

# HE GRADUATED!!! NOW WHAT? ITS TIME TO GET AHEADD

Much attention is shifting toward our adult population with various learning differences and the need to provide effective support services that maximize independence. More specifically, there is a clear increase in focus toward providing appropriate post-secondary support in higher education for students with High Functioning Autism, Asperger's Syndrome, Non Verbal Learning Disorder (NVLD) and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). According to a recent NY Times article, 'with earlier and better intervention, more of these children are considering college, and parents, who have advanced them through each grade with intensive therapies and unrelenting advocacy, are clamoring for the support services to make that possible.' Unlike many other (residential) programs for students with various learning challenges in higher education, AHEADD (Achieving in Higher Education with Autism and Developmental Disabilities) works with students in the college environment and is currently serving students in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and in Northern Virginia.

AHEADD was developed in cooperation with Equal Opportunity Services of Carnegie Mellon University

in response to this increasing need for specialized support. Carolyn Komich Hare, Founder and Director of AHEADD, piloted

the program in 2002 at Carnegie Mellon in an effort to determine whether an individualized support program similar to those utilized in many public school systems could help a struggling student with Asperger's Syndrome achieve success. The answer is a resounding 'YES.'

AHEADD is specifically designed to address inherent social, communication and organizational difficulties associated with Autism Spectrum Disorders, NVLD, ADD and helps students develop individualized strategies to independently manage their college ca-

reers. AHEADD compliments the college accommodation plan by providing a forum in which students identify their needs and are assisted in developing effective strategies for managing all aspects of their college careers. These aspects include, but are not limited to:

- effectively advocating for and communicating needs to faculty

- time management/organizational skills

- opportunities for social interaction and development of social skills
- facilitated integration into the campus community

AHEADD staff work alongside each student during individual meetings to identify each semester's goals and subsequently determine how the staff and student will work together to achieve those goals. Staff liaise with Disability Resource Services regarding development and implementation of accommodations, as well as with each student's professors. In addition to providing individualized support, AHEADD believes that creating general awareness within a campus community is a vital to creating a sense of tolerance, understanding and community. To this end, staff conduct regular inservices for faculty and other key personnel (Health Services, Counseling and Psychological Services, etc).

Since its inception, AHEADD has been highlighted on two occasions in the *Chronicles of Higher Education* as an outstanding program and was also recently distinguished in the *New York Times Education quarterly*. As AHEADD grows to meet the needs of greater numbers of students across the country, it expects to continue setting the standard for exemplary support of exceptional students.

If you would like more information about AHEADD, please email [carolyn@aheadd.org](mailto:carolyn@aheadd.org).

