



The Importance of Early Intervention with Asperger's Syndrome

By Patty Black

Asperger's Syndrome (AS) is a neurobiological disorder that is classified on the high functioning end of the autism spectrum. People with AS show a wide range of characteristics that can range from mild to severe. The chief identifying characteristic is a marked deficiency in social skills and social interaction. People with AS can also have trouble with transitions or changes in routine and greatly prefer sameness. They may tend to have obsessive routines and become preoccupied with a particular interest. They also have extreme difficulty reading nonverbal communication and can have great difficulty judging proper body space. Some other characteristics can include extreme sensitivity to sounds, tastes, smells and sights. A person with AS experiences the world in a much different way based on these



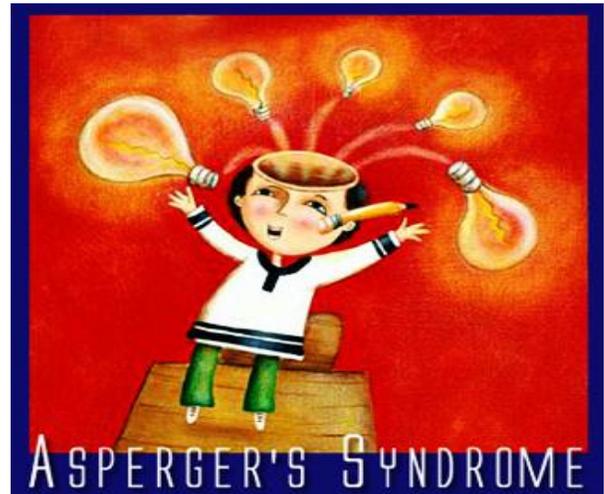
neurological and social differences. For instance, they may need to wear only one certain type of clothing based on how it feels to them, only tolerate certain food tastes and textures, or be irritated by noises or lights that may appear quite normal for most others. As a result of these differences, many folks with AS can appear odd or eccentric due to their specific neurological differences. People with AS generally have normal to very high IQs and often show exceptional skills and abilities in a particular area. Language development in young children diagnosed with AS can be seen as normal, but if one looks more closely, difficulties with language pragmatics can be observed. Their vocabularies can be extensive. These children can be very literal and struggle in using language in an appropriate social manner.

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Due to the social problems that can arise with AS, early detection is very desirable. There are now therapies available which can ease the child's passage through some difficult growing years. All of the current available research points out that intensive early intervention makes a critical difference to children with AS and all children with autism spectrum disorders. Without such early identification and diagnosis, these children are unlikely to learn the crucial skills they need or derive optimal benefit from education. In fact, The National Research Council analyzed intervention models for young children with autistic disorders and concluded that such intensive early intervention made a **clinically significant difference** for many children.

One example I can give of a beginning positive outcome from early intervention strategies would be with my own young daughter Jessica. Jess is 4 years old and was diagnosed with AS last year. Actually, AS in females is diagnosed far less often than in males due to the way the genders present themselves. Girls are often overlooked or misdiagnosed as they tend to not be as noticeable as the boys with the aggressive outbursts and actions that first signal a major problem. In fact, young girls who had AS and were not officially diagnosed were often termed "invisible" children because as females they tended to keep their anxiety and distress more bottled up rather than letting it explode forth as boys with AS might. Before as much was known about the condition, young females would often just "slip through the cracks" while boys were identified four times as often.



Actually, Jess had enough observable social difficulties in school to prompt a visit with a respected developmental pediatrician who diagnosed the AS. Several key members of her therapeutic team were a social worker for play therapy, an occupational therapist to deal with sensory integration techniques and a special education teacher who used streamlined modalities to help Jess and her teachers cope better with difficult problems. We were also lucky to have some wonderful teachers care for Jess right at her preschool as well (St. Colman's Daycare in Watervliet, NY). As the weeks passed, some significant improvements were noticed with Jess and her behavior and ability to cope in her social environment at school. At the final parent/teacher conference her scores and ratings on social interactions, expression of feelings, small group interactions and many other important skills had markedly improved. I credit this to the early intervention skills she has received from the patient and dedicated people who have been working with her recently. An excellent site to visit for more information regarding awareness of early signs in children is www.firstsigns.org ♦



Free Drug Discount Card Offered by New York State Working with Pharmacies and Manufacturers to Lower Drug Costs

New York State announces the **New York Prescription Saver (NYPS)**, a free prescription discount card that can help save on the cost of prescription drugs. The card is for New York State residents who are 50 to 64 years of age or persons with a disability regardless of age. Income limits are up to \$35,000 single and \$50,000 married. Eligibility is based on prior year's income. However, if there is a substantial income drop residents may report their current year gross income. Those with Medicaid coverage are not eligible. The NYPS card can lower the cost of prescriptions by as much as 60 percent on generics and 30 percent on brand name drugs. When the card is presented, the price will be reduced by a cash discount right at the pharmacy counter. Most outpatient prescription drugs are eligible for a discount. New York State is sponsoring the program with the support of a statewide network of over 3,900 pharmacies that are generously providing these discounts. Many pharmaceutical manufacturers are also participating and providing additional discounts.

Individuals must use the card at participating pharmacies. Applicants can apply online at <http://nyprescriptionsaver.fhsc.com>, download a NYPS application from the website and mail it in, or call the toll-free Helpline at **1-800-788-6917**. Supplies of applications are being distributed to community organizations and pharmacies. The discount card will be mailed to members within two weeks after the application is approved. Participating pharmacies, and the discounted prices for drugs, can be found on the website.

Apply now and start saving at the pharmacy counter ♦



New York Makes Work Pay – Developing a Path to Employment for New Yorkers with Disabilities

New York Makes Work Pay is a comprehensive Employment System Medicaid Infrastructure Grant funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This project will provide policy and practice solutions to address New York State's estimated 70% unemployment rate among working-age folks with disabilities. It is a joint effort of the New York State Office of Mental Health, the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University and the Employment and Disability Institute at Cornell University. In order to stay up to date on New York Makes Work Pay news and to learn about statewide and regional activities, events and partners, and to receive their free newsletter, sign up at: www.NYMakesWorkPay.org ♦

Disability Activists Rally In Support of Community Choice Act

By Joe Adler

Dozens of ADAPT members were arrested in Washington, DC on two consecutive days in April after blocking Independence and Constitution Avenues and subsequently crawling up the Capitol steps. These acts of civil disobedience followed an unsatisfactory meeting with Obama administration officials. Although the President had promised repeatedly during his recent campaign to support independent, community-based living for Americans with disabilities by endorsing legislation to remove institutional bias in Medicaid, he told disability leaders on April 26 that Congress, rather than the executive branch, must take the lead on this issue.

Currently, Medicaid pays the cost of nursing home care for older and disabled people, but won't cover the cost of home care, even though the same assistance can generally be provided at a lower cost. According to Senator Tom Harkin, this disparity in funding eligibility has resulted in the incarceration of Americans, who are only demanding the same fundamental rights and responsibilities as other citizens: to live independently, to work and to pay taxes. Another speaker at the ADAPT rally, Amber Smock, explained that Deaf people have an added incentive to stay out of nursing homes, since few people there are able to sign. The hundreds of ADAPT protesters were heartened both by Senator Harkin's strong endorsement of civil disobedience as a tactic to effect social change and by the appearance of SEIU workers to lend support to the protest.

The legal basis for the pending Community Choice Act was established in law by the Supreme Court in 1999, which ruled in Olmstead vs. L.C. and E.W. that people with disabilities must be offered services in the most integrated setting. Although the right to independent living in the least restricted environment has been ESTABLISHED LAW for a decade, enforcement has lagged far behind. It has been contended that passage of the CCA would increase the cost of entitlements. Now that the Congressional Budget Office has scored the cost of the CCA appropriately, this argument has no validity. It is anticipated, in fact, that passage of this bill will result in cost savings, as disability advocates have contended. We will need to wait and see if the Congressional leadership will get behind this act, rather than defer to lobbyists for the nursing home industry ♦

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