 times/year. The purpose of *Connections* is to offer information on current therapy groups and services in the community; provide updates on services available through the Connections Program; and offer a place where information on community happenings of interest to mental health and human services providers can be shared.

Submissions are welcome. E-mail them to chusted@healthdistrict.org by the following deadlines:

NEXT EDITION: November/December
Article Deadline: October 15, 2008

Submissions printed in *Connections* do not necessarily reflect the views of the Connections Program. Our editorial staff do not check the credentials of individuals wishing to submit groups or other listings. If you have concerns regarding credentials or other issues, please contact the group leader or author of the article directly. Thank you.

struggle to comprehend information that is abstract or implied. It is critical that educators respond to each child's need by using appropriate communication techniques.

Some children on the spectrum learn best when they receive support within a mainstream classroom. Others need a setting structured around an intensive language and behavioral program. In most cases, educational objectives for a child on the spectrum will encompass both functional skills, such as communication and social behavior, and academic learning. These objectives are recorded within an Individualized Educational Plan (I.E.P.) and monitored by the child's case manager. Parents can play an important role in their child's educational plan by attending school meetings and asking questions.

Children with Autism Experience Love and Affection. If only more people could see the relationships that develop between children with autism spectrum disorders and their families. This is one of the joys of working in a developmental clinic. In order to see the bond, however, one can't be limited by the images of "relationship" that instinctively come to mind. Often the behaviors we associate with affection, such as a spontaneous hug or kiss, do not give children on the spectrum a pleasant sensation. While it is normal for parents of children on the spectrum to experience frustration when bonding does not occur in the typical way, other means are eventually found to experience emotional connection. Soothing interactions may involve rocking with the child, listening to music, engaging the child with a favorite activity, playing together with a pet, or applying deep pressure to a part of the child's body.

Autism Spectrum Disorders are Lifelong. While some parents report dramatic recovery in response to a particular therapy, there is no medically accepted cure for autism spectrum disorders. Signs are evident before age three and continue to some degree throughout the lifespan. The level of independence achieved in adulthood is linked to several factors, including reasoning ability, other psychiatric symptoms, and the child's exposure to educational and therapeutic interventions. Some adults on the spectrum require close supervision. Others learn vocational skills, but need help dealing with situations that are outside of their daily routine. There are also adults with high functioning autism in our community who are fully independent. Many of these individuals graduate from college, find success in their careers and start families of their own.



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Resources for the Community

Group Supervision

This is an ongoing group providing supervision for people who need hours for licensure. This group has recently been formed. Space is limited. This group meets two times per month for an hour each time.

The cost is \$35.00 per session. The location is in Old Town, Fort Collins. There are two facilitators: Rachel Isenberg, LCSW, ACSW and Maggie Tibbitts, LCSW.



If you are interested in participating in this group, please call Rachel at (970) 490-6851 or Maggie at (970) 988-4173.



News Release

Date: June 26, 2008
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Jane Bradley
(970) 472-4133

Jane D. Bradley has been selected as the new Executive Director of ChildSafe. ChildSafe is a non-profit agency providing individual and group treatment to sexually abused children and their non-offending family members. Jane comes to the position with over 24 years experience in the field of victim services. She was the Victim/Witness Program Director at the District Attorney's Office of the Eighth Judicial District (Larimer and Jackson counties) for 21 years. She received her Victim Advocacy Certification from California State University-Fresno and holds the designation of Credentialed Advocate at the Advanced Level from the National Organization of Victim Assistance. Jane has Bachelor's Degree in Social Work from Colorado State University. Anyone interested in receiving information or services from ChildSafe may call (970) 472-4133.

Parents Also Benefit from Support. Parents of children on the spectrum experience the same worry, joy, frustration and pride that other parents do. In addition, they also face extraordinary challenges that may arise around the clock and test the limits of patience and positive thinking. The Autism Society of Larimer County (www.autismlarimer.org) and the Autism Society of Colorado (www.autismcolorado.org) publicize support groups in Larimer County that bring families together for education and friendship. Foothills Gateway (www.foothillsgateway.org) is another vital resource in our county that provides case management, respite care and vocational programs.

Dr. Skalicky is a licensed psychologist and clinic director at NeuroDevelopment in Fort Collins (www.neuro-development.com). He welcomes your comments or questions: admin@neuro-development.com.



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mental health & substance abuse resources

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