

Autism Society Lehigh Valley

Empowering the Autism Community to Live Fully

Creating a Caring Community

The connection is you.™



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Co-Founder – Creative Abilities

10/23/25

Agenda

- **Autism Society Lehigh Valley (ASLV)**
- **What is Autism?**
- **ASLV Programs for Children, Teens, Adults**
- **Creative Abilities**
- **Information/Resources Program**
- **First Responder training (new program)**
- **The Cliff after 21**
- **Important message**



Autism Society Lehigh Valley

- **Affiliate of the national organization: Autism Society (Rockville, MD)**
- **All volunteer organization working with local families, children, youth and adults with Autism in the Lehigh Valley**
- **6 board members, several regular volunteers & special facilitators**

Our mission.

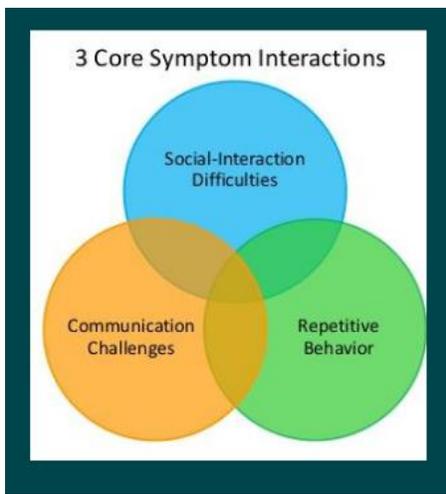
We create connections, empowering everyone in the Autism community with the resources needed to live fully.

Our vision.

Creating a world where everyone in the Autism community is connected to the support they need, when they need it.



What is Autism?



- **Autism is a developmental disorder of neurological origin that affects a person's ability to communicate and socially interact with others.**
- **Core Symptoms:** Social Interaction Difficulties, Communication Challenges, Repetitive Behavior
- **The characteristic behaviors of ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) may or may not be apparent in infancy, but usually become obvious during early childhood (24 months to 6 years).**
- **ASD affects individuals in every country and region of the world and knows no racial, ethnic, nor economic boundaries.**

Behavior

- “Stereotyped” (repetitive) movements
 - Hand flapping, finger flicking, rocking, hand clapping, grimacing or eye gazing
 - Repetitive and/or “odd” use of language
- Rigid/inflexible behaviors
 - Distress with transitions, changes in routines
 - Insistence on sameness – “unreasonable” insistence of following routines in precise detail
- Sensory issues
- Perceived aloofness – prefers to be alone
- Extreme attachments to objects
- Perseveration on a particular topic – ‘obsessive’ interests



Sensory Sensitivities

- Difficulty tolerating sounds
- Strong dislike of crowds
- Difficulty tolerating certain temperatures, lights or smells
- Difficulty managing changes in environment
- Food sensitivities, especially to texture
- Strong sensitivity to the feel of clothing or shoes
- Extreme dislike of being touched or hugged
- Extreme dislike of touching certain things or getting hands dirty
- Engage in repetitive movements
- High tolerance for pain



Making a Difference for Children with Autism



Community Outings



Bi-monthly Kidspace Children's group

- **Parent Support groups for parents of younger children (2x per month)**
- **Community activities for younger children and families- monthly meetups**
- **Children Group at Kidspace (2x per month)**

Building Friendships- Small groups & Fun Outings for Teens



Teen D&D



Teen Outings



Teen Theater

- Middle School/ Teen social connection groups
- Teen D&D (2x per month)
- Teen Game Group
- Young Adult 16 – 21 (new group)
- Teen outings – 3-D printing, game nights, bowling and more
- Teen Theater

Groups for Adults

- **Adult social group (2x) & Monthly Pizza Social**
- **Fun in Nature: Wildlands Conservancy**
- **Online parent support groups for parents of adults**
- **Adults Giving back to the community**



Fun In Nature (Wildlands Conservancy)



Friday Adult Pizza Social



Halloween 2024

Creative Abilities Group



- **When young adults age out of school** - idle and isolated, spending much of their time alone with technology instead of engaging in productive activities with supportive people in the community.
- **Lack of a variety of meaningful quality activities**
- **Collaborate with local art organizations**
 - The Baum School of Art
 - Art Department – Cedar Crest College – Jill Odegaard
 - Art Beat Café – Emmaus

Creative Abilities Group: Baum School of Art



- **Creative Abilities with Rosemary Geseck started 2023**
- **Small group open painting – each person creates their own painting**
- **Very accepting environment**
- **Now learning new techniques integrating into their own style**
- **Look at the smiling faces!**



Creative Abilities Group With CREATE

Cedar Crest College Art Department (Jill Odegaard)



2019: Papermaking



2022: Mythical Creatures



2025 Flower Reliefs



2023: Favorite Animal

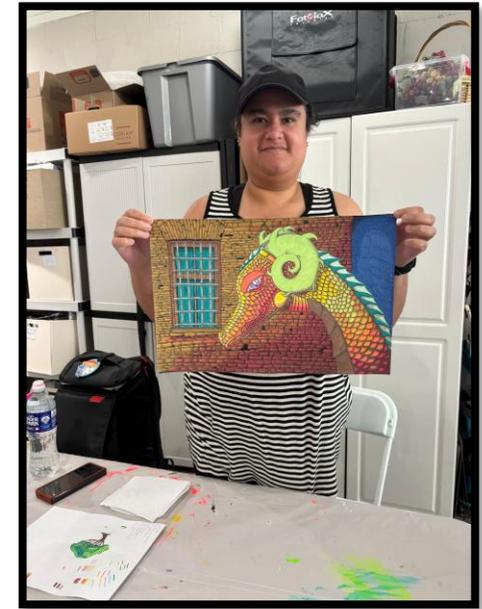


2024 Herstory

The Art Beat Cafe



- Inclusive and understanding environment
- Weekly art meetups (10 – 14 participants and families)
- Hosted 2 – Creative Abilities Art Shows in April



Theater with Mr. Rob – Adults

2019: Right Where You Belong



2020: Friends are Mightier than THE PLAGUE



2021: The Bear, The Witch, and the Sisterhood



2022: Want to Change The World?



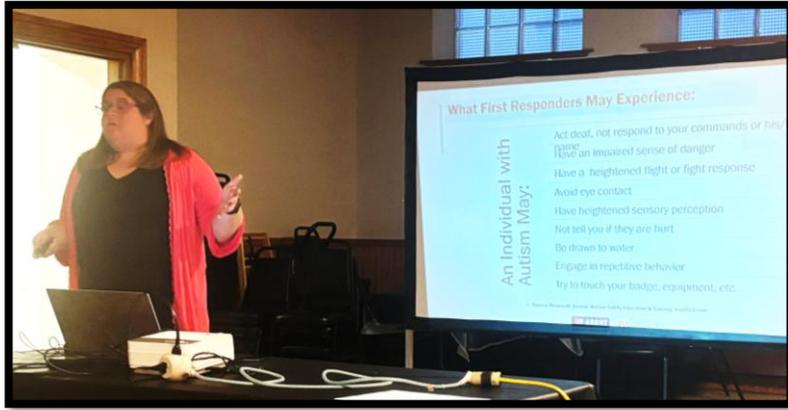
2023: Puppies!!!

2025: Across the Void

ASLV Information/Resources

- **Information and resources** – 2024 over 250 calls, emails and messages
2025 already over 200
 - Looking for social groups, parent support groups, community activities, help with IEP's, all ages, where to get a diagnosis, how to get services after HS and more
- **Member of Lehigh Valley Supporting Families Collaborative**
 - Trainings for parents in the Lehigh Valley on waiver services, non-waiver services and other topics of interest to our special needs individuals

First Responder Training



- **First Responder training** – Sept 23 with Amy Alford (M.Ed., BCBA), Clinical Director Office of Developmental Programs
- First training was September 23 with Oley first responders with over 35 people.
- Discusses how to recognize if a person has Autism, or high anxiety
- Tips on how to care for a person with Autism
- Future: to expand program

The Cliff: After 21



- Services are now based on eligibility rather than through the school system.
- Parents are now responsible for coordinating the services.....
- Services to help with vocational interests is often a first priority
- However, many of our youth and adults don't like jobs with loud noises, busy environments and external demands.
 - Like restaurants, grocery stores and retail stores
- Where are the back office jobs of the past, job carving, etc.?

Adult is capable of Secondary Education

- Higher Education- many need support to be successful
 - School coach is sometimes recommended: organization and structure as well as socialization
 - Question: to disclose disability and use disability services or not
 - Several programs focused on individuals with intellectual disabilities or Autism



CILS- East Stroudsburg U.



SEED-LCCC/LVCIL



PLACE Continuing Ed.

If you can't work and can't go to school?

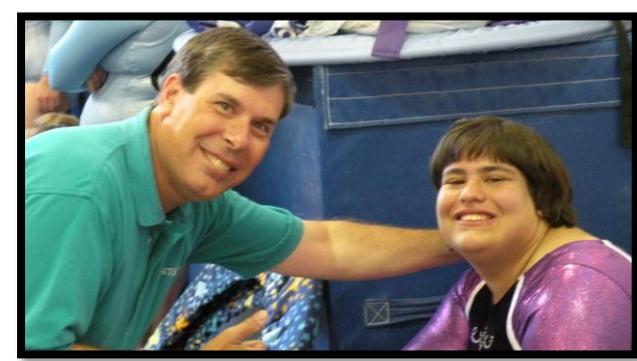
- **Waiver programs – (not all individuals with Autism are eligible)**
 - **HCBS Medicaid waivers offer services to individuals with intellectual disabilities or Autism.**
 - **Home and community-based services (HCBS) provide opportunities for Medicaid beneficiaries to receive services in their own home or community rather than institutions.**
 - **PFDS (Person/family Directed Support)**
 - **Community Living Waiver**
 - **Consolidated waivers**
 - **Autism Waiver**

There are challenges but also blessings.

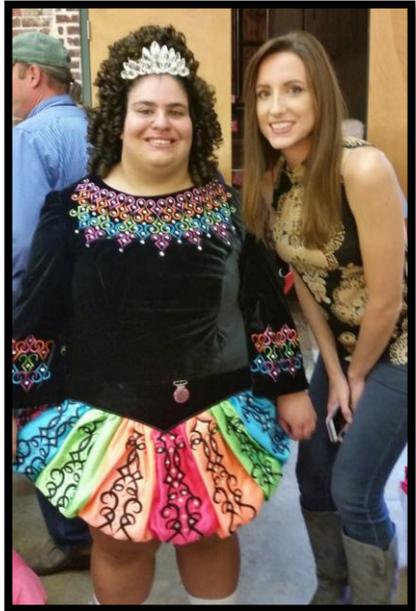


Theater

- It is not an easy as a parent, need a lot of knowledge
- We need to see their abilities and encourage them
- Stacy in Girl Scouts and we loved to camp together.
- We loved Special Olympics, in artistic and then rhythmic gymnastics.
- She loved Irish Dancing too! And Karate!
- She loves arts and crafts, & especially Rosemary's class at The Baum School
- See the real inner person: loving, caring and sympathetic individuals
- Stacy loves schedules (and keeps me on track) and she loves planning activities (and wants to give back as a volunteer)
- Stacy loves Creative Abilities & the ASLV groups and activities.



Special Olympics



Irish Dancing



Karate



ASLV Friday Social



Baum School Art Class

Thank you!

Questions?