Over 500 parents, school personnel, and community professionals attended the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities’ (CARD) 7th Annual Conference, Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders: the Science and Practice of Effective Interventions, on November 7, 2008 at The Desmond Hotel and Conference Center in Albany. Experts in the field of autism spectrum disorders from around the country discussed current interventions and strategies for students with ASD.

The keynote address was given by Ilene Schwartz, Ph.D. of the University of Washington. Dr. Schwartz is currently the Principal Investigator for the Center for Professional Development in Autism, a federally funded grant directed to train teams of service providers to deliver services to students with autism. In addition, she is the co-PI on a technical assistance grant to provide services to elementary students with autism (Elementary DATA) and on a model demonstration grant to provide behavior support to students with significant behavioral challenges.

In the afternoon, eight breakout sessions were offered with topics including: Developing Systems of Support for Students with ASD, Respectful Approaches to Behavior Support, Using Video iPods to Teach Critical Skills to Students with ASD, Understanding the Neurologic Basis of Autism, Helping Adolescents with ASD Gain Self-Knowledge, Life Skills, and Self Determination, Using Visual Supports to Enhance Learning, A Video Guide to Early Symptoms of ASD, and Instructional Strategies for Building Social Skills.

We would like to thank participants, all of the presenters, The Book House of Stuyvesant Plaza, and The Desmond Hotel and Conference Center for making the 7th Annual Conference a success in the Capital Region!

New Family Programs

In an effort to continue providing quality programs and events in Albany, Schenectady, Fulton, Montgomery, Hamilton, Washington, Warren, Saratoga, Columbia, Greene, and Rensselaer counties, CARD Albany surveyed registered families this fall to determine programs that are most needed around the Greater Capital District. Based on feedback, CARD Albany is initiating a new Family Education Seminar Series this year. The first session is titled, “Encouraging the Development of Social Skills in Children and Young Adults with ASD” and is being offered in Hudson, Saratoga, and Albany.

In addition to the seminar series there will also be a number of other family events planned throughout 2009 in an effort to bring registered families together for fun, support, and networking.

For more information visit: http://www.albany.edu/psy/autism
CARD Albany Introduces New School-Based Program

Educating students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) can be a challenging and complex process. Often school professionals feel that they do not have the time, resources, or proper training to utilize evidence-based interventions and programming with their students with ASD. When school professionals are able to devote the time they need to receive training and plan a well-organized, data-driven curriculum that addresses the individual needs of students with ASD, they can provide a highly motivating, effective, and rewarding environment in which students can learn.

With this in mind, CARD Albany has developed a new consultation and training program to assist teams in developing appropriate educational programs for students with ASD. CARD Albany staff will work with district staff to assess the needs of the team, and create a targeted program to help staff develop the skills they need to educate students with ASD using evidence-based methods. Whether the team is struggling with developing effective teaching tools, creating a program to facilitate social development, or supporting the behavioral challenges of students with ASD, CARD Albany can provide assistance to the team on an ongoing basis.

The overall goal of this program is to give teams the tools they need to provide students with ASD and effective educational environment.

If you would like more information about this program, or learn how your district can participate, please contact Erin Berical, Training Coordinator at (518)442-2574.

Peer Modeling Project Sees Success

Impairments in social interactions are characteristic of children with autism spectrum disorders and continue to be a focus of interventions. Although early efforts to improve social skills in children with ASD were typically adult-directed and highly structured, more recent research has focused on peer-initiated approaches and naturalistic settings such as classrooms. Researchers at CARD have recently concluded implementation of a classroom-wide peer-initiation program in a local first grade classroom and begun work with a second classroom. The purpose of this research is to examine the effectiveness of using multiple peers as models and to target specific social skills for participating children with ASD. The program uses a buddy system, in which children are paired with each other and play together for 10 minutes each day. The buddies rotate daily so that children can play with different peers and toys over the course of several months.

Results from our research in the first classroom indicated that the child with ASD was able to make gains in the social skills that were targeted. Additionally, children in the classroom reported that they liked the program and thought other children would enjoy participating. We are now working with a second child in order to gather more data about this program. If you are interested in participating in this research program or would like more information, please contact Lindsay Washington (lw533817@albany.edu) or by phone at (518) 442-2574.

Fall Family Fun Wrap Up

Halloween lovers were eager to attend the fifth annual CARD Halloween party held at the Verdoy Volunteer Firehouse in Latham, New York on October 24, 2008. Twenty-seven miniature ghouls, ghosts, and goblins, along with their families, enjoyed two hours of food and fun. CARD’s costume-clad staff helped children paint pumpkins, create masks, decorate trick-or-treat bags, and frost cookies. Party-goers made ghostly treats and Halloween-themed door hangers while others played Toss a Ghost. As some attendees enjoyed eating their homemade sundaes, a frightfully fun costume parade circled the room. The night concluded with a raffle, where many tired trick-or-treaters took home great prizes. Snacks and donations were kindly provided by several local businesses including Stewarts, Dominos, the Breadbasket, and many others. Thanks to everyone who came and helped make this event great fun.

Forty-five families gathered to celebrate the holidays with CARD on December 6, 2008. The Desmond Hotel served a delicious brunch buffet while the children were busy making holiday and winter crafts, decorating cookies, and watching holiday movies. Santa stopped by to join in the festivities, as well. He was very excited to give out candy canes and hear what was on each child’s Christmas list! Thanks to everyone who made the holiday party a success!
Some of you may have been fortunate enough to attend the Albany ASA conference last year. The speaker was Kari Dunn Buron, one of the authors of *The Incredible 5-Point Scale: Assisting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders in Understanding Social Interactions and Controlling Their Emotional Responses*, by Kari Dunn Buron and Mitzi Curtis. This helpful resource is based on a simple 5-point scale to support a program for teaching social understanding. The scales are visual and reduce abstract ideas to numbers. Given what we know regarding learning characteristics of individuals with ASD, it is an effective tool. Individuals who lack social understanding can benefit when difficult situations are broken down into clear, concrete parts. Some 5-point scale templates included in the book are: “A 5 Means I Am Screaming,” “Meeting and Greeting Others,” and “When Words Hurt.”

Ruth Aspy, Ph.D. and Barry G. Grossman, Ph.D. are the authors of *Designing Comprehensive Interventions for Individuals with High-Functioning Autism and Asperger Syndrome: The Ziggurat Model*. Brenda Smith Myles, the keynote speaker of the 2007 CARD conference in Albany identified the Ziggurat Model as one of the three recent advances in the field that have the potential to significantly impact individuals with ASD. The premise of the model is that underlying needs and characteristics related to ASD must be addressed. The book includes two assessments useful in designing interventions: The Underlying Characteristics Checklist and the Individual Strengths and Skills Inventory. An attractive feature of the Ziggurat Model is that it is compatible with federal and state education guidelines. It also promotes collaboration and communication among parents and professionals.
CARD Welcomes New Staff

Jessica Fuller, B.A.

*Project Support Specialist*

Jessica spent five semesters at Colgate University, where she studied Behavioral Neuroscience. She received her B.A. degree in psychology from the State University of New York at Albany. Her professional experience includes working as a teacher’s aide at Brookside Preschool Summer Program in a classroom with 2-4 year olds with developmental disabilities. She plans to attend a graduate program and earn a Masters degree in Occupational Therapy.

Linda Benton, MS.Ed.

*Education Specialist*

Linda received a B.A. degree in English Literature from Seton Hall University and a Master of Science in Education degree in Special Education and Elementary Education from Syracuse University. She has extensive experience working with students in both self-contained and inclusive settings. For many years, she specialized in training teachers on how to integrate assistive technology into students’ programs to support learning. Linda has been an adjunct professor at the State University of New York at Albany and Russell Sage College, and was a subject matter expert for two distance learning courses for the University of New Mexico. She has presented at local and national conferences, and written articles on a variety of topics in special education. Most recently she was a program coordinator and supervisor at a school for students with autism and other neurological disabilities.