

The Sun

Newsletter

October-December 2015

Inside this issue

Legislative update 3

Inside Autism Delaware™ 4-6

P2P: Two dads 8

Dads find support
in a men's group 9

My autism 9

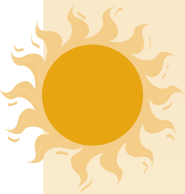
Higher education: 'Going to
college in state or out? 10

On life after higher education . . 11

Higher education

In June, the Autism Delaware Scholarship Committee announced that two young scholars would receive the 2015 Autism Delaware Adults with Autism Scholarship. Brandon Brown and David Lee Cook, Jr., accepted their \$1,000 scholarships at the annual awards night at Dover Downs Hotel and Casino.

Shortly thereafter, Autism Delaware sat down with Brown to discuss his hopes and expectations. And Cook, a three-time scholarship winner and a junior at West Chester University, submitted his own essay explaining and encouraging others with autism to experience higher education.



Our mission

To help people and families affected by autism spectrum disorder (ASD)



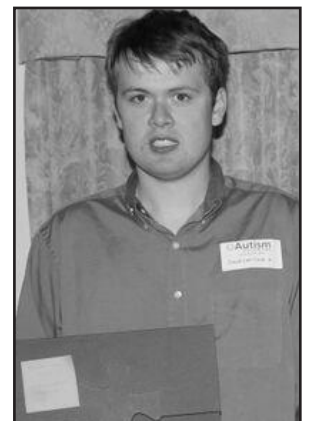
Brandon Brown suits up in his Townsend Fire Company 26 turn-out gear

A 2014 graduate of Middletown High School, Brandon Brown was accepted into the University of Delaware's Career & Life Studies Certificate (CLSC) program in August 2014 and expects to receive his certificate in May 2016. Brown's

studies include working with a coach and practicing job skills, such as problem solving: "To work step by step," explains Brown, "to solve a problem for any topic."

Asked if the CLSC program was difficult for him or easy, Brown focused on the easy: "The campus tour was easy; 'met a lot of people. Communication skills made it easier to talk to persons and to write letters and email.

Continued at the top of p. 7



Three-time winner David Lee Cook, Jr., displays this year's scholarship

College is an important yet challenging next step after high school. The need to adjust to the new setting (which usually includes a student body much larger than that of high school) plus prioritizing homework over the frequent

and tempting college parties and living away from home for the first time, all this may seem, more often than not, overwhelming for students and parents.

For students like me with Asperger's syndrome [now defined as autism spectrum disorder], the transition from high school to college can be particularly difficult to handle. However, most universities offer a wealth of resources for all their students to succeed, and they

Continued on p. 7



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The Sun

A publication of Autism Delaware

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Telling a positive story

Every day, individuals and families living with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) break down barriers and experience success. The process can make for a great, positive story. By sharing these stories with each other and the world, we enrich our entire community. These stories also provide a hope-filled roadmap for the many parents and caregivers lost amid the piles of information that come with their children's new diagnoses.

In my years here at Autism Delaware, I've had the privilege of seeing some incredible examples of barrier breaking in the autism community. In my opinion, some of the greatest examples come from the recipients of the Autism Delaware Adult with Autism Scholarship. This annual award provides some funding for college or other secondary education for individuals on the spectrum.

This year's recipients—Brandon Brown and David Cook—exemplify successful college careers. Brown started working toward his University of Delaware Career & Life Studies Certificate right out of high school last year. And Cook has received the Autism Delaware scholarship for three years in a row because of his outstanding collegiate effort. Now a junior at West Chester University, Cook is like every other 20-something facing the pressures of college and a new, independent life. And he's a remarkably poised and articulate young man. (For more about Brown and Cook, check out the cover story in this newsletter.)

I also like to tell stories about the incredibly positive impact that people

with autism make throughout our community. Whether the listener is inside or outside the autism community, I talk about individuals with autism—from those mildly affected to those most severely affected—who grow, learn, and change throughout their lives.



Teresa Avery
Executive director

Nowhere is this as evident as in Autism Delaware's POW&R program. Participants in our adult vocational services program are working in businesses throughout Delaware and breaking barriers in the process. As a result, POW&R has become a model of success. Our POW&R staff is out supporting participants

- at work in medical offices, distribution sites, retail outlets, and more;
- in volunteer work at animal shelters, food pantries, and museums; and
- in recreation in parks and at the beach.

Let's face it—Autism isn't easy. We spend a lot of time talking about the tough aspects of autism. On the other hand, we also hear and can share stories of fantastic accomplishments that are the direct result of life on the spectrum.

What's yours?



A service of Autism Delaware



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Legislative update

2015 has been a busy year for the introduction of bills relating to education in the state of Delaware. Our general assembly was tasked with considering and voting on several important bills. If passed, these bills would make significant changes in the way Delaware students with special needs are educated. Below are a few examples of legislation that was introduced and the status of each bill.

Senate Bill 33

SB33 improves and enhances the IEP (individualized education program) process. It allows for greater parent participation and teamwork with school staff. It also increases consistency and accountability across school districts, making IEP training a statewide priority.

This bill was passed and signed by Delaware Governor Jack Markell. The new IEP standards will go into effect with the 2015–2016 school year.

Senate Bill 92

SB92 amends Title 14 of the current Delaware Code to expand and enhance the educational services offered to public school students who have an autism classification, regardless of where they attend school.

This bill is waiting for a vote in the Senate when the 2016 legislative session begins in January.

Senate Bill 93

SB93 establishes the Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism (DNEA) as well as the Interagency Committee on Autism. As written in the bill, the DNEA provides a resource for training and technical assistance for Delaware state agencies, schools, organizations, and other private entities that provide services and support to individuals and families affected by autism spectrum disorder.

Like SB92, this bill is waiting for a vote in the Senate when the 2016 legislative session begins in January.

House Bill 30

HB30 provides state funding for basic special education to Delaware students from kindergarten through the third grade. Currently, basic special-education funding runs only from the fourth through twelfth grades.

This bill is currently assigned to the House Appropriations Committee and will be considered when the 2016 legislative session begins in January.

House Bill 175

HB175 creates a unified sports pilot program in track and field for all public high schools during the upcoming school year. A unified sport is an athletic program that combines students—both with and without disabilities—to train and compete on the same team.

This bill is waiting for a vote in the House when the 2016 legislative session begins in January.

Senate Joint Resolution 2

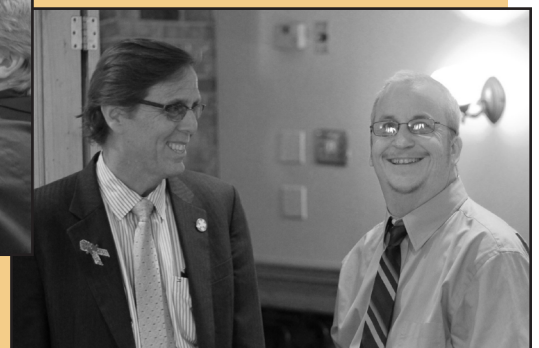
SJR2 requires the Delaware Department of Education (DOE) to study student assessment testing. DOE will convene a group that consists of members of the general assembly and the public. The goal is to conduct an in-depth review of past testing results and make recommendations for consolidation or elimination of specific assessments.

SJR2 was passed and signed by Delaware Governor Jack Markell. The final report is due by January 31, 2016.

Join us!

We're gearing up for the next session of the Delaware General Assembly—and your voice needs to be heard. Tell your state senator and representative how you and your family are affected by autism and what you need.

Contact Autism Delaware™ policy & community outreach director Alex Eldreth at alex.eldreth@delautism.org. Or call (302) 224-6020, ext. 204. And be heard!



INSIDE Autism[™] Delaware

Celebrating annual awards night in Dover

On June 26 at the Dover Downs Hotel & Casino, Autism Delaware celebrated the individuals and businesses that make extraordinary efforts on behalf of people and families affected by autism spectrum disorder (ASD).



Outstanding Autism Delaware Volunteer award recipients include Wilmington University's Friendship Alliance members Errol Ebanks, Sabrina Metz, and Davida Freeman.

The invitation-only event drew long-time volunteers from across the state. "Volunteers are our most valuable asset," notes Autism Delaware executive director Teresa Avery. "As a nonprofit organization, we rely on dedicated volunteers to help with administrative tasks, programs, and fundraising events. Even our employees volunteer at our big fundraising events. As a result, more of the fundraising dollars go where they're needed, and more Autism Delaware programs and services are available to more individuals and families affected by autism. We at Autism Delaware are privileged to be able to rely on such passionate and talented people, and it's my honor to celebrate them."

Autism Delaware also announced the winner of the new Jason Anderson Outstanding Employee Award. Anderson was senior director of ticket sales and operations for Dover International Speedway and a major

advocate for employees with autism when he died in January 2015. The award in Anderson's memory acknowledges an employee with the same "above-and-beyond spirit that Jason had when working with people with autism," continues Avery. "We honor Jason's name by giving the award to Palmer Chiropractic Life Center's office manager, Lynn Murphy."

Given in tandem with the Jason Anderson award, the prestigious Autism Delaware Noel Perry Smith Award for Outstanding Employer was presented to Palmer Chiropractic Life Cen-



Autism Delaware executive director Teresa Avery with Kati Capitan-Anderson holding son Ryan, Claire and Marc Anderson, Palmer Chiropractic Life Center office manager Lynn Murphy, and Palmer Chiropractic associate Kim Mirra, DC

ter. A long-time employer of participants in Autism Delaware's POW&R (adult employment) program, Palmer Chiropractic is a model not only for other businesses in the community but also for the benefits of diversity in the work force.

"The hiring practices at Palmer Chiropractic need to be highlighted and honored," adds Avery. "Thanks to Dr. Palmer, POW&R participants have been able to gain valuable work experience in the community."

In addition to the outstanding employer award, the 2015 Autism Delaware Outstanding Community Partner Award was presented to the Hertrich Family of Automobile Dealerships. This award acknowledges an extraordinary donation of time and resources to the autism community.

"The Hertrich family is a strong supporter of Autism Delaware," notes Avery, "as the highest-level sponsor for our event in Rehoboth Beach, the Blue Jean Ball. The Hertrich Family of Automobile Dealerships is also this year's exclusive BidPal sponsor for the Blue Jean Ball. And in 2013, Fred and Lyndie Hertrich served as the event's honorary chairs."



2015 Volunteer of the Year Cathy Solomon



Autism Delaware executive director Teresa Avery with Outstanding Autism Delaware Volunteer award recipients Tim Mizell and Joe Principe, Autism Delaware board president Marcy Kempner, and recipients Demetris Demetriou, Geoff Avery, Josh Grant, and Don Koss. Absent recipients include Cheryl Ford, Tim Hudson, Judy Impell, Bill and Karen McKinnon, Dwayne McMahan, Angie Sipple, and Pete Stomieroski.



On behalf of the Hertrich Family of Automobile Dealerships, Tushar Patel and Fred Hertrich IV accepted the 2015 Autism Delaware Outstanding Community Partner Award.

Grant-funding committee announces 2015 recipients

Made up of Autism Delaware staff and board members, the grant-funding committee awarded four \$1,000 community grants to innovative programs that address the needs of Delawareans with autism spectrum disorder (ASD):

- Catholic Charities Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP)—to offer therapeutic recreation activities to IOP clients
- Delaware Family Voices—to train on the use of the document organizer called Care Notebook and to train Autism Delaware’s Spanish-speaking staff or volunteers
- Easter Seals Delaware and Maryland’s Eastern Shore—to provide respite care vouchers to families caring for people with ASD
- Dover YMCA—to provide local, physical activity programs (in conjunction with Easter Seals and the John S. Charlton School) for children with ASD

For more information and applications for Autism Delaware’s community grants, visit autismdelaware.org.



Summer fun at day camp

Lucky day campers spent August 17–20 at the popular Children’s Beach House in Lewes. They kayaked, swam, and took part in a low ropes course, arts and crafts, environmental studies, plus a whole lot more. All these activities provide ample opportunity to work on communication and social skills, build self-esteem, hone previously learned skills, and to try something new—all while appropriately supported by knowledgeable staff.

Swim camp designed for learning and recreation

Twelve children, aged 4–21, enjoyed Autism Delaware Swim Camp this year. The Tuesday sessions ran June 23–August 11 at the Boys & Girls Club’s pool in Milford. Parents observed and learned ways to reinforce swimming skills at home.



Designed for youth with ASD, the annual swim camp offers instruction on basic swimming skills and water safety while engaging in a fun, physical fitness activity. Each week also provides opportunities for learning socialization and communication skills.

Drive for Autism brings out the stars

Autism Delaware welcomed more than 275 celebrities and sponsors to the 14th Annual Drive for Autism Celebrity-Am Golf Outing at the DuPont Country Club on May 28. The event’s NASCAR theme brought out its top performers, including NASCAR All-Star Race 2015 winner Denny Hamlin, Danica Patrick, Matt Kenseth, Jamie McMurray, Clint Bowyer, Elliott Sadler, Austin and Ty Dillon, Aric Almirola, and three-time Winston Cup champion Darrell Waltrip. The Drive for Autism also drew stars from the National Football League, National Hockey League, Major League Baseball, and the University of Delaware, as well as broadcasters from FOX, CBS, ESPN, NBC, and the NFL Network.

The event has become more of a “gathering of friends,” according to Drive for Autism chair Artie Kempner. “Many of the returning celebrities have personal connections to autism, but even those who don’t have made the outing an every-year event on their schedules to raise funds in support of Autism Delaware’s much-needed programs and services.”

“And our celebrities and guests always say that this is the best-run event that they play all year,” adds Drive for Autism tournament director Deanna Principe. “We had 83 volunteers help make the event run smoothly.

They also ensured that more of the raised funds go where they’re needed. And this year, we raised more than \$400,000. The programs and services that will benefit include family support, clinical services, advocacy, awareness, and our POW&R program.”



Team Dillon Racing members (L–R) are Tyler Kempner, Ty Dillon—who won “worst dressed” for his Yeungling logo pants—Austin Dillon, Austin Craven, and Billy Race.

Programs

October

1—Grandparents support group. Autism Delaware Lewes office. 9:00 AM. **Register:** Dafne Carnright at (302) 644-3410.

7—Parent coffee hour. Hampton Inn. 117 Sandhill Dr. Middletown. 9:30 AM.

8—Bounce night. Hopping Good Time. 23 Cochran Dr. Bldg. 6. Camden. 5:30–7:30 PM. **Register:** Gail Hecky at (302) 644-3410.

7, 14, 21, 28—Bowling night. Bowlerama. 3031 New Castle Av. New Castle. 5:30–7:00 PM. **Register:** Karen Tuohy at (302) 633-3316.

9—Teen/Tween game night. Autism Delaware Newark office. 6:30–8:30 PM. **Register:** Heidi Mizell at (302) 224-6020.

13—Parent coffee hour. Panera Bread. 3650 Kirkwood Hwy. Wilmington. 7:00 PM.

17—Sensory friendly movie: TBA. Westown Movies. 150 Commerce Dr. Middletown. 10:00 AM.

19—Grandparents support group. Autism Delaware Newark office. 6:30 PM. **Register:** Heidi Mizell at (302) 224-6020.

23—Haunted-but-not-scary train ride. Wilmington & Western Railroad. 2201 Newport Gap Pike. Wilmington. 6:00 PM. **Register:** Kris Grant at (302) 224-6020.

October Cont'd

31—Fall festival. Killens Pond State Park. Pavilion 1. Felton. 12:00–3:00 PM. **Register:** Gail Hecky at (302) 644-3410.

November

4, 11, 18—Bowling night. Bowlerama. 3031 New Castle Av. New Castle. 5:30–7:00 PM. **Register:** Karen Tuohy at (302) 633-3316.

4—Parent coffee hour. Hampton Inn. 117 Sandhill Dr. Middletown. 9:30 AM.

5—Grandparents support group. Autism Delaware Lewes office. 9:00 AM. **Register:** Dafne Carnright at (302) 644-3410.

13—Teen/Tween game night. Autism Delaware Newark office. 6:30–8:30 PM. **Register:** Heidi Mizell at (302) 224-6020.

14—Skating party. Milford Skating Center. One Park Av. 5:00–7:00 PM.

16—Dads support group. Autism Delaware Newark office. 6:30 PM. **Register:** Brian Hall at (302) 224-6020.

21—Sensory friendly movie: TBA. Westown Movies. 150 Commerce Dr. Middletown. 10:00 AM.

28—Sensory friendly movie: *Good Dinosaur*. Carmike Cinemas in the Dover Mall. 1365 North Dupont Hwy. 10:00 AM.

December

2, 9, 16, 30—Bowling night. Bowlerama. 3031 New Castle Av. New Castle. 5:30–7:00 PM. **Register:** Karen Tuohy at (302) 633-3316.

2—Parent coffee hour. Hampton Inn. 117 Sandhill Dr. Middletown. 9:30 AM.

3—Grandparents support group. Autism Delaware Lewes office. 9:00 AM. **Register:** Dafne Carnright at (302) 644-3410.

11—Teen/Tween game night. Autism Delaware Newark office. 6:30–8:30 PM. **Register:** Heidi Mizell at (302) 224-6020.

19—Sensory friendly movie: TBA. Westown Movies. 150 Commerce Dr. Middletown. 10:00 AM.

21—Grandparents support group. Discussion of holiday strategies. Autism Delaware Newark office. 6:30 PM. **Register:** Heidi Mizell at (302) 224-6020.

AutismDelaware.org
for the up-to-date
list of programs for
you, your family,
and your child on
the spectrum



Holiday parties

Santa is planning this year's holiday parties in New Castle County and Sussex County!

For dates, times, and locations, visit autismdelaware.org.

Brandon Brown Cont'd from p. 1

"And I liked the work site, the Marriott in Newark. My job, to clean condo rooms and repair plumbing. The engineering supervisor taught what to do."

Because of Brown's good experience with the CLSC program, he has a few thoughts about further courses: "To learn carpentry, maybe, or be a volunteer librarian. I would like to learn how to stock books. I already know how to stock shelves and clean DVDs and disks."

In addition to his CLSC studies, Brown began a part-time job in July, wiping tables and helping patients with their therapy, at Premier Physical Therapy & Sports Performance.

Brown also maintains his station as a volunteer firefighter

with Townsend Fire Company 26. "Started as a junior member seven years ago," says the now-21-year-old Brown. "We learn how to fight fire at a structural building [controlled] burn."

When on call, Brown enjoys the camaraderie offered at the fire house. Feeling at home, Brown considers this time fun and recreation: "I hang out here a lot. We watch TV and talk."

An added benefit to being a volunteer firefighter is riding the truck in Hacks Point parades a couple times a year. "I don't wear turn-out gear for the parade," clarifies Brown. "I wear the class B uniform. It's like a suit."

David Lee Cook, Jr. Cont'd from p. 1

have helped me adjust to college life over the past two years.

I attend college at West Chester University in West Chester, Penn. The university's Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (OSSD) accommodates students with any kind of disability to help them with their classes. These accommodations allow the students to take extra time on tests, be prompted to turn in assignments or turn in assignments later, and take tests in classrooms by themselves. In addition to the OSSD, plenty of other resources are designed to help students learn their subject material, such as tutors for every subject and the writing center.

Living on campus can be a very rewarding experience while in college, but it also has its drawbacks, particularly when dealing with roommates who you might not get along with. Fortunately, colleges usually offer some dorm rooms where students have their own bedrooms. At West Chester, I share a living room and bathroom with one roommate, but we have separate bedrooms.

Some dorm buildings also offer special amenities, such as a kitchen, a computer lab, even a movie theater. There are also plenty of clubs and organizations to get involved in. They focus on anything from general interest and student activities to major-specific clubs, honor societies, and sports teams.

An important part of college is getting used to doing homework in a very different way than in high school. If your high school workload is not challenging enough, you may not be prepared for the workload at the university level. There is a lot of homework in college!

Also, you are in each class for only three hours a week—about half the time of a high school class. So, you need to spend about twice as much time outside of class doing

homework and studying—about six hours per week for each class. Some classes do not even have graded homework, which means that your class grade is based solely on a few tests.

Most importantly, college teachers will not remind you to take notes and pay attention in class, especially if you are in a class of 300 students, which is not unheard of in college. You must motivate yourself to do well, manage your time wisely, and take advantage of your professor's office hours—for all your classes.

When it came to homework and study habits, I was very well prepared for college. Having graduated from the Mount Pleasant High School International Baccalaureate Program, I was able to handle countless hours of homework and knew how to manage my time. Both are skills I was able to perfect through a rigorous high school curriculum.

However, navigating social life at college was difficult at first. Unlike high school, there is more than one group of friends to stick with because I am part of multiple social groups based on my dorm building, clubs, and major. (I am a mathematics-actuarial major.) Because I stay in dorm buildings, I am more involved in campus life and better adjusted to college than I would be as a commuter.

College is a wonderful experience. Not only is it preparing me for life in the real world, but it is also giving me time to make best friends and memories. College is an experience not to be missed, and I guarantee that, if you go, you will love every moment of it, even though there may be some challenges along the way. College is a time for you to find your true self and to know that you will be accepted—whether or not you have autism.

Every February, Autism Delaware™ offers open application for the adults with autism scholarship, the Daniel and Lois Gray memorial scholarship, and para-to-educator stipend.

For more information, visit autismdelaware.org.

PARENT PARENT

Written by parents for parents

A couple of fathers share their experiences here and offer insight into the unique aspect of raising sons with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Both fathers are long-time autism advocates. Rob J. Gilsdorf is also a past board president of Autism Delaware™. And University of Delaware staff member David Graham moved his family from St. Louis to Delaware to get the services that his son needed.



Andrew Gilsdorf and dad Rob visiting Baltimore's Inner Harbor

Growing up, I developed expectations of what fatherhood would entail. For raising a son, I expected Little League Baseball, tossing the football around, cheering my son at high school football championships, and the like.

As we parents of children with autism all find out, autism changes all expectations, and it requires some adjustment and acceptance. It creates a need to define a new "normal."

Early on, I realized I was experiencing a deep sense of loss. I lost the son I thought I would have, the typical son. Once I came to grips with my self-pity and moved forward, a really great, productive transformation began. I realized that my son Andrew has given me, as his dad, so much—and in a way that, only now, I can truly appreciate:

He gave me an opportunity to focus on others as opposed to myself.

He taught me how to move beyond embarrassment and anger.

He directed me toward self-awareness.

He taught me patience and acceptance.

He opened my eyes to how incredible he is.

These gifts are priceless and so is Andrew. While different, he is quite normal in many ways: He is bright, searches for happiness, works to please others, and wants to be and is productive.

Andrew is only different, and thanks to Andrew, so am I. As with sons with autism, dads with sons on the spectrum need to put on a different set of glasses to see the world. And while different, it is really nice.

—Rob J. Gilsdorf

You experience a certain growth as the parent of a child with autism. When my son Nick was first diagnosed at three with severe autism, I was all "We need to get going on this thing! How are we going to fix this?" I was anxious, nuts, not grounded, if you will.

Over time, you realize you've done what you can. Like the stuff to make Nick more appropriate in the community. We hope the community understands what's going on with Nick, but we don't demand that the world accept him. We're more interested in what will give him more opportunities in the community.

With Nick, the learning is never done, so dealing with autism as a dad is really sort of a spiritual thing. It teaches us how to change, accept, tolerate all the uncomfortable things in life.

Today, Nick is 28, and the biggest challenge of all is not the job at hand—the caregiving, the structured life for our son—but our daughter: knowing my wife and I are not going to



Nick Graham and dad David

be here forever and wondering how to avoid putting the responsibility on our daughter.

'My advice for fathers beginning this process? Be proactive. Do what you need to do. We need to understand the issue and resolve it. It might feel like you're in the tank, but it's not the end of the world. We can face and manage this the best we can.

Early intervention is key because it leads to good outcomes. If mom and dad are concerned, then the people around them need to be concerned. Engage the support of your immediate family and your friends.

And be ready to educate them. When they're trying to blow off one of your child's behaviors or an affect that doesn't feel right to you, bring them along. You've got to have family and friends!

—David Graham

A memorable moment

Nick said "No." He was using PECS [Picture Exchange Communication System] at the time, because he's not verbal, but he said "No"! He pushed the PECS picture that says "No way!" It meant Nick was making a choice and not just going along. That's a communication issue you worry about: Is he being compliant? Then, you get word: Nick did this or that—and you can't believe it.

—David Graham

Dads find support in a men's group

In a **Bergen.com** article entitled *The Special Parent: Reaching Out*, Yvonne Chilik Wollenberg points out that men have difficulty reaching out, even to other men experiencing similar issues. Yet reaching out is an excellent step for a father with a child with special needs.

"A support group for just fathers allows men to talk about tangible issues," writes Chilik Wollenberg, "such as finding a good therapist or buying the right equipment, while sharing the more painful aspects of their children's lives with men who understand" (<http://www.bergen.com/family/special-parent/the-special-parent-reaching-out-1.762874>).



A once-monthly support group specifically for the fathers of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is now offered by Autism Delaware™ in both the Newark and Lewes offices. Run out of the Lewes office, the southern Delaware group is coordinated by educational consultant Vincent Varrassi, MA, LDT-C. (See the accompanying box for background information about Vincent Varrassi.)

Visit autismdelaware.org for more information about autism resources and support groups.

About Vincent Varrassi

Vincent Varrassi ran a successful dads support group in New Jersey for many years before moving to Delaware and starting the Autism Delaware meeting.

Holding master of arts degrees in both teaching and learning disabilities, Varrassi also has more than 30 years' experience as a professional educator. He continues

to present papers on a variety of topics involving students with disabilities and serves on the executive board of several professional organizations, on the professional advisory board of the Autism Spectrum Education Network (ASPEN), and on the editorial board of the **ABC's of College Planning**, which is published by the New Jersey Association for College Admission Counseling.

My autism

Sun contributor Mike Schroeder is currently volunteering at Autism Delaware and wrote this article as part of his service.

Autism has affected my life as well as my family's life in several ways.

As a young child, my diagnosis was pervasive developmental disorder—not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS). Not until I was 14 years old was my family told I had autism. This is considered a fairly late diagnosis, but my family was happy to finally have an explanation for my funny quirks, obsessions, and repetitive talk.

I have been a very shy person most of my life, which may or may not be due to autism spectrum disorder (ASD). During my school years, I had trouble making and keeping friends.

In high school, I started running cross country. This activity helped me a lot because I was part of a team and my teammates accepted me for who I was.

Despite ASD, I was able to graduate from college. I needed an extra three years and had to work extra hard, but it all paid off in the end. I got my degree in liberal arts from Wesley College in 2006.

Anxiety has been a significant problem for me in my life. If

I'm in an unfamiliar place, interacting with unfamiliar people, or standing in a crowd, I find it extremely difficult.

Autism has affected my family relationships as well. Sometimes, I get defensive and frustrated and yell. My moods, obsessions, and anxiety can be difficult for all of us. Maintaining relationships with people outside of my family has also been difficult for me.

Since graduating from college, I have had a few jobs doing such work as packing boxes and data entry. They all ended with me being laid off.

I am optimistic that I will find another job. With patience and a positive attitude, I will achieve my goal of long-term employment. My dream job involves either data entry or writing. I hope to become more independent and experience some lasting relationships, too. In the meantime, I volunteer at Autism Delaware and have worked with the newsletter editor as well as do data entry.



Mike Schroeder

Higher education: 'Going to college in state or out?'

If your child with autism is interested in going to school out of state, CIP (College Internship Program) offers a choice of colleges and universities in Berkeley and Long Beach, Cal.; Brevard, Fla.; Bloomington, Ind.; Berkshire, Mass.; and Amherst, N.Y. Developed especially for young adults, aged 18–26, with autism spectrum disorder and learning differences, CIP helps its students succeed in college, employment, and independent living.

According to the website, cipworldwide.org, the curriculum includes individualized supports in social skills, college academics, internship and career development, and life skills. The program also offers health and wellness, creative arts, student advisement, and support with executive-functioning skills, such as managing time and prioritizing tasks.

Students also choose an area of focus:

- The college-and-certification track provides support through individual tutoring sessions and supervised group study halls, liaison with college faculty that meets the student's unique needs, and assistance with enrolling and accommodations.
- The career skills training and employment program provides small group workshops focused on personal and professional success in the community.

CIP's holistic and strength-based approach helps students get jobs that earn a living wage. Employment skills are strengthened through training, counseling, community service, résumé development, and internship and job placement.

For more information about CIP, visit cipworldwide.org. Or call (877) 566-9247.



If your child is interested in going to college in state, the University of Delaware's Division of Professional and Continuing Studies and the Center for Disabilities Studies offer an education program for adults, aged 18 and older, who can document an intellectual disability and who have graduated from high school with a diploma or certificate of attendance.

Called the Career & Life Studies Certificate (CLSC) program, this post-secondary education program accepts up to 12 students annually. In addition to enjoying the authentic college experience, students work toward gainful employment or further education while

increasing their capacity for independent living.

"Each student's program is individualized," explains Debbie Bain, who coordinates the life studies component of CLSC, "and begins with developing a person-centered plan [called a 'PATH'] that identifies the student's hopes and dreams in various life domains. The student sets goals and creates an action plan to achieve tangible outcomes. The PATH sets the tone and direction for the student's program, determining what activities, experiences, and goals the student will address. The PATH is a flexible, evolving document that is revisited throughout the two-year program."

To earn the CLSC, a student engages in a minimum of 25 hours of programming each week. Programming includes

- undergraduate and CLSC-specific classes. The CLSC core course modules focus on academic preparation, college orientation, and experiential instruction in life skills, such as goal setting, communication, problem solving, and intensive career exploration.
- internship experiences based on the individual student's career goals.

- taking part in campus life.

For help along the chosen PATH, the student has access to the supports identified in the plan, such as undergraduate peer mentors and coaches. A coach supports students through instruction, encouragement, information, and guidance in all areas of the program.

During breaks in classes and activities, the student is encouraged to engage university resources (such as Student Health Services), cultural and athletic opportunities, and academic resources (such as the library, writing center, and tutors), and to take part in seminars

Continued in first column on page 11

SusPAC update

The 2014–15 school year was busy for the Sussex Parent Advisory Committee (SusPAC). We wrote letters to legislators who assisted in securing funding for the Sussex Consortium School, dedicated space in the new elementary school and existing middle school, reviewed the APERS (autism program evaluation scale) results for our program, discussed the district's plan for addressing the program's needs, and met with potential school board candidates before the election to introduce the consortium's program.

—Dafne Carnright
SusPAC member

Parent participation is so important. The parent advisory committee is one way you can get involved and make a difference in education. Please consider attending a PAC meeting at your child's school.

CLSC program Cont'd from p. 10 offered through the Office of Academic Enrichment. Campus life includes student organizations and clubs, the gym, and community and career services. Students learn how to navigate the campus, use the UD shuttle, and manage their time effectively.

Throughout the program, students are expected to function as independently as possible. The supports offered during orientation and at the beginning of new activities gradually fade, so each student learns how to respond on his or her own to typical day-to-day challenges.

In turn, the student establishes a network of support involving others who the student can trust and rely on within his or her environment. (These resources are called "natural supports.") Skill sets established during the CLSC program promote successful transition to adulthood.

Upon successful completion of the program, the student receives the Career & Life Studies Certificate and moves into employment or continued education toward a targeted career goal.

To ease the transition into independent living, a range of post-CLSC activities is available that includes transition meetings and community-based employment assessment.

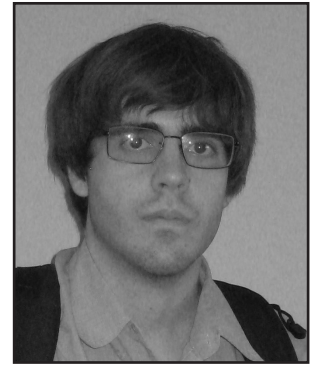
CLSC is one of 27 nationwide programs funded by the U.S. Department of Education's TPSID (transition and post-secondary education for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities) grant.

"It's so very exciting to be part of this initiative and support students who want the college experience," adds Bain.

For more information, visit udel.edu/cds/initiatives-adults-clsc.html. Or call (302) 831-4688.

On life after higher education

A graduate of the University of Delaware Career & Life Studies Certificate program, Michael Denny describes his effort to hone his chosen craft while managing his post-college life.



Michael Denny

"For my dad," begins the 24-year-old Newark resident, "[my] graduating from Christiana High School and the University of Delaware's career and life studies program was evidence of me exceeding expectations. When he learned that I had autism, the goal more or less was to make sure I could do everyday things, like go to the bathroom and take a bath, without constant assistance. When I graduated, my dad's fears were proven unfounded.

"When I think about or even remember I have a degree and certificate," continues Denny, "I see them as essentially souvenirs that I got while I was working on trying to achieve my goals. Most of the time, I work, sleep, or do something fun.

"Overall, I would say my processes for both high school and college needed consistent and dedicated effort. There were both easy and hard parts.

"The one thing I remember being difficult," adds Denny, "was Spanish class in high school. The Spanish language is counterintuitive for me, and I took after-school lessons that only led to me getting a barely passing D or C grade."

Because of Denny's school experience, he can see the benefit of further education, such as college classes involving writing and the theater. He is also open to any other subjects that involve creative work with entertainment media (in other words, books, movies, and video games).

"My dream job," says Denny, "is being a writer. Have I achieved it? Right now, my hobby is buying how-to-write books and using them to help me attempt to write stories—or at least the ideas and

explained mechanics of stories. So, the short answer is 'Yes, I have reached my defined dream of being a writer, but no, I have not published or released anything of note yet.'

"Currently, I work within a lab involved with breeding and housing a supply of lab rodents. I essentially keep things stocked, filled, and ready for general medical experiments and college student assignments.

"I cannot think of any alternatives to my current job, and I currently just feel intimidated by what I want to do—write—and maintaining my current job. It's a viable situation most of the time, but it does highlight my problem with definitive long-term goals."

In the meantime, Denny turns to writing as a recreational outlet. He reads a lot, too, and reviews and edits Wiki information sites. Like most young men today, he also enjoys playing video games.

"I don't consider anything a major accomplishment in my life," sums up Denny, "because my next accomplishment is always bigger than the last one. I just remember to work toward my goals and not to feel tired.

"Now that I think about it, an important accomplishment is being able to go to sleep at a sane time so I get to work on time."

Employment tool kit

Young adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) have strengths and abilities that employers can use. To help your child find the job that's right for him or her, Autism Speaks offers the Employment Tool Kit. It might help your child find his or her dream job! Check it out at autismspeaks.org/family-services/tool-kits/employment.



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**Walk for Autism
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**Saturday,
April 23**

**Fox Point
State Park,
Wilmington**



Register at

autismdelaware.org