



Autism Community Network CONNECTIONS

a bimonthly newsletter connecting those who care

ACN Part of Texas Autism Summit

Plays role in developing recommendations for State-wide “Act Early” policies

By Jessica H. Franco, PhD
Executive Director

During any given legislative session, the Texas Legislature considers several bills that could affect the lives of individuals with autism and those who care for them. For example, Texas recently passed a bill that requires medical coverage for behavioral therapy for young children with autism. Texas is also in the process of developing a state-funded autism information center. These major successes are due largely to the hard work of the Texas Council on Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorders. This council was developed to advise and make recommendations to the state legislature to ensure that the needs of individuals with autism and their families are addressed.

The council is composed of family members of persons with autism and representatives from various state agencies involved with autism services.

Several committees were formed to support the Council in developing the recommendations that will impact the state. Last month, Autism Community Network was invited to be a part of the “Texas Autism Summit’s Act Early Committee.” Along with 20 other key state leaders from the early intervention community, we were able to participate in developing recommendations for state policies on autism screening, diagnosis, and referrals in Texas. This plan detailed the best practices for providing these services and supporting families facing autism spectrum disorder.

The amazing part was that we have already been providing the recommended services in San Antonio! Our local foundations and corporations saw the need for improved autism services several years ago and funded the development of state-of-the-art autism screenings, diagnostics, services and referrals. As such, joining this committee provided a great forum for us to share information and insight about what we have already been doing at Autism Community Network during the past year. I couldn’t have been prouder of all that the autism community in San Antonio has accomplished. We are on the road to becoming a model for what collaboration can do for autism services in a city and possibly even a state. ■



ACN offers Workshops for Providers, Parents and Educators

Individuals who wish to deepen their knowledge about autism are invited to attend ACN’s workshops. Classes are taught by board-certified practicing professionals on our campus on South Zarzamora Street. As is the case with all ACN services, our workshops are available in English and Spanish. Recent topics include: Managing Difficult Behaviors, Autism 101, Verbal Behavior, and others. Our upcoming workshop schedule is listed on the back page of this newsletter. ■

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www.autismcommunitynetwork-sa.org

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Our thanks to these in-kind donors:

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"Dr. Chris Scholarship Fund"

Individuals will soon have the opportunity to underwrite the cost of autism services for families unable to access care on their own. The new fund will be named after Medical Director Chris Plauché (Johnson), MD, who has served hundreds of children and families effected by autism. If you wish to participate as campaign volunteer, or be a lead contributor, please contact ACN Director of Development Covita Moroney at 210-860-5644, or email covita@autismcommunitynetwork-sa.org

The Fagans Share Their Story

How this family's search for answers led them to ACN

Melinda and Paul Fagan began to wonder if their daughter, Sloanee, was slow to develop verbal skills. As first-time parents, they were unsure. When they'd voice their question with friends, they'd hear: "Wait until she's two – she'll talk your ears off!" But when Sloane started swimming lessons at 18-months, an attentive, informed instructor saw signs that made her start asking questions, too.

The Fagan's experience is described below in their own words, excerpted from an full interview conducted in their home by ACN Development Director Covita Moroney.

• • •

"As first-time parents we did not have a yardstick. But, you get oriented toward action as you go further along the path, and there's still no talking. Sloane turned two — and still no words. Her health was good, everything was normal. The experts [they had consulted many] were saying she was normal, but it was not adding up. The question became: Is

We've gone from worry and concern to what seems like a manageable situation and a bright future.

she calm and self sufficient or withdrawn and troubled?

"After we had Sloane's hearing checked we left wondering: what next? By this time we had been in touch with Easter Seals, and they recommended we consult a developmental pediatrician. We had a list of names which included Dr. Johnson and her center. [Dr. Chris Plauché (Johnson) is ACN's Medical Director.] They were the only ones to call me back!

On the same day that we got them, I drove the forms Autism Community Network had mailed us back over, and Sandra scheduled our appointment.

"Sloane had a four-hour evaluation with a team of four therapists as well as Dr. Johnson. We had expected it to take 30 minutes, and really didn't think this (autism) was what was going on — so I told Paul not to come. We were still just trying to eliminate one more possibility from our list.



Melinda, Sloane, and Paul Fagan welcomed ACN into their home in order to share their story.

"I was impressed by the age-range of the therapists, and their techniques. They traveled as a team, worked together as a team. And they never made us wait as they worked with Sloane. Each therapist tested a specific ability while the others watched and made suggestions, asking me questions, involving me along the way. When one therapist finished their tests, the next traded places and began working with Sloane without a pause. When they completed their tests, they left us alone for a bit.

"After 30 minutes the team came back in, this time with an extra person. I suddenly felt as if I had brick in my stomach! Each therapist introduced themselves and explained what they saw in the specific tests they had done.

They explained each aspect of the test and the score they gave Sloane, and asked me if I agreed with their conclusions. Finally they all turned to the last person, Dr. Johnson. She had been observing the whole time, and giving direction, but I didn't know until that moment which one was Dr. Johnson!

"Because I have some medical training I appreciated the process, and knew there was no question I would agree with Dr. Johnson — whatever she said. Up to this point nobody had said the word, *autism*, so when it came out of her mouth everything just stopped...

"Dr. Johnson took my hand and said: 'I want you to stop thinking what you are thinking — that this is somehow your fault' How did she know what I was thinking?" ■ *Hear the rest of the story in the video interview posted online at: www.youtube.com/user/AutismSATX.*

Our West Side Story

Accessible facility and open door policy make neighbors feel welcome.

By Sandy Jessen
Parent Liaison

Often, at ACN we are asked about services for older children on the autism spectrum. Recently a West Side grandmother visited Autism Community Network with her 18-year-old grandson who has Aspergers. She needed resources and ideas for this boy, who had just graduated from high school. While grandma was talking with our social worker, Marisol Flores, Brooke Lamartina, Community Outreach Coordinator and I chatted with the young man. He seemed very proud about his high school graduation, but told us that his grandmother wanted to get him off the couch and doing something! He started to talk about his comic heroes and began to boast about the comics he could draw. He knew absolutely every fact about these comics and every “power” each was capable of — right down to the details about super man’s dog Krypto.

Apparently, in a previous conversation Brooke had with grandma, she learned that the boy is an exceptional artist. So, I asked if he would consider drawing something that we could put up on the walls for children to enjoy at ACN. Immediately he had a million ideas: Superman, Ninjas and so forth in battles, and displaying their super powers! It sounded great. He became more animated and as he envisioned these

pictures, began to give more intricate details about these superpowers. Then I had to ask, “Yes, but do you think the girls will like superpowers?” A short silence, and then I asked him, “Can you draw princesses?” Another silence, but shortly thereafter, “No, but I can draw Super Woman and Cat Woman!” Problem solved.

When Grandma walked over to us, she smiled watching us in this animated conversation. By this time Tina, our speech pathologist, asked for some pictures of her favorite super heroes. I assured grandma that we really would love some of his art to put around our cottages. Grandma smiled, “We definitely will be back with some pictures!” From the proud look on her face, I knew she was serious. ■

This is an excerpt from Sandy’s Blog at MySA. Read it in its entirety at <http://voices.mysanantonio.com/autism/>



This drawing was delivered to ACN soon after the events described in this story.



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Autism Service Center of San Antonio

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Community Outreach Event

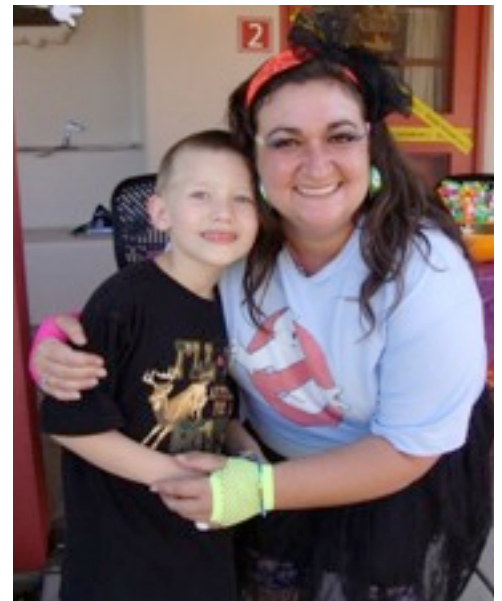
ACN hosts a “Spooktacular” event on October 30

By Sandy Jessen
Parent Liaison

Friday, October 30th ACN invited children from nearby West Side elementary schools to “Spooktacular,” a community awareness event in which our neighbors were welcome to come visit our cottages for games, prizes, face-painting, a gypsy fortune teller and autism information.

Children began by decorating their own Halloween bags with assorted decorations, and then followed the “spooky” pathway stopping for games, face-painting, coloring, and a look into the future with Gypsy Covita amidst the “haunted” cottages. In each of ACN’s treatment cottages prizes were available, thanks to a generous in-kind donation from McDonald’s.

We look forward to more events with our West Side neighbors, and to letting this community know we are here as a resource for them. ■



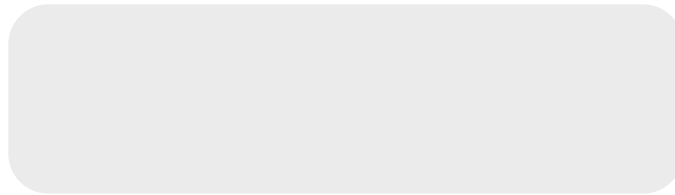
Sibling support group member Austen Stevens and group facilitator Brooke enjoying the fun activities at ACN’s Halloween event. Austen’s brother Parker has recently completed ACN’s six-week course of speech-language therapy and is about to begin ABA therapy.



Autism
Community
Network

701 South Zarzamora Street
San Antonio, TX 78207

Connecting Those Who Care!



Mark Sundberg, PhD, will lead a 3-Day Workshop on the VB-MAPP in San Antonio Jan. 27-29, 2010.

Autism Community Network is thrilled to be hosting Dr. Mark L. Sundberg, creator of the Verbal Behavior Milestones Assessment and Placement Program. We have invited him to San Antonio to teach a 3-day workshop on his VB-MAPP, a highly effective assessment tool, curriculum guide, and skill tracking system based on Skinner's analysis of developmental milestones. Parents, providers, and educators will gain valuable skills to more effectively help children with autism make progress in their development. This event will take place at El Tropicano Hotel, on San Antonio's Riverwalk. Visit our web site for a link to the [brochure](#), or call Brooke Lamartina at 210-435-1000 for more information, or to register. Special note: Discounted early registration was extended to December 1, so register soon! ■

Autism Event Calendar

ACN Free Autism Screening:

Free screenings are conducted by ACN's team of professionals.

—For appointment: 210/435-1000—

Private Consultations:

Dr. Franco and ACN's team are available for consultations and/or in-service training for pediatricians, educators and others seeking to enhance skills related to identification and intervention.

—For details call: 210/435-1000—

Any Baby Can Group Counseling:

ABC offers families group counseling on Monday evenings, Wednesday mornings.

—To register call: 210/227-0170—

ATC Social Group

Autism Treatment Center offers social group sessions for children and teens, in English and Spanish.

—For details call 210/590-2107—

ACN Workshops:

- November 20: Treating Sensory Integration Disorders

- December 4: Autism 101

—To register call: 210/435-1000—

Sibling Support Group

Treehouse Pediatrics hosts evening sibling support groups, moderated by ACN's own Brooke Lamartina.

—For details call 210/288-5047—

Reaching Families Facing Autism:

Any Baby Can offers an autism training series geared toward parents and families of children ages 2-11.

—To register call: 210/227-0170—

Treehouse Outreach Program

In-home services are now offered by Treehouse pediatrics, in addition to their ongoing day program.

—For details call 210/340-2627—

For additional information contact brooke@autismcommunitynetwork-sa.org