



Newsletter

Volume 2, Number 4, July 2013



Calendar of Events

July 8, 2013 -- Citizens' Advisory Committee For Special Education Meeting, 7-8:30 p.m. at the Board of Education Building, Leonardtown.

July 17, 2013 -- Autism Spectrum Support Group Meeting, 6:30-8:00 p.m. at the Coffee Quarter, California, MD.

July 17, 2013 -- Autism Spectrum Support Group Meeting, 6:30-8:00 p.m. at Panera in La Plata, MD.

July 29, 2013 -- Round Table Discussion at the Leonardtown Library Meeting Room, 23250 Hollywood Rd., Leonardtown, MD 20650, 6:00 - 8:00 p.m. Borrowing from the well-known "continuous improvement" model of acknowledging the things being done well and identifying and improving those that aren't, the Autism Spectrum Support Group of Southern Maryland is partnering with the Parents' Place of Maryland to hold a Round Table Discussion. The purpose of the discussion is to gather information from, and share information with, families of people with ASDs in all three counties -- St. Mary's, Charles, and Calvert -- across all age ranges and levels of disability, regarding school services in the three school systems. (Families of people with ASDs or who are suspected of having an ASD who do not have an IEP or 504 Plan for whatever reason are also welcome.) Once information is gathered, group participants will determine courses of action, and follow-up meetings may be scheduled. The Support Group invites parents and caregivers of people with ASDs to attend the Round Table Discussion on Monday, July 29, 2013, from 6:00 to 8:00 pm, at the Leonardtown Library. Contact Terri (terri@autismsupport-somd.org) with questions.



...Shelby for her memorable graduation ceremony! Shelby rocked it, as only she can!

...Nico for going to the doctors *twice* and letting them check his vitals (BP and temperature). And kudos to Nico for vomiting quite often in an appropriate receptacle -- a huge improvement.



All set for a successful "field trip" to Urgent Care.

...Christopher for beautifully managing the stresses in his computer animation camp.

...Adam for graduating from High School; participating in the SkillsUSA competition for Technical Drafting (AutoCAD) and placing 3rd in the Regional Competition held at Forrest Technical Academy; for competing in the SkillsUSA Maryland State competition and placing 1st; and for competing in the National Competition in the Kansas City, MO. And kudos to Adam starting his first job working at a machine shop in Lusby; for earning his driver's license; and for attending the College of Southern Maryland working towards a degree in Engineering.



Resource Review

School Community Tool Kit

by Terri Griest

Autism Speaks Family Services created an online resource called the *School Community Tool Kit* (available at <http://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/tool-kits/school-community-tool-kit>). It is a 117-page document that can be downloaded in its full version or in individual sections to suit users' needs.

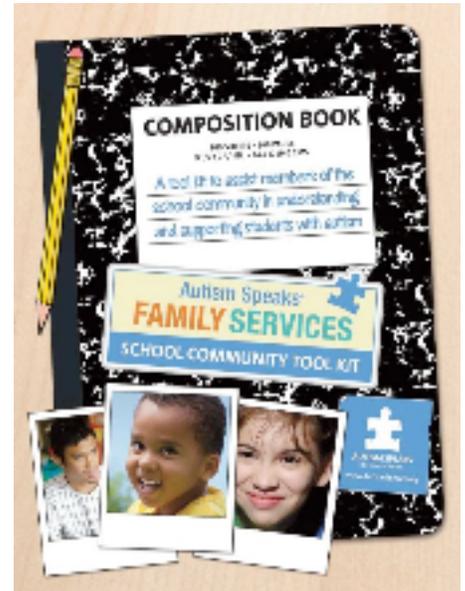
Its purpose is "to provide helpful information about students with autism and tools and strategies to achieve positive interactions and increase learning for all members of the school community." (*School Community Tool Kit* homepage) In meeting its purpose, the kit provides information for supporting students with autism to members of the school community (classmates, teachers, custodial, lunchroom, and transportation staff, office staff, school nurses, paraprofessionals, coaches, and security). Additionally, it provides a one-page "About Me" profile template for a student and/or his family to complete and share with appropriate school community members.

The information contained in the *School Community Tool Kit* is good. It offers autism basics and information across a range of topics, some not often communicated to school teams. It also covers bullying and has major sections on educating students with autism as well as supporting learning in students with autism. The final section is web, print, and video resources.

The Kit states that parents are meant to select and distribute copies of appropriate sections to school community members as "it is the student's parent or caregiver who initiates the connection between their child and many members of the school community." (p. 1) It's good information for the school team to have, with one caveat: The only student-specific component is a set of questions "About Me." Parents may want to use the questions as a starting point and tailor this section to include items that they are comfortable having the school team know.

A disclaimer on the *School Community Tool Kit's* home page states, "This tool kit is not intended to be a curriculum for special education for students on the autism spectrum, but rather a support for the general education and administrative school staff who interact with students with autism in various capacities. However, it is envisioned that this tool kit will provide valuable information and resources that can be employed by special education and administrative staff in their efforts to plan for and support students in general education environments and involvement in the school community as a whole." School communities should be encouraged to view the *School Community Tool Kit* as a valuable, informative resource regardless of who brings it to their attention.

In practice, though, it is up to parents to work with the school team to provide the information contained in the kit. While it is only July, it is never too early to begin planning for back-to-school communications with the new school team. The *School Community Tool Kit* provides a good foundation.



Round Table Discussion Set for July 29th

Summer is upon us. Our families can take a break from the demands of school, homework, and the relentless rounds of therapies. We may take family vacations or send our children to camps; other families prefer the quiet home life to recharge. However we spend it, summer vacation also provides valuable time to reflect on what is working for our children with ASDs and what isn't.

We sometimes forget to tell our school teams when things are going well; and when they aren't, a single voice easily gets lost in the noise. To give us a voice to be heard, the Autism Spectrum Support Group of Southern Maryland is partnering with the Parents' Place of Maryland to hold a Round Table Discussion on July 29th to talk about educational services for children with ASDs in Southern Maryland (Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary's Counties). We want to know what educational services are having a positive impact on your children so that we can offer appreciation and encouragement to the our school systems. Additionally, the Round Table Discussion will provide an opportunity for us to discuss problems with educational services using a positive framework for guidance.

Once we have gathered information from participants, we will work together to provide solutions where possible and to determine further courses of action. If appropriate, we will create work groups and schedule follow-up meetings as we focus on developing solutions. In addition, members of the Support Group and Parents' Place will collaborate to synthesize the information and present the findings to appropriate members of the three school systems.

To attend, we ask that you be a parent or caregiver of a person with an ASD (anywhere on the Spectrum) or of a person suspected of having an ASD, whether or not the person has an IEP or a 504 Plan. Topics will be restricted to educational services in the three Southern Maryland counties.

We encourage parents and caregivers of children across the spectrum to participate in the discussion, to share your child's educational story in any area, and to work together as a group to create positive solutions.

The Round Table Discussion will be held at the Leonardtown Library, 23250 Hollywood Road, Leonardtown, MD on Monday, July 29, 2013, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Light refreshments will be provided. Please RSVP (so we have enough materials for everyone!) to Missy at 301/884-4662 or to Terri at terri@autismsupport-somd.org.

The flyer is attached to this newsletter; please share!



Executive Functioning Workshop a Great Success!

by Lisa Powell



On Saturday, May 11, 2013 the Autism Spectrum Support Group of Southern Maryland, the Learning Disabilities Association of St. Mary's County, the Citizens' Advisory Committee for Special Education, and the Partners for Success Centers of Charles, St. Mary's, and Calvert Counties put on a jointly sponsored Executive Functioning Workshop at the Southern Maryland Higher Education Center. Dr. Joyce Cooper-Kahn and Dr. Laurie Dietzel, authors of the book, *Late, Lost, and Unprepared*, came to Southern Maryland to lead an all-day workshop. Nearly 100 parents, teachers, and other professionals were in attendance. The morning session was a general information session for all, covering definitions of executive functions and dysfunctions. Breakout sessions for parents and teachers were held in the afternoon.

The afternoon session for teachers was led by Dr. Cooper-Kahn, who recently published a book, co-authored with Margaret Foster, entitled, *Boosting Executive Skills in the Classroom: A Practical Guide for Educators*. In this session, Dr. Cooper-Kahn used real-life situations to offer practical solutions. For instance, when a student has a long-term project, the teacher and/or parent will need to assist the student with a timeline of deadlines and due dates and then work with the student at each point on the timeline for the completion of the project. The use of planners, technology, and other materials were also discussed. Suggestions included the use of Google Docs or emailing assignments to self. Healthy habits and repetition for internal training are needed to promote internalization of practices, such as a routine weekly meeting with a parent on Sundays to preview and plan the week and gather needed materials. Students need routines and reminders, such as a daily morning routine, both at home and at school, with reminders for transitions. The RtI model was used as a guide on the levels of intervention and support needed for students.

Dr. Cooper-Kahn and Dr. Dietzel stated frequently that when children have EF difficulties, the adults in their lives need to become their executive functioning center until this develops on its own with maturity, sometimes as late as the early or mid thirties. This indicates that the adults working with these students will need to provide continual guidance and support for not a few days or weeks but for several years. The time spent providing supports will be worth the wait as children move into self-sufficient, productive, and happy adults.

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Other components of the workshop took place in the Gallery: Several of the workshop's cosponsors set up display tables offering information about the organizations and FAQ and tips sheets. Giveaways included a table of free books and another displaying the many door prizes drawn at the conclusion of the workshop. Business was brisk at the raffle table as attendees purchased tickets for their choice of baskets of books and other materials. Blue Wind Gourmet catered a delicious lunch of sandwiches, salads, and chips while Swann's Sweets Bakery provided chocolate chip cookies for dessert.



News from the COPAA Conference

by Missy Alexander

In March, I had the pleasure of attending the annual Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (www.copaa.org) conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico. One of the highlights for me was attending a session that focused on the civil rights of all children to receive an education. The presenters went back to our roots, as it were, and encouraged us to "remember the strength of the disability movement as a civil rights movement seeking equal access and equality of instruction and opportunity." In 1954, the United States Supreme Court held, in *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka*, 34 U.S. 483 (1954), "that separate is not equal, and is often unequal when exposed." The purpose of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 is, in part, "...to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living." What does all of this mean for families in our communities? It's this basic premise: our children are *entitled* to be educated with their peers in their community. While this may sound harsh, it's true that all of the school employees on an IEP team are *eligible* to be there because of their credentials. They can be replaced. Our children can't. As parents, it is our responsibility to foster a cooperative relationship with school staff. However, at the end of the day, never forget that it's our child's legal entitlement that is our sole obligation.



Can You Show Me Where That Is?

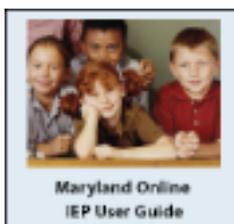
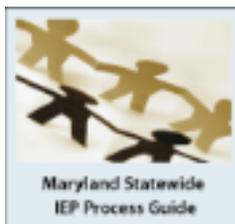
by Missy Alexander

Have you ever seen a blank Individualized Education Program (IEP) form from the Maryland State Department of Education? The form, approved for use on July 1, 2013, is online at <http://cte.jhu.edu/iep/IEPFormFinal06112013withoutwatermark.pdf>.

Why is it important for families and caregivers to see the blank form? So you know what to expect. So that you can intelligently discuss the development and review of the child's IEP and be a meaningful participant at IEP meetings. It will help you answer the 5 W's + H + E: *Who* is providing a service, *What* service is being provided, *When* will the service be provided, *Where* will the service be provided, *Why* is the service being provided, *How* will we know the service is working, and *Explain* any clarification information needed so that the IEP can be implemented across settings. Please take a few moments to review this blank IEP form and compare it to your child's IEP. There may be a few differences as the new format was issued on June 11, 2013, but you should still be able to compare what you have with what is suggested. If you're unable to access the online form, please contact me and I'll provide you with a copy (301-884-4662 / missy@ppmd.org).



The Maryland Online IEP Demonstration Site can be found at <http://olms.cte.jhu.edu/1344>. According to the main page, "This site provides a user's view of the Maryland Online IEP. It provides access to the functions and fields of the tool. This demonstration site does not contain any live district data." It also provides links to the Maryland Statewide IEP Form (referenced above), the Maryland Statewide IEP Process Guide, the Maryland Online IEP User Guide, the Maryland Voluntary State Curriculum, and the MD Online Implementation and Planning Guide.



11 Fun (and FREE!) Places To Take Your Child With Special Needs

By Brenda Kosky Deskin

The Friendship Circle Blog, March 5, 2013

(Reprinted with permission: <http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2013/03/05/11-fun-and-free-places-to-take-your-child-with-special-needs/>)

Since we home-school my autistic son, Michael, we are always looking for new places to take him to expand his horizons, provide different environments in which he can practice and generalize his newly learned skills, and simply to have fun. Read on for some tips on how to come up with places that would be ideal for your child with special needs. Then, check out some of the great places we've taken Michael to over the years that haven't cost us a dime!

THE TIPS...

1. **What does your child like?** When brainstorming about places to visit, think of things your child likes. If it's animals, think about local farms. If it's airplanes, check out your local airport.

2. **Keep your eyes and ears open.** Michael loves sheep so I once did a u-turn on a country road to determine the address of a barn where I spotted a flock of sheep grazing. I then did a 'reverse-lookup' online, found the farmer's phone number and gave him a ring. A lovely gentleman by the name of Anton was more than happy to have Michael come out and see his animals. Now, "Anton's Farm" is one of Michael's favorite destinations!

3. **Don't be shy!** I can't tell you how many Dalmatian owners I've stopped in their tracks to introduce myself and explain Michael's love of this breed. Once they get over the initial shock of being stalked, they have all been so understanding and generous with their time, inviting us over for doggie visits on

many occasions.

4. **Don't be afraid to ask.** The worst thing that can happen is that you get a "no". I've made many requests over the years for Michael to visit people's homes and places of work. I'd say that nine times out of ten, they are more than happy to help.

5. **Explain your child's special need.** Educate people before your visit about your child and his or her disability. More often than not, people's fears can be attributed to ignorance. If your child flaps his hands or makes loud noises, for example, give them the heads-up, assuring them that it is just your child's unique way of expressing delight or excitement.

6. **Call or email first.** If you are thinking of visiting a place that is not traditionally open to the public, call ahead and explain your situation. Chances are they will be more receptive to a visit if they have some advance notice.

THE PLACES...

If your child loves animals:

1. **A local animal breeder.** An animal breeder may be willing to let your child play and pet the animals they are breeding. A great way to find them is through sites like Kijiji.ca (canada only), Ebay Classifieds or Cragislist where they often advertise puppies, kittens, etc., for sale.

2. **A Farm.** Establishing relationships with farmers could also be helpful down the road when you are looking for vocational opportunities for your child. Michael loves his visits to a local dairy farm and there are plenty of tasks that he could gradually learn there like feeding the calves, sweeping, etc.

3. **A dog training school.** A dog training school may let you interact with the dogs during their "recess". You can even request to watch classes that are just for puppies!

4. **A pet store.** My love of animals does not extend into the reptile family. So, when Michael wants to watch snakes and lizards, we take him to a nearby pet store. Some of these shops even specialize in reptiles and amphibians.

5. **The racetrack.** The racetrack can be a lot of fun for animal lovers. We took my son to a racetrack (and in case you are wondering, there was no gambling) and he loved it. Here is a blog I wrote about how educational and enjoyable a visit to the track can be!

6. **An animal rescue organization.** Almost every breed of dog has its own local rescue group or site. We even have a donkey sanctuary nearby! Visit Petfinder.com to find an animal shelter near you.

If your child loves vehicles:

7. **The Airport.** The airport, an airplane museum or a spot under a runway are great ideas if your child likes planes. If you decide to go for the outdoor option, I'd highly recommend headphones as those planes can get pretty loud when you're standing right underneath!

8. **Watching Trains.** Find a good trainspotting location, train station, or a busy railway crossing. Just make sure you and your child keep a safe distance when the trains pass.

If your child loves music:

9. **A rehearsal of your local orchestra.** While it took a few weeks to arrange, it was well worth the wait as Michael really enjoyed it! If this proves too difficult, consider going to high school band practice, or smaller theatre groups as they often won't mind having a few people in the seats.

If your child loves the outdoors:

10. **A walk in the woods.** Bring a net to catch and release frogs, make a list or photo diary of all of the animals you see on your walk, take pictures of beautiful flowers or play eye-spy. The sky is the limit!

11. **A greenhouse or community garden.** For colder climate dwellers, a large greenhouse can be a much-needed break from the harsh weather of wintertime. In the summer, a garden can be an excellent opportunity to learn how to take care of plants.

In Case You Missed It... ...Links from our Facebook page

Our Facebook page has 95 "Likes"! We're reaching more and more families every day. Join our Facebook conversation: www.facebook.com/AutismSupportSoMD. In the meantime, here are last month's links:

Autism on the Seas: Group Cruise and Individual Travel for families and adults with Autism
http://www.alumnicruises.org/Autism/home_Brochure.htm

IDEA and Kids with Special Dietary Needs
<http://www.wrightslaw.com/blog/?p=2831>

The Purpose of IDEA is Your Mission Statement
<http://www.wrightslaw.com/nltr/13/nl.0611.htm#2>

10 Impressive Special College Programs for Students With Autism
<http://www.bestcollegesonline.com/blog/2011/05/25/10-impressive-special-college-programs-for-students-with-autism/>

Round Table Discussion about School Services in Southern Maryland
<https://www.facebook.com/events/161876977325672/>

Rise of the autistic workforce
www.newscientist.com/article/mg21829194.300-rise-of-the-autistic-workforce.html#.UcC50YWQxsV.

The Human Voice May Not Spark Pleasure In Children With Autism
<http://www.npr.org/blogs/health/2013/06/17/192753499/the-human-voice-may-not-spark-pleasure-in-children-with-autism>

Bullying and Children with Autism
<http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2013/06/12/bullying-children-with-autism-infographic/>

I'm a teacher, and I know IEPs aren't being followed. What do I do?
<http://www.wrightslaw.com/blog/?p=20>

Why and How to Read Your Child's IEP
<http://www.ncl.org/students-disabilities/iep-504-plan/why-how-read-your-childs-iep#.UcNHSBSHX9s.facebook>

IEP Meeting Conversation Stoppers
<http://www.ncl.org/students-disabilities/iep-504-plan/iep-meeting-conversation-stoppers#.UcNOtvr6JTU.facebook>

Apps for Parents of Children with LD
<http://www.ncl.org/parents-child-disabilities/family-coping-ld/apps-parents-children-ld#.UcoGHmtqAIw.facebook>

In Far from the Tree, Andrew Solomon explores how parents respond to dramatically different children.
<http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/427432/june-24-2013/andrew-solomon>



www.facebook.com/AutismSupportSoMD



[@autismsomd](https://twitter.com/autismsomd)



The Autism Spectrum Support Group of Southern Maryland

www.autismsupport-somd.org



***ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION FOR FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS OF
PEOPLE WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS***



If you are a family member or a caregiver of a person with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), please join us! Our goal is to gather information from, and share information with, families of people with ASDs in all 3 Southern Maryland Counties (Charles, Calvert, and St. Mary's) across all age ranges and levels of disabilities regarding school services in all 3 school systems. Families and caregivers of people with ASDs, or who are suspected of having an ASD who do not have an IEP or a 504 Plan for whatever reason, are also welcome!

Once information is gathered, group participants will determine courses of action, and follow-up meetings or activities may be scheduled.

Where: Leonardtown Library, 23250 Hollywood Road, Leonardtown, MD

When: Monday, July 29, 2013, from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Light refreshments will be provided.

Please RSVP (so we have enough materials for everyone!) to Missy at 301/884-4662 or to Terri at terri@autismsupport-somd.org