



Paragon Autism Services

Newsletter

November 2014

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

IN THIS ISSUE

What's New?

Halloween is past and daylight savings time is over, but there are some great events to look forward to this month. On Saturday the 8th, the Arc of Greater Prince William County will host its 20th Circle of Support Conference. This is a large conference for families of special-needs children and professionals that provide services to them. The conference will be held at Hylton High School in Woodbridge from 8:00AM-3:30PM.

The following weekend on Saturday the 15th, the Fredericksburg Area Council on Transition (FACT) hosts the seventh Pathways to the Future event. This is an educational event to raise awareness of the challenges young adults with disabilities face in transitioning from school into the broader community. This event will be held at Chancellor High School in Spotsylvania County from 8:30AM-4:00PM.

Our third monthly Special-needs Family Fun Night at KD'z Kidz World will be Wednesday the 19th from 5:00-7:00 pm. The facility will be closed except to those with special needs and their siblings. Paragon Autism Services is very excited to collaborate with KD'z Kidz World and make this a great, monthly event!

The Autism Lunch and Learn meetings for November and December will be combined due to the holidays, and will take place Thursday, December 4th from 12:00-1:00 pm. The Lunch and Learn events are meant to serve as an opportunity for families to share information and ask questions of a group of area service providers. For more information, reach us at: RAACinfo@gmail.com

To keep up-to-date with new events and services we are offering, please "like" us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter if you have not done so already. Updates, details on events, questions for the community and general information are regularly posted on Facebook. Behavior management tips and fun items are posted on Twitter.

If you haven't seen it yet, check out our Facebook online support group page. We hope that this page may serve as an always-on, online extension of our monthly support group meetings for parents of children with autism. Members of the group can post comments and ask questions to the rest of the group. The group is called Fredericksburg Autism Support Group and the address is indicated to the right.



Life Skills

In this month's newsletter we will consider the broad category of skills often referred to as life skills. Though many of these skills seem perfectly obvious, it is frequently the case that these types of skills are overlooked in favor of addressing more conceptual, or academic skills. If you feel that developing life skills is an area of need for your child, read on to learn how to get started. As always, feel free to contact us if you have questions or are looking for resources.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Questions:

marc@paragonautismservices.com

Like us at:

www.facebook.com/ParagonAutismServices

Support group:

www.facebook.com/groups/fredericksburgautismsupportgroup/

Follow us:

[@ParagonAutism](https://twitter.com/ParagonAutism)

paragonautismservices.com

Our Services

In-Home Applied Behavior Analysis

Paragon Autism Services provides Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) to individuals ranging in age from 2-21 diagnosed along the autism spectrum. Our services include individualized ABA therapy delivered to the client in their home, parent/caregiver education and training, educational advocacy, collaboration with other service providers and assistance in locating resources. ABA is a service provided through Virginia's Medicaid program, covering 100% of the cost for services. Children with a diagnosis of Autism can qualify for Medicaid through the EDCD waiver, regardless of family income level.

Educational Advocacy

Paragon Autism Services is pleased to announce that we are now offering educational advocacy and consulting services as a standalone service to families in Fredericksburg city, Spotsylvania, Stafford, King George and Caroline counties. Our rate for advocacy will be \$60.00/hour and pro bono services will be offered on a limited basis to those with demonstrated need. Contact us for more information.

Parent Support Group

Paragon Autism Services hosts a monthly support group for parents/caregivers of children with Autism. Co-hosted by the Autism Society of Northern Virginia, meetings will take place at Paragon's offices on the second Tuesday of every month from 6-8 PM. Meetings are free and open to anyone, and free childcare will be provided to children on the spectrum. RSVP is required and should be sent in advance to receive childcare.

CPR & First Aid Training

Marc, our Community Outreach and Education Facilitator, is now a certified CPR and First Aid instructor. Paragon will soon begin offering CPR/First Aid courses to area families at a nominal cost. Additionally, Paragon is now offering CPR/First Aid training to local human services and educational agencies at a discounted rate. Please contact us for details

Community Trainings

Free community training events will now be offered on a quarterly basis in a conference format. Guest speakers will be featured and a variety of topics will be offered at each event. Quarterly conferences will take place on Saturdays with the first to be held this winter. These training events will remain free and open to anyone. More details will follow regarding the first conference.

Playgroup Outings

We have begun our playgroup outings for children with autism/Asperger's. These meetings will take place at local recreational facilities and are designed to foster increased social contact between children and allow for a friendly environment in which they can play as they wish. Playgroups will provide a casual, free-play event. The only costs for playgroup meetings will be admission fees charged by the planned facility. Playgroups will be open to any child with autism and their siblings. Though these meetings will be open to children of any age, we anticipate most participants will be between two and eight years old.

Social Skills Training

Additionally, we are still interested in providing intensive social skills training as a separate service, but must have appropriate peer pairings in order for participants to derive the most benefit. If you are interested in this service for your child, please contact us.

Lending Library

We recently began a lending library at our office, and though it's a humble beginning, we hope to see it grow quickly. There are books on many autism related topics, including education, special education law, behavior analysis, skill development, as well as memoirs. Please take a look the next time you're here. Any donations will also be graciously accepted!



WHY ABA?

ABA is the science of changing behavior through the manipulation of environmental factors. Through the use of ABA strategies our team brings about positive and meaningful change. ABA strives to increase and teach socially acceptable behaviors through skill-building and the reduction of inappropriate behaviors to include aggression, self-injurious behaviors, tantrums and elopement. ABA is a scientifically validated approach for the treatment of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

We help reduce inappropriate behaviors to include aggression, self-injurious behaviors, elopement and noncompliance.

We help clients build functional skills including:

Language and conversation skills

Socialization and play skills

Self-help skills to include grooming, toileting, and eating skills

Replacement behaviors for and reduction of undesirable behaviors

Cooperation and compliance skills

Thinking About Life Skills

For many parents of children with autism, as adulthood approaches there comes a point when the realization that your child may not have the skills they need for independence at home and in the community sets in. In ensuring that a child is successful at home, school and in the community, it is often the case that many supports get built in to the routine. These may not seem significant, as these types of things happen with any child. We're all guilty of doing things like putting our child's shoes on for them because it's faster and easier for us. However, for a child that may not learn as intuitively as others, over time these shortcuts can delay the development of independence and self-reliance. Something as simple as making a sandwich for oneself can be the difference between true independence during time home alone or not. Many of these types of supports occur so naturally that they're nearly invisible within the family. It often takes some probing to identify the layers of support that an individual has come to rely on.

There are several areas that parents and professionals alike recommend looking closely at in preparing an individual for adulthood. Some of those most often mentioned include communication, safety, pursuing interests, self-esteem, self-regulation, independence, social relationships, self-advocacy, and earning a living.

James Partington and Michael Mueller, creators of The Assessment of Functional Living Skills (AFLS), offer an easy way to frame this topic in describing what they consider to be functional living skills: "If the learner is unable to do the skills for himself, then someone else will have to help or do them for him." Framing the question in this way means thinking about the multiple environments that your child will be participating in and asking two questions about each:

1. What are the skills necessary for independence and success in this environment?
2. Can – or will – my child do each of these himself?

If you find that the answer to number two is "no" for many skills, it's time to make a plan! If your child has an IEP at school, beginning no later than the year in which they'll turn sixteen, transition services must be included.



Transition services are included to help ensure a successful transition from school to any post-school settings or activities a student will be part of. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) tells us that:

"Transition services means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that— ... Is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests; and includes—
 (i) Instruction;
 (ii) Related services;
 (iii) Community experiences;
 (iv) The development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives; and
 (v) If appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and provision of a functional vocational evaluation"

Transition services included in the IEP will not be sufficient on their own to address the needs of most individuals in preparing them for post-school life. However, they can be one part of the plan and should be taken seriously!

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is a powerful tool for building life skills. This is often the go-to approach, utilizing task analysis and chaining procedures. If your child receives ABA services in the home, clinic or school setting, this is a great opportunity to begin working on these skills.

There are several assessments available to help identify strengths and areas of need regarding life skills (we use and recommend the Assessment of Functional Living Skills), many of which can be administered by parents. If you feel that this may be an area of need for your child, take a look at a life skills assessment, start talking to school staff about possible needs and how to address them, and share your concerns with any service providers that work with your child, as they each may have their own unique insights into your child's skills and needs.



Playgroup Outings

In addition to the monthly special-needs night at KD's Kidz World, we'll be resuming indoor monthly playgroups soon for the fall and winter. Check our Facebook page or contact us for more information.



Support Group

The positive response to our parent support group in collaboration with the Autism Society of Northern Virginia has been overwhelming. There is a clear need for more centralized information on resources and services in the area, and we hope that these meetings can be a first step in establishing this. We welcome any feedback or suggestions you can offer. Meetings will continue on the second Tuesday of each month. Childcare is provided for children on the spectrum. RSVP required.

AROUND TOWN

KD's Kidz World and Paragon Autism Services host a monthly special-needs night on the third Wednesday of each month. The facility is only open to children with disabilities, their siblings and other family during these events. Come out for our next event on Wednesday, November 19th from 5-7 PM. <http://kdkidzworld.com/>

Prioritizing Life Skills

If you feel that your child would benefit from directly addressing life skills, it may be difficult to know where to start. The key areas mentioned above – communication, safety, pursuing interests, self-esteem, self-regulation, independence, social relationships, self-advocacy, and earning a living – establish a good starting point. Though each of these still represents a broad category of skills, they offer guideposts to begin planning the roadmap towards independence. Let's look at some of the most important.

Communication

When thinking about targeting life skills for improvement, it may be that academic or conceptual learning goals are put on the backburner. However, communication is the **most** important life skill and one that must always be addressed when deficits persist. Even if progress is slow, we must always strive to teach at least basic functional communication skills. The ability to make one's want and needs known is fundamental, and cannot possibly be over-emphasized.

Safety

Skills related to personal safety are critically important for individuals with disabilities. It has been reported that those diagnosed on the autism spectrum are up to seven times more likely than others to have encounters with law enforcement. Additionally, those with developmental and intellectual disabilities are at increased risk of abuse and neglect by caretakers. Factor in environmental safety awareness issues and elopement behavior and it's plain to see that safety skills must not be ignored.

Self-advocacy

Ensuring that someone has the ability to advocate for themselves goes beyond developing just the language necessary to do so. It is so often the case that individuals with disabilities are not given the opportunity to voice or pursue their own interests and preferences. When an individual requires intensive support, it is very easy to overlook opportunities to allow them to communicate and act on their own wants and needs. This in turn limits opportunities for enjoyment and satisfaction. It is not enough to attempt to provide more of these opportunities; we must also make sure a child has the ability to make themselves heard. Speaking up and making decisions for oneself are skills that are critical for meaningful participation and satisfaction in the community.

Pursuing interests

For many individuals diagnosed on the spectrum, spending leisure time doing enjoyable activities is something that may require teaching and practice. Sometimes this just means exposure to a variety of activities in order to broaden interests. Regardless of the level of need in this area, it is worth pursuing. The ability to spend time engaged in an appropriate activity potentially means a lesser need for supervision and monitoring. More importantly, though, this can lead to the pursuit of personal interests and the development of hobbies, which afford an individual the opportunity to exercise choice in how they spend their time, and hopefully results in greater daily enjoyment.



HEADS UP!

We'll be hosting our next free IEP workshop on Friday, December 12th to provide families the opportunity to come in with questions or concerns regarding their child's IEP. The workshop will be held from 9:00-5:00 and is by appointment to allow for specific, individualized advice from one of our educational advocates. We'll post more information as the date approaches, but contact us now if you're interested.

Paragon Newsletter

312 Progress St., Suite 300
Fredericksburg, VA 22401



Paragon Autism
S E R V I C E S
Making a Difference Together

Upcoming Events

November

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8 ARC Circle of Support Conference 8AM- 3:30PM
9	10	11 Parent Support Group 6-8PM	12	13	14	15 Pathways to the Future 8:30AM- 4PM
16	17	18	19 Special- Needs Night at KD'z Kidz World 5-7PM	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29 Sensory Friendly Movie at AMC Tysons & Potomac Mills Home 10AM