

The Chase Academy

INNOVATIVE EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

Welcome New Board Members

Letter from the Executive Director

As I sit here preparing the first newsletter for 2009, I can hardly believe that almost half of the year has already passed, and that **The Chase Academy** is approaching its third year! It's been a roller coaster ride to say the least, but those of us who started this non-profit are still here as supporters and families that keep believing in the dream.

While many people would be caught up in the loss we recently faced by losing Stetson's facility and having to cancel the 2nd Annual *Chase Your Dreams* Family Day Expo, I can not help but see the community responsiveness from the 30 local companies who had committed to our event and are **READY** to support next year's event! Everyone was so gracious and supportive, full of kind words and phone calls to let us know that they *could* be counted on. And we **WILL** be back next April – different location, same exhibitors with lots more joining them, I'm sure.

I am so happy to start this newsletter by welcoming our new Board members. Moreover, it was through this year's Expo that we acquired our Board members as well. For the first time we have community members with **NO** relationship to the Autism community stepping forward to fight for an educational facility for our kids.

Teresa Valdes and **Janet Fetterman** are local real estate agents – Teresa is in Port Orange with ReMax, and Janet owns Concord Real Estate in New Smyrna Beach. These two ladies are longtime friends of each other – and both came to TCA separately!! Both could not believe it when we mentioned that the other was joining our team. Teresa supported us several years ago by giving us a matching grant for the *Caeli* fundraiser held for our benefit.

These ladies are joined by **Barry Stewart** who already works for a non-profit designed to support troubled kids, and the three of them hope to kick start a fundraising campaign that will provide TCA not only with start-up funds but with on-going financial support.

We are also joined by **Jodi Underhill** of DeLand, a former middle school guidance counselor and current private Licensed Mental Health Clinician. Jodi has just started her own private practice and focuses much of her time on adolescents. She is also working on developing her own Equine Therapy non-profit. Jodi brings us her expertise and we are happy to have her join us. You will see later in the newsletter how we plan to exploit Jodi for



MIRIAM "MIMI" LUNDELL
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

her many skills!

Lastly, it is no secret that Sara Stewart and I have really hit it off upon finally meeting. Sara started attending meetings earlier this spring, and we became instant friends. Sara just attained her Autism Endorsement, and I have slated her to be one of TCA's first instructors (along with me). We plan to bring Autism-endorsed teachers to our school as one of its "distinctions" that makes our program a cut above the rest.

I can not tell you how invigorated I am to have a team of enthusiastic and talented people ready to roll up their sleeves. For me, it has been a long time coming, and I am surely grateful for their help and their fresh ideas. Some of those ideas are later in this newsletter. Keep reading, keep believing and please, keep supporting **The Chase Academy**.

Volume 4, Issue 1

May 2009

Special points of interest:

- *Do you know of a facility that has space available for The Chase Academy? Please help us find a home for the Academy. Time is of the essence!*
- *If you are a member of the Academy, please join one of our 4 advisory committees today! We need you!*
- *Support the Academy by becoming an Autism Ambassador and/or a Chase Academy member.*

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MISSION STATEMENT

To provide educational services specifically tailored to meet the individualized needs of students with high-functioning Autism or any of the related Autism Spectrum Disorders and to focus these services on maximizing the students' potential for inclusion into mainstream society.

Autism Ambassadors Program

Do you consider yourself outgoing? Do you easily socialize with strangers? Do you already have a social and professional network that others would envy? Do you want one?

If you can say “yes” to any of the above questions, you are a great candidate for our new **Autism Ambassadors** program. The **Autism Ambassadors** are volunteers who work with our Fundraising Board Chairman to raise awareness and funding for Autism education in Volusia County.

As part of **The Chase Academy**, the first goal of the **Autism Ambassadors** program is to build a network of sustaining members for our school. Year after year, we will need financial support to grow our program into a cornerstone of Autism Educational Services in Volusia County. By building a **Sustaining Membership** program, we will know we can rely on community members and organizations to support our efforts and help us grow. In return, those in the **Sustaining Membership** program get included on our website at

the level of support they provide annually, they get access to discounts on our outreach programs and fundraising events, and best of all, they take part each Christmas in our **Members Ball** where they get the chance to network with other members, meet our students and staff, and update their knowledge and awareness of Autism in Volusia County.

This may sound like an ambitious program, but really it is very simple. With an annual gift **as low as \$100.00**, just twice that of our family membership, community members can know they have a roll in the building and maintaining of a one-of-a-kind program for children with Autism in Volusia County. It is time for everyone to realize that Autism is not a “them” challenge, it is a community challenge. According to the CDC, **the Annual Economic Cost of Autism in America is 90 Billion Dollars. Ninety percent (90%)** of these expenses are spent on life-long support of which **2/3 could be reduced through early intervention and education**. Without educa-

tional programs like **The Chase Academy**, this number is projected to increase to over **400 Billion Dollars in the next 10 years!** By supporting **The Chase Academy**, the Volusia County community is choosing to change the outcome by saving the U.S. economy a staggering bill in disability services for those students on the “High-functioning” end of the spectrum who may very well be able to independently support themselves – but only if they have the right educational supports in place during their school years.

As an **Autism Ambassador**, you will get the product knowledge and training to continue to widen and build our membership network, and you will have the unique roll of truly building this Academy. It will not happen if we do not build it ourselves, and we can build it with the community and financial support of those around us. So take your skills and put them to good use! Join our **Autism Ambassadors** program and widen your network for a worthy cause.

Outreach Programs Are Coming

As an organization whose mission is to build community while helping those on the spectrum get the educational services they need, our Board has come together to build a series of outreach activities that will serve our mission and allow members of the Autism community to receive some unique services.

Currently, we are in the planning stages but here are a few of the programs we have in the works for our members:

Meditation Training Circle – Lead by a certified Pranic Healer, this meditation program specifically targets those who suffer from the anxiety associated with Autism. Through meditative practice, the students will learn to focus on their inner emotional state and provide themselves with the means to calm and restore focus. This circle is best for adolescents, teens and adults. Classes will be located in DeLand.

Social Skill Development Courses – This monthly program will be conducted by a LMHC, and will

gather a small group of students in middle and high school who need more practice and direction with their social skills. Designed to give them the resources and tools to interact with their peers in a conducive and productive manner, the many “why’s” of their peers behaviors will be addressed. This course will be located in DeLand.

Equine Therapy – We are planning on offering this program as soon as it establishes itself in North DeLand for all ages. A monthly/bi-monthly program will be established, but private therapy will also be available.

Cotillion - An old-fashioned “how-to” for everything from formal dancing, dinner manners and society dress, this program will feature a variety of “specialists” designed to best advise our group on the nuances of good manners. This program will meet in various locations as needed.

Parent Support Group – Westside and Eastside groups will be developed with the help of active par-

ent members. This members-led group will direct its course whether it be emotional support, educational and professional workshops and speakers, or just respite. We are pleased to provide a location, time and “leader” for each group.

All programs will be developed on a calendar with dates, times, locations and age groups being available on our website’s community page. These programs will come at a low, by-session, cost to anyone who decides to attend. Those holding an annual Chase Academy membership card will receive session discounts.

Do you have an idea for an Outreach Program? Contact us at mtlun-dell@tcaofvolusia.org and leave your suggestions! Do you have a talent you would like to use to lead an Outreach Program? We would love to hear from you as well.

KIDS KORNER

Student of the Month ~ Karen Lundell

Living with Autistic Relatives - Not Your Typical Life

By Jimmy Everett and Karen Lundell

Autism. Though many may not even know the meaning of the word, a select few have to live with the reality of Autism every single day. It is not that uncommon for people to have family members with Autism, especially considering that 1 in every 150 children is born with Autism. Luke Niven, sophomore, has spent a lot of time around his cousin with Autism and says that it really isn't as strange as most people might think.

"The only difference is he talks different and writes strange. He's got a job, a girlfriend and everything," said Luke. Although some people with Autism are affected very little by their condition, this is not always the case.

Mimi Lundell, the parent of a child with Autism and an Autism degree holder, says that Autism "ranges from very mild to very profound." When describing her son, Chase, she states, "He faces what we call independence challenges. He can't tie his shoes or snap & zip his pants." This, if nothing else, shows how the affects of Autism range from one individual to the other.

Lundell stated that a few early signs of Autism in children are "delayed developmental milestones such as rolling over, sitting up, eye contact, not trying to get attention, non-verbal or very little language up to age 3 or 4, and delayed motor skills."

So how do families begin to realize that their relatives have Autism? According to Jeannette Darby, her granddaughter

Parents: If you would like your child to be featured in Kids

Korner, please send a photo and a brief bio to Eileen Taft, taft@cfl.rr.com. Thank you.

Callista began showing signs of Autism when she was very young. "She didn't make eye contact, walked on her toes, and ran in circles," said Darby.

Once the family starts to realize these strange characteristics in their child, they will usually take them to a doctor who will evaluate the child. If the child is determined to have Autism, they will be formally diagnosed. The families of those diagnosed with Autism say that to the average person it is not difficult to pick out someone who has Autism.

"I think my ex-husband summed it up when he said 'for a nine year old, he makes a great six year old,'" Lundell said.

Although to most it would appear this way. Those who live with relatives with Autism know that having Autism does not necessarily affect intelligence.

Jeannette states that Callista always excelled in certain subjects, especially math. She has always had the desire to learn and often tells her father, "Daddy we need to study!"

Many people with Autism are in-fact very intelligent. Can they expect to have successful futures with decent paying jobs? It is questionable.

"[Chase] has an IQ of 155 and should be able to become an independent adult if he gets the right educational sup-

ports now throughout his educational career," said Lundell. "However, because he has such unique educational needs the odds are that he won't get them. And he too will end up having to file for Social Security Disability benefits, and live in a group home when I die. For a mother, this is a nightmare."

Perhaps the type of future they will have depends on the severity of their condition. For Luke's cousin Zack, who is now twenty-two, life has been somewhat normal. "Despite his condition he's led a happier life than most people would have," said Niven. The relatives of children with Autism can only hope for this type of outcome.

"I think that [Callista] will be able to live on her own, but will still be dependent," said Darby. There is no way to tell absolutely though. The fact of the matter is that living with Autism has its uncertainties. It is a lifestyle that is filled with challenges to overcome. But in the end, people who have Autism are the same as you and me. They are still people and should be treated as such.

Darby sums it up by saying, "Be nice to them; show them all the love and patience you can. Make them feel worth while and be proud of them because they work hard at everything that they do."



Karen Lundell
10th Grade
DeLand Senior High School

Educational Support Services: New Consultation Services Available

With the help of several Board members, I am in the process of developing consultation-based educational support services.

I recently had the opportunity to help a family with a crisis situation involving a violent episode the child had at school.

After interviewing the mother and speaking with the family, I agreed to join their IEP meeting the next day. Their fear was that charges would be pressed and their child would be expelled. None of that happened.

The school welcomed us and was ready to hear the information I had gathered – some of which answered for all of us why this kind of episode could have occurred. The child was returned whole-heartedly to the classroom

by a welcoming teacher, the parents were happy to place the child back at the school and everyone seemed relieved and satisfied with the resolution of the event.

Much of this outcome was credited to me; I can tell you now, I only listened and perhaps knew the right questions to ask, but I can not get over the thrill I felt to be of such use – to be able to offer a family such peace.

This has inspired my consultative services designed to support all children on the spectrum, and the goals of all families and parents.

I am happy to do the following:

- ⌘ IEP Meeting Advocacy
- ⌘ Review IEP’s developing/

revising goals and create a plan to implement these within the classroom.

- ⌘ Classroom observation-based suggestions and support implementations for better results within the classroom
- ⌘ Behavioral Modification Plans - for classroom use and/or for a “2nd opinion.”
- ⌘ Crisis Intervention - for school-based maladaptive behaviors

Fees for my services are \$75.00 per hour for non-members and \$50.00 per hour for members. Funds will be set aside for those who need to pay on a sliding scale so that all children can be served.

Facts about Autism

- ⌘ 1 in 150 children is born with Autism.
- ⌘ 67 children are diagnosed with Autism daily.
- ⌘ More children will be diagnosed with Autism this year than with AIDS, diabetes and cancer combined!
- ⌘ It is the fastest growing developmental disability in the U.S.
- ⌘ Autism receives less than 5% of the research funding of many less prevalent childhood diseases.
- ⌘ Boys are four times more likely than girls to have Autism.
- ⌘ There is no medical detection or cure for Autism.

Funding Statistics:

- ⌘ Leukemia: Affects 1/25,000 (\$310 million in funding)
- ⌘ Muscular Dystrophy: Affects 1/20,000 (\$175 million in funding)
- ⌘ Pediatric AIDS: Affects 1/8,000 (\$394 million in funding)
- ⌘ Juvenile Diabetes: Affects 1 in 500 (\$130 million in funding)
- ⌘ Autism: Affects 1 in 150 (\$15 million in funding)

Local Public Schools and Autism:

- ⌘ One (1) Autism Specialist for the entire County.
- ⌘ Children with Autism are often grouped in with children who have varying exceptionalities.
- ⌘ No unified County program for children with Autism; they are treated like children with all types of learning disabilities.
- ⌘ Programs do not play to their strengths or accommodate their exceptionalities. Rather, they are forced into conforming which can have severe long-term effects.

MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

We are launching our 2009 campaign for membership. This year, membership *will* have its privileges! Not only will you receive our newsletter and discounts for TCA events and fundraisers, but you will also receive discounted prices on all our Outreach programs as well as our Consultation fees.

During our first year, our members' support did more for us than we could for them. We were so new, just a great idea really, that we could only provide you with an insiders look on how we were growing in return for your investment of support.

This year, we plan to offer programs and services unlike any other offered in Volusia County that can provide your child with excellent educational support. While we wait for our dream of a full K-12 school to come to life, we will do what we can to support the children who need us now.

That is our promise to you – our family members. You are the backbone of our organization and we need your support most. Take a moment and complete your 2009 membership application available on this page. Better yet, send it on to friends and family and ask them to join our community effort. It is an investment in the future of Autism education in our county, in your child's future and in the possibilities we know can be realities.

STEERING COMMITTEE

Mimi Lundell - 386/690-0893
mtlundell@tcaofvolusia.org

Amy Filson - 386/295-5101
akfilson@aol.com

Eileen Taft - 386/689-5933
tafte@cfl.rr.com

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

(For One Year Membership)

I wish to join The Chase Academy in the category of:

_____ **Student (18 years +)** **\$ 15.00**

Benefits: E- newsletter, priority notice for all Academy related functions and events, 10% discount on all Academy merchandise

_____ **Individual** **\$ 30.00**

Benefits: Same as Student plus - 2 pre-event discounted priced tickets for fundraisers or events

_____ **Family** **\$ 50.00**

Benefits: Same as Individual except for 4 pre-event discounted priced tickets for fundraisers or events

_____ **Non-Profit Organization** **\$100.00**

Benefits: Same as Family except for 12 pre-event discounted priced tickets for fundraisers or events plus - 4 complimentary tickets to any single event, 20% discount on all promotional advertising

_____ **Corporate** **\$300.00**

Benefits: Same as Non-Profit Organization

Enclosed is my check for \$_____

Please make checks payable to: The Chase Academy, Inc.

Name(s) _____

(If family, supply names of both spouses)

Company or College Name (If student)

Address _____

City/Zip _____

Home or Office Phone _____

Email Address _____

Join us today as we Chase the Dream!

www.TCAofVolusia.org

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