

Oct. 2008

Sonnenberg Consultants Newsletter

Media/Research Updates:

Midwest Autism Conference: Putting the Pieces Together

By: Carin Yavorcik

To be held October 19-21 in La Crosse, Wis. Join the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse for a comprehensive conference covering strategies that support individuals on the Autism Spectrum in school, home and community environments.

Throughout this event sessions will cover:

- Visual Structure
- Sensory Integration
- Positive Behavior Strategies
- Teaching Social Skills
- Communication Options
- Biomedical Treatments
- Vocational Preparation
- Early Diagnosis and Intervention
- Biomedical Treatment Options

The event will be held Oct. 19-21 at the La Crosse Center in La Crosse, Wis. For information: call 608.785.6500 or visit www.uwlax.edu/conted.

Model Me Kids Launches Online Social Networking Group

By: Robin Gurley

New venue to share experiences

Model Me Kids has just created a social network for parents, teachers and friends to share experiences about children with autism spectrum disorders. It is located at <http://modelmekids.ning.com/>.

There are already over 200 members connecting on topics such as children with autism participating in sports, girls and autism, and more. There are group areas including one for general discussion and another for teachers/therapists. There are also videos posted, including a new documentary Model Me Kids produced about a unique karate class for children with autism.

McCain Makes History

WHILE AUTISM IS ACKNOWLEDGED, EXECUTIVE ORDER REQUESTS FALL ON DEAF EARS

It's often been said that it's going to take a president to have a child with autism to ever really make an impact on how our government views the community's plight. During his speech at the GOP national convention in September, presidential nominee and Senator John McCain, while not directly affected by autism, made it personal. After both his wife Cindy McCain and running mate, Alaska Governor Sarah Palin, both pledged to be advocates for the special needs community, McCain stood before millions, and, for the first time on a national stage, a presidential candidate uttered the word "autism."

"It's monumental," says Andrea Davids, a mother of three (two with autism) from Sea Bright, N.J. "It's what we've been waiting for. I don't know if it's enough for me to vote for him just yet, but what it means to me is that he's listening. For the first time it feels like someone is listening."

McCain was subtle. He spoke about the Wimmer family from Franklin, Penn. "Jake works on a loading dock, coaches little league and raises money for the physically and mentally disabled," he said. "Toni is a school teacher and she's working towards her masters degree. They have two sons, the youngest, Luke, has been diagnosed with autism. Their lives should matter to the people they elect to office and they matter to me and they matter to you."

Over four years ago the autism community asked both President George Bush and Senator John Kerry to answer some questions so that they could get familiar with their presidential candidates and how they would handle their concerns. After much hemming and hawing both candidates did respond. Bush actually missed a deadline set by Unlocking Autism, but would later commit to the removal of thimerosal in vaccines if he were still in office after the 2004 election. Four years later, Bush has failed to come through on his promise and the autism community has yet to see the complete removal of the mercury-based preservative in vaccines.

Experts Convene to Discuss Autism and Mitochondrial Disease

On June 29, a panel of 15 experts convened in Indianapolis to discuss the co-occurrence of mitochondrial disease and autism. The Hannah Poling case has brought this issue to the public and into focus as a priority for researchers and clinicians. An important outcome of this meeting was the initiation of a dialog between researchers in autism and mitochondrial disease, increasing future collaborative research in this area. The promise of further collaboration was encouraging to an audience comprised of scientists and advocates interested in seeing more research at the interface of these two complex disorders.

Intelligent Design

DAVE GERARDI

Oct. 2008

Meg is a Colorado teen on the autism spectrum and is one of many such children finding new

uses for a piece of software that was never intended for her. Four years after SketchUp was released by Boulder, Colo.-based @Last Software, the development team started getting a noticeable number of emails and phone calls about it. The feedback wasn't about an annoying bug or requests for new features. Parents were calling in with stories about how their child with autism loved the software.

"The parent was typically an architect," says Tom Wyman, a business development manager at Google, which owns SketchUp. "Their child would start using it and were having a lot of fun."

In fact, the kids weren't just using the software, they were excelling at it. "We have a great background in 3D software but have no experience in autism," Wyman laughs. He called the Boulder County, Colo. chapter of the Autism Society of America and asked if the SketchUp team could come down to the office for an info session. "Well, first of all," said Sue Thomas, who answered the phone, "I don't have an office. This is my house." Thomas and Theresa Wrangham, co-founders of the Autism Society in Boulder County (ASBC), visited SketchUp's offices and held an "Autism 101" talk to help the team understand why children with autism were responding to the program.

"The ASBC opened up the doors to their community," says Wyman. The @Last offices became a place for kids to come in and try the software. "We thought that maybe we should make a version specifically for the ASD community, but we learned quickly that we didn't need to. The kids were doing better than a lot of our professional users," he laughs. The kids were blunt with feedback. "They would use it and say, 'well, that's a dumb feature.' If anything, (their feedback) benefited the pro users." Founded in 1999, @Last Software was bought by Google two years ago. SketchUp was released in 2000 as a \$495 professional product. @Last donated licenses to schools and families on a case-by-case basis. After the Google purchase, the development team released a pro version and a free version. The free download option, Wyman says, brought the program to a much wider audience.

Anja Kintsch, an assistive technology specialist for Colorado's Boulder Valley School District, authored a guide for parents and teachers looking for ways to use SketchUp with their children and students. Kintsch likes the alternative to writing by appealing to the kids' strengths. The software, she says, also opens vocational doorways and instills confidence.

One student, who was considered the 'weird kid' in school, began designing complex structures. Classmates started coming up to him. This time, it wasn't to tease but to ask how he did what he did. "He has this strength," Kintsch says. "A lot of these kids have good spatial skills. Being able to show it off is really wonderful." The requirements for using SketchUp, Kintsch says, are fine motor control with the mouse, the ability to read very simple instructions, the ability to think in 3D while working in 2D and the tolerance of mild frustration.

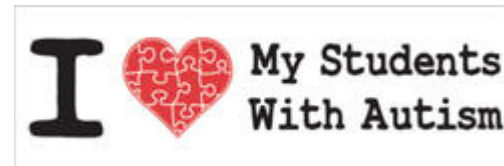
Usage of SketchUp isn't limited to floorplans and rooftops. Kintsch suggests using it to explore a new environment. "You can explore it virtually first and talk about things you might see and what might cause anxiety," she explains. By building the environment together, parents and educators can better appreciate what the child might see as threatening or important. "People on the spectrum may see different landmarks as important," Kintsch adds. She recommends using the program as a jumping off point for questions, such as, "What do we do when the angry dog barks?"

Users also benefit from Google's 3D Warehouse, a free online repository for community-submitted 3D models. "You don't have to feel comfortable with drawing in SketchUp. If drawing ever becomes frustrating, it's easy to go into the warehouse and either get something similar or put together pieces (from several

models)," Wyman explains.

Rachel, a Colorado teen who started using SketchUp to make her dream karaoke room, has gone on to digital media courses at a local vocational school. She wants to be an architect. According to Wyman, her instructor said she "kicked the other students' butts."

For more information, visit: sketchup.google.com, google.com/educators/spectrum.html, http://docs.google.com/View?docid=dcdkdbkp_0c88w7ndd (for Kintsch's guide), and sketchup.google.com/3dwarehouse.



Bumper Magnet <http://www.victorystore.com>



Key Chain <http://www.victorystore.com>

Company updates: (w/ families)

- Congratulations to all who made it into the \$100 gas gift card drawing! Good Luck!
- Remember, all hours need to be made up within the same month you missed to be eligible for the drawing. Even if that is not possible, they still need to be made up within a month of the date missed.
- Remember it is your responsibility to attend all team meetings unless you receive prior consent by your Senior to not attend.