

## Connecting to Autism

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>> DONNA CUSTARD: Hello, I'm Donna Custard sitting in for Ray Zardetto today. And welcome to Disabilities At Work Radio here

on the VoiceAmerica Business Network. Each week at noon Eastern Time, Disabilities At Work Radio explores issues, ideas, initiatives and innovations involving the workplace and people with disabilities and we discuss them with prominent members of the business, government and disability communities. Disabilities At Work Radio is brought to you this week by Capital One Financial Corporation.

Today's show is about autism. Capital One has an employee committee made up of employees who are all parents of children on the autism spectrum, and they have formed a group called the Autism Spectrum Connection. The mission of this workplace network is to provide support and helpful information for parents with children on the autism spectrum.

My first guest today is Don Busick, Managing Vice President of Operations at Capital One Financial Corporation. Don is here today to talk about how the Autism Spectrum Connection has benefitted him as a parent of a child with autism, as well as other colleagues at Capital One. Welcome, Don.

>> DON BUSICK: Thanks, Donna. Thanks for having me on the show.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: It's great to have you. Can you tell us a little bit about what you do at Capital One?

>> DON BUSICK: Sure. I work in the credit card business of

Capital One and I manage our operations, so many of our call centers and sales centers around the country.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Okay. And the Autism Spectrum Connection, why did Capital One get involved in that or start that program?

>> DON BUSICK: You know, I was really pleased that Capital One decided to start the Autism Spectrum Connection. As you know, autism is an epidemic that is affecting so many children in our community and I think the latest estimates show about one in every 110 children. And it is incredibly challenging for parents, both emotionally and financially, to care for children, particularly working parents, so the real mission of the Autism Spectrum Connection was to provide as much support and helpful information for our associates who have been touched by autism.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Great. And what was the impetus for this? How did this get started?

>> DON BUSICK: You know, I actually had the idea to start the Autism Spectrum Connection based on a personal experience I had just a week after my son was diagnosed. I was meeting with a coworker who set up some time to ask me some business advice, and he happened to mention that his son was on the autism spectrum and after I got rid of a lump in my throat, given that it was so new to me, I spent the next hour asking him for advice and I learned so much from him. And what it made me realize is that there is no better source for helpful

information than to speak to another parent who has walked in your shoes. And that was the real genesis of the idea. And we approached our human resources department here at Capital One to help us connect more associates within the company whose lives have been touched by autism and that's how the whole thing got started.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: So you are one of the Founding Fathers then?

>> DON BUSICK: I am, in a sense.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: What are the goals of this -- now you are calling this a network, or what do you refer to this as?

>> DON BUSICK: We refer to it as a connection, but it's basically a network of associates.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Okay. What are the goals of the Connection?

>> DON BUSICK: Our primary goal is to provide support and helpful and useful information to our associates whose lives have been touched by autism, and that includes everything in helping to navigate our benefits program to financial support options that may be available to our associates. We also coordinate speaking events where we bring in experts in the field of autism. And then we provide easy access to useful information. We have a wiki or a website that has all sorts of helpful community resources for our associates.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: And when you say your associates, is this just that one building or is this throughout all of Capital One?

>> DON BUSICK: It's throughout all of Capital One, any of the branches that we have all of and any of our corporate sites around the country.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Give us an idea of how big that is.

>> DON BUSICK: Well right now we have about over 50 associates who have joined our membership. We have more that attend our event, but about 50 associates who joined our membership ranks right now and we have only been existence for about the past year and a half.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Okay.

>> DON BUSICK: And it's been a wonderful experience as there is just so much to learn from folks would have been through the journey before you and that's really the whole purpose of the connection.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: So you mentioned there is about 50 associates involved, and they are across the country?

>> DON BUSICK: That's correct. We have the largest membership base here in Richmond, that's where this started, in Richmond, Virginia, but as you know, Capital One has branches all around the country. And so, as the word has gotten out about the purpose of the Autism Spectrum Connection we have continued to have more members join across the globe.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: And the people who are getting involved, the associates that are getting involved, they are all touched by autism in some way?

>> DON BUSICK: They are. We don't have a strict rule on what it takes to be a member as some people just want to get involved because they like to help their community. But primarily it's been the purpose of this has been to help associates who have family members or loved ones who have been touched by autism in some way, shape or form.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: And that's great and they are getting resources from other people who have also been touched by it and have first-hand experience in working with other organizations or support networks. So that's really fantastic. How did you get the support from Capital One?

>> DON BUSICK: Well, the way we did it, was a handful of us who initially started this concept reached out to our human resources team who worked with other associates before to set up our connection groups. We have other Connection groups, things like our Adoption Connection, other sort of communities of interest. And the business response we received from our human resource department was incredibly receptive and they really provided a lot of the financial support and assistance to help set up the network and address some of the needs that came from some of the early members.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: That's terrific. What has the group accomplished so far, would you say?

>> DON BUSICK: So in addition to growing our membership base, we have had several events where we have brought in experts in

the community to help share some of the latest teaching techniques for how to help children with autism, to help work effectively within the public school system, which is such a challenge for so many parents.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Mm-hmm.

>> DON BUSICK: Our benefits department also listened to some of the needs of our associates and the company decided to add applied behavioral therapy benefits to the medical coverage plan and increase some short term rehabilitation limits that we had for speech and occupational therapy, which is so critical for children on the autism spectrum.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Yeah. And the whole point of this is to help parents, obviously, of children with autism or individuals within the organization who have been touched by autism in some way, shape or form. Why do you feel that this is so important that it's provided in your workplace?

>> DON BUSICK: Well, it is such a difficult challenge for so many parents and as an organization we have so many resources available to us here at Capital One. And I think personally it was important to me because raising a child on the autism spectrum is incredibly confusing and I personally benefitted a lot from the support I got from my co-workers and felt like I was honestly obligated to do the same thing for other coworkers who are either currently or going to soon go through the same experience that I did.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: What kind of advice did you get from your coworkers? I'm curious to hear how that helped you.

>> DON BUSICK: You know, I think one of the biggest pieces of advice was honestly just knowing that someone had been through this before. You know, early on after you are in a situation where your child has been diagnosed with autism, there is an incredible need to know that there can be a positive future for your family. And I think that was one of the biggest emotional lifts that you get from talking to other parents that have been through it before.

Clearly, there are some very practical things around how to connect with resource providers in the community, that was probably the biggest one that benefitted me personally as there isn't exactly a playbook for what to do once your child has been diagnosed and having other parents be able to share some of the journeys that they took and some of the helpful resources they found in the community was what I found the most beneficial.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Plus the spectrum is so broad as well. I mean, there are so many different degrees of autism that what might work for one parent may not work for another. So it's great that you have so many people that you can touch base with and get information from.

>> DON BUSICK: It's very true. And so the larger our membership ranks grows, I think the more valuable it is. And

you also have children who are on parts of the spectrum as well as all ages. So the challenges of a parent who has a recently diagnosed challenged child is different than one who has, let's say, an 18-year-old child who they are looking for how to support them as they move into adulthood.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: What kind of advice would you give to other parents that might be listening now who have autistic children?

>> DON BUSICK: You know, the best advice I can give is to seek out other people, whether it's inside your workplace or outside of your workplace, who are in the same situation as you and share your experiences. What I found it's just the best way to really learn all of the options that are really available to you. And frankly, it's just a wonderful form of comfort.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Mm-hmm. Do you find that some parents are reluctant to share the fact that they have got a child on the autism spectrum?

>> DON BUSICK: I do. And I honestly put myself in that camp. It was one of the first barriers that I had overcome and I really appreciate the support I received come from of my coworkers on this particular topic because it is a challenging thing to want to share that about your personal experience. But I do find, as usual, you get back as much as you give in this case, and the more that you share the more you learn about what is possible and the help that you can give to your child.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Mm-hmm. Can you give us any anecdotal

stories or any examples of anything that you have seen since of the successes that have arisen out of the Connection?

>> DON BUSICK: You know, I think there have been about a couple that I have personally witnessed where we had some family, some members who weren't aware of the benefits programs that were actually available to them through Capital One that were able to get some behavioral therapy benefits that really have helped some young children. One child I know of in particular developed the ability to speak, which is so exciting to hear when you realize that that is possible and that it might not have happened. And I say might not have happened had we not started this.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Or it could have taken a lot longer.

>> DON BUSICK: Exactly.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: You try to look for these, um, resources on your own and I think it's very valuable that you have got other people that you can reach out to within your own organization and just touch base with them and find out what is going on, what are your experiences, what are the good resources what are the ones that are not so helpful and take it from there.

And I think it's wonderful that Capital One has included new benefits to its employees, because you mentioned behavioral therapy, occupational therapy and those are just so important for children who are affected by autism. So that's wonderful.

>> DON BUSICK: It really is.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Yeah, and we actually need to take a short break right now, but when we come back your colleague, Vicki Mirandah who is the Senior Director of Human Resources at Capital One Financial is going to be joining us, and we are going to discuss more of your company's four online associate connection groups and we will be able to talk to her a little bit more about all of the benefits and how this actually came to be within Capital One. So I'm really excited to talk to her.

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>> DONNA CUSTARD: Welcome back to Disabilities At Work Radio here on VoiceAmerica's Business Network. The show this week is

brought to you by Capital One Financial Corporation.

I'm Donna Custard and I have been speaking with Don Busick who is the Managing Vice President of Operations at Capital One Financial Corporation. Don and I are now joined by Vicki Mirandah; she is the senior director of human resources for Capital One Financial Corporation. Welcome to the show, Vicki.

>> VICKI MIRANDAH: Thank you for having me on the show, Donna.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: We are so glad that you could join us. Don and I have been talking quite a bit about the Autism Spectrum Connection that he helped to start at Capital One Financial. Why don't you tell us a little bit about what you do for Capital One?

>> VICKI MIRANDAH: Sure. As you mentioned, I work in the human resources department and currently I work on the corporate diversity and inclusion initiatives for Capital One and very much love my job.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: I can see why because Don has been telling us about how this all came about and it just seems like such a tremendous help to families that are affected by autism. Is that the only connection group that is offered by Capital One?

>> VICKI MIRANDAH: We have four connection groups today at Capital One and hope to build out a few more within the coming months. What we have today are the Adoption Connection, the Parent Connection, the Flexible Worker Connection as well as the Autism Spectrum Connection had you heard Don talk about.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: That's great. And these programs are changing the way employees are interacting it seems. Why does Capital One offer these various connection groups?

>> VICKI MIRANDAH: At Capital One we really believe it's important for our associates to be able to bring their whole self to work. And what I mean by that is we know that at Capital One our associates have, you know, wonderful talent and skill sets to do the job, but that is only part of who they are. The other part is very much, you know, what you don't see at work and we believe that in order for associates to be fully engaged and productive, it's important to allow them to bring the other self of themselves to work and things like connection sites as well as our five associate networks do help them to pay attention to that part of their lives which is very important.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: That's terrific. So Don was telling us a little bit about how he reached out to human resources and through a lot of interworking within the company was able to start the Autism Spectrum Connection. Can you tell us a little bit more about those interworkings so that if there are other people involved with their businesses looking to offer groups like this, can you give us some advice or some of the step-by-steps that you used in order to get these four different groups into place at Capital One?

>> VICKI MIRANDAH: Absolutely. One of our biggest lessons

learned, and this is been how we have built up our four connection sites and our five associate networks, is to actually listen and pay attention to what your associates or employees are telling you. I know that seems to be very simple advice, but it's pretty powerful.

About ten years ago when we started our associate networks and we really started with our women's network, what we did was actually to look at what was happening around us. We noticed there was a group of women associates in IT who were getting together every so often for lunch. And so we approached them and asked them, you know, what that was all about and candidly they told us that they got together every so often just to connect, support and network with each other. And that actually became the nucleus and the genesis of our women's network at Capital One. And in short order we built our four other networks today which are the African American, the Asian, the Hispanic and the LGBT, which is the lesbian, bi-sexual, gay and transgender network. And along with that we also built the four connection sites that Don and I referenced earlier.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: So what is the difference between a connection site and a network?

>> VICKI MIRANDAH: The biggest difference I would say is that our connection sites or our connection groups, if you will, associates come together around a cause that is important to

them. For example, it could be autism or being a parent or being a flexible worker. Whereas with our associate networks, it's really aligned around a little bit more of the demographic part of who you are from a diversity perspective, be it as a woman or as a person of color, being identified as Asian, Hispanic, LGBT, et cetera.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Mm-hmm. Now, with regard to the Autism Spectrum Connection, Don was telling us, and correct me if I'm wrong, Don, that as a result of starting this connection, new services or new benefits were offered as part of the benefits package within Capital One. I believe, Don, you had mentioned the behavioral therapy, the occupational therapy. What were the others?

>> DON BUSICK: Speech therapy as well.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Speech therapy. How -- I can imagine how tremendously helpful that is to a parent to have that covered, because I imagine those services are rather expensive.

Internally, Vicki, was that difficult to coordinate and make that happen?

>> VICKI MIRANDAH: Actually it wasn't and I'm happy to say that, because one of the ways that we work at Capital One is we have very much a collaborative environment and team work is something is absolutely underscored and emphasized. And when Don and his colleagues came to us and asked us to look for assistance in looking at some of the health benefits, it wasn't

difficult to sit down with our benefits partners in HR to look at what was on the table and then to also go back to our healthcare provider to see if there were other opportunities that we had even not invoked or not taken full advantage of. And that, I'm pleased to say, is typically how we work at Capital One, it's a very collaborative environment.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Great. I'm going to pose this question to both of you, now, Don had mentioned that the group will bring in speakers or experts in the field of autism. Don, is that something coordinated by you or, Vicki, is that by you? How does that work?

>> DON BUSICK: This is Don. We tend to work as an integrated team on this. So I'd say it's both of us. Usually it's -- the ideas start from one of our members, but, um, Vicki and the human resources team bring a lot of expertise in how to pull together events and work with us to help bring in and in some cases identify speakers and in some cases just to help us with the logistics of how to pull off an event like that.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: And, Vicki, how do you reach out? Do you reach out to the community, or are these resources that you already know about?

>> VICKI MIRANDAH: Actually, we leverage a couple of different sources. So in bringing in external speakers is something that we do quite often at Capital One. So there is a network of sources that I depend on, national, sometimes we do local. And

many a times such as with Don and the group, we actually go to them because they tend to be the best sources of information and work with some of their resources and subject matter experts and we help that to bring them on board to Capital One, if you will.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Mm-hmm. That's terrific. Um, any other advice that you would give to employees looking to implement a program like this, Vicki?

>> VICKI MIRANDAH: I would absolutely say yes. I would say think about this from a partnership approach. Do leverage your HR team members. And for the HR professionals, I would really advise them to listen to what your associates are saying and listen carefully to what they want and build something that hits the sweet spot that works for both your associates and works both for the company as well.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: That's terrific. Have you ever had to turn anyone down who has requested a new group?

>> VICKI MIRANDAH: Yes, we have, because, you know, there is always more -- you don't want to bite off more than you can chew. And sometimes there are requests that may not be aligned with what we are, you know, working on currently or perhaps we will revisit some of these requests in the future.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Well, between the networks that you mentioned and the connections that you mentioned, it seems like you have covered a very broad spectrum of things that people

would be concerned about coming into the office and you had mentioned coming in as a whole person so that they are must more engaged in their working while they are at the office. And when you and I had spoke previously, it is a great recruitment tool as well to list all of these benefits that are offered to associates and it helps with your retention of your employees so that they are not distracted with thinking about, geez, you know, I really need to think about occupational therapy for my child and they get distracted and also their overall job satisfaction. I think it's a tremendous little package that you offer to your associates. So congratulations. Even though I'm not an employee, thank you for doing this, because it's really a tremendous opportunity, I think, for your associates to be more involved with not only Capital One, but with their community as well.

>> VICKI MIRANDAH: Thank you. I agree.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: So we are going to have to take another break. We have been talking today about autism and ways in which companies such as Capital One can support employees who have children on the autism spectrum. But before we go to the break, let me invite all of you listening to Disabilities At Work Radio to join our tteam on Twitter at DisabilitiesAt and also friend us on Facebook at Disabilities At Work. And if any of you have comments or suggestions you can e-mail them to us at [info@DisabilitiesAtWork.org](mailto:info@DisabilitiesAtWork.org). I'm Donna Custard sitting in

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in sponsoring this week's show.

Earlier today I was speaking with Don Busick and Vicki Mirandah of Capital One about the Autism Spectrum Connection that was created by employees whose lives are touched by autism in some way.

I'm now joined by Laura Turley who is the director of programming and a therapist and a consultant for COLE, which is an acronym for Community Outreach Learning Experiences. Laura is responsible for designing and directing behavioral and educational programs for children with autism and their families. She also consults with families and schools and conducts individual therapy. Welcome, Laura.

>> LAURA TURLEY: Hi. How are you?

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Fine, thanks. Thanks for joining us today.

>> LAURA TURLEY: Thank you.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Can you tell us a little bit more about COLE and how it got started?

>> LAURA TURLEY: Sure. Well, I started in this field almost fifteen years ago really by taking an ad off of the psychology bulletin board at U. W. Milwaukee where I was doing my undergrad. I started working through Wisconsin Early Autism Project there in Wisconsin and when I moved to New England about eleven years ago I started working with the Building Blocks Program on the North Shore, and then about a year after that went private and started COLE Incorporated and have been

working privately since, also in and out of schools and working with families.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Okay. And you are located in Marshfield, Massachusetts, right?

>> LAURA TURLEY: Correct.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: So tell us a little bit how families find information regarding receiving services at home for perhaps their children who are on the autism spectrum.

>> LAURA TURLEY: Sure. Well, the first thing they would do, really, is talk to the pediatrician. If they are at a point where they know that they are going to require services in their home or out of home for their child that means they have probably already been to the pediatrician and that appointment usually leads to appointments with other specialists like speech therapists, occupational therapists, physical therapists and behaviorists.

If the child is under three, that would also lead to a phone call and appointment with their local early intervention. And they would, then those specific specialists or the early intervention would then set them up with the services that they need.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Now, you and I had talked previously about some of the statistics regarding how many children are actually affected by autism.

>> LAURA TURLEY: Correct.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Can you just give us those statistics?

>> LAURA TURLEY: Right now, the latest statistics are really 1 in about 110, which is daunting. It's also overwhelmingly more boys than girls, which is yet to really be discovered why. But it is, you know, when I started in this field, like I said, sixteen years ago, it was more like 1 in 150.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Wow. And when we were talking about the individuals from Capital One, Don and Vicki a little bit earlier, they had talked about this program that they started at Capital One because so many employees had individuals within their families, usually children, who were affected by autism, and they were having difficulty finding services. And they talked a little bit about the types of services that their children needed, but can you talk about other types of needs that arise in the home or in the community with children who are affected by autism?

>> LAURA TURLEY: Sure. You know, some of the main needs that a child on the autism spectrum, or specialists said that they would need, would be a speech therapist, many times occupational therapists and physical therapists because of motor planning difficulties. And most common is a behaviorist to work with different behavioral issues.

But also a family would need other things. You are talking about your entire family when you talk about having a child with autism. So the family would need to access parent

support groups, sibling support groups are also growing and are extremely important for brothers and sisters of children with autism so they don't feel alone and so they can have a voice and meet other children that have brothers or sisters with autism and understand that they are not alone and that, you know, other kids are also dealing with this and, you know, be able to talk about and work out their feelings because there is a lot of feelings there that your typically developing siblings don't have.

Also social skills activities, you know, different types of things that you can access within your own community. You know, library hour, gymnastics, music, dance, after-school care and programs with the school that you can use for extracurricular activities and also for generalizing skills that your kids learn in PT and OT and speech therapy classes.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: But not all of these services would be provided in the home, correct?

>> LAURA TURLEY: Correct.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: So are some of these services more appropriate for providing, let's say, in the school during school hours or actually physically taking your child to a location for these services?

>> LAURA TURLEY: Absolutely. If your child has been diagnosed with autism, more than likely your child will have an IEP which is an individual education plan that is used within the school.

And so within the school that means your child will receive services that the school and the entire team deems necessary for your child to increase their skill levels, speech therapy and occupational therapy and physical therapy. You can also access those types of things in addition to behavioral therapy through your insurance. So you can take your child to a speech therapist or an occupational therapist or a physical therapist outside of school or outside of home. You can also have services, especially the behavioral services that provide ABA, which is applied behavioral analysis. You can have that done within your home.

I have had that in my home for our second child. I also have taken both of our children outside of the home to PTs and OTs and speech therapy. Sometimes it works better in your home, sometimes it works better outside of your home. You need to feel out what works best for your child and your family and go with that.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Mm-hmm. And how would someone find these type of services?

>> LAURA TURLEY: Well, like I said, the first thing you do is call your pediatrician. That would lead to phone calls and referrals to other specialists. You can also call the special education department within your school system. They would be a wealth of knowledge and information for resources. You can also contact your local ARC, and they can give you information

on respite and different activities, places, you know, places to call and go to.

You can also Google autism, honestly, and that would give you an abundance of information you would have to sort through, but you can locate specialty services within your community. And, again, extracurricular activities within your community that really extend the therapeutic model to a more social level that really helps kids' general life skills.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: When we were talking about Capital One, they had talked about reaching out to peers who may be affected by the autism spectrum in some way, shape or form, and they are usually a tremendous source for information and resources.

>> LAURA TURLEY: Absolutely. If you contacted your SPEDPAC, which is your Special Education Parent Advisory Council for your school, you can join, you can learn from it, but you also might be surprised at what you can contribute to it also. You know, just going to a couple different meetings can really open your eyes to other people being in the same boat and dealing with some of the same and some very different issues. And you really find that you can learn a lot and you can contribute a lot.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Now these various services, are these all delivered by certified or trained therapists, or is it a very broad spectrum of who is delivering the services?

>> LAURA TURLEY: You know, that can depend, it can vary. Most

of the services -- well, all of the services that you are going to receive in the schools are going to be by certified and trained professionals. Services you would obtain through behavioral companies that provide applied behavioral analysis and behavioral training are going to be provided through trained professionals.

Families have also chosen to have their babysitters or their nieces or nephews or aunts or uncles trained by someone, you know, sometimes within a school system or someone like myself who provides training in those areas and train them enough to be able to work with their cousin or their niece or their nephew to be able to provide extra help; if they are looking for just a little bit of extra help maybe at an odd period of time in the day that they can't, you know, take their child out or get someone from one of the other professional organizations to come in, maybe they are more comfortable with someone in their family helping out. It's really a personal and private choice, but there are definitely a lot of options.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: And then it would start like you mentioned with the pediatrician to determine, okay, here is where you are on the autism spectrum and here is what I would recommend for services.

>> LAURA TURLEY: Right. There are going to be appointments with psychologists and neurologists, you know, that are going to help you out and figure out exactly where you are, where

your child is at and what level they are at.

They are going to make recommendations for services that they feel your child needs, but you also have to listen to your inner voice and you also have to follow the lead of your child. And if you feel that there have been a lot of suggestions that maybe not one in particular suggestion that you feel is an area that your child needs to work on, you need to follow your gut. You need to ask for that and you need to say, you know, I know you didn't really recommend speech therapy, but, gosh, we are really having a hard time understanding, you know, my son or my daughter, can we have an evaluation? You have to follow your gut and you have to listen to your child and your inner voice.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Mm-hmm. Now, how long do these types of services last?

>> LAURA TURLEY: Well, um, right now there isn't a cure for autism. Right now there are children who receive services from as soon as they are diagnosed, maybe at 18 months, 24 months, three years old and they can receive services lifelong.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Okay. So it doesn't just stop once they are out of school.

>> LAURA TURLEY: No, it certainly doesn't have to and especially since the Erica Autism Bill enact relative to insurance coverage for autism was passed and begins next year, January first, there are going to be a lot more options through insurance for parents to be able to continue services outside

of school and after the children reach age 22 and are no longer under the coverage of the school system.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: That was going to be my next question, to find out how much insurance would be obligate to cover. So that's great to hear that that will be covered under a lot of insurance policies starting, you said, next year, right?

>> LAURA TURLEY: Absolutely. January first.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: That is terrific.

>> LAURA TURLEY: I plan on taking advantage of it myself.

>> DONNA CUSTARD. Oh, I'm sure. I know how expensive those services can be.

>> LAURA TURLEY: They can be and they are critical.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Yes, they are. We need to take a little break. I have been talking with Laura Turley about finding resources for children with autism. When we come back, we will be talking more to Laura about obtaining services. Stay with us, I'm Donna Custard and this is Disabilities At Work Radio.

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>> DONNA CUSTARD: Welcome back to Disabilities At Work Radio. Remember that Disabilities At Work can be heard each Wednesday at noon Eastern Time on VoiceAmerica's Business Network. We have been discussing things about autism today on the show.

Now we are going to be discussing how to go about obtaining services for your children.

And I'm back with Laura Turley and during the break Laura and I talked a little bit about extracurricular activities. And, Laura, I'd like to pick up on how extracurricular activities have helped you both personally and professionally with children on the autism spectrum.

>> LAURA TURLEY: Sure. You know, for my own children, I have two children -- three children, and our older two boys have some special needs. Our older son has some attention difficulties and he has been challenged with some sensory speech and behavioral issues. Our younger son has PDDNOS, which is on the autism spectrum, sensory difficulties, motor planning issues, speech issues, and anxiety related issues.

And what I have done in terms of extracurricular activities, things -- activities that I have accessed outside of school related services and outside of home based related services is really look at the community. You know, we have been able to join in library story hours to help our boys work in groups, sitting still, paying attention. We have them in gymnastic classes, which, again, helps with groups, physical therapy, occupational therapy, a lot of the sensory integration piece, even imitation skills. You know, music classes, dance classes, things that really help our kids work in groups and imitate and work on generalizing skills that they learn in

physical therapy and occupational therapy, really help our kids learn to work in groups and to use the skills that they are learning on one-on-one in a more social situation, which is much more natural and helps them learn to imitate their peers.

You know, as therapists and as parents we can, you know, say, okay, let's do this, let's do that, imitate this, imitate that, but we are never going to be five years old again. If our child is five years old and has special needs or doesn't have special needs, they need to start, you know, imitating and learning from another five-year-old. So you need to put them in that situation.

So we have really, you know, tried to access a lot of the extracurricular activities within our community.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: And like you said before, if you follow your child's lead, he or she will tell you what is going on and whether or not the activity is appropriate for them.

>> LAURA TURLEY: Oh, absolutely, you need to talk with the coaches and the teachers. You know, if your child needs one-on-one assistance or they might need visual aids, extra time to do things.

You know, with our older son, you know, everyone in the community was trying soccer so we were going to try soccer and I thought that my child would really like it because he really liked ball play, and we went and it was a disaster. It was completely overwhelming for him. Visually, it was just too

much. I really feel that he had trouble with trying to track the ball, trying to see where the children were going. It didn't work for him. It was overwhelming and he melted down. It was not a positive experience. And you know what? It doesn't matter to me if all of the other kids on the block are playing soccer. It didn't work out for my child, so we tried something different.

We found that golf is wonderful for him. It's much more calm. He knows exactly where the ball is going. There is not so much visual stimulation with people going back and forth. He loves it and he's good at it. So that's what we are going with. You know, we follow our child's lead. Not everyone has to play soccer.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Yeah. And it sounds like you are finding the right fit for him. Now, getting back to services that families should be availing themselves of, what exactly might a family expect when someone comes into their home to work with their child or if they go out into the community and seek services? Can they expect that their child will immediately conform to what is being brought before them?

>> LAURA TURLEY: I wouldn't imagine. I wouldn't imagine it would be immediate because kids on the autism spectrum are going to have difficulties in specific areas and kids on the autism spectrum are going to learn differently. So, it might take many more repetitions of learning a skill before a child

on the spectrum is able to master that skill or gain the understanding of that skill. So, no, it's not going to happen overnight, but the point is is that it can happen. And with time and with a lot of patience and with repetition, kids on the autism spectrum can absolutely learn. And it can be frustrating because it takes longer than you would like or longer than you think, but stick it out because it can happen.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: And it's also therapeutic and helpful for the other family members. You had mentioned in the previous segment about having siblings learning more the autism spectrum and getting some therapy themselves so that they understand more about what their brother and sister is going through.

>> LAURA TURLEY: Absolutely. You know, once in a while my older son will ask why our middle son screams so much or doesn't understand this or does this or doesn't do that. And it can be frustrating because he sees his friends' brothers and sisters not acting that way, so, you know, why does his?

And it's helpful for siblings to have an understanding, like I said, to have a voice, to have someone else to talk to and bond with and, you know, talk with and say, oh, your brother does this, your sister does that? Oh, my gosh, so does mine. You know? So, I mean, it's fair, isn't it? It's fair. As adults we talk about things and work out our issues and children need to do the same thing.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Mm-hmm. What kind of time commitment could

parents expect to be giving to the therapies? Is it several hours a day or is it once a week?

>> LAURA TURLEY: Oh, it can definitely be several hours a day. It depends on the service. You know, typically speech therapy services are one to several times a week. In the school system, it can be even more than that when it happens during the school day.

You know, I have my middle boy going to physical therapy activities several times a week, my older child several times a week. It depends on the child, and it certainly depends on how it can work into your family. Sometimes people find that they are able to obtain more services taking their child outside of the home because they work better sort of off their own turf. Sometimes it works better to have people come into their home and they can get more hours of services that way. Some children work better in the morning than in the afternoon. It really depends. And the commitment is huge. It's absolutely huge. I'm not going to lie.

It's much more time, you know, obtaining services than you ever thought, but it's so worth it in the end. It's absolutely worth it in the end. And these are our children and this is what we do for our children and we do the best that we can. We obtain the best we can and the most that we can and what works in each family is what works. Each family is different.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: And it sounds like families need to have a lot of patience, understanding, and actually lower expectations initially until they start moving into the process and maybe even have some flexibility when they are starting with therapeutic services.

>> LAURA TURLEY: Sure. Because you are going to find that, you know, maybe one therapist works better than the other or one gym is better than the other. And you are going to find that some things just work better, some things don't, you might find that swimming works a whole lot better than, you know, another activity or having a one-on-one therapist works better than group therapy. You are going to work -- there are going to be a lot of kinks that you are going to have to work out. That's absolutely true.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: So with any kind of therapy, whether it's occupational therapy or speech therapy or even going into different activities such as gymnastics, or you mentioned golf and soccer, do you recommend that families set up goals and objectives for their child or for the entire family?

>> LAURA TURLEY: I think it would be fair to have something in mind that you would like to see happen. I don't recommend -- I don't recommend putting a lot of pressure on the child saying, okay, with this class we want to try and do this or that. What you want your child to do is have a whole lot of fun. If therapy is fun, therapy works.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: I think that applies to just about everything that kids do.

>> LAURA TURLEY: Absolutely.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Now, when services end or maybe draw to a close or slow down, is there any kind of a transition that gets worked into the goals and objectives or a plan of sorts?

>> LAURA TURLEY: Sure. For example, when a child is exiting an early intervention program, which a child is in until they are age three, and they would be entering the school system, they would be exiting an ISSP, and entering an IEP program, which means the goals and objectives that we are working on in early intervention with those therapists, those occupational therapists and physical therapists, speech and behavioral therapists, those goals and objectives would transfer then to the school.

And what the school would look at is what has already been done and what the goals and objectives were and build on that and build and write new goals and objectives to be able to work within the school system, which often times change, because you are going from one environment, which could have been all services at home, to another environment, where services are going to be happening at school, which can be overwhelming for a child and you have to take those, you know, those concerns into consideration when you are writing goals and objectives and be able to write goals and objectives that

that include socialization and integration with small groups to be able to generalize the skills.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Now, you had mentioned transitioning from an ISSP to an IEP, which follows the child all the way through high school. Is there a transition from the IEP into adulthood?

>> LAURA TURLEY: It depends on where the child is going to go. If the child is going to remain at home, or go into one of the many group home situations that are available. It depends on whether the child is going to be. So, yes, those goals and objectives can continue. And if there is a case worker that is working with that family, then they will, you know, that person will be able to help them if they are going to be in, like I said, in a group home, there will be someone there that can oversee helping that person as an adult continue to work on goals and objectives. And also, you know, the family is always going to be working on different goals for that child, whether that person is a child or an adult, and so it is lifelong. There are always going to be things and concerns that person with autism is going to be working on. So they will always need support.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Laurie, you are such a wealth of information. Now I understand that you write columns on autism, correct?

>> LAURA TURLEY: I do.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: How could people view your columns?

>> LAURA TURLEY: They can go to Examiner.com for Boston, and they would look under the Marshfield Parenting and Autism Examiner. And they would be able to read my columns there.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: Great. Thank you so much for all of your input today, Laura, it's really been very informative.

>> LAURA TURLEY: You are very welcome, it's my pleasure.

>> DONNA CUSTARD: I'd also like to thank all of my other guests today, Don Busick and Vicki Mirandah from Capital One Financial Corporation. I'd also like to thank them for sponsoring this week's show.

Next Wednesday at noon Eastern Time we will be back with another show, exploring ideas, innovations and initiatives involving the workplace and people with disabilities. Until then, I'm Donna Custard sitting in for Ray Zardetto and this is Disabilities At Work Radio.

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