



Social Event Draws Parents of Children with Autism

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Contact: Wendy McKinnon, Programs and Outreach Associate

(703)243-3466, scholarship@researchautism.org

BRANCBURG, N.J.—A social gathering for parents of children with autism drew over 80 people seeking advice on various treatments from local autism professionals and fellow parents. Jointly sponsored by the Organization for Autism Research and Child's Play, with the support of local State Farm Agents, the first Social for Parents of Children with Autism took place on Fri., March 26 at the Child's Play Social Skills Center in Branchburg, N.J. The free event was the first in a series of quarterly socials planned for parents at Child's Play throughout the year. The next event is scheduled for Fri., June 18th at 7:30 PM.

Six local experts were on hand to answer parents' questions about a wide array of topics including social skills programming, occupational therapy, speech language pathology and applied behavior analysis (ABA). The panel included Ann Marie Kuba, a teacher of an ABA program in Bridgewater-Raritan and private ABA programmer/therapist; social skill programming professionals Kerrie Pawlikoski, MA and Rebekah Blackwell, OTR/L, program directors at Child's Play; occupational therapy professional Anna Lima Nierenberg, OTR/L from Therapeutic Rehabilitation Services in Branchburg; speech language pathologist Catherine Delfino, MA, CCC-SLP from Branchburg; and Annette Cartaxo, MD, a pediatric neurodevelopmental specialist from Kinnelon, N.J.

"As parents just beginning to search for answers, we found the meeting a fantastic starting point," said parent Wendy Pisano, of Randolph, N.J. Added fellow parent Christine Shungu of Franklin Park, N.J., "It was one of the most informative gatherings that I have been to."

Parents of children of all ages were also in attendance to share their recommendations with younger parents. Approximately 50 percent of the attendees were parents of children recently diagnosed with autism while the remaining half split between parents of children under 5 years old and children 5 and above. The networking opportunity is a critical component of the socials, according to Anthony Ferrera, an OAR board member. "We want parents to share their advice with each other. We want them to exchange information, whether it's recommending doctors, finding the best nutritionists, or suggesting certain therapists."

Future socials are expected to focus on specific topics of interest to parents. "The first event focused on a broad spectrum of issues," said Cheryl Santos, administrator of Child's Play. "At the next social, we will narrow down the presentation to one or two disciplines so that we are able to focus on a specific topic."

OAR is an organization formed and led by parents and grandparents of children and adults with autism. Its mission is to put applied research to work providing answers to questions that parents, families, individuals with autism, teachers, and caregivers confront each day. OAR accomplishes this

by funding research studies designed to investigate treatments, educational approaches, and statistical aspects of the autism community. No other autism organization has this singular focus. For more information, please visit OAR's Web site, www.researchautism.org or call OAR at (703) 351-5031.

The Child's Play Social Skills Center facilitates quality social interactions between typical peers and children who experience delays associated with autism spectrum disorders. This includes, but is not limited to, communication delays, developmental delays, and social delays. As the focus of our center is very specific, children who are medically fragile or who have aggressive behaviors may not be appropriate for our setting. For more information, please visit Child's Play Web site, www.childsplaysocialskills.com or call 908-722-8884.