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Free Resource Fair for the Developmentally Disabled in Marin County helps Families and Service Providers Address the Transition Years to Adulthood

San Rafael, CA, October 23, 2009 – Marin families of individuals with developmental disabilities face a steep learning curve twice. The first task is getting to know the special needs of the child and the resources available to help through their years as minors and within the education system. The second big hurdle comes near adulthood. Different service providers enter the picture as minors transition into adults. Teens with developmental disabilities, their parents, educators and service providers involved with them must learn to navigate new territory.

Helping to navigate this transition, the Golden Gate Regional Center, the GGRC Service Provider Advisory Committee, the Marin Autism Collaborative (MAC), the Marin County Office of Education and Area Board 5 have teamed up to provide a focused educational opportunity addressing these transition years. One group of particular concern is for individuals diagnosed on the autism spectrum. The rate of diagnosis has now increased to 1 in 100 rather than the previously reported 1 in 150.

One of the organizers of the event is the Marin Autism Collaborative, a two-year-old organization that has gathered momentum with the reality of autism being on the rise in Marin County. MAC was the brainchild of Lifehouse (MAC's fiscal sponsor), which has been serving individuals with developmental disabilities for over fifty-five years. A community wide survey conducted by Lifehouse in 2006 identified the need for a venue where people with autism and their allies could collaborate and exchange information.

Nancy Dow Moody, the President/CEO of Lifehouse, is proud of the work of MAC "It's wonderful to work with so many leaders in the field of autism to improve resources and education for the many people affected by autism in our county. The GGRC Service Provider Fair will enable families affected by all developmental disabilities to learn about the many resources available."

MAC's Transition Subcommittee, chaired by Matthew Tarver-Wahlquist, Day Program Director of Opportunity for Independence, will present workshops for parents and provide opportunities for discussion about the transition from secondary school to post-secondary opportunities. Matthew emphasizes "the transition years are some of the most important – and difficult – periods in a person's life. All too often individuals and their families are unaware both of the amount of planning required and what sorts of resources are available to them. This event has been designed to address both of these concerns."

Matthew would know. His organization, Opportunity for Independence (OFI), has been working with people with diagnoses on the autism spectrum in their programs for seventeen years. OFI's program participants with autism require service providers to be flexible, as these individuals benefit most from highly customized programs. Addressing the challenge of transitioning from their Individualized Educational Programs to specialized programs for these adults is paramount.

The event, with workshops presented separately in English and Spanish, will include:

- An Information Fair from 3:00–7:00 pm featuring the many service providers and resources available in Marin County for children, teens, and adults with special needs. Service providers will be there to answer questions.
- An IEP Transition Planning workshop from 5:00-6:30 pm to help parents learn about transition services for teenagers ages 16 and older.
- Support/Networking sessions from 3:00–5:00 pm and 6:30–7:00 pm.

Support/Networking Sessions in English will be led by Janet Lawson, parent, MFT, and Director of Autistry Studios, and Stephanie Stein, parent, MEd, and Director of Parent Services of Matrix Parent Network. Support for Families from San Francisco will be conducting the IEP Transition Planning workshop. Sessions in Spanish will be led by Rocio Smith from Area Board 5.

The four-hour resource fair will be held at the Marin County Office of Education on Wednesday, October 28 from 3pm-7pm. The event is free of charge to students with developmental disabilities and to anyone who is a resource for children with special needs: parents, special-education teachers, service providers, and social workers. Refreshments will be provided.

Event Location:

Marin County Office of Education

1111 Las Gallinas Ave
San Rafael, CA 94903

Resources:

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