

# Shelter

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Potter League or with the North Kingstown shelter to bring our animals."

Szepatowski pointed out that the property at 44 Southwest Ave. will probably not be available because of Native American artifacts and other features that limit the use of the old town office building. She said that since 2000 her company, Paws and Claws, along with the help of the Friends of the Jamestown Animal Shelter have found homes for 561 animals in need of adoption.

"The problem is, Paws and Claws is no longer open," Szepatowski said. "Consequently, 50 to 100 animals a month have nowhere to go except other shelters where there is not always room."

Lawn Avenue School teacher Maureen McGuirl made the campaign for an animal shelter a class graduation project called Project Good Citizen. The students researched the need for an island animal shelter and endorsed the idea of tying a nature center to the facility.

The students presented the shortcomings of using shelters in neighboring towns, and emphasized the importance of having a facility on the island that was dependable and convenient.

"Stray animals can be a health problem, with rabies and other diseases," they said.

"The Osprey and Coyote study could be included as part of the animal shelter program," they added, emphasizing that education about the importance of this matter is essential to the shelter's success. They also mentioned that recent foreclosures of properties have left more animals homeless.

The student's comprehensive presentation drew warm applause from the audience attending the workshop, and most appeared to be supportive of the idea. When Szepatowski opened the floor for questions, few were asked.

To illustrate the support for her idea, Szepatowski thanked, "The sixth grade class at Lawn Avenue School who made and sold jewelry and gave us a check for the animal shelter for \$36 with a card they made themselves."

She also thanked "The kids from the Village Hearth Bakery who gave us close to \$50 from holding two yard sales." She mentioned that donations for the shelter were being held in two accounts set up by Town Finance Director Tina Collins at Town Hall.

Szepatowski also emphasized that the shelter would be self-supporting. "The shelter will not be staffed by town employees and will be run without using town money," she said.

Szepatowski concluded the workshop by addressing the council. All were present except for councilman Robert Sutton who was attending a community farm meeting.

"What we are looking for from the Town Council is the promise to lease the old water treatment plant in 2009 when it will be available," Szepatowski said. "If we can prove that we can make the necessary renovations without costing the town a dime, it would be an excellent use of the old building. We are confident that we can raise the money through grants and donations. We are looking for a 10-year lease because grant money is not available if we do not have a fairly lengthy lease," she added.

# Standardized program for special needs students sought by education commission

By Rudd Hall

The Rhode Island State House hosted the first ever State Commission for students with special needs children on April 30, with aims of organizing a program to help students with various degrees of learning disabilities.

One person providing testimony on the matter is a Jamestown resident living with Asperger's Syndrome.

This commission was brought together by state Representative Peter Palumbo of Cranston, who has two children living with autism. Autism is a brain development disorder that impairs social interaction and communication as well as causing restricted and repetitive behavior. Palumbo has experienced the difficulties and tribulations of being a parent, having children with varying degrees of the disease, in a school system that was not adequately prepared to deal with that issue, mostly due to the lack of awareness. But as Jamestown's Representative Bruce Long says, "the problem is that there is no set program to deal with the Autism Disorder Spectrum (which ranges from the most severe autistic child to a child who suffers mildly from ADD, an attention-deficit disorder), it may be town by town or school by school in terms of programs available to treat children with this disease."

Palumbo held discussions with many other parents of children afflicted with learning impairments that fall within this autism spectrum. He developed the commission in order to gather these parents, as well as experts throughout Rhode Island, with the goal of establishing a more rigorous program designed not only to help students and schools, but to also bring awareness to the Rhode Island community at large.

Dr. Andrea Chait of Pathways Strategic Teaching Center in Warwick began the discourse by outlining exactly how her organization helps children within the

Autism Disorder Spectrum as well as what they've accomplished thus far. "We're a comprehensive education and treatment program serving children with autism ages 3 to 15, and we base our strategies of a principle called Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)." Chait said. The organization, Pathways, is a self-contained non-profit private school with a satellite classroom in Jamestown, she added. Pathways provides consultation services to school systems and members of the community and currently serves 30 students from 17 different school districts in Rhode Island and Massachusetts, Chait said.

In the Pathways program, students are provided with a 1:1 staff to student ratio, which consists of a supervising teacher, a lead teacher assistant, as well as several teacher assistants, and program oversight is provided by a licensed psychologist, and a nationally-certified school psychologist and board certified behavior analyst.

The ABA method involves the use of science to improve behaviors of social significance for individuals. These principles of behavior are used to teach skills and the data collected is analyzed continuously to find out exactly what methods work for the children with various degrees of the disorder. However, it is not a method set in stone, it is an entire field of strategies proven effective in increasing the socialization, communication, and adaptive functioning of children.

Though it seems like a relatively new disease, this is not the case. The number of afflicted children has jumped due to group advocacy and an increased awareness of visible symptoms. In 2004 The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) mandated the special education services be based on "peer-reviewed research." Services provided must be based on reliable evidence that the program or service works and special education needs to collect evidence in the form of progress

during instruction through repeated assessments.

One island family is working to increase awareness of this disorder. The Burrows family, Melissa and Ed, have two children, Jessica and Andrew, who both suffer from Asperger's syndrome, a condition which falls within the Autism Disorder Spectrum. Jessica, who is a junior at North Kingstown High School, sat in on the commission hearing to tell her story. She started out by saying, "I was diagnosed with it (Asperger's) in 1997 when I was in kindergarten, and I spent a lot of time keeping it quiet until about the eighth grade when I really started to pursue the path of an advocate, and I've been doing that ever since." Jessica Burrows continued, "I was fortunate to be in the Jamestown school system, I believe they did a very good job, the way it was handled, anything I needed was there, the support was there," and added, "It was wonderful how my mom was listened to and because of this I believe I got the most out of my education and it set me on a good start which has continued throughout high school."

Jessica was very appreciative of Jamestown's acceptance of her condition, especially when it came to something most children look forward to, a fire drill, which gets them out of class temporarily. The disease causes Jessica to suffer from hyper-sensitive hearing, so before the school would perform the regulated fire drills to keep their children safe in a time of real trouble, Jessica would be informed five minutes earlier, saving her from being uncomfortable, making her feel included. "It made life a lot easier," she said. After her testimony, Rep. Palumbo congratulated Jessica, saying, "she speaks better in public than most of my colleagues."

What she and her mother Melissa both want people to understand, is that people who suffer with these afflictions from ADD to autism are contributing citizens, too. "We need to be accepted by others, I want to be open with it, I'm not Rainman," Jessica said, noting, "People with autism can be successful, they can do the work, it may take a little more support, a little more time but they can do the work."

Andrew, an eighth grader at Jamestown's Lawn Avenue School was a little shy at the hearing, but he did get a laugh out of the crowd saying, "You ever want to know anything about frogs, ask me, I'll tell you everything you need to know."

The Burrows family, as well as other families throughout Rhode Island will continue on their crusade of advocacy and awareness, until a comprehensive and standardized program is established, to achieve an equal standard of education and humanity for every student in the country.

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