

PROJECT PROPOSAL

Date: November 27, 2014

aut  sm
TEENAGE PARTNERSHIP

STOP THE ST  GMA.

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Blog: <http://agentsofchange.info.yorku.ca/category/autism-teen-nights/>



Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/autismteenagepartnership>



1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Autism Teenage Partnership (ATP) is a free weekly program for youth with autism that provides a relaxing environment conducive to developing social skills and building friendships. We find that many individuals with autism tend to be loners and bullied at school and thus at-risk for many mental illnesses like self-harm, and depression. This program will allow participants to be themselves and make meaningful relationships in a safe and non-judgmental space. This initiative will rely on working alongside the City of Toronto, Milliken Advisory Council, Autism Ontario and on student-volunteers for its success. The target community for this program is threefold: the participants, their parents and families and our volunteers. The participants enjoy the program, giving families and parents much needed respite. In the same way, volunteers from a variety of disciplines gain experience and practice with dealing with individuals with autism. This program will take advantage of summer holidays, as it gives participants the opportunity to establish and foster social nets and relationships away from home and school. In this program individuals with Autism or ASD are welcomed to our group for healthy snacks and activities, which include video games, board games and arts and crafts. This helps to facilitate the participants' social skills, meet new friends, and aid in their integration into society. Although there are initial start-up costs, there are only small recurring expenses, so we see it feasible for the program's continuation throughout the school year and summers to come.

Total Budget: \$2,086 (with \$700 of Ministry funding and \$1,386 of in-kind funding)

Start date: June 1, 2014

End date: August 31, 2014

2.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.1 Program Overview

Approximately 515,000 or 1 in 94 Canadians are living with autism (NEDSAC, 2008). Concentrated efforts in social supports have been traditionally focused on the childhood years, while support for teens has been limited. In addition, parents often complain that their child with autism spends too much time on the computer, and do not have a close group of friends. The few supports available for this population are typically provided by institutions in medical environments and have teens interacting with professionals such as physicians, psychologists, and teachers.

These teens with autism are usually misfits among peers, therefore vulnerable to bullying and social isolation. According to a recent study in the United States, children and youth with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are nine times more likely than other children to visit the psychiatric emergency department (Kalb et al., 2012). Teenagers with autism may have limited interaction with any one their own age and thus cannot build social support networks which are so vital for mental health and well-being. Parents and families caring for this child are at-risk for caregiver burnout and need much needed respite. Caregivers may get caught up in managing

their child that may over look the need for socialization despite its necessity for thriving in adulthood. Other boundaries could include fear of judgments and stigmatization.

In the context of a youth with autism, thriving is more than surviving, and likewise thriving in our society, does not just mean absence of any problems; and involves the realization of one's full potential. Social exclusion can become a norm in their school, and this alienation can stunt healthy growth and development. It is impossible for teens with autism to practice much needed social skills. These teenagers are particularly susceptible to depression, anxiety, self-harm, eating disorders, and alienation.

2.2 Executive Board Members

JC* - Founder, President

BW – Co-founder, Vice-President Operations

MP – Program Director

JF – Media and Public Relations

* Primary Contact

2.3 Community Partners

The success of this program is contingent on working closely with our partners, which include Autism Ontario, City of Toronto, student volunteers, and Milliken Advisory Committee.

Autism Ontario's (AO) goal is to ensure that each individual with ASD is provided the means to achieve quality of life as a respected member of society. Their vision is for acceptance and opportunities for individuals with ASD. They are dedicated to advocacy and public awareness about autism and the day-to-day challenges involved.

University-aged student volunteers are an important part to our program. These volunteers come from a variety of backgrounds including nursing, psychology, education, law, and medicine and contribute to a multi-disciplinary environment. To be able to volunteer, they must obtain a recent (1 year) police check and attend a training session with XXXXXXXX, Social worker from Autism Ontario. Volunteers will be drawn from Autism Awareness – a university club started by colleagues with chapters at Western, and York.

Milliken Advisory Committee is a community group running out of Milliken Park Community Recreation Centre in the Milliken community in north Scarborough. They work closely with City of Toronto Parks Forestry and Recreation for the best interest of their own community. They have ensured ATP a venue in-kind at a City of Toronto community centre – Milliken Park Community Recreation Centre, 4325 McCowan Rd. (McCowan and Steeles).

2.3.1 Community Partner Contact Information

Autism Ontario:

City of Toronto: Parks Forestry and Recreation; Milliken Advisory Council:

Milliken Park Community Recreation Centre

Autism Awareness at Western:

2.4 Statement of Opportunity

One in every 94 children in Canada is diagnosed with autism or ASD (NEDSAC, 2008). ASD is characterized by social deficits and communication difficulties. To help with problems associated with the development of social skills, this program gives the opportunity for individuals and families affected by ASD to make friends and socialize in a safe place.

The target community is teenagers and families living with autism or ASD in the GTA. As many of these teenagers have summer holidays, we hope to provide them the opportunity to establish and foster social nets away from home and school. It is important to encourage social skill acquisition in youth as it will provide opportunities in the future for social independence and integration into society.

A similar teen night was facilitated in London, ON by AO, in conjunction with Autism Awareness at Western in 2012. In this program, individuals with autism or ASD were welcomed to their facilities for pizza, healthy snacks and activities such as video games, board games and arts and crafts. We saw the benefits of this program and it was very popular within the London community. After coming back to the GTA and establishing a connection with the Toronto Chapter of AO, we decided to start this initiative in the GTA. Because we have witnessed and experienced the success of teen night in London, we are confident it will succeed in the GTA.

This program benefits the participants and families as it helps engage them socially and foster social independence. It deals with problems of social exclusion and forming social safety networks, two social determinants of health. Teens are able to connect with like individuals, and the volunteers help to stimulate social interaction. Practicing these skills will tremendously help in daily living.

Services for this age group are currently provided by post-secondary institutions which are tied to the school year and academic settings with teens typically working with counselors and youth workers. Themes are usually focused with academic success and coping with school,

without a place to “crash” and “hang out”. Individuals with autism have many unique challenges and needs such as sensory stimuli. ATP provides activities and environment that satisfies these sensory and social needs. Autism Ontario are the consultants for this program, where training and resources are readily available to support the volunteers and the development of the program.

3.0 PROJECT DETAILS

3.1 Detailed Project Description

Mental health is becoming a prevalent issue in society today. Initiatives such as Bell’s Let’s Talk have started the conversation, however, there is still a lot of support needed for the families affected by mental health disorders. The objective of this project is to provide individuals and families affected by autism and ASD a safe place to build social safety networks, and practice and learn new skills to fight social exclusion. Empowering young students in advocacy can help improve mental health and autism perceptions in Canada. Our initial goal for the summer of 2014 is to have 10 participants in the weekly program, however, we are confident we will exceed this number. This program will run for two hours every week during the months of July and August 2014, and upon completion, we will evaluate the program’s feasibility to continue events during the school year. Through the generous aid of the City of Toronto, we plan to hold these sessions at the Milliken Park Community Recreation Centre located in North Scarborough. Our status as a non-profit youth group allows us to qualify for rent-free use of recreation rooms, which have a capacity of approximately 30 people. The location is formidable as it draws participants and volunteers from all over the GTA, is accessible by TTC, and has lots of free parking. Furthermore, use of this facility allows us access to storage space, kitchen facilities, as well as use of the park located next to the recreation centre. This provides diverse programming potential. Finally, the executive director has worked at this location for over 8 years, so he is familiar with the facility, and has strong working relationships with staff.

The reason we chose to start this program in the summer is that it capitalizes on when students have more down time and are in need of routine and social interactions. Being able to offer these programs to the community can help participants and families with activities of daily living and can improve their quality of life. Ultimately, our program aims to improve skills and give the participants confidence for future social independence and integration into society.

Our founder also established Autism Awareness Western in London, ON, and have experience in autism volunteer work and summer camp will direct planning of the program. Programs will include activities such as board games, arts and crafts, icebreaker activities, and active games. The preparation for the teen nights will occur in the months prior to the sessions. Weekly programs will be constructed, with detailed lists of activities planned and supplies needed. Valid police checks will be required for all volunteers. These need to be completed in a timely manner, as police checks may take up to 10 weeks to complete and require a cashiers cheque.

Autism Ontario was chosen as a partner because we have worked with them in the past. They are established provincially and we will rely on their networks, community, advertising and other assistance as needed for our program. Majority of our program's participants will be recruited from AO, and they will benefit from the large number of volunteers we can provide. Their enthusiastic responses to our ideas provide us with confidence that our program will deliver needed support to families, and become popular within the autism community.

Although our goals for a teen night program are ambitious, we have all the pieces in place to ensure success. Our leadership team is strong, and has experience organizing and implementing a similar program in London, ON. Our relationship with our community partners is great, and their enthusiastic response has been encouraging. Lastly there is a need for this program with the continuing support towards mental health in our society. Once all the pieces are put together, an organized, exciting, fun teen night program will be available to offer support to teenagers and families affected by ASD.

3.2 Target Audience

ATP benefits the following target audience:

1. Teens with autism – enjoying fun activities and friendships setting up for a good adulthood.
2. Families living with autism – providing services to their teens guided and much needed respite in lieu of caregiver burnout.
3. Volunteers - currently we have over twenty volunteers who are all university students, mostly in nursing, psychology, medicine and education. They undergo vigorous training, and entry assessments including immediate vulnerable sector police checks. This program provides a safe multidisciplinary forum for young professionals-to-be a platform and environment to practice skills and knowledge in caring for individuals with ASD to be used in their future profession.
4. Community partnerships – ATP sought out supports and resources from local and organizations such as, Autism Ontario, the City of Toronto, and Milliken

Advisory Council. Through this outreach and promotion, this program demonstrated the community needs and developed a model prototype for a possible future area of support.

3.3 Description of Programming

On the first day, participants and volunteers made colour coded name tags. This helped everyone distinguish who was a participant, volunteer or facilitator. This created structure during the session but also an enjoyable group activity.

The purpose of the program is to create social outlets where teenagers can “mix and mingle” so to say. For each week, the planned activities are in three sections: "The Zone", "Let's Get Artsy", and “Just Chill”. The reason for the three selections is because teenagers with ASD often do not have much choice in their life. Parents are often taking them to doctor appointments, telling them what to do, what they should do, etc. Our layout creates an environment where they are in control. We have 3 different sections that adhere to 3 different "activity" styles. The "The Zone" is the main activity of the night where everyone can participate in one activity. The "Just Chill" zone consists of sensory toys, such as stress balls, foam swords, puzzles, board games, etc. This section allows them to interact in a group setting with a variety of activities to enjoy. The last zone is "Let's Get Artsy". This zone provides participants with all the materials required for self-expression through the arts. The different range of activities in one session also allows us to cater to different types of personalities and different types of diagnoses on the spectrum.

The ability to have a choice also ties into the Self-Determination Theory. This theory is based on the fulfillment of three factors in life: autonomy, relatedness and competence. Choice falls under the category of autonomy, helping build their sense of self as well as an individual identity. This not only encourages initiative but also allows them to realize they are in control of this moment. Each of the activities in our program facilitates community engagement, social interaction, communication, cooperation, social bonding and amusement. In the end, this is a place to socialize and forget about daily stresses. (Miserandino, 2012)

Week 1:

Main Activity: Profiles

Profiles : This activity consisted of participants creating a silhouette of a head and decorating it with objects/pictures that represented who they are.

Social : The reason for making profiles is to get to know the participants. Individuals with Autism are sometimes not able to verbally express what they like to do or what they enjoy. Furthermore, they may have difficulty in expressing their personality. The profile activity is a method for our participants to learn more about each other through an artistic means while honing in on their visual and sensory abilities.

Motor skills: This activity is a challenging activity for those who do not have fine motor skills. Volunteers are available for assistance.

Psychological: This activity provides an opportunity for self-reflection as it allows the participants pause and think to express who they are.

Week 2:

Main Activity: Mini Pizzas

Mini Pizzas: During this activity, participants will make mini pizzas on English muffins. We provide shredded cheese, peppers, and sausages.

Social: Everyone will be excited to make their own pizza. It is an interactive activity, volunteers helping participants and vice versa. The reason for this activity is because food is a common element in many social gatherings. The excitement over the pizza allows participants to openly ask for help when required. This activity helps participants build confidence in preparing food for themselves.

Motor Skills: The act of making pizzas is a little difficult for those who do not have fine motor skills. However, when asking for help from a volunteer it creates a relationship with the volunteer while learning or observing the motor actions needed to make the pizza.

Week 3:

Main Activity: Cupcake Making

The purposes and goals of this activity would be similar to those of Week 2.

Week 4:

Main Activity: Movie Night

This night provides an avenue where the participants could enjoy one activity together. They can come to the consensus of watching a movie which require cooperation and communication. Compromising and team-work can often present as a difficult task for teenagers with ASD. Also, acceptance can be learned if they movie that they initially picked was not going to be watched that night.

Week 5:

Main Activity: Play Dough

Social: This activity allows for conversation and cooperation. Everyone works together to make sure the play dough's texture came out just right.

Psychological: This activity facilitated the notion of following instructions. It is sometimes difficult for those diagnosed with ASD to follow specific orders, as the communication between the brain and the action system may not be functioning optimally. This is a great way to try to get the play dough to come out perfectly and learn how to politely request for help from each other.

Week 6:

Main Activity: Physical Activity Day

Social: This session is a great way for participants interact and communicate on strategies while playing a team sport. However, some participants with limited motor skills will decide to stay in and work on crafts or play board games.

Psychological: Physical activity not only relieves body stress but also mental stress. The adrenaline releases body regulating hormones that can help calm the mind and facilitate the production of positive thoughts (Mutrie & Faulkner, 2004).

Week 7:**Main Activity: WII Night**

Social: The purpose of this activity served the same goals as Week 6, while “keeping up” with the 21st century. On this day, participants will be allowed to bring in games or anything electronic to share with their peers.

Psychological: Studies show that bonding over video games or electronic games provides a different social outlet for people. It helps them relate in something virtual and can benefit for their socialization. (Ertzberger,2008)

3.4 Detailed Itinerary

Session 1	Date: July 8, 2014
Time	Itinerary
6:00-6:10 PM	Arrival, making sure everyone is here, attendance, sign ins, assign volunteers
6:10-6:30 PM	Ice breaker - introductions
6:30-7:00 PM	Activity 1: Silhouette Decorating (one already done - everyone should make them)
7:00-7:30 PM	Activity 2: Arts/ Craft Station - we will lay out general craft supplies and have a themed craft for that day
7:30-7:50 PM	Snack Time -
7:50-8:00 PM	Get ready to leave
Material: Long poster paper, markers, crayons, scissors	

Session 2	Date: July 15, 2014
Time	Itinerary
6:00-6:10 PM	Arrival, making sure everyone is here, attendance, sign ins, assign volunteers
6:10-6:30 PM	Ice breaker - introductions

6:30-7:00 PM	Activity 1: English Muffin Pizzas (With first half)
7:00-7:30 PM	Activity 2: Craft # 2 (Craft Station)
7:30-7:50 PM	Snack Time
7:50-8:00 PM	Get ready to leave (detach from activities)
Material: English muffins, cheese, sauce, oven, oven mitts, spoons, plates, grater, trays	

Session 3	Date: July 22, 2014
Time	Itinerary
6:00-6:10 PM	Arrival, making sure everyone is here, attendance, sign ins, assign volunteers
6:10-6:30 PM	Ice breaker - introductions
6:30-7:00 PM	CUPCAKE MAKING (we would have to prepare these cupcakes ahead of time - or bake them actually during the session)
7:00-7:30 PM	
7:30-7:50 PM	
7:50-8:00 PM	Get ready to leave (detach from activities)
Material: cupcake boxes, cupcake pans, oven, oven mitts, icing, sprinkles (perhaps 3 types) balloons	

Session 4	Date: July 29, 2014
Time	Itinerary
6:00-6:10 PM	Arrival, making sure everyone is here, attendance, sign ins, assign volunteers
6:10-6:30 PM	Ice breaker - introductions
6:30-7:00 PM	Activity 1: Video games
7:00-7:30 PM	Activity 2: Wii
7:30-7:50 PM	Snack Time
7:50-8:00 PM	Get ready to leave (detach from activities)
Material: video games, consoles, remotes, rock band	

Session 5	Date: August 5, 2014
Time	Itinerary
6:00-6:10 PM	Arrival, making sure everyone is here, attendance, sign ins, assign volunteers
6:10-6:30 PM	Ice breaker - introductions
6:30-7:00 PM	Activity 1: Silly putty making
7:00-7:30 PM	Activity 2: Play dough making
7:30-7:50 PM	Snack Time
7:50-8:00 PM	Get ready to leave (detach from activities)
Material: Play dough: flour, water , food colouring	

Session 6	Date: August 12, 2014
Time	Itinerary
6:00-6:10 PM	Arrival, making sure everyone is here, attendance, sign ins, assign volunteers

6:10-6:30 PM	Ice breaker - introductions
6:30-7:00 PM	Activity 1: Yoga/soccer/badminton
7:00-7:30 PM	Activity 2: Yoga/soccer/badminton
7:30-7:50 PM	Snack Time
7:50-8:00 PM	Get ready to leave (detach from activities)
Material: Yoga mats, extra-large badminton rackets, soccer ball	

Session 7	Date: August 19, 2014
Time	Itinerary
6:00-6:10 PM	Arrival, making sure everyone is here, attendance, sign ins, assign volunteers
6:10-6:30 PM	Ice breaker - introductions
6:30-7:00 PM	Activity 1: Move night
7:00-7:30 PM	Activity 2: Make a Movie Poster
7:30-7:50 PM	Snack Time
7:50-8:00 PM	Get ready to leave (detach from activities)
Material: Popcorn, movies, screen, console	

Session 8	Date: August 26, 2014
Time	Itinerary
6:00-6:10 PM	Arrival, making sure everyone is here, attendance, sign ins, assign volunteers
6:10-6:30 PM	Ice breaker - introductions
6:30-7:00 PM	Activity 1: t-shirts
7:00-7:30 PM	Activity 2: t-shirts
7:30-7:50 PM	Snack Time
7:50-8:00 PM	Get ready to leave (detach from activities)
Material: Clothing paint, T-shirts	

4.0 FINANCES

4.1 Project Budget

4.2 Budget Justification

In this budget, we show that we will be receiving \$XXXXXX of in-kind support. This is representative of over 65% percent of our total budget and is made possible by our partners and volunteers. This project will require only \$YYYY of funding to cover other expenses like equipment, healthy snacks, volunteer appreciation gesture, and police checks. We hope to demonstrate that supports like ATP for these teenagers can operate on a low budget with passionate student-volunteers rather than expensive professionals. This allows us to develop our policies and framework with the goal of setting up similar satellite programs across the province.

As nursing students we hope to promote healthy eating habits through the \$40 allotted each week for healthy snacks. In addition, equipment will vary depending on the participants likes and dislikes, thus the break-down for the equipment expense will be clarified later as we continue through the summer and learn more about our participants.

Running this program is associated with a moderate start-up cost but low recurring costs. The equipment and supplies will last years with the proper care. A constant stream of volunteers will be available through Autism Awareness clubs, reaching post-secondary students from three different campuses, and participants will be continually provided by AO. Long-term, money can be raised through donations, fundraising initiatives, and grants, and a low subsidized cost for participation could be implemented to contribute to expenses. With our strong partnerships, we are confident sustainability of this teen group can continue for years.

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