In June, the University at Albany became the home base for a New York State pilot program providing community-based services to improve the lives and education of individuals with autism. Through a proposal submitted by Dr. V. Mark Durand, Director of the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities, the North Country Autism Technical Assistance Center (NCATAC) became a reality!

The NCATAC was created through legislative grants from Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno and Finance Committee Chairman Ronald B. Stafford. NCATAC was established to address the limited availability and rising costs of specialized services related to the support and education of children and youth with autism. The pilot program will provide direct services to individuals with autism and their families in 27 school districts in Warren, Washington and Saratoga Counties.

“The North Country Technical Assistance pilot program will establish a paradigm in New York State for providing comprehensive services to children with autism and their families,” said Senator Bruno. “This much needed initiative will offer expertise to faculty and professional staff, complement existing programs and services, and coordinate efforts both within and among the state’s autism agencies.”

“This program provides a much-needed, cost effective method of helping autistic children in our local schools, and the families and teachers who have sought this assistance,” said Senator Stafford. “The Senate is pleased to support this joint venture between Glens Falls, South Glens Falls, and the University at Albany, as we seek to improve the quality of educational services for all New Yorkers.”

Autism and Related Disabilities; Gina Cosgrove, Psy.D, a licensed psychologist serving children at Karner Intensive Developmental Services, and Jane Nofer, Ph.D, a clinical psychologist who deals exclusively with autism spectrum diagnoses.

Following welcoming remarks from a representative for Senators Bruno and Stafford, Dr. Durand outlined components of quality autism programs, and Dr. Nofer discussed communication skills. After the lunch break, Dr. Cosgrove talked about building social skills and maintaining friendships, and Dr. Durand presented information on positive behavioral support strategies. In their presentations, speakers described their work and how they implement these approaches with individuals with autism spectrum disorders.

“Today’s turnout at the conference indicates just how important an issue autism is regionally as well as statewide,” said Dr. Durand. “The Center’s direct services and consultations are aimed at addressing the limited availability and rising costs of specialized services related to the education and treatment of children within Northern Saratoga, Warren and Washington County area. The pilot project is pivotal in that it will also serve as a model for expansion of such regional centers statewide. We are opening up new opportunities for children,” said Durand, “and also providing parents with something that has been very elusive... HOPE.”
Parent Training Workshops: November 11th and 21st 2002

One of the unique features of the North Country Autism Technical Assistance Center design is the spirit of collaboration that serves as the cornerstone to all services benefiting children with autism. In keeping with this spirit is the focus on parents as significant partners. In November, NCATAC began a series of workshops aimed at helping parents better understand and manage some of the challenging issues experienced by families who have children with autism. The first parent training session, Positive Family Intervention, was held on November 17th. In addition to discussing numerous positive parenting strategies, Dr. V. Mark Durand provided parents with various relaxation techniques.

The second parent training session, Problems of Daily Living, was held on November 21st. In this session, Dr. Durand discussed the everyday problems experienced by children with autism and their families. Eating and sleeping concerns were highlighted, along with strategies for promoting positive behaviors. Dr. Durand provided parents with a number of resources to assist them with their efforts at home, including “the good sleep habits checklist” and “the 7-Cs:” calm, communication, choices, change preparation, consequences, constructive feedback and consider the next time.

NCATAC will be repeating this series of parent training workshops this spring with our new partnership schools: Queensbury Union Free School and Hadley-Luzerne Central School. For further information on these trainings, contact NCATAC or call the district special education administrator.

Teacher and Paraprofessional Training

South Glens Falls High School was the site for workshops held on December 5, 2002 and January 16, 2003, which brought together teams of educators and paraprofessionals as important partners serving children with autism in educational settings. On December 5th, educators attended a session presented by Dr. V. Mark Durand, Director of the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities, which offered insight and options for structuring the classroom to meet the needs of children with autism. The session outlined the basic processing problems often occurring in children with autism spectrum disorders. Dr. Durand also introduced educators to environmentally friendly interventions and designs to meet these needs. In addition to numerous “take home and use” strategies, Dr. Durand discussed the principles of “errorless learning,” a technique he supports over the customary “trial and error” method.

Concurrently, Dr. Tim Feeney, Director of the Wildwood Institute in Schenectady, presented a lively session to paraprofessionals. Dr. Feeney addressed current “myths” in the paraprofessional role, and introduced intervention to promote positive experiences for children with autism in any classroom.

A third training session on January 16, 2003 partnered teachers and paraprofessionals in a two-hour activities-based format. Participants were introduced to Dr. Durand’s Motivation Assessment Scale and its application in the classroom. Working teams then generated support plans based upon the learning and needs of their individual students. The next teacher/paraprofessional training will be held on March 26th. This workshop will target school personnel in Queensbury Union Free School and Hadley-Luzerne Central School.
“Sibshops" Coming to the North Country

For the past 12 years, the Sibling Support Project at Children’s Hospital in Seattle has provided brothers and sisters of children with special health and developmental needs peer support and education within the context of fun and recreation. There are currently over 200 Sibshops registered throughout the United States and eight countries internationally. The emphasis is on school age FUN. A large part of the day is spent playing games. However, the shared experiences of connecting with their peers and enjoying typical childhood experiences may not be a regular part of the lives of brothers and sisters of children with autism. The added responsibilities and emotions that come with having a sibling with a disability such as autism can start to take a toll on even the healthiest child.

“I don’t like telling people at school because I am afraid they will judge me or treat me in a different way because of something my brother has,” said Kara LaLonde age 13. Kara is not alone in these sentiments. For many children who have siblings with disabilities such as autism, the experience of feeling alone in the world is not uncommon.

As Don Meyer, M.Ed. founder of the Sibling Support Project points out, “If people are really interested in care that is truly family centered, then they need to be thinking about the family member who’s going to have the longest lasting relationship with that person with special needs and to be available as they would be to parents.”

The North Country Autism Technical Assistance Center, in keeping with its commitment to provide community-based, family centered services, shares this philosophy. NCATAC is proud to announce dates for their series of “Sibshops” using this model of sibling support. NCATAC Sibshops are scheduled for three Saturdays: March 22nd, April 12th and May 3rd, from 10:00AM-2:00PM at the Glens Falls YMCA. All 7-12 year old brothers and sisters of children with autism spectrum disorders are welcome to attend.

The event will be run by NCATAC staff and community members, some of who also have siblings with special needs. Sibshops are a lively mixture of new games, discussions and information. Participants should dress comfortably and be ready for action!

For siblings living in Warren, Washington, and Saratoga Counties, Sibshops are free. Lunch is included. For children outside this area, there is a $5.00/day fee. Participants must be pre-registered.

For more information and registration materials please contact the NCATAC.

When my sister Kelly was diagnosed with autism, I was devastated. At 13, I had no idea what autism was, or how to explain to my friends why Kelly wouldn’t talk. I wish there had been someplace like Sibshops that my sisters and I could’ve gone to connect with other siblings and learn more about autism. I hope that kids who come to Sibshops will learn more about autism have fun and realize that there are other kids that they can lean on.”

-Julie McChesney
SibShop Co-facilitator

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 500 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). The application of behavior analysis principles and ethical issues involved in their delivery are covered.

Each course offers 3 credits at either the undergraduate and graduate level.

For more information, visit our website or call: (518) 442-5132.

“Over 500 parents, special and regular education professionals have completed parts of the course sequence.”
In December, full scale planning and implementation of the North Country Autism Technical Assistance project was initiated with a full team of individuals in place. We would like to introduce you to the team serving the needs of our children with autism spectrum disorders:

V. Mark Durand, Ph.D., Director, Center for Autism and Related Disabilities; Professor of Psychology, University at Albany.

Kristin V. Christodulu, Ph.D., Associate Director, Center for Autism and Related Disabilities; Visiting Assistant Professor of Psychology, University at Albany.

Sarah Roche, M.A., Project Assistant; former special education teacher.

Sue Ann DuBois, OTR/L

BCP, Education Specialist; nationally board certified pediatric occupational therapist; has served children with autism in the home and educational settings for the past 19 years.

Sarah Fazziola, B.A., Education Specialist; served children and adults with autism in residential and educational settings, and directed a special needs inclusion program serving children with multiple disabilities; has worked with children with disabilities for 12 years.

Melissa Zona, B.A., Graduate Student; “Sibshop” coordinator; has worked with children on the autism spectrum at the Child Development Center’s Therapeutic Nursery in Manhattan; has extensive experience in developing home-based behavior programs.

Meet the NCATAC Staff

Visit our Website
See us at: www.albany.edu/psy/autism/autism.html

Our NCATAC Advisory Committee

Center for Autism and Related Disabilities - Kristin V. Christodulu, Ph.D.

South Glens Falls School District: James McCarthy, Ph.D., Superintendent of Schools; Carl Grasso – CSE/CPSE Chair; Gail Aiken - Parent, School Board Member

Glens Falls School District: Thomas McGowan-Superintendent of Schools; Barbara Sealy-Director of Special Education; Cathleen Cardone, Parent

Queensbury Union Free School: Sherrie Moses – Director of Student Support Services; John Goralski-CSE Chairperson (grades4-8) Assistant Principal (grades 4-5)

If you would like to make a gift to the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities, please make checks payable to: University at Albany Foundation

Please indicate on check that donation is to be directed to: Center for Autism and Related Disabilities

Mail to: Rebecca Popp
Division of University Advancement
University at Albany UAB 209
Albany, NY 12222
518-437-4785
rpopp@uamail.albany.edu

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE FUTURE NCATAC NEWSLETTER MAILINGS, PLEASE E-MAIL YOUR REQUEST TO:
SDUBOIS@ALBANY.EDU

WE WILL PLACE YOU ON OUR ELECTRONIC MAILING LIST!