CARD’s 5th Annual Statewide Autism Conference
Promoting Best Practices and Enhancing Quality of Life for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders

The 5th Annual Statewide Autism Conference was held on April 1, 2011 at the Hilton Rye Town in Rye Brook, NY. Peter Gerhardt, Ed.D., delivered the keynote address “Teaching Learners with ASD the Skills Needed to Help Maximize Quality of Life Across the Lifespan”. His address offered profound insights on adaptive skills which promote lives with competencies and enhanced quality. Dr. Gerhardt is the Director of Education, Upper School, for the McCarton School in New York City. He has more than 30 years experience utilizing the principles of Applied Behavior Analysis in support of adolescents and adults with autism spectrum disorders in educational, employment, residential and community-based settings. He has authored and co-authored articles and book chapters on the needs of adolescents and adults with ASD and has presented nationally and internationally on this topic. His keynote address was very well received by the audience, comprised of school personnel, community professionals and family members.

Similarly well received by the audience were the afternoon breakout sessions, which included “Supporting Self-Determination for Individuals with Autism and Problem Behavior” by Fredda Brown, Ph.D., “Understanding Emotional Meltdowns In ASD” by Carla A. Mazefsky, Ph.D., “Getting the Most out of the Autism Internet Modules” by Sheila Smith, Ph.D., and “ERASE: An Efficient FBA/BIP Process” by Rose Iovannone, Ph.D., BCBA-D. CARD Albany research coordinator, Melissa Rinaldi, Ph.D., presented “Thinking Differently: Better Understanding Students with ASD in the Classroom”, Jane Thierfeld Brown, Ed.D., discussed “Transition after High School for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders”, David Kuhn, Ph.D., BCBA-D provided the audience with information on “Autism and Challenging Behaviors: Assessment and Treatment in the Classroom” and Rose Iovannone, Ph.D., BCBA-D shared her knowledge on “Peer Mediation Intervention to Enhance Social Skills in Students with ASDs”.

We would like to thank all our presenters, The Bookhouse of Stuyvesant Plaza and the Hilton Rye Town for helping to make this 5th Annual Statewide Conference a memorable event. We are looking forward to the 6th Statewide Autism Conference in Rochester, NY, which is promising to be another enlightening experience.

UAlbany Receives National Honor for Community Service

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), a federal agency, has recognized the University at Albany as a leader among the nation’s institutions of higher education for its support of volunteerism, service-learning, and civic engagement. UAlbany was named to the 2010 (U.S.) President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll for engaging its students, faculty and staff in meaningful service that achieved measurable results in the community during the 2009-10 academic year.

Three UAlbany initiatives were featured in the University’s application to the national recognition program. The Center for Autism was one of the three chosen for this honor. Through CARD, students helped faculty and staff develop effective educational programs and conduct other activities, contributing to the Center’s training of almost 7,300 individuals in 2009-10. In nine years, the Center’s programs/services have reached more than 31,000 people.

Thank you to all of our graduate and undergraduate students for their help through the years!
Comprehensive Evaluation and Intervention Program for At-Risk Families of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

The Center for Autism and Related Disabilities at UAlbany, in collaboration with CapitalCare Developmental–Behavioral Pediatrics, is pleased to announce a comprehensive evaluation and intervention program for at-risk families of children with ASD who also display challenging behaviors. The program is funded by a grant from the New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD). Children with autism often exhibit challenging behaviors that interfere with their ability to learn and also create significant disruptions to everyday routines in the daily life of a family.

This comprehensive evaluation and intervention program provides multidisciplinary behavioral supports to families, including medical, psychological, social work and educational elements. The program is guided by a family-directed contextualized intervention approach assisting families in understanding and effectively responding to challenging behaviors, therefore avoiding crises and preventing out-of-home placements while simultaneously increasing the capability of family members to support the child in the home.

The comprehensive evaluation and intervention program offers a unique set-up, currently not available locally due to its focus on multidisciplinary collaboration and its contextualized, family guided treatment planning approach. It is available to families eligible for OPWDD services and Family Support Services.

If you are interested in more information, please contact Dr. Kristin Knapp-Ines at 518-442-5418 or visit the CARD Albany website: http://www.albany.edu/autism/

Save the Date Annual Distinguished Guest Lecture on Autism

Annually, CARD Albany invites distinguished autism experts to present on the latest cutting-edge research in the field, in areas such as genetics and brain imaging.

Two lectures are offered: one for physicians and other medical professionals and another for parents and non-medical professionals. Lectures last approximately 90 minutes, with an additional 30 minutes for questions and discussion. Continuing Medical Education (CME) credits are provided for medical professionals through a joint sponsorship with New York Medical College. The Distinguished Guest Lectures on Autism are free of charge.

This year’s Guest Lecture will be presented by Ami Klin, Ph.D. Dr. Klin is the Chief of Autism and Related Disorders of the Marcus Autism Center.

Dr. Klin is also a Georgia Research Alliance Eminent Scholar at Emory University and Director of the Division of Autism and Related Developmental Disabilities in the Department of Pediatrics at Emory University School of Medicine. Dr. Klin is an internationally recognized psychologist and researcher. Dr. Klin’s primary research activities focus on the social mind and brain, and aspects of autism from infancy throughout adulthood. In his most noted work, Dr. Klin used eye-tracking technology to visualize and measure social engagement, allowing him to monitor infants who potentially have an autism spectrum disorder.

Date: Wednesday, January 25th, 2012
Parents and Non-medical professionals: 2-4pm
Medical Professionals: 5:30-8pm
Holiday Inn, Wolf Road, Albany

For more information about future Guest Lectures, please visit our website: http://www.albany.edu/autism/

Parent Education Program

The Center for Autism and Related Disabilities continues to offer a parent education program funded through a grant from the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities in an effort to reduce the stress of parents during the often overwhelming and confusing time period following the diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder. The program is offered on a continuous schedule at no-cost to families of young children recently diagnosed with ASD in the Capitol Region. The goal of the program is to provide accurate evidence-based information to parents in a timely manner (within 6 months to one year following diagnosis) on a variety of important topics such as how to choose treatment, medical/developmental issues, accessing resources and living with ASD. Five 2-hour sessions are delivered in a group-format led by a clinical psychologist from CARD (continued on page 4)
Book Review

Making Sense of Autism Spectrum Disorders: Create the Brightest Future for Your Child with the Best Treatment Options
By James Coplan, M.D.

“Making Sense of Autism Spectrum Disorders” by James Coplan, M.D. is an impressive resource for parents, professionals, and anyone who has a basic understanding of autism and would like more general information on the topic. In this book, Dr. Coplan begins by discussing the causes and symptoms of autism. He then goes on to provide readers with an up-to-date, concise road map for traveling through the maze of services, therapies and programs available for individuals with autism spectrum disorders. In the final chapters of the book, he focuses on the family and the individuals with autism as they age.

One of the more useful parts of this book is the section on treatments for autism. Very often, books provide only one viewpoint of treatments or discuss them as entirely unrelated entities. This book discusses how a variety of treatments are similar and how they differ from each other as well as why different research supported treatments might be appropriate for different children or for the same child at different points in his/her life.

Additionally, treatments are discussed in a “top down” and “bottom up” format in regard to the complexity of abstract thought required to increase success with the treatment so that readers can help determine the appropriate level of treatment to consider.

Dr. Coplan demonstrates compassion and concern that transcends throughout all topics he discusses in the book. He addresses common parental concerns, questions popular theories, and refutes assertions that have no scientific basis with careful use of data presented in charts, graphs and diagrams that are easy to understand.

This book is upbeat, informative and provides an excellent basic overview of autism. It is scientifically-based but topics are explained clearly in an easy to understand format and language. It may not, however, be for parents who are having first concerns that their child presents with many of the characteristics of autism. Because of the wealth of information provided, reading it, at times, may be challenging, complex and overwhelming for parents who are currently dealing with the new emotions, vocabulary and concepts that surround autism. For anyone who is seeking additional knowledge of Autism Spectrum Disorders in general, “Making Sense of Autism Spectrum Disorders” is an excellent resource.
CARD Research Presented at Penn State National Autism Conference

On August 2, 2011, CARD staff and students had the opportunity to author and participate in poster presentations at the Penn State National Autism Conference in State College, PA. The poster presentations highlighted scientific and promising practices within educational programs serving students with autism. The poster presentations included: School Consultation Project – Building Capacity of School Teams to Support Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders, Education Program for Parents of Children Recently Diagnosed with Autism and Impact of a Student’s Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder on General Education Teachers’ Attitudes.

CARD Albany Expands Distance Learning Opportunities

Over the past few years CARD Albany has been steadily developing its capacity to provide training programs at a distance. From 2008 through 2010 CARD Albany offered access to the annual and statewide autism conferences via professionally produced CDs. Parents and professionals around New York State could access the high-quality presentations at these conferences without having to travel to the conference site itself.

In May 2010, CARD added to its distance learning repertoire by producing a web-based option for special educators and administrators who are required by New York State to take a three-hour autism training. “Responding to the Needs of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders” has been taken online by nearly 800 professionals from around the country. Registrants can view the training from the convenience of their home or work computer 24-hours a day, seven days a week.

In January 2012 CARD looks to increase options for distance learning once more by pairing with the web-based software platform Elluminate to offer a series of trainings targeted to classroom aides working with students who have ASD.

These sessions will provide learners with information about autism, the impact autism has on a student’s learning experience, as well as evidence-based practices that one-to-one paraprofessionals will find practical and effective in assisting students with ASD to be successful in the classroom.

Check CARD Albany’s website in the coming months for more details as we develop this exciting new training option! http://www.albany.edu/autism/

Parent Education Continued

and/or a nurse clinician from CapitalCare Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrics. The goals of the program are to: 1) increase knowledge about autism, 2) decrease parental stress, and 3) improve family quality of life.

Preliminary data on the UAlbany Center for Autism and Related Disability parent education program suggests that, overall, participants are highly satisfied with the program and following the program they are more knowledgeable about autism. In addition, parents are reporting lower levels of stress following the program. Specifically, parent stress scores on a standardized measure were, on average, in the high stress range (86th percentile) prior to treatment and fell within normal limits (62nd percentile) following treatment. Parents also reported overall improvements in their quality of life following the program, with the greatest change in the area of emotional well-being, followed by positive change in family interaction and disability-related support. CARD will continue to evaluate outcomes of the program as more parents complete the education series. If you are a parent of a child recently diagnosed with autism and would like to learn more about the education program, please contact Dr. Kristin Knapp-Ines at 518-442-5418.