

# Full Spectrum

FALL 2009

Transition to Adulthood Newsletter

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## Planning For A Quality Life

By Deborah Chin, UM-NSU CARD

The transition from school to community life takes planning for most youth and their families. However, this is especially true for individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) who face the challenges that come with changes in environment, people, routines, and an increased demand for independence. For students with Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs), planning begins by age 14 or earlier, when students make a diploma decision and the IEP team identifies transition service needs. The purpose is to begin planning early so that students receive the supports and preparation they need to achieve their post-secondary goals. School districts can help students prepare for the transition by providing opportunities for life skills instruction, employment experience, vocational or technical school access, dual enrollment, coursework and community outings. Still, whether planning begins at school or long after the adult is out of school, being proactive and exploring options can help families better cope with the uncertainties of adulthood. For this reason, it is never too soon to start planning for the steps that are needed for an adult to have the best possible quality of life.

*There is no entitlement to services in adulthood, regardless of need.*

Governments, communities, and service providers are struggling to adequately meet the needs of adults. Ultimately, it is up to adults and their families to identify creative ways of reaching goals and creating the life they want. One of the easiest things families can do is, *create a written plan*. Even something as simple as a glorified to-do list can help outline tasks while keeping goals in mind and everyone on track. The planning and implementation process may include assessment of the current situation, establishing goals, identifying next steps, and continuously reassessing progress to make relevant changes to the plan. Goals should be unique to the individual so they reflect meaningful outcomes for the adult.



As you develop your plan, here are some questions to ask in the process:

- What are the goals and priorities right now? How do you want life to look in 5 or 10 years?
- What is needed to achieve the goals? Do new skills need to be learned? Are additional services or supports needed?
- Does the adult play an active and meaningful role in planning for his or her future? (e.g. provides input for the IEP, chooses recreational and social activities)
- What does the adult enjoy doing? What is he or she good at? Does the adult have the opportunity to try new things?
- What are the challenges or barriers? Do you know where to go for help exploring possible solutions?
- Have you applied for the services for which you might be eligible? (i.e. Medicaid Waiver, Vocational Rehabilitation, Social Security benefits)
- Are you connected to community supports? (i.e. religious organizations, recreational programs)
- Have you considered: employment, post-secondary education, job training, housing and residential supports, finances, friendships and social opportunities, transportation, mental health and medical needs, legal guardianship, self-advocacy, and other life areas?

For more information about transition planning, check out the UM-NSU CARD website for links to resources:  
<http://www.umcard.org/adult.php>

## Make a Connection



*By Carol Nigro, Community Resource Coordinator, Dan Marino Foundation*

**www.Autube.tv** is a new web resource in the effort to advance the national conversation on autism that includes true experts, people with autism. It is a platform for your voice in the autism community. Funded by the Dan Marino Foundation, Autube.tv uses the latest in social networking and multi-media communications to create a rich interactive experience. Each month Autube.tv introduces a new topic on issues related to autism spectrum disorders. The site includes commentaries from people around the world and provides direct links to resources like books, websites, films and other media.

Autube.tv invites those on the autism spectrum to connect with others, comment, post a link to a video response, or vote in our monthly poll. This is an opportunity to lend your voice to the discussion on autism-related issues. Join Autube.tv in the effort to overcome stereotypes, increase awareness, and generate a stimulating dialogue that can dispel the myths surrounding individuals with autism spectrum disorders.

## Executive Functions: Skills for Self-Management

*By Lizette Rivera, UM-NSU CARD*

As we go about our daily life, many mental processes are helping us to carry out, plan for and respond to the various tasks, challenges, opportunities we face. **Executive Functions** is a term used to refer to these cognitive processes. Executive functions are often compared to the conductor of an "orchestra", coordinating and managing many cognitive functions. We use executive functions when we engage in activities such as planning, organizing, strategizing, and paying attention to and remembering details.

There are 8 dimensions of executive functions:

- 1) Selective and sustained attention
- 2) Initiation
- 3) Inhibition
- 4) Planning
- 5) Organization
- 6) Shifting/flexibility
- 7) Monitoring
- 8) Working memory

Research findings suggest that individuals with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may exhibit significant impairments in initiation, the ability to cue oneself to begin a task or activity, as well as the ability to independently generate ideas, responses, or problem-solving strategies. Executive functioning skills seem to be associated

with IQ and verbal ability, and contribute to success in work and school. They also allow people to manage the stresses of every day life. Deficits in executive functioning are likely to become more clearly noticeable with age, so it is important to teach individuals with ASDs good compensatory skills. These could include how to use and rely on tools like time organizers, computers, watches with alarms, visual organizational aids, calendars, and visual schedules. Additional strategies that may be beneficial are planning and structuring transition times and shifts in activities or making a habit of creating and using checklists and "to do" lists. Minimizing clutter and organizing work space may help with managing space and materials.

The National Center for Learning Disabilities ([www.nclld.org](http://www.nclld.org)), states that the brain continues to mature and develop connections well into adulthood. A person's executive function abilities are shaped by both physical changes in the brain and by life experiences, in the classroom and in the world at large. Early attention to developing efficient skills in this area are crucial, however it's never too late to work on improving this skill set.



## Transforming Ideas Into Actions

There are many voices in the discussion about how to best meet the needs of adults with autism and improve quality of life for all. Sometimes when individuals join together to synthesize their ideas the message is clearer and progress is achievable. That is one of the reasons UM-NSU CARD has chosen to be a partner of the Advancing Futures for Adults with Autism National Town Hall Meeting being held on November 13, 2009. Additional local partners include Easter Seals, The Victory Center, and the Autism Society Miami-Dade Chapter. The event is part of an effort to provide a forum for people in communities across the country to build consensus and help create change that can improve the lives of adults with autism.



This unprecedented invitation-only event will provide adults and their families, professionals, lawmakers, and others the opportunity to play a constructive role in addressing the challenges adults face. Participants will work simultaneously with others around the country to share ideas and concerns, while identifying strategies and solutions.

The Autism Program of Illinois will host the central AFAA Town Hall location in Chicago with nearly 400 participants. The Miami satellite location will host 50 participants, and is one of several locations across the country. The Town Hall meeting will be a thoughtful, results-oriented discussion. Small group discussions will allow each

participant the opportunity to give direct, substantive feedback. Network computers and wireless keypad technology will transform the individual discussions into cohesive recommendations representative of the whole room, as well as the remote participants at satellite locations. Working together, the concurrent group discussions will create a clear set of shared priorities and recommendations to shape the next steps and enhance the lives of adults with autism.

The Town Hall Meeting is Phase 2 of a three phase project. Phase One was a Think Tank held in January 2009. After the Town Hall Meeting, recommendations for public policy changes will be presented as part of Phase 3, an Autism Congress to be held in 2010. These events will begin to empower national and regional networks to advance public policy and build momentum for improvements in how adults can have successful outcomes.

For more information on the National Town Hall, please visit the AFAA website at [www.afa-a-us.org](http://www.afa-a-us.org). Locally, contact Natalee George at [ngeorge@psy.miami.edu](mailto:ngeorge@psy.miami.edu) or call 305-284-5901.

Location:  
November 13, 2009  
11:30 am – 5:30 pm  
UM-NSU CARD Forum  
Bank United Center  
Hurricane 100 Room  
1245 Dauer Drive,  
Coral Gables, Florida



### Research Opportunity University of Miami

#### Adaptive Behavior in High-functioning Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Researchers are seeking to learn more about the way IQ may relate to the skills children display at home, school, and in the community.

We are currently recruiting children between the ages of 7 – 17 years who have been diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome or high-functioning autism spectrum disorders.

This study will take place at the University of Miami and children will be compensated for their time.

This study is being conducted under the direction of Dr. Jennifer Durocher,  
Department of Psychology, University of Miami.

Please contact Diane Adreon, (305) 284-6556 to learn more about this project.

University of Miami IRB#: 2008111  
Nova Southeastern University IRB#: 06250907

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# Healthcare Options

When teens become adults their options for continued healthcare coverage can change. Families may have to explore alternatives in order to continue receiving medical and mental health care. Often, adults struggle to find affordable insurance coverage when they are no longer in school at least part-time or receiving employment benefits. Sometimes it is simply not possible to pay for the cost of basic medical care, specialists, treatments, and medications when they involve large out-of-pocket costs. Yet for many adults, medical and mental health services are a necessity which have a direct impact on quality of life, daily functioning, and even employment opportunities.

While private insurance is generally perceived as providing higher quality options, it also tends to be more expensive and the cost may be prohibitive. The following list provides some options that adults and their families can explore in order to ensure they continue to receive the healthcare services they require.

- Private insurance coverage
  - While enrolled in school with possible exceptions for individuals with disabilities
  - COBRA
- Medicaid/Medicare through Social Security Disability benefits
- Separate plans for dental and vision
- Clinical training programs for low-cost therapy, psychiatric, and other mental health services
- Call local information & referral lines (e.g. 211) for information on financial assistance, charitable organizations, and other resources
- Community Health & Mental Health Centers
- Cover Florida Health Care insurance [www.coverfloridahealthcare.com](http://www.coverfloridahealthcare.com)
- Florida Discount Drug Card program
- Medication discounts through drug companies, research studies, and clinical trials

## Explore the Possibilities



**"A picture is worth a thousand words."**

This expression holds true because visual art transcends spoken language. It is one reason pictures are often used to help individuals with autism communicate. So it makes sense for an art program to serve adults with autism.

That is the premise behind Art Possibilities, a new non-profit program focused on helping adults with autism explore and develop their artistic talent. In August the program launched its first classes, which are being held twice a week. The goal is provide a creative outlet and potential job opportunities for adults as self-employed artists who could create t-shirts, greeting cards, comic

strips, paintings, and anything else that could be a medium for artistic expression and communication.

Art Possibilities is a non-profit organization which provides an alternative to some of the opportunities and activities currently available to adults in our community. Mayra Ron, a parent and the program's founder, stresses that even if the adult does not currently draw or show interest in art, the program may be able to help discover hidden talents as well as foster existing artistic ability. The program plans to eventually expand from classes to a full day program.

Classes are being held at the Southwest Regional Library, 16835 Sheridan Street, Pembroke Pines, FL 33330.

For more information contact Mayra Ron at 954-682-3264 or visit the website: [www.artpossibilities.net](http://www.artpossibilities.net)

University of Miami / Nova Southeastern University CARD does not endorse specific programs or points of view on developmental disorders.

**This newsletter is an opportunity to share information, resources, and experiences. We welcome your comments and contributions. Send them to Deborah Chin at: [dchin@psy.miami.edu](mailto:dchin@psy.miami.edu)**