

Arkansas Autism Resource and Outreach Center

HOPE, DIRECTION, SUPPORT

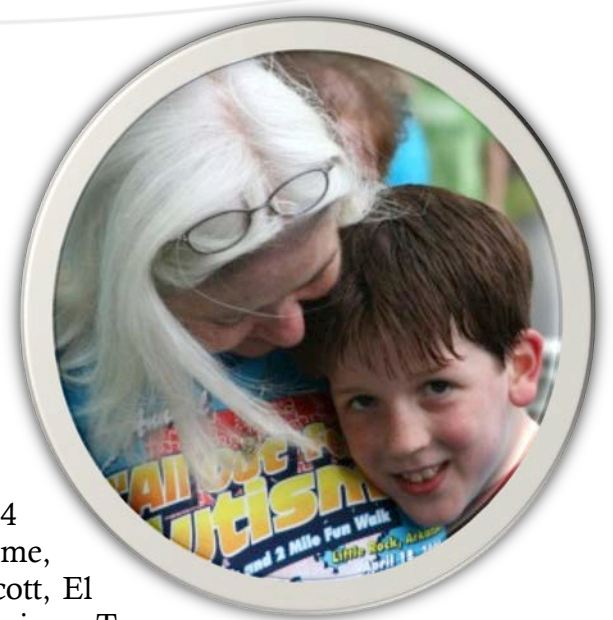


The Arkansas Autism Resource & Outreach Center (AAROC) is a parent-run non-profit organization of the same name. AAROC, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) corporation and as such any donations are tax deductible under Section 170 of the Internal Revenue Code.

The Challenge...

The mission of the AAROC is to provide *Hope, Direction & Support* to the families of Arkansas touched by Autism Spectrum Disorders. We believe that this support needs to be responsive, individualized, and ongoing if it is to meet the needs of families. In order for these criteria to be met, the support must be delivered quickly and as close to home as is possible.

In 2010 several community meetings were conducted around the state to determine what families of children with autism would prioritize as their most significant needs. Between January and April of 2010 these meetings were conducted in 14 sites across the state including Fayetteville, Mountain Home, Marshall, Conway, North Little Rock, Pine Bluff, Dumas, Prescott, El Dorado, Nashville, Jonesboro, Helena, Fort Smith, and Hot Springs. Two hundred forty seven (247) family members and providers and 5 State Legislators attended these meetings. Additional meetings were conducted between October and December of 2011. These meetings occurred in 24 sites including Crossett, Monticello, Warren, West Helena, West Memphis, Widener, Marked Tree, Osceola, Manila, Magnolia, Camden, Paragould, Jonesboro, Batesville, Newport, Searcy, North Little Rock, Russellville, Fort Smith, Arkadelphia, Kirby, Nashville, Texarkana, and Hope. Family members, providers and legislators also attended these meetings. Interestingly, across ALL these locations there was one need expressed by both family members and professionals.....**autism resource centers in local communities.....places that families can readily identify and access to have their needs met.**



Their voices were resoundingly clear:

“We need a place in our community where we can.....

- learn about autism and how to help our child,*
- find out what services are available and how to access them,*
- consult with an advocate to help us with school/insurance issues,*
- connect with other families walking the same path, and...*

.... REGAIN OUR HOPE”

What We've Accomplished



The AAROC stands ready to address these priorities for the state. We are working to accomplish these goals through the following activities:

Parental Support:

- Family Fun Days to defer the cost for families to enjoy a day at the Little Rock Zoo or an Arkansas Traveler's Game
- Information and Referral Services to assist families with identifying available services, understanding eligibility criteria, and completing necessary paperwork
- Emotional Support by connecting families to other families in their community who have similar experiences and by providing caring staff who are available to talk through issues or simply listen, when they need it
- Technical Assistance by answering questions on a variety of topics including school issues, IEPs, Medicaid services, post-secondary options, behavioral challenges, etc.



Education and Training:

- Seminars and conferences for parents, therapists, law enforcement and first responders, educators and health care professionals.
- A three-part Family Training Series offered quarterly that targets parents whose children have been newly diagnosed

Awareness and Advocacy:

- Various Fundraising and awareness activities
- Legislative Advocacy
- Participation on Legislative Task Force on Autism

AAROC Family Training Series

Session 1: Understanding ASDs

So much about autism is puzzling. Many of the behaviors exhibited by individuals with autism spectrum disorders can be troubling, but understanding possible reasons why individuals exhibit such behaviors is key to addressing them. This workshop explains how individuals with ASDs process information in their environment, and gives examples of strategies that can be used to support these individuals in their everyday lives.



Session 2: Navigating Services in Arkansas

Individuals with autism are served in Arkansas by a number of different state agencies. So many, in fact, that families often report that they missed an opportunity to receive a service or benefit because they weren't aware such a program existed. Additionally, recent changes to insurance regulations mean that families have access to evidence-based treatments that were once out of reach. In this session we discuss which agencies are responsible for serving individuals with autism, what kinds of services they may provide, and regulations governing private insurance benefits.

Session 3: Understanding the IEP Process

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) ensures that children with disabilities receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LEA). However, the process of developing an individualized education plan (IEP) can be a confusing (and at times, intimidating) experience for families. This session focuses on the IEP process, from identification and referral for special education services to implementation of the plan.

With continued support, the AAROC hopes to expand the Family Training Series to include in-depth trainings on topics such as:

- Positive Behavior Supports for Families
- Sensory Support Strategies
- Visual/Language Support Strategies



What parents are saying:

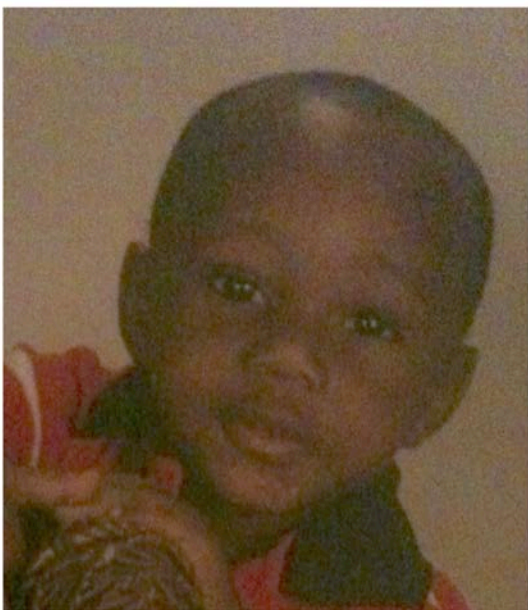
“The parent training classes AAROC provides gave our family more guidance than I can put into words. The day our three-year-old son was diagnosed with autism we were sent home with stacks of information. AAROC helped us make sense of it all. The classes they offer helped us to better understand autism, but more importantly helped us to understand our son. There was a tremendous amount of personal attention given to every family present. AAROC has become our family's main resource as we continue to provide support for our child. Current data and treatment options were discussed in a simple manor. The information was very timely and was explained better than any therapist, physician, or specialists has done to date. The presentation answered questions I didn't even know I had! Everything from insurance coverage to education programs was discussed. I owe every ounce of progress my son has made to the loving individuals at AAROC and their parent training class. Thank You AAROC!”

-Chelsea Johnson, Little Rock



“AAROC was very helpful to our family. Once we had a diagnosis of Autism on our son, Alex (who was 2), there was that moment of 'What now?'. AAROC was there for us. They helped lead us in the right direction to get enrolled in the programs offered and to also offer support for our family. I could call them and talk at any time and felt comfortable doing so! They gave us excellent training on Autism, how to help our son with Autism, the programs available for Autistic children and also about IEPs and the public school systems. I am so grateful to AAROC for everything they have done! I am so grateful that they answered the 'What now' question with friendly and loving support! Thank you AAROC!”

-Aimee McDonald, Jonesboro



What parents are saying:

“The Autism sessions were very informative. The staff allowed us to express our feelings and tell our stories. This decreased our anxiety greatly. We were able to identify with the stories from other families. The information that was given will benefit us now as well as in the future.”

-Charles Revels, Magnolia



“Our son, Jonathan, is five years old and just started kindergarten this year. He has moderate to severe autism and required an IEP for school. We went into the IEP meeting not having any idea what we were doing and what our rights were. Consequently, we were provided incorrect information and his IEP wasn't very thorough or helpful. When we attended the IEP training class at Partners they educated us on all the required forms, what can be included, how specific it could be and they were so informative about the entire process.

When we went back to Jonathan's school for his annual review to write his IEP for next year we were armed with knowledge of our rights and the entire process. Jonathan's IEP nearly doubled in length due to the specific information we included in the document. This is Information we would've never known about without the IEP class! Partners also gave us contact information for our local LEA for our school district. After contacting her, she actually attended our annual review and was extremely helpful in helping us with the entire IEP process as well as being an advocate for our son.

We are so grateful to Partners for giving such a great and informative course! Not only is it top notch, current information, it is provided free of charge! This helps out families of children with autism since most everyone knows just how expensive classes, therapies and interventions can wind up costing. I don't think we could've found a better program or a better group of people that provided us with information that is invaluable to any family that deals with autism! “

-Mandy Slaughter,
Beebe



Inclusion Grant Program

AAROC Inclusion grants are for organizations that wish to include children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), ages birth to 18 years, in an inclusive extracurricular program. In order to qualify for a grant, the program must be one designed for children without disabilities where the operating agency has a desire to provide necessary modifications and supports to enable children with ASD to participate. These grants allow children with ASD to be served in integrated settings, with supports, alongside the typical children in the program rather than in separate settings.



The Autism Delta Project

The mission of the Autism Delta Project is to provide education, training, and support to families with children who have autism and those who provide services to people with autism as a means to increase access to quality services in the Arkansas Delta. This will be accomplished by collaborating with existing providers (schools, preschools, therapists, clinics) in increasing the use of evidence-based interventions to improve outcomes for people with autism and increase quality of life for individuals and their families.

Arkansas Autism Facts:

- 1 out of 65 children will be diagnosed with Autism in Arkansas
 - 1 out of 40 boys
 - 1 out of 172 girls
- Children in Arkansas are diagnosed later than any other state
 - Median age is 61 months (national range is 46-61)
 - Time of diagnosis has increased since 2002
- Minority Children and those from Rural areas:
 - Are diagnosed later
 - Have less access to evidence-based services
- Early intensive intervention works
 - 33% of children receiving intense early intervention have optimal outcomes
 - 33% children receiving intense early intervention have good outcomes
 - 33% continue to need intensive life long supports
- Arkansas has resources to support children with autism
 - Arkansas Autism Partnership for young children
 - EPSDT Autism Services
 - Health Insurance Mandate

Action Steps:

- Set up Community Advisory Board
- Hire an Autism Specialist for the Arkansas Delta
- Identify and hire a local community liaison
- Develop a three year plan that addresses the needs of the Arkansas Delta community

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