



# NEWSLETTER

## Featuring Dr. Valerie Paradiz

*Training Series Guest Speaker on April. 8, 2011*



### **Supporting the Emerging Self-Advocate with Autism and Related Conditions**

While most professionals in the special education community agree that the principles of self-determination and person-centeredness are good ideas, it is a challenge to “walk the talk” in day-to-day classroom settings. Theory must become practice, yet how can you teach people with autism to become more self-aware? How can you guide them in becoming more autonomous in their ability to

request accommodations or express their needs?

In the past several years, much dialogue has been generated around this question within the autistic self-advocacy community, particularly among those diagnosed with Asperger syndrome. This emerging community of self-advocates, who have modeled their agenda and message on other successful disability advocacy groups, such as the deaf, have created a forum to communicate their needs and preferences and develop strategies for navigating sensory and social challenges with dignity, self-awareness and confidence. Despite this, much of their hard-won wisdom, as well as hands-on tools for realizing their goals,

### Calendar

#### **April 8, 2011**

Training Series - Presenter: Dr. Valerie Paradiz - “Supporting the Emerging Self-Advocacy with Autism Spectrum & Related Conditions: Implementing the Integrated Self-Advocacy Curriculum” - ITV across Kansas

#### **April 12, 2011**

Webinar Series - Presenter - Lori Chambers - “PECS Phases 2-4” - Online, across Kansas

#### **April 14-15, 2011**

Special Invite Training - Autism Specialist Summit - “VB-MAPP” facilitated by Jane Goetz - Overland Park, KS

For more information and registration information on Trainings, please visit:

[www.KansasASD.com](http://www.KansasASD.com)

& check out the Training Calendar

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## PARADIZ CONTINUED

still required formalization into a cogent, organized methodology that therapists, teachers, families and support providers can understand and utilize.

Evidence-based practices and workable strategies for individuals with ASD to learn self-advocacy ability are limited. And for those who are not diagnosed within the Asperger range, behavior modification programs might be the only option provided to offer the structure they require to feel safe and behaviorally organized. However, this often leaves staff, not to mention those with ASD who can communicate their experiences, feeling that the person with autism's needs have been left out of the equation; that insufficient room has been provided for building independence, increased ability in self-regulation, or even the simple human experience of knowing, expressing and having others respond positively to one's specific needs and preferences.

For many individuals with autism, feeling well, safe and integrated in the current environment depends a great deal on their sensory and social ease. Within the autistic self-advocacy community, individuals who can

communicate their experience often describe "behavioral challenges" as a form of ineffective self-advocacy. In other words, becoming overly stimulated due to too much sensory or social input can result in a "meltdown" or other unfortunate behaviors. From the seasoned self-advocate's perspective, such strategies for communicating needs are often unsuccessful and arrive too late. They can even lead to unwanted results, usually involving profound misunderstanding for all involved, neurotypical (staff, family/caregivers) and autistic.

Understanding the significance of a diagnosis of autism might not be possible for some people on the spectrum due to their cognitive differences. In spite of this, we know from recent, encouraging data emerging from self-advocacy pilot programs in New York City Public School District 75 that young people across the autistic spectrum can learn skills in identifying their social and sensory discomforts and needs. We have also learned that they are capable of developing self-advocacy strategies to address their needs, which in turn affects their ability to organize their behavior and experience greater confidence in a variety of settings.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> District 75 supports more than 5,000 students with autism spectrum conditions and 23,000 students with disabilities. The emerging data are from 2008-2010 and the District's ISA Sensory Scan™ pilot programs, which implemented the *Integrated Self Advocacy ISA® Curriculum* developed by Valerie Paradiz (AAPC, 2009).