Through the Years...

Meet the STAFF

‘SEA’ the WORLD

CELEBRATING

40 YEARS

Eden II Programs

1976–2016

SERVICE • SCIENCE • PASSION

RETROSPECTIVE ON 40 YEARS OF EDEN II PROGRAMS

connections

Communicating the News and Needs of Eden II Programs | Spring/Summer 2016
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The mission of Eden II Programs is to support people with autism throughout their lives to achieve their full potential through service, science, and passion.

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THE YEAR WAS 1976. PL 94-142 (also known as the Education for all Handicapped Children’s Act) had just been passed. For the first time in the United States, we were legally required to provide a free and appropriate public education to ALL children, even those with special needs. I remember speaking with one of Eden II’s founding families about what it was like when they had to bring their son who had autism to school when he turned five. They said they went to the school and registered him for kindergarten (as there was no special education). He didn’t even last an hour before the school called, told the family to pick him up and that he was not welcome back in school. This was several years prior to PL 94-142. So, the passing of 94-142 was meant to insure that no child with special needs was asked to go home or denied an education. Yes, 1976 was a pretty important year.

The fact that this law had JUST passed is what makes it even more impressive that a group of six families had gotten together and formed a school that same year; a school that would serve children with autism. In 1976, autism was relatively unheard of. In fact, the incidence at that time was approximately 4 in 10,000 (or 1 in 2,500). That did not deter this group of families. They travelled to New Jersey to learn about a school that had begun there called Eden only to find out this program could not accept students from NY. They worked with a consultant, raised money via fundraisers and started their own school, called Eden II. In 1976, Eden II was approved as a non-public school by the New York State Department of Education. And off it went...

Eden II based its programs on Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and quickly began having much success. It would be another 20 years before ABA was shown to be the most effective model for children with autism and become a widely used program. In 1982, Eden II developed their adult program, given the fact that several of the founding families’ children had aged out of the school program with no place to go. That has pretty much been the theme ever since. As a need became evident, Eden II tried to find a way to fill that need for the autism community. The largest growth began in the mid-1990s. Two major things occurred at that time. The first was that ABA had shown to be the most effective treatment model for children with autism and the second was that the incidence with autism had risen dramatically to approximately 1 in 500. That was five times greater than when the school opened in 1976.

Today, Eden II provides services for students living in NYC as well as Nassau and Suffolk Counties. Eden II has provided support services, trainings and consultation to programs and families across the US as well as Sri Lanka, Ireland, Canada, Australia, Russia, Cyprus and more. Eden II provides services to children from age three through adulthood. There are schools, adult day programs, family support programs, residential programs, consultations and trainings.

We are excited to celebrate our 40th Anniversary this year. We will take the time to honor those whose vision, courage and passion got the school started 40 years ago. We will reflect on the amazing work done by those families who followed them and have kept the program going and growing. We believe that we are a family here at Eden II and that belief was instilled in this program 40 years ago.

It is hard to imagine what the future will bring us. It is a difficult time for programs such as Eden II. The funding we receive has been cut over the years and in most cases, we do not get sufficient funding to cover the costs. We have uncertainty in funding and in regulations and policies. The incidence of autism is 1 in 68 today. Again, over five times greater than what it was in 1995. The need for services and supports is great. Of course, our six founding families forged their way in even more uncertain times so we look to the past to help guide us as we move forward in this uncertain future.

We have just moved into our new building at Beach Street where we hope to develop a model program for adolescents and young adults on the spectrum. We have a few great collaborations with businesses and not for profits we hope to launch soon to provide training and work opportunities for our adults with ASD. We are opening a new residence for young men who will be returning home from out of state programs. We will be finishing up our new strategic plan that will provide us with our roadmap and guide for the future. Happy 40th Anniversary Eden II. Here’s to the next 40 years!

Joanne Gerenser, Ph.D., CCC-SLP
Executive Director

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**Then...**

**& Now**
“I am thankful to Joanne and everyone at Eden II for everything they’ve done for my family.”
- Alice Hicks

“As soon as I heard about Eden II, I knew I had to put my son in a school close to home that could provide for him.”
- Gretta D’Agostino
& Now

“We believe that we are a family here at Eden II and that belief was instilled in this program 40 years ago.”
- Dr. Joanne Gerenser

“Eden II encourages parents and loved ones not to give up when challenged with a roadblock.”
- Denise Bianchi

Do you have a fond memory of Eden II Programs?
Tell us on Facebook or Twitter using #MyEdenMemories
Interview with Jen Mauri

WHAT WAS YOUR STRONGEST MOTIVATION WHEN WORKING WITH THOSE WITH AUTISM?

My strongest motivation when working with those with autism is to know that I am making a difference in their lives. Since day one, I never wanted to leave work for the day, unless I knew that something was being accomplished. Whether it is teaching a student a daily living task, teaching them to follow a schedule, or even just having an everyday conversation. My biggest motivator is putting a smile on my students’ faces. For me, to know my students are happy and smiling is by far my biggest motivator.

WHAT IS OFFERED IN THE NEW FITNESS CENTER?

The new fitness center at Beach Street is amazing! We have a treadmill, an elliptical, a rowing machine, resistance bands, dumbbells, Pylo boxes, Bosu balls, medicine balls, and a heavy bag for boxing. We also have three flat screen TVs that I use for motivation for the students to keep going. Let's face it, no one likes to walk on the treadmill without some sort of entertainment. We use what is called circuit training in the fitness center. Circuit training is a combination of body conditioning, resistance training and cardio exercises. My students stay on each station for a set number of minutes and then are asked to switch to the next station. They continuously switch stations until the end of class.

HOW ARE THE STUDENTS ENJOYING THE NEW FITNESS CENTER? DO ANY MOMENTS STAND OUT TO YOU?

The students are constantly moving and always being introduced to new exercises. Circuit training is great because you do not get bored easily. There have been many proud moments in the new fitness center. The students are very motivated and eager to get in there and start exercising. They come running in asking where to start first!
WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BIGGEST BENEFITS OF PHYSICAL FITNESS FOR THOSE WITH AUTISM?

Physical fitness benefits children with autism in many ways. Exercise can be a useful adjunct to traditional behavioral interventions, leading to improvement in symptoms, behaviors and their quality of life. Physical activity has shown to improve fitness levels and increase general motor functions. Besides improving fitness, motor function and behavior in individuals with autism, physical activity can promote self-esteem, increase general levels of happiness, and can lead to positive social outcomes. Exercise is an effective treatment associated with decreases in self-stimulatory behaviors, hyperactivity, aggression and self-injurious behaviors. When my students come to class, I want them to use that time to relieve stress, enjoy themselves, and be happy.

HOW IMPORTANT IS IT FOR A STUDENT'S DAILY SCHEDULE TO INCLUDE FITNESS?

Physical fitness is an effective therapy for children, adolescents, and adults with autism. A fitness routine is very important to have in a student’s daily schedule. More than half of children with autism are overweight or at risk of being overweight. This puts them at an increased risk for numerous health problems like diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and depression. Children and adults with autism sometimes have unusual dietary patterns, which can lead to weight gain. Daily physical activity may help overcome many of these challenges and improve a person’s overall quality of life.

Free Running Program for Autism Families

STATEN ISLAND Borough President James Oddo and the New York Road Runners are working together to help children on the autism spectrum and their families stay on the move. They are offering a free program that will give running coaches the opportunity to train parents and their children to run. The program is available every Sunday at 9am at Conference House Park in Tottenville. “This event is not about a love for fitness, rather it’s about helping to further the relationship between the child and his or her parent,” said Oddo. The program is sponsored by Oddo, Assemblyman Michael Cusick, the New York Road Runners, Autism Speaks and the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation. For more information, visit www.openrun.nyrr.org/#ConferenceHousePark.
Marissa Bennett joined Eden II’s Genesis Programs in 2003 and is an Outreach Coordinator for the Genesis Outreach Autism Center. She has been an active advocate for individuals with ASD for over 20 years and is the parent of a young adult with autism.

Meet the Staff: Marissa Bennett

DID YOU HAVE ANY PERSONAL CONNECTION TO AUTISM PRIOR TO WORKING FOR EDEN II?
My son was born in 1990 and was diagnosed with autism at 18 months old. At the time there was not much known about autism, effective education and treatment options, or potential outcomes. As a parent, it was very difficult to get educated, navigate a course for intervention for my child, while simultaneously going through the emotional process of receiving this diagnosis for your child. I began getting involved in the field out of advocacy for my child and a desire to help others access accurate information and appropriate services for their loved ones.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR FONDDEST MEMORY OF WORKING AT THE OUTREACH AUTISM CENTER?
Working in the outreach department has given me the ability to help individuals and families that aren’t able to currently access our programs. Through outreach, the agency has had the opportunity to create many programs to help address the needs of the autism community as they arise. One of our programs – our onsite behavior clinic – allows us to help individuals overcome significant, behavioral crisis situations and again participate in their family and community life as well as excel in their education settings. It has been particularly rewarding to see this process and enable families to remain intact and thrive.

WHERE DO YOU HOPE TO SEE THE FIELD IN 10 YEARS?
As the incidence of autism, unfortunately, continues to increase, my hope is to see the field have a better understanding of the disability in order to create more comprehensive programs and diverse services to address issues across the lifespan. I hope to see an increase in awareness and access to quality behavior analysis, educational, and adult programs and services. As the population ages, there will continue to be a tremendous need for programs and services for those aging with autism. I would like to see improvement in options and outcomes for adults seeking meaningful employment, housing and residential opportunities, as well as other services to help them live their lives with dignity, purpose, and happiness.

WHERE DO YOU HOPE TO SEE GENESIS IN 10 YEARS?
I anticipate that Genesis will continue to be a leader in education and intervention services for people with autism. I hope Genesis will obtain a building of its own that can be designed to meet the needs of all of the programs and accommodate expansion of our programs to help more individuals and families.

For information on the Genesis Outreach Autism Center, please call 516-937-1397.

EDEN II’S GENESIS OUTREACH AUTISM CENTER provides a myriad of services for individuals on the autism spectrum across all ages and functioning levels and is located in East Meadow, NY. Services provided include: comprehensive assessment and evaluation services, ABA services, speech, language, and communication services, behavior intervention planning, social skills groups, vocational programs, and consultation services for individuals with autism spectrum disorders. Additionally, located onsite, our Behavior Clinic is designed to provide comprehensive services to address behavior challenges that impede an individual’s quality of life.

“It is an honor to be a part of the growth of Eden II Programs, and to work with such a high caliber of staff. I applaud the families and the individuals we serve for their tireless commitment and hard work.”

— Mary McDonald, Ph.D., BCBA-D, LBA Interim Associate Executive Director for Long Island Programs
**DRIVE FOR AUTISM** recently awarded Eden II Programs with a generous $12,000 grant for the purchase of an Educational Use CCTV system. The system will consist of multiple video recorders which will allow us to monitor classroom behavior of our students, helping us fine tune our educational programming. The recorders will also aid in our students’ independence by allowing them to engage in various tasks without staff present but still ensuring their safety at all times. Drive for Autism has been a supporter of Eden II for many years, providing funds for iPads as well as defibrillators for multiple Eden II locations.

Drive for Autism Trustee, Thomas Trezza shares, “Our mission has always been to provide funds to programs (such as Eden II), so they can acquire needed items that are not in their regular budget. The needs for individuals on the Autism Spectrum continue to grow and our foundation is thrilled to be able to assist programs in their mission of educating and treating individuals with autism.” The Drive for Autism Foundation is a private charitable foundation that was established to raise funds and distribute them to schools and non-profit organizations committed to the education and treatment of persons with diagnoses under the autism spectrum.

**DON RUSSO** is the Senior Vice President of Oracle’s Insurance Global Business, a division of Oracle’s Financial Services Global Business Unit. His experience includes over 35 years in the software industry split evenly between working for major financial institutions and consulting to a number of industries. Mr. Russo served as Vice President at Salomon Brothers and then at Merrill Lynch, where he worked in both Finance and IT and was responsible for key systems such as Finance, Credit, Risk Management and Support for Trading Operations. He led the acquisition of Oracle’s Major Banking and Insurance assets including i-Flex, Adminserver and Skywire. Prior to his current role, he was one of three Senior Vice Presidents running Oracle’s Global Financial Services Business. Mr. Russo has an MBA from the Wharton School and a BA from Boston College.
‘SEA’ the WORLD

As the weather heats up and parents find themselves looking for activities to do with their children, it can be especially challenging for those with children on the spectrum to find autism-friendly things to do...

Fortunately, companies are constantly looking for ways to address the needs of those with disabilities. We have scoured the internet, and asked parents of children on the spectrum what they are most looking forward to doing.

Autism on the Seas is an exciting opportunity for families to enjoy autism friendly activities on their cruise. Since 2007, Autism on the Seas has worked with Royal Caribbean, the Disney Cruise Line, Celebrity Cruises and more to provide families a truly unique experience beginning the moment the cruise is booked. They provide a number of specialized private activities, and parents are able to enjoy a night of respite during their trip. Trained, professional staff is on board 24/7 to provide the activities and any assistance.

Beginning with just 4 cruises a year, Autism on the Seas now offers 30-40 cruises a year. Owner/Founder Michael Sobbell hopes it only grows from there saying, “Our goal is to really be able to become even larger and be able to accommodate more families and their schedules. We are all extremely passionate about this and we even have some of our volunteers fly into port on their own dollar just to spend time with the families.”

Mr. Sobbell continues, “When you spend a week with these families, it’s like they become your family. It’s changed my life and my family’s life. My son is now going to school to help those with autism because of his time spent helping out with Autism on the Seas.”

Autism on the Seas is also unique in that there is no “aging out”. Families with adult children can enjoy the benefits of the cruise, with staff assisting groups of all different ages.

A Vacation Financial Assistance Program is also available to financially assist families. For more information, visit autismontheseas.com

Autism Flying Preparation Programs

There are a number of airlines that now provide special trainings for those on the spectrum to ease the travel experience. JetBlue had partnered with Autism Speaks on “Blue Horizons for Autism,” which allows families to experience realistic settings while walking through the airport so they can better prepare for future travel. The families are able to check in at the airport and go through the process of boarding the plane. The planes then simulate flying to get passengers accustomed before they board a real flight. The program also works as a way to educate airline crew members about autism.

Newark Airport has also launched a program to help those with autism prepare for plane travel called “Autism Explores.” Similar to “Blue Horizons,” this program guides those with ASD and their guardians through important steps of the traveling process, like check-ins and baggage claim. For more information, visit autismspeaks.org/air-travel-resources.

Staying Home?

Summer weather means summer blockbusters! AMC has partnered with the Autism Society to create a wonderful and safe movie going experience for those on the spectrum. The theatre sounds are lowered, the lights are turned on, and guests are able to dance, walk and sing. AMC currently offers viewings the second and fourth Tuesday and Saturday, Saturdays at 10am, and Tuesdays at 7pm. For a list of participating theatres, please visit amctheatres.com.
Travel Tips
Ways to help you and your child with autism have a fun, memorable and safe family vacation!

01. Preparation
Help your child learn about the destination ahead of time and show them what to expect before you travel. Check out websites and look at videos and pictures. Taking the time to familiarize your child with new surroundings can help you prepare for the trip.

02. Identification
Wandering is very common in children with autism. Identification should be worn at all times and include the child’s name, diagnosis, your cell number, and any information that may help reunite you and your child should they wander.

03. Accommodations
Create a welcoming environment away from home by taking along your child’s blanket and a favorite toy. Before committing to a long trip, try spending a night at a friend or relative’s house to help your child get used to unfamiliar surroundings.

04. Schedule
Create a vacation schedule with as much routine and structure as possible. Follow this schedule from the beginning to the end of the trip. Do not over schedule the day as your child may require some down time.

05. Attractions
Think about what your child needs and ask for special-guest relations when booking activities. Some places will issue a pass that will allow for special accommodations for your child.

06. Memories
The most important part of your trip is to have fun and make memories! Pictures from your last vacation may help your child to look forward to the next family trip.

Tell us about your vacation on Facebook or Twitter using #MyEdenVacation
Participant Highlight: Nicky Caldarera

Then...

NICKY was diagnosed at 18 months old and has come a very long way. He was nonverbal and had poor social skills.

& Now

NICKY is very friendly and will go out of his way to introduce himself to new people. He enjoys many things like his vocational training at a local business, tap dancing, playing the keyboard, being in the running club, and performing in the drama program. He is a star on stage!