



## A glimmer of hope ...

As the alarming number of autism cases continues to rise, the critical need for adult services is becoming more apparent. While the road continues to be long and difficult, we can see some positive attributes on the horizon.

The Quest Autism Foundation (QAF) was founded in 2000 and for five years our team raised enough funds to officially open our doors. Our growth has been slow but steady, and we are proud to say that we have more than doubled in size. However, with the severe shortage of resources, continued program growth will be very difficult.

### A call to action...

In late March, Jim Hoppe, a QAF Founder and a Managing Director, was invited to attend a luncheon with the New Jersey Governor, Chris Christie, along with a small group of professionals in the autism field. The purpose was to discuss the major issues surrounding individuals with autism in New Jersey. Not unexpectedly, money continues to be the most critical issue. More specifically, how state dollars are distributed and budget amounts that do not meet the needs of individuals with autism are equally critical.

If the average life span is approximately 80 years, individuals will be in the adult system for 60 years. Public money is heavily distributed to individuals between the ages of 3 – 21 (\$90K per yr). Under the current system, the average 21 year old entering the adult system may receive approximately \$21K per year.

### A lack of resources...

The autism caregiver community calls this phenomenon “falling off the cliff.” For most individuals, there is little difference between the services and supports they require at age 20 and those required at age 22 to warrant this significant drop. More importantly, this severe shortage of money comes at a time when parents/guardians of the individuals are aging and are “physically, mentally and emotionally exhausted.” Governor Christie understood

this point and plans to address it going forward.

“Many dollars are being wasted by the complexity of the system and the difficulty in actually accessing the dollars designated to an individual as a result of the extensive paperwork involved” quoted Jim Hoppe.

Mary Pat Christie toured the EPIC school to kick-off Autism Awareness Month. Toli Anastassiou (QAP Program Director) and Jenn Hoppe (a Quest Founder and a Managing Director) were in attendance and met with New Jersey’s First Lady. Mary Pat congratulated both Toli and Jenn for their work at Quest and reiterated that it was the Governor’s plan to address issues concerning the adult population.

### Our Quest continues...

While the road remains uncertain, we are hopeful that our voices are being heard. We will continue to raise the key issues in every way possible and push to drive the necessary changes in our system that will someday result in increased funding, better processes, and the representation of individuals with autism fairly, regardless of age.



*BD Employee Dennis Banks  
with QAP participant, Jaimie Hoppe*

# Adult Day Program

## From the Desk of the Program Director, Toli Anastassiou, MA, BCBA

With winter finally over, I am excited to bring in the warmer weather with our first Quest News in nearly three years. Since our last newsletter, there have been a number of changes here at Quest.

We have welcomed new staff, new work opportunities, and most significantly, new participants into our program. As you are reading this, you may be wondering “Who’s Toli?” For those that may not recognize me, I am the Program Director here at Quest, and one of the new (ish) faces. I joined Quest three years ago with a primary focus on expansion: developing into a program that better serves the adult autism community without sacrificing the quality of service that our participants and families have come to expect and deserve. A very exciting prospect.

### New Faces

After a long search, we met two wonderful individuals, John and Andrew, who joined us earlier this year. Their transition into Quest was so seamless that it is difficult to remember what we were like before they arrived. More recently, Jonathan and Christopher have joined our program bringing us to capacity at our home in the Wyckoff YMCA. It has been exciting to see the development and day-to-day changes in the dynamic of Quest: participating in the development of our young adults; seeing new friendships develop; and most importantly, developing the potential in each of the participants of our program..

### Looking forward to a bright future

Our mission and goals remain unchanged – to provide quality vocational, daily living, and recreation and leisure services to adults with autism; and to provide outreach and develop collaborative relationships with the community. I am very happy to share that we are meeting our mission by providing monthly tours to parents and professionals. We regularly meet with new families to lay the foundation for a bright future. We have connected and provided support to act as a model program for a parent group looking to replicate the Quest model in their local YMCA. Quest has presented to local community groups and at national conferences; provided staff training; and

we continue to provide support for best practices in autism education and treatment. We have participated in adult advocacy efforts – notably participating in the development of Autism New Jersey’s Blueprint for a Lifetime of Services; and Advancing the Future for Adults with Autism’s (AFAA) national town hall meeting to address the needs of adults with autism. Further, we have strengthened our community relationships by expanding both our number of paid and volunteer worksites.

In conclusion, although we have accomplished a great deal in a relatively short period of time, our goal has not yet been reached. We are currently in the process of looking for additional program space to further meet the need for quality day programs for adults with autism. Look forward to our continued growth (and more regular updates) in the near future.

All the best,



Toli



*Mike stocking drinks at the BD cafeteria*

## Is your company hiring?

Is your business looking for excellent, reliable part-time help? Our adult participants possess a wide range of skills including: mail sorting & delivery, direct mail/letter assembly, filing, copying, shredding, recycling, cleaning, inventory stocking, shopping, bagging groceries, product assembly, and more.

Quest provides our adults with a variety of volunteer and supported employment opportunities. Local companies who wish to learn more about our employment services, can contact us at [info@questnj.org](mailto:info@questnj.org).



*Barry Jorgensen and Andrew Melnitsky collecting litter at the Wyckoff YMCA*

## Employer Spotlight: Moe's Southwest Grill

### 380 Ridge Road, Mahwah, New Jersey

Moe's is a fun restaurant that offers delicious fresh tex-mex style food from burritos to tacos to chips and salsa. If you are lucky enough when you are there, you'll run into one of their friendly owners, Mia and Lee DiPrizito. We struck up a relationship with Mia and Lee when our participants and staff started eating lunch there regularly. The DiPrizito's are also members of the Wyckoff YMCA and had heard of our program. It was just good fortune and timing when they asked Quest what they could do for us. We responded that we would love for one of our participants to have a job here and they immediately answered, "Sure, you got it!" and the rest is history



*Mike with Mia DiPrizito, owner of Moe's Southwest Grill*

Mike Olivero has been working at Moe's for over a year now and really enjoys his job, where he can be found a couple afternoons a week cleaning tables, filling condiments, and sweeping up to help keep Moe's spic and span. Recently a second participant, Barry Jorgensen, started at Moe's doing similar cleaning tasks and is more than happy to enjoy a nice plate of chips and queso after his work shift is done.

We are so grateful for the support and generosity that Moe's has given to Quest Autism Programs and our participants. Not only is it our favorite place to eat but a great place to work as well.

# Welcoming New Faces

This past summer, QAP welcomed two new participants, Andrew Melnitsky and John Carezza, both recent graduates from their school programs. We are excited to have some new faces at Quest and grateful they both have transitioned very well into their new routines.



## Meet Andrew

Andrew started at Quest this past August after graduating from the Douglass Developmental Center. We are happy to welcome him to our program.

Andrew enjoys making salad for lunch, eating out with his friends, walking on the treadmill in the Y's fitness center, and looking through cookbooks and magazines during down time. Andrew is a hard worker as well. He helps out around the YMCA collecting garbage & recycling everyday with his buddy Barry. Andrew also volunteers cleaning up at a local grocery warehouse, P&C Specialty in Glen Rock.

## Meet John

John also started this past summer after graduating from ECLC in nearby Waldwick. He had been working with his dad at Park Ave BMW, doing office work. Fortunately, he was able to continue that job when he came to Quest. He also volunteers four afternoons a week at Christian Health Care Center in Wyckoff sorting and delivering mail to their residents. John's quite busy at Quest as well and is a fast learner. He works out in the fitness center at the Y with his pals from Quest, takes inventory and refills our supplies, and likes to make chicken nuggets and fries for lunch. In his free time, John likes to do puzzles, play games with friends, and is a tough competitor on Wii...someone has yet to beat John in bowling!



*Top: Andrew at work at the James A. McFaul Environmental Center in Wyckoff*

*Bottom: John sorting mail at the Christian Health Care Center*

This past February, we welcomed another new participant, named Jonathan and Chris joined us in May. You'll hear more about these two fine young men in our next newsletter. **Many thanks to the following businesses for giving us employment/volunteer opportunities:**

BD  
Christian Health Care Center  
James A. McFaul Environmental Center  
Moe's Southwest Grill  
Park Avenue BMW  
P & C Specialty of Glen Rock  
Ramapo-Bergen Animal Refuge  
The Valley Hospital  
The Wyckoff YMCA

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# Contributing to the dialogue

Quest has been heavily involved in community outreach. We are striving to support the needs of the autism community as well as those of our program from advocacy efforts, including participating in Autism New Jersey's "Blueprint for Lifetime Support" to working to change policy with Advancing the Future for Adults with Autism (AFAA); to education, to support of evidence-based programming for adolescents and adults with autism.



## And the QAF Award Goes To . . .

In an effort to advocate for and encourage interest in services for adolescents and adults with autism, QAF sponsors the Best Adult Poster Award at Autism New Jersey's annual conference in Atlantic City.

### Best Poster Award 2010

Title: Using Activity Schedules to Teach Adolescents with Autism to Play Nintendo Wii Fit.

Presenters: Julia Mandelbaum, Sharon Reeve, Kenneth F. Reeve and Tina Sidener.

*Photo: Autism New Jersey Executive Director, Dr. Linda Meyer, Julia Mandelbaum, Toli Anastassiou and Carrie Hennessy*

## Conference and Community Presentations

Toli and Clinical Director, Carrie Hennessy presented at the Organization for Autism Research (OAR) conference in Virginia in October, 2010 and at the New Jersey Association for Behavior Analysis (NJABA) conference in Edison, N.J. on March 17, 2011. Their informative topic was "Preparing Your Young Adult for a Successful Transition to an Adult Day Program."

In addition, Quest staff has made numerous presentations to community groups, including the Wyckoff Women's Club, Bergen Community College and to the staff of the YMCA in Somerset Hills.

## National Dialogue

Quest participated in advocacy efforts including Autism New Jersey's (ANJ) *Blue Print for Lifetime Support*. The document identifies the critical goals and activities that will lead to an improved quality of life for individuals with autism, and outlines how we can collectively address this.

## Advancing Futures for Adults with Autism

On November 13, 2009, Americans from across the country came together to create a policy agenda addressing the needs of adults with autism. Quest was represented in the discussion and made recommendations on this important issue. Over 1,000 were people involved in the town hall, which included caregivers, advocates, elected officials, family members, and adults with autism.



*Photo: Quest supported Autism Speaks Walkathon 2011*

# Your support

**On October 15, 2010, the Quest Autism Foundation** hosted its annual Harvest Ball fundraising event at the Rockleigh Country Club in Rockleigh, NJ. We have been holding this fabulous event at the Rockleigh for the last ten years to benefit Quest Autism Programs and to provide grants and support to other adult autism organizations.

The Harvest Ball continues to be a very successful fundraising event for Quest, but has also transformed into an annual celebration of Quest's ongoing perseverance to make the dream of providing adult services to the autism community a reality.

Last year's event included over 100 raffle and silent auction items which ranged from sports memorabilia to designer handbags during its extravagant cocktail party followed by a heartwarming video presentation of the Quest participants in action, a delicious dinner and dessert. The evening continued with an exciting live auction which included the coveted "front row behind home plate" Yankee tickets for the 2011 Old Timers Day game-donated by the Luckow family, a BMW cruise bike-donated by Park Avenue BMW and a 46" Aquos LED/LCD TV-donated by Michael Diker of BD

and Sharp Business Systems. The evening continued with a jumping and packed dance floor. Highlights of the evening can be seen on our website [www.questnj.org](http://www.questnj.org) and facebook.

We were so fortunate to have had so many wonderful friends and family members attend the event to share the joy of what has been accomplished in our "quest" and to enjoy a fun filled evening.

It is with grateful hearts that we thank all those who have supported this major fundraising event through the years, especially the Luckow family and the entire benefit committee.

*"We make a living by what we get;  
we make a life by what we give."*

-- Winston Churchill

**Save the date** for this year's Harvest Ball to be held on Friday, October 21, 2011 at the Rockleigh Country Club. 100% of the proceeds go directly to Quest Autism Programs.

## Jennifer Hoppe honored by the Wyckoff YMCA...

YMCA Directors Joy Vottero and Joyce Kwiatkowski visited Jenn Hoppe at her home in Wyckoff to tell her she had been selected to be a recipient of the William E. Boye, Jr. Humanitarian Award on May 4, 2011.

This year's honorees were people who "reach for the stars." Jenn was honored in recognition and appreciation of her above & beyond dedication to the special needs community in Wyckoff and beyond. So many children with special needs are gaining the special services and education they deserve thanks to her energy to "make it happen".

"The Y is so proud to accommodate Quest and its innovative programs for young adults with autism. Our involvement with the Quest organization is truly one of the ways the Y fulfills its mission of social responsibility" said Joy Vottero.



Quest Autism Foundation is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. Contributions are fully deductible less any applicable event costs. To make a donation, attend our events or contribute to our auction, please call Jenn Hoppe at 201 848 8611.



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1) Joy Vottero, Mark Reisman, Nina Reisman, Nancy Addis, Kelly Rooney, Kris Pepper, Ellen Gifford, Tara Fallitico & Joyce Kwiatkowski 2) Lynne Freeman & Jennifer Hoppe 3) Toli Anastassiou & Renu Persaud 4) Meghan Howell & Eric Howell 5) Gianna Canizzo and Debi Gonda 6) Harvest Ball invitation cover, designed by Veronique Bella 7) Aimon Altaai, Angela DiPiazza, Camille Bergamatto, David Bergamatto, Lisa Solodar, Beth Malin, Rose Leone, Frank Morano, Daniel Kenney & Mariann Kenney 8) QAP Job coach, Alexandria Rodriguez and Quest participant John Carenza



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**The Quest Autism Foundation (QAF)** is a non-profit public 501(c)(3) charity dedicated to enabling adolescents and adults with autism to lead more productive and independent lives by:

- providing excellence in vocational and recreational services;
- partnering with a broad spectrum of community sites;
- increasing recreational and leisure opportunities; and
- contributing to the national dialogue to address the severe shortage of services



## Quest Autism Foundation

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James M. Hoppe  
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Quest Autism Foundation, Inc.  
PMB 257, 637 Wyckoff Avenue  
Wyckoff, NJ 07481

## Save the Date! The Harvest Ball

Friday, October 21, 2011  
Rockleigh Country Club