

DHS: The Impact

Autism Awareness Month

April 10, 2015

April is Autism Awareness Month in Pennsylvania, and the Department of Human Services (DHS) is raising awareness of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) through multiple events around the state. Governor Wolf's proposed FY 2015-2016 budget includes additional funding to increase the capacity of the Adult Autism Waiver for home- and community-based services, as well as provides resources and support for individuals with ASD.

FY 2015-2016 Proposed Budget Initiatives

- \$19.5M for autism services, including:
- \$15.1M to continue support for up to 664 adults receiving home- and community-based autism services
- \$372,000 to increase the Adult Autism Waiver capacity by 50 people

"There are more than 55,000 children and adults with autism receiving services in the commonwealth, according to the Pennsylvania Autism Census," said Acting DHS Secretary Ted Dallas. The census indicates a 181 percent overall increase in individuals with ASD in PA from 2005 to 2011 and a 334 percent increase of adults (21+). DHS expects this dramatic upward trend to continue, which illustrates the increasing need for services delivered by professionals trained to support individuals with autism and their families across the lifespan.

The ASERT Collaborative (Autism Services, Education, Resources and Training) is a statewide initiative funded by DHS' Bureau of Autism Services (BAS). ASERT is a key component of the commonwealth's strategy for supporting individuals with autism and their families. ASERT supports the Bureau's efforts to continually improve the quality of its programs and connects existing resources and pockets of expertise to address regional gaps in effective services and supports.



Michael Jones, pictured at left, participated in a multimedia social skills group led by ASERT, designed to help adolescents and adults with autism learn social skills. Through the group's photography class, Michael discovered that he enjoys taking, editing, and critiquing photos in a group setting. Michael shared that while strengthening his photography skills, he learned a lot about making friends and building lasting friendships. Michael said, "I am proud of making lots of new friends and being a popular guy." He looks forward to building friendships in high school and attending college.

Get Involved

Throughout April, BAS and ASERT plan to host a variety of events for Autism Awareness Month:

- Free ASD trainings for professionals conducted by the BAS Clinical Team. Visit www.autisminpa.org for locations.
- ASERT's 30 events statewide. Visit www.PAautism.org for more information.
- Visit ASERT in Harrisburg on April 13, 2015, at the Capitol Rotunda from 8 AM to 3 PM.
- Attend *Autism Spectrum Disorder: The Transition from Childhood to Adulthood* on April 20, 2015, from 6:30 to 8 PM, at the State Museum in Harrisburg presented by adults on the spectrum and Nina Wall, Director of BAS. This free event is open to the public and does not require registration.
- Registration will open at the end of April for the 8th Annual PA Autism Training Conference at www.autisminpa.org.

For more information about the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, please visit www.dhs.state.pa.us.