

weap: The People

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Wisconsin Early Autism Project, Inc.

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A History of Autism

Justin Sallows

Wisconsin Early Autism Project

Autism has actually only been fairly recently named as an individual disorder. We've certainly come a long way in understanding and classifying Pervasive Developmental Disorders.

The word *autism* was first coined by Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler in 1911 in his description of Schizophrenia. He derived it from the Greek word *autos*, meaning *self*. He used the term to describe autistic patients which appeared to retreat into themselves and resist outside influence.

It gained its modern meaning when Leo Kanner of the Johns Hopkins Hospital first described 11 children with "early infantile autism" in 1943. These children all had the same symptoms: social interaction impairments, anguish over changes, good memory, belated echolalia, over sensitivity to certain stimuli (especially sound), food problems, and limitations in spontaneous activity.

A year later, Hans Asperger of the Vienna University
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Why I came to WEAP

Matthew Sargeant

Wisconsin Early Autism Project



I didn't hear the word *autism* until I took a Behavioral Psychology class my junior year in college. After 15 minutes of lecture, we spent 15 minutes watching a video of Dr. Lovaas featuring his treatment and the various outcomes. I had no idea at the time that working with autistic children would be such a large and enriching part of my life.

My interest at the time was in law enforcement and justice administration. I was taking this Behavioral Psychology class in pursuit of becoming a criminal profiler for the FBI. That would entail looking at crime scene evidence to determine facts about the perpetrator.

During my final semester as an undergraduate, we were required to do an internship with some sort of law enforcement agency. I chose the Peoria Police Department mainly because it was a relatively big town that was close to my parents and friends. I was very

Hospital wrote and lectured about a group of 4 male children experiencing similar symptoms to the children in Kanner's study with the exception that they had age appropriate speech.

In the 1950's and 1960's autism was largely blamed on parents, specifically mothers. Bruno Bettelheim wrote a book called *The Empty Fortress* in 1967 in which he theorized that autism was caused by a lack of loving attention by "refrigerator mothers" indicating their frigidness. This is actually a term originating around 1950, but Bettelheim's book added new fuel to the fire.

In 1987, pioneering research on the treatment of autism from 1970-1984 was published by O. Ivar Lovaas through the Young Autism Project at the UCLA Clinic for the Behavioral Treatment of Children. The research detailed how through therapy, children can learn appropriate responses and useful behaviors. It found a 47% significant improvement rate among children who had been treated. Since then the notion has grown that autism can be positively affected by therapy.

Autism was first put into the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Third Edition* (DSM-III) in 1980. This officially classified autism as its own disorder. Asperger's Syndrome followed with the DSM-IV in 1994, along with 5 other subdivisions collectively known as Pervasive Developmental Disorders.

Glen Sallows, PhD and Tamlynn Graupner, M.S. released a four year study that was published in the *American Journal on Mental Retardation, Vol. 110, No. 6* in November of 2005 which replicated Lovaas' results.

Today I see children at WEAP learning and laughing and playing and interacting. I see them reaching out and exploring the world around them. I see therapists moved to tears as children work so hard and achieve so much. I see parents getting excited the more progress they see in their child. Autistic children are so very much loved and they are loving back.

The dark ages are a distant memory now and it's hard to imagine anyone feeling as they once did. Today these children have the tools to become happy, healthy participants in our world and we all have a brighter future ahead because of it. ♦

Asperger's Virtual Paradise

Justin Sallows

Wisconsin Early Autism Project



Avatars are individualized characters that can be controlled by the user. Here, users congregate as if in a real outdoor environment.

In 1997, John Lester created an online forum called *Braintalk Communities* in which people with all sorts of neurological disorders could come together and discuss issues.

When he learned of the virtual world of Second Life, it occurred to him that he could use it to benefit a community he had come to know through his forum. "I have always been interested in creating online worlds where people dealing with neurological problems could find each other and most importantly, help each other help themselves." Second Life seemed like a natural place to start his idea. "A lot of what's happening in 'Second Life' is social," says Lester. "And I thought that this could be a fantastic place for people dealing with Asperger Syndrome. Give them a simulated environment and let them practice social skills in a three-dimensional space."

Last year Lester launched "Brigadoon", a 16-acre virtual island for the exclusive use of people with Aspergers. It is created by members, for members. Social events such as virtual concerts and dinners are regularly scheduled.

It's not all fun and games though. Participants also have access to therapy sessions conducted by clinicians from the University of Texas at Dallas Center for Brain Health. Here they can engage in such things as faux virtual job interviews which feel less like roll play than a 1 on 1 therapy session but are a step removed from such an event in real life.

(watch video: <http://www.brainhealth.utdallas.edu/>)

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eager to get started, and see what policing was all about. I wanted to get into law enforcement to help people, but I saw officers bogged down with writing traffic tickets and handling repeat domestic cases.

Once you arrest someone, you don't see them again unless they are a repeat offender. You aren't with them long enough to have any meaningful impact on their lives and I found that frustrating.

Once I finished my classes I moved up to De Forest with my brother to finish my thesis away from all the home distractions. My neighbor, who was a Senior Therapist at WEAP, heard I was looking for a job and asked if I was any good with kids. I said I didn't know but I was pretty good with my friend's kids. She asked if I would be interested in working with autistic children, and I said "sure". She got me an application and I was on my way.

I was very nervous about meeting the family for the first time and wasn't really sure what exactly I was suppose to do. I picked up on the programs pretty fast, but was still a bit stiff with the play. It took me a couple of months to let loose and try to have as much fun as the children.

After about 6 months I started to notice that the things we were working on really had an effect on the child. We were able to teach kids to talk, read, write, go to the bathroom, ride a bike, have a conversation and most importantly have fun. I really began enjoying going to work everyday just thinking of what else I could do that would help this child learn to speak better, read or play with other kids. Not only that, but I could see the difference I was making with each of my kids.

I have worked for WEAP for over 5 years now and I can honestly say that these kids have changed my life for the better, and they have taught me so much. I have never met anyone that works harder than the autistic children I work with. Some of them go to school all day, then come home and work with us. They try so very hard to do all the stuff that I just took for granted growing up. Every day they have to struggle with fighting off overwhelming frustration over not being able to do what other kids are able to do.

My proudest moments are when a child finally gets a program that they were struggling with, or when they approach another child and are able to carry on a conversation with them. It still warms my heart when a child smiles at me for the first time or says their first

sounds or words, goes potty in the toilet for the first time, is able to control their problem behaviors and are able to tell their first joke. These kids have the best personalities and kindest hearts you will ever meet.

Whenever I tell someone what I do for a living they always say "Wow you must have a lot of patience". I always tell them "yeah I do", and I always wonder how I could not give these kids my patience when they give me 150% every day. They deserve every bit of effort and patience I could possible give and then some.

Although I started with WEAP on pure happenstance it has changed my life forever. I often feel that this life has chosen me and not the other way around. I look back and think of all the events that had to line up just right for me to even get started in this field, and for it not only to have found me but for me to be good at this job and find such fulfillment in it.

I don't know what the future holds for me but I do know that autism will always be apart of it in some way.♦

Watch a Video for Autism

The band Five For Fighting has started a website with one goal in mind, to make people think about what kind of world they want, and give them a way to make a difference.

The way it works is that when someone makes a donation to the site, part of that donation is forwarded to that charity every time the video is viewed, less some small fees for hosting it. Over 95% of money donated goes directly to the charity.

A viral email incorrectly stated that the band itself would pay \$.40 per view.

Although it would be more efficient to donate directly to a charity, this way requires watching of the video which gets more people invested in the cause and divulges important information.

Donors are acknowledged on the main page of the site.

Here is a powerful video full of important facts and beautiful images of a little girl with autism. Music is by the band Five for Fighting.

Donations go to autismspeaks.org.

<http://www.whatkindofworldtheywant.com/videos/view/id/408214>

Upcoming Events

(courtesy of Sarnet.org)

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PECS Basic Training

(Formerly called Two-Day PECS Training Workshop) This intense two-day training is designed to teach participants to appropriately implement the Picture Exchange Communication System. It begins with an overview of the Pyramid Approach to Education to explore the key components of designing effective educational environments. A historical overview of language training programs used with non-verbal individuals is discussed.

Apr 21 - Apr 22

Milwaukee

8a-4PM

\$295/Professional - \$195/Parent

Stefanie Levendis

www.pecs.com Slevendis@pecs.com

888-732-7462

Autism Society of Wisconsin Annual Conference

Brenda Smith Myles PhD, Paula Kluth PhD, Dr. Eric Courchesne

May 1 - 3

Green Bay

Varied Fees

Regency Suites / KI Convention Center

Jane Pribek

www.asw4autism.org asw@asw4autism.org

920-553-0278

Children and even adults with Aspergers can often feel out of place in the world, but they can have an affinity for technology, so this environment seems to be a good fit. It is thought that Brigadoon will be a "safe area" where people with Aspergers can congregate and get used to social situations.

The opposing opinion is that virtual environments are all too alluring to people *without* disorders, so members of Brigadoon may decide that facing real world obstacles is too frustrating to deal with when a virtual alternative exists. Time will tell how helpful it will be in the long term, but for right now users have at least one place to go outside the home where they are always welcome.

Anyone interested in becoming part of this community can email John Lester here: braintalk@gmail.com ♦

Groups and Classes

Location	Group	Age/Level	Facilitator	Fee	Days	Time	Start Date
Eau Claire	Social Skills	5-8 YRO	Michelle S Shelly B	\$30/session	Tuesdays	4:00-5:30PM	Feb 5- Mar 25th
La Crosse	Social Skills	5-8 YRO	Kally Angell John Nicklay	\$30/session	Thursdays	4:00-5:30PM	Feb 28- April 17th
Madison	Sibling Class	Open to Community 8-14	Chris W Michelle S	\$30 first child, Prorated for additional	Tues	4:00PM	Feb. 5
Madison	Parent Group	Open to Community	Chris W	\$30/session \$4/child daycare (register 2 wks in advc.)	2 nd Tues ea.Month	4:00-5:30PM	March 11
Madison	Teen Group	Open to Community 12 + YRO	Matt N	\$40/session	Thurs E/O Is outing	4:00-6:00PM	continuing
Madison	Social Skills	Open to Community 7-9 YRO	Chris W.	\$300/10 week session	Wednesdays	1:30-3:00PM	Jan 15 th - Feb 26th
Green Bay	Caregivers Group	Open to Community	C. Van Dyke	\$30/session \$4/child daycare (register 2 wks in advc.)	Mondays	5:00-6:15PM	Feb 4- May19
Milwaukee	Parent Training	Open to Community	Alissa M	\$60 for 3 class sessions	Tues	4:30-6:00PM	Feb 5,12,19

Current Openings

GREEN BAY 920-338-1610 Dunbar Manitowoc Sheboygan Oneida Green Bay Fond du Lac	MILWAUKEE 262-432-5660 Milwaukee Oak Creek Bristol Genoa City West Allis	Wauwatosa New Berlin Oconomowoc Waukesha Sussex Mukwonago Muskego Juneau Grafton	MADISON 608-288-9040 Waunakee Reedsburg Watertown Lake Mills Madison	EAU CLAIRE 608-781-6500 Hudson Gilmanton Glen Flora Mondovi Augusta	
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