Center for Autism And Related Disabilities

Program Doubles in Local Counties Served

When Cathleen Cardone of Glens Falls found out in late 2002 that the University’s Center for Autism and Related Disabilities was starting a North Country pilot program to provide services to public school districts and families with children having autism, she did not hesitate.

“Immediately took Colleen out of B.O.C.E.S. and back to district,” she said of her now nine-year-old daughter. “I knew the presence of the UAlbany Center would enhance Colleen’s future. Since then, I also know that it has saved the district thousands of dollars.”

A pioneering approach to serve the needs of children with autism, their parents and school professionals, the North County Autism Technical Assistance Center Pilot Program expanded this fall from three to six counties and from 30 to 50 school districts. Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno and State Senators Hugh Farley and Elizabeth Little secured approximately $180,000 in funding to make possible the program’s growth from districts in Warren, Washington and Saratoga counties to ones in Fulton, Montgomery and Schenectady counties. Now called the Regional Center for Autism pilot program, it was designed and is run by UAlbany’s Center for Autism and Related Disabilities.

“The success of the North Country program to this point did not go unnoticed in my district, and there was a tremendous demand in these counties for its services,” said Senator Farley.

In the program’s first school year, July 1, 2002 to June 30, 2003, thirty school districts in the northern counties reported increased levels of care and assistance to students and teachers, with cost savings of nearly $500,000. In addition, some 829 parents, educators and community professionals participated in Center workshops and seminars. (Continues on page 3)

Snowcones, Spiders, and Slime

CARD launched this program on March 22nd 2003, following a model which is used worldwide, and since then it has been a triumphant success. These events provide brothers and sisters of children with autism an opportunity to meet other children who really know what it’s like to have a sibling with special needs.

Although there are times for discussion and new information, Sibshops are anything but boring. These all day affairs are jam-packed with new games and the main item on the agenda is always fun! (continues on page 4)
Autism Distance Education Network

Through distance education, The University at Albany has developed a program focused on the education of children with autism and related disorders across New York State. Using the latest in RealPlayer technology, this coursework consists of a series of three courses.

Over 900 special and regular education teachers, school psychologists, occupational and physical therapists, paraprofessionals, speech and language professionals, teacher assistants/aides and parents have completed parts of the sequence. Courses can be audited or taken for undergraduate or graduate credit. In addition, the Behavior Analyst Certification Board, Inc.® has approved the course sequence as meeting the coursework requirements for eligibility to take the Board Certified Associate Behavior Analyst ™ Examination.

Autism I—Foundation Course includes an overview of autism and related disorders, including discussion of diagnostic issues, philosophical issues, research on the biological and psychosocial bases of the disorders, as well as an overview of intervention techniques and legal issues.

Autism II—Introduction to Intervention provides the student with an in-depth knowledge of empirically validated techniques used to treat children with autism. Highlighted are programmatic efforts to improve language/communication and social skills of these children.

Autism III—Practicum in Intervention parallels the Introduction to Intervention course, engaging students in practicum experiences with children having autism. Students are supervised as they work with children and are required to design and implement a series of plans with students that support the Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Each course offers 3 credits at either the undergraduate and graduate level. For more information, visit our website or call Alaina Forrest at (518) 442-5132.

Parent and Professional Training Opportunities Continue in 2003-2004

In an effort to provide information concerning the care and education of individuals with autism spectrum disorders to parents and professionals in need, the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities began a series of trainings for parents and professionals in the North Country in the fall of 2002. Glens Falls and South Glens Falls school districts were the first in the North Country to partner with the Center for Autism for this purpose. Parent and professional trainings in November of that year covered topics such as managing challenging behaviors in home and educational environments, classroom structure, eating and sleeping disorders, and use of the Motivation Assessment Scale. These and many other training opportunities have been (and continue to be) located at the high school in South Glens Falls, thanks to the generous support of Superintendent James McCarthy.

2003 saw partnerships with Queensbury Union Free and Hadley-Luzerne school districts, and training sessions occurred for parents and school personnel at Queensbury’s middle school in March. These well attended training sessions proved to be informative and well-received. The Center continued its professional training for the year by offering sessions to school personnel in our third set of partnering school districts, Saratoga Springs and Mechanicville, in May. Saratoga Springs City School District graciously hosted the professional and complementary parent training sessions in one of their administrative buildings a short distance from the downtown area. The 2002-3 school year ended with a law clinic for parents in the North Country with presenter and attorney Kristen King, J.D. from the Civil Rights and Disabilities Law Clinic at Albany Law School. Ms. King discussed Medicaid, trusts and education law in Glens Falls last June.

Nichols and David Utter provided much needed information concerning transition from academic environments into the adult world of vocation in the trainings “What Every Parent Needs To Know Before Your Child Graduates” and “A Practical Guide To Understanding and Implementing Successful Transitions” in October.

Our training schedule continued in January with social communication training. Ms. Vickey Morrison, MS, CCC-SLP, an instructor of communication disorders at the College of Saint Rose presented parent and professional trainings titled “Social Communication in People with Autism Spectrum Disorders” through the Center at the end of the month. January also included training for paraprofessionals working with individuals on the autism spectrum, with the Center’s director, Dr. Kristin Christodulu, as presenter. Dr. Christodulu’s presentation titled “Introduction to Aspects of Autism Spectrum Disorders” provides strategies for aides and assistants in the classroom and during the school day. This training was located at Prospect School, and included staff from Prospect, Queensbury Union Free School District and several other districts nearby.

For the 2003-4 school year (and a new grant year for the Center) the Center began a new series of topical, professional and parent trainings by offering transitional training for parents and professionals through a partnership with the Wildwood Young Adult Program. Presenters Andrew Greenwald, Gwen (Continues on page 3)
Trainings (continued)

day training was offered to a number of school districts including those in Johnstown, Gloversville and Amsterdam. The HFM BOCES Training Center was the site for presentations by Dr. Christodulu, Andrew Greenwald, Gwen Nichols and Vickey Morrison, covering such topics as introduction to autism spectrum disorders, best practices in educating students with autism, successful transition practices, and social communication. An additional two hour training session on social communication was offered to parents of individuals with autism spectrum disorders in Fulton and Montgomery counties in March as well.

“In March, the Center traveled to part of the new addition to our catchment area: Fulton and Montgomery counties.”

Rounding out the 2003-4 school year, complementary professional and parent trainings occurred in the northernmost part of our catchment area in April, including schools districts such as Bolton, Warrensburg and North Warrensburg. Finally, a parent training occurred on May 19th at the high school in Saratoga Springs, addressing functional behavior analysis and positive behavior supports.

The Center will continue to send information about our training schedule to parents and professionals in our catchment area via mail and email. Please watch for flyers that offer useful training opportunities. Questions pertaining to these trainings may be directed to Melissa Zona at 442-2574.

Program Doubles in Local Counties Served (continued)

In year two of the project, from July 1, 2003 to Jan. 15, 2004, 398 more participated in this training.

The program, provided at no costs to the school districts themselves, was created at UAlbany in response to a statewide and national plea from districts concerned with the dramatic increase of children diagnosed with autism. The State Education Department plans this increase conservatively at more than 175 percent over the past 10 years, while the U.S. Department of Education has estimated the rise to be 435 percent nationwide during that same period.

Last year, Bruno and now-retired State Senator Roland Stafford spearheaded the first funding for the North Country initiative. Little, who succeeded Stafford in the 45th District, enthusiastically supported the program’s continuance. “The response from parents and teachers in Warren, Saratoga and Washington counties has been tremendous,” she said.

“The program has been a treasure for public schools in the North Country,” said Dr. James McCarthy, Superintendent of Schools for the South Glens Falls Central School District. “It’s been a serious, economically responsible example of reaching out to public schools and their communities.”

The program also has received broad support statewide from both governmental agencies and major professional educational associations. Such support will be critical in eventually expanding the program into a full regional network of centers throughout the state.

“We believe this new year of funding will fully prove the program’s effectiveness as a regional approach for statewide implementation,” said Dr. Kristin V. Christodulu, UAlbany psychologist and director of both the program and the Center.

Sherrie Moses, director of student support services for the Queensbury School District, lauded the training courses and seminars. In addition, she said, “the pilot program has given providers and families a place to go to for expertise in crisis or even before crises arise.

“During trying economic times for both districts and families, to have an outreach center with an immediate response in order to improve services for these children is just a phenomenal thing.”

Cruising for Autism

Extra! Extra! Read all about it!

The Center for Autism hosted their 1st Annual Benefit on Friday, May 21, 2004 and it was an enormous success. The event took place on the Excursion Vessel, Mohican and left Lake George at approximately 7:30 p.m.

Our host and master of ceremonies was News Channel 13 anchorwoman, Ms. Benita Zahn. With her help, we had a silent auction which included items to bid on throughout the capital region, north country and the Mohawk valley.

The affair also included buffet style dining, live music presented by Grand Central Station, and a special performance by Sarah Hickey, sibling of a child with autism. Planning for the 2nd Annual Benefit will start shortly. If you are interested in being on the Center for Autism’s fundraising committee, please contact Lauren Simon at 442-2574.
Center for Autism and Related Disabilities
University at Albany, State University of New York
1400 Washington Avenue
Social Science 281
Albany, NY 12222

Phone: 518-442-2574
Fax: 518-442-4834
E-mail: lsimon@albany.edu

MEET THE NEW STAFF

After an extensive search, the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities is pleased to announce that Jessica Boisjoli (Education Specialist), Tara O’Connor (Education Specialist), and Lauren Simon (Intake Coordinator) have joined the staff.

Jessica comes to us from Schenectady ARC, where she served as an Assistant Manager for a community residence. She brings with her a wealth of experience and is recognized for her proficiency in program planning and behavior modification.

Tara comes to us from the State of Utah Human Services Division, where she served as a Program Coordinator. She brings with her an abundance of knowledge and is known for her expertise in person-centered planning and positive behavior supports.

Lauren is a recent graduate of the University at Albany, where she studied psychology and education. She comes to us with an array of clinical experience and is working toward a masters degree in school psychology.

Snowcones, Spiders, and Slime (continued)

Our spring, summer, and winter Sibshop series started out with a carnival theme, “It’s Not Fair!” Cotton candy, snow cones, carnival games and prizes were abundant amongst discussion between the siblings of the resentment they may sometimes feel about having a brother or sister with autism.

Another Sibshop, “Quit Bugging Me!” involved activities such as, caterpillar races, butterfly piñatas, and spider cookie creations. Discussions this time centered on ways to gain some much needed privacy and personal space. There was also a game show themed Sibshop where the siblings were contestants on games such as Family Feud and Double Dare. Although facts about their siblings’ special needs were often ‘on the board’, it was merely impossible to ‘be bored’ when covered in slime!

As one eight-year-old sibling put the Sibshop experience, “It’s really great and I’m serious! It’s just really fun.”

As well as holding Sibshops in Glens Falls, Saratoga, and Mechanicville, CARD held an ice cream social this past fall for all the Sibshops participants and their entire family. This was a great opportunity for these brothers and sisters to reunite, sign photo yearbooks, and share their experience with their parents and siblings. With the continued success of the sibling program, CARD is planning on making this an annual event!

Planning for the next series of Sibshops has already begun. If you are a sibling of an individual with autism, register before it is too late! Contact Melissa Zona at (518)442-3287 for more information and to register.