

Parents helping parents and professionals enable individuals with disabilities to reach their own potential

## Our Success Story: David and Sawyer Aston

Like most parents, my wife and I do everything we can do to keep our two children safe outside our home. Although only two years apart in age, our children are sometimes worlds apart. My 10-year-old daughter (Madison) is a typical child, while my son (Sawyer) has autism.

We have taught my daughter the rules about looking both ways when crossing the street; staying on the side walks; "stranger danger"; etc. My son, on the other hand, has no concept of danger, is non-verbal and very impulsive.

In thinking about how best to protect our son, my wife and I have had to make some "modifications" to our surroundings and overall lifestyles. This includes redundant locks on all doors, completely fencing in the front and back yard, purchasing a tracking device and maintaining (as best we can) 24/7 parental/adult supervision. Still we worry and wonder what more we can do.

Most of us have seen the "Blind Child Area" street signs or "Deaf Child Area" street signs. I got to thinking about why there were no "Autism Child Area" street signs. Would people know what they meant? Probably not, but at least they might think twice when driving down our

street. Or maybe a neighbor, who was too embarrassed or concerned about asking about my son and his difficulties, might think twice if s/he sees my son walking/wandering in their back yard.



*Sawyer & David Aston*

I began to research the topic of autism street signs and found out that they were very rare (to say the least). So one day, while I was at Amherst Town Hall, I approached the Planning Department's office and asked what I would have to do to get a new street sign put up on our street. I was told that I would need to go to the Amherst Town Traffic Safety Committee meeting and plead my case.

I found out when the next committee meeting was and went to it with my son. The room was probably built to seat about 12 people comfortably and when I arrived at the meeting there were already 10 or so committee members plus five or six other residents who were looking to plead their case. I put my name on the list of people who wished

to address the committee (I was now last on the list) and I waited with my son. Now anyone who is familiar with autism knows that the words "waiting" and "autism" do not go together. By the time it was my turn to address the committee; they had seen first hand what my wife and I deal with on a daily basis and to my pleasant surprise the Amherst Traffic Safety Committee was all too willing to help. They took the cause on as if it were their own child.

I was told that the committee would research the topic and report back to me. I left the meeting very encouraged. I hit a snag early on in the proceedings; however, as the Town said they would put up the sign as long as it was in the Federally Approved Highway Sign book (I didn't even know there was such a thing). Well, the sign book had not been updated since something like 1985. Of course there would be no signs dealing with autism in the book.

This was pointed out by someone on the committee

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## ATTENTION READERS!!

**ACT NOW** or this may be the last time you receive *Special Insights*! See the insert pages for important information about how to continue receiving your copy. Contact us with your updated information **today!!!**

### A Message from Max



It is September and a new school year is upon us. Back to school usually means new school clothes, backpacks and school supplies. However,

when you have a child with special education needs, more is involved. Establishing a positive connection with your child's teacher is a major goal for most parents. Communication is a key priority. You should seek to develop an open, direct and ongoing relationship right from the beginning of school.

Since Craig is 19 years old, transition is a major issue for my wife Joyce and I. In order to help start the year off right, we are going to contact Craig's teacher early in the school year to let her know about his summer and what our goals are for him during the upcoming year. We are working with his teacher and special education director in the Frontier Central School District to help assure that he is getting the right kind of work experiences to prepare him for future employment based on his interests and our expectations for him.

This summer Craig was able to have two valuable experiences, working as an intern at Tops and, thanks to an Options for Persons Through

Services (OPTS) grant from the NYS OMRDD, being an Apprentice Leader at Cradle Beach Camp. Craig has been able to be out in the community and experience different employment opportunities while relating to a supervisor and peers in real job situations. Whatever the age of your child, it is good for you to get informed about special education. Contact the teacher early in the school year to help assure that your child has the right program based on their IEP and keep the communication lines open throughout the school year.

The NY State Education Department has a Parent Guide on their website that covers many critical areas to review. You can view it at: <http://www.vesid.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/policy/parentguide.htm>. Major issues that parents need to be familiar with, such as your rights and responsibilities as a parent under the Individual with Disabilities Education Act 2004 (IDEA), are here in one place.

Parent Network of WNY will offer many workshops and informational sessions to help parents stay updated on these basics. Individual support is also available when needed. To enroll in any of the workshops, call (716) 332-4170. If you have questions or are seeking information contact Information and Referral at (716) 332-4175.

Have a productive school year.

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Your support of the Parent Network is an invaluable gift to all parents. Donations are tax-deductible. Checks can be made payable to: the Parent Network of WNY.

## Dr. Joyce Epstein's Six Types of Involvement: Keys to a Successful Partnership

**Nov. 15**  
**8:00 - 3:30**  
**Lucarelli's**  
1830 Abbott Rd.  
Lackawanna

Dr. Joyce Epstein is coming to WNY. She will be discussing the six keys of parent involvement listed below. Following

these keys can result in inclusive, well implemented and goal-oriented programs.

### => Parenting

Assist families with parenting skills and setting home conditions to support children as students. Also, assist schools to better understand families.

### => Communicating

Conduct effective communications from school-to-home and from home-to-school about school programs and student progress.

### => Volunteering

Organize volunteers and audiences to support the school and students. Provide volunteer opportunities in various locations and at various times.

### => Learning at Home

Involve families with their children on homework and other curriculum-related activities and decisions.

### => Decision Making

Include families as participants in school decisions, and develop parent leaders and representatives.

### => Collaborating with the Community

Coordinate resources and services from the community for families, students, and the school, and provide services to the community.

*(Epstein, et. al. 2002. School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action, Second Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.)*

For more information or to register for the conference featuring Dr. Epstein, call (716) 817-7484. You can also download the brochure at: [www.parentnetworkwny.org](http://www.parentnetworkwny.org)

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Call us at (716) 332-4170 or send an e-mail to:

[info@parentnetworkwny.org](mailto:info@parentnetworkwny.org)

### What Do You Think?

Do you have an idea for a story? Is there a topic or issue you would like to see in *Special Insights*? Please share your ideas and success stories with us. You can do this by phone at (716) 332-4178 or e-mail:

[jrz@parentnetworkwny.org](mailto:jrz@parentnetworkwny.org)

## Transition Talk: Transition Planning Checklist

While IDEA 2004 provides the legal requirements for transition services to support your child's goal of employment in the community or further education, there are several things that parents and students must do to prepare for life after high school.

- Confirm the date of your child's graduation. Federal law states that your child's eligibility for special education ends when s/he graduates from high school **with a regular diploma** or until the child reaches the age of eligibility for a free appropriate education under State law.
- Clarify whether your child will receive a regular high school diploma or a certificate of attendance.
- Clarify that your child will be able to fully participate in the graduation ceremony.
- Find out what local agencies provide job coaching for transitioning youth. Contacting adult provider agencies before your child graduates or "ages out" will help to ensure that your child will continue to receive services after graduation. This may also prevent your child from being placed on a long waiting list for adult services.
- You are entitled to invite representatives from other agencies to your child's IEP meetings.
- If the IEP Team, which includes the parents and the child, determine that your child's transition needs can be met by participating in transition programs on college campuses or in community based settings, these services should be included in the child's IEP.[3]
- If appropriate, invite the child's support coordinator from your local Office of Mental Retardation to IEP meetings during the last year of high school. This person can help to coordinate post-high school support services.
- If your child will be eligible for services through Vocational Rehabilitation, schedule an appointment for an intake interview and file the necessary paperwork with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation ahead of time. Request that a Vocational Rehabilitation counselor attend the IEP meeting no later than spring of the your child's last year in high school.

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### **Transition Talk cont'd.**

- Discuss your child's transportation needs. If s/he will need assistance getting to and from work, request and fill out applications for public transportation services.
- Request information about social/recreational opportunities for young adults with disabilities in your community. Ask for their contact information.
- Request information about post-high school training programs at local vocational schools, community colleges, business schools, and state-affiliated training schools.

When your child graduates from high school, you and your graduate should celebrate accomplishments -- and the transition to adulthood.

With the new emphasis on transition planning in IDEA 2004, and online resources such as [www.wrightslaw.com](http://www.wrightslaw.com) and [www.transitionmap.org](http://www.transitionmap.org), more students with disabilities are preparing for further education, employment and independent living as productive, active members of their communities.

*An excerpt taken from:  
Transition Planning: Setting Lifelong Goals  
by Jennifer Graham and Peter Wright, Esq.*

### **Success Story cont'd.**

and it was decided that "we can do what we want in terms of making signs" as long as it met legal standards. The overall review process then began. The Town's legal department went to work, so did the Highway Department, the Planning Department and even the Police Department. All the research was done and approval was given.

Approximately 8 months after this process first began there were two beautiful "Child with Autism Area" signs located on our street. Have they helped? Who knows for sure? What I do know is that most families in a few block radius of our house now know about my son and to look out for him. Strangers have walked by our house and offered congratulations for getting the signs put up. Others have called our house offering congratulations and/or wanting to get signs put up in their neighborhood.

It seems to me that half the battle with autism is increasing awareness and if these signs can help in some small way, then it was worth it.

**- David Aston**

