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# Bridging the Gap



*The Autism Center of New Jersey Medical School is proud to present Bridging the Gap, that was collaboratively developed by TAC and The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation This ongoing program is made possible by funding from the Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation and The Department of Health and Senior Services of New Jersey. Bridging The Gap creates programs specifically designed to address the unique needs of adolescents and adults living with ASD.*

## Mostly Music: Brings Families Together

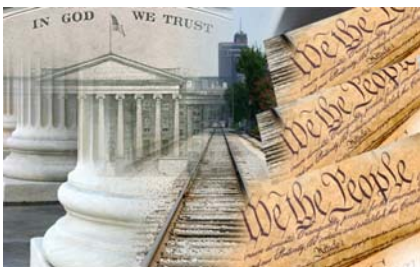
To date the Mostly Music program has provided an entertainment experience for adolescent/adult with ASD, (autism spectrum disorder), and their families. The Mostly Music program has been open to those individuals living at home with their families or those individuals living in residential placement, in group homes throughout the community.

As of this report, the Mostly Music program has held five events at the Autism Center of NJMS.

The presence of a family outlet in the Newark community has been tremendous. The needs of the community are so great and varied that having this type of outreach for these affected families has endeared The

Autism Center to this community in ways we could not have imagined. The past two events have had enrolments of over 70 individuals. The family dynamic has been varied. Mom and young adult only will represent some families. Others will take the opportunity to bring the entire family of four or six together. We have also hosted group home members and their staff for the events.

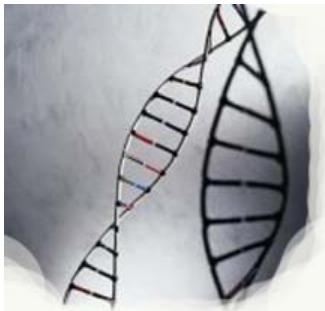
The effect of the music on the individuals with ASD is nothing short of amazing. We have had in attendance a wide spectrum of functioning levels. Non-verbal individuals from area group homes to more mild individuals, who present on the high functioning side of the autistic spectrum, have equally enjoyed the programs. Everyone comes together and people help one another. We have heard that those individuals who cannot sit through any activity for more than ten minutes or so have stayed engaged for the entire two-hour program.



### GOVERNMENT WATCH

#### New Jersey legislation important to the ASD community

A representative from The Autism Center along with Linda Fiddle, the executive director of The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation testified in support of two important pieces of legislation affecting the autism community. November 23, 2009 two bills were heard in the Assembly Health and Senior Services Committee A 4225 permits adults with ASD to register with the State registry and A4226 Covers persons with ASD under, "Law against Discrimination". Both bills were released from committee.



## Bridging the Gap Seminar Series

*Bringing important information to the medical community  
and public about autism from experts working in the field.*

BRIDGING THE GAP SEMINAR SERIES 2008-2009 is an ongoing program which is supported by an educational grant from The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation and by the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services.

The first event of the series took place on October 13, 2008. The subject for this event was The Autism and Epilepsy Connection. This important topic was presented by noted neurologist Dr. Mark Mintz. The talk highlighted the presentation of the dense array EEG and its application for individuals with autism. To further enhance your knowledge of the co conditions, autism and epilepsy and basic first aide procedures, The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation has produced a public service brochure available free and downloadable from their website [www.djfiddlefoundation.org](http://www.djfiddlefoundation.org). The informative brochure will also be available on The Autism Center website [www.umdnj.edu/autismcenter](http://www.umdnj.edu/autismcenter).

The second event was held December 8, 2008. The topic was Autism Diagnostics: defining tests and definitions. Our presenter for this program was, Dr. Walter Zahorodny and Dr. Susan Aduato.

The third event was held February 9; 2009. The topic for this presentation was when autism is not alone: an examination of co-occurring conditions. We were pleased to welcome Dr. Gahan Pandina to The Autism center for this presentation.

The fourth event was held on April 13, 2009. The topic was The Brain and Gut Relationship in Autism. Our presenter was Dr. Kevin Holder, with Sarah Maillet-Moyna, RD.

The last event in the series was held on June 8, 2009. The topic was The Genetic Bridge to Autism, and we were delighted to have our own Dr. Beth A. Pletcher, Medical Director, and The Autism Center giving the presentation.

Please let us know if you have topics you wish to be covered in future lectures so we can create the programs which are relevant to you and your family's needs.

## THEATER FOR ALL: Community Collaborations



Explore your potential through theater programs.

In our next issue we will explore the world of theater through the lens of autism and Asperger's syndrome.

We will also highlight The Autism Center's research in our section called Science Watch.

Be informed with us. Find all of this information on our website:

[www.umdnj.edu/autismcenter](http://www.umdnj.edu/autismcenter)

### Mostly Music Continued From Page 1

We have engaged community schools as well as other providers to lend support and advertising for the Mostly Music program. The flyers typically go out to the not only The Autism Center mailing list, but also to area schools with programs servicing an adolescent population. We have also partnered with AFSNJ, Autism Family Services of New Jersey. They have distributed our flyers to their entire mailing list of families with ASD. They have also participated in our events and have brought groups from both their Co-options program and their Out and About program.

The events have also been advertised on various web-servers, such as Mosaic, The Schafer Report and OAR and Childs Play. The Mostly Music program has enjoyed tremendous growth. We, as a center have grown as well. We now feel comfortable hosting this type of forum for families and have made inroads into our Newark community, and beyond, which will continue to provide benefits for the center and the families in the community for a long time to come. Serving an informal dinner with program has been a wonderful bonus for families. Parents have thanked us repeatedly for providing a "night out", in the truest sense. We are providing a feast for not only the mouth, but for the ears and the soul as well.

The participants and their families highly anticipate the next event and have given the program positive feedback. We are also giving the families a stress free time to come together as a community and feel welcomed and whole.

The Autism Center of  
New Jersey Medical  
School has just  
published the  
2010

Art Calendar

Contact us for your  
2010 Art Calendar at  
the address below  
supplies are limited

### GOVERNMENT WATCH

The New Jersey Adults with Autism Task Force released its report describing the needs of adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and presenting recommendations designed to address these needs to Governor Jon S. Corzine and the New Jersey Legislature. The New Jersey Adults with Autism Task Force, created by legislation (A4057/S2559) and signed by Governor Jon Corzine (PL 2007, c. 173), charged the task force with studying, evaluating and making recommendations intended to meet the needs of adults associated with the significant challenges presented by autism.

"The work of this task force will serve the future of our state as we seek to support the efforts of adults with autism in living as independently as possible and achieving their own personal best," said Governor Corzine. "New Jersey will continue working with individuals with autism and their families in an effort to meet this challenge." The complete report can be found at [www.state.nj.us/humanservices/ddd/boards/AATFrpt.pdf](http://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/ddd/boards/AATFrpt.pdf)

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## UNPRECEDENTED NATIONAL TOWN HALL MEETING DEVELOPS POLICY AGENDA FOR ADDRESSING THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF ADULTS WITH AUTISM

### More Than 1,000 Individuals with Autism, Family Members, Advocates, Service Providers, Community Members and Elected Officials Gather at 16 Sites Nationwide

On November 13 Advancing Futures for Adults with Autism (AFAA), held a national Town Hall meeting at sixteen different sites across the country with the goal of developing an actionable national policy agenda for life-long living and learning with autism. A consortium of leading autism advocacy organizations and service providers focused on addressing the increasing and unmet demand for effective services for adolescents and adults with autism,



At each site, working groups – including adults with autism, family members, community members, neighbors, employers, service providers, representatives of funding and support agencies, elected officials and others – established priorities for meeting the needs of adults with autism in several key areas, including employment, housing, safety, recreation, transportation and social

opportunities. The Town Hall was organized from a central Chicago Town Hall hub, with more than one thousand participants across the country linked via live webcast. Proposals developed during the course of the day-long session were voted on electronically by all participants to develop a focused agenda for change.

“There is a tidal wave of children with autism who will become adults during the next decade and our society has yet to address how the need for services, jobs, housing and other opportunities to lead fulfilling and productive lives will be met,” said Peter Bell, AFAA co-chair and executive vice president of Autism Speaks. “These aren’t challenges we can keep putting off. The need for action is real and urgent, and the Town Hall is a critical step in developing an agenda that can ultimately be realized through legislation and other means of effecting change.”

In New Jersey, the Town Hall Meeting was hosted by AFAA Steering Committee members, The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation, a national autism organization that develops, advocates for and supports programs for adults with autism throughout the United States and Alpine Learning Group, a day and adult program for individuals with autism. YAI of New York was a sponsor of the event that was hosted at **The Autism Center of NJMS**.



The prevalence of autism in the United States has increased tenfold in the last decade, from 1 in 10,000 to 1 in 100. With this dramatic increase has come a greater demand for effective services for adolescents and adults with autism and for accurate information on what constitutes appropriate evidence-based intervention and practice. The need continues to far exceed the available resources. The Town Hall meeting took a vital first step in developing a national policy to address these issues.

For information about the AFAA National Town Hall, please visit [www.afa-us.org](http://www.afa-us.org).

## **A Synopsis of Needs Identified and Addressed by the New Jersey Adults with Autism Task Force**

By Linda Walder Fiddle, Member of The NJ Adults with Autism Task Force

The New Jersey Adults with Autism Task Force (NJAATF) convened in June of 2008 for one year in monthly full task force meetings and sub-committee meetings during the time between these meetings. The NJAATF was created out of the legislative leadership of Assembly Speaker Joseph J. Roberts, Jr., Assemblywoman, Joan Voss, NJ Senators Loretta Weinberg and Joseph Vitale and many others including advocacy and not-for-profit groups who are unwavering in their commitment to address the needs of adults challenged by Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Governor Jon Corzine has made ASD a priority issue in New Jersey and as testament of his support has hosted town hall meetings and attended several autism related events throughout the state where he has extolled the efforts of the NJAATF members that include parents, advocacy groups, advocates, state officials and department leaders and an individual on the spectrum who serves as Vice Chair of the group. The NJAATF report addressed a wide array of needs and was enhanced by the participation of individuals with ASD, families and concerned community members who attended statewide open-house meetings and responded to pertinent topics in an on-line survey. The full report is available on the Department of Human Services website and the website of The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation at <http://www.djfiddlefoundation.org> Governor's Most importantly, the groundwork had been laid for further advocacy efforts, legislative initiatives and systems changes that can improve and enhance the future for adults with ASD throughout this state.

Some of the key needs relating to adults with ASD that were put forth by the New Jersey Task Force and that are consistent with other task forces, think tanks and symposia relating to adults include:

- The need for effective and coordinated transition planning guided by the individual with ASD, their parents/caregivers and autism trained professionals; this must begin early in the education process;
- The need for a variety of day programs that provide person centered training, autism specific support systems and intensive life skills curriculum that fosters independence;
- The need for college support and opportunities for those pursuing that path;
- The need for a variety of safe and sustainable residential options that enhance participation in community life;
- The need for a variety of employment opportunities that focus on the strengths and talents of adults with ASD and the availability of a support system to assure their sustainability and success;
- The need to enhance the health and wellness of adults through fulfilling and varied recreational endeavors;
- The need to educate the community about the diversity of the adult ASD population so as to create more awareness, opportunities and support for them;
- The need to address issues relating to community life and the safety of adults with ASD such as transportation, sexuality, marriage, legal matters, faith-community participation and aging.

These needs are ones that The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation has been addressing by developing programs for adults with ASD and supporting them through grant awards since 2002 and we will continue this work in New Jersey and throughout the United States in the days and years to come. It is essential that in the process we listen to the ideas and guidance from adults with ASD. Organizations like the Autism Society of America, The Autism Center of NJMS and our organization have been doing so for many years and others should follow this lead. Self – advocates must have a platform and voice in the national and statewide agendas that affect their lives. The needs mentioned are ones you will be hearing more about in the future and the more discussion the better as we engage our state and country in creating the best futures possible for adults with ASD. I encourage your participation and inclusion in the work that lies ahead.

### **About the Author:**

*Linda Walder Fiddle, Esq. is the founder and executive director of The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation, a national autism organization with the mission to develop, advocate for and support programs through grant awards for adolescents and adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), including residential, vocational, recreational, educational endeavors. For more information visit <http://www.djfiddlefoundation.org>*