

Spring 2009

Issue 4

# The Thread Report



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## *Success Has Many Faces at The Uncommon Thread*

"We established The Uncommon Thread," said Founder Greg Carr, "because my wife and I knew, from first-hand experience, that ABA therapy can work miracles for children diagnosed with autism and other developmental-delay disorders. Every day I come into work and am overwhelmed by the number of parents out there who need our help, not only with affordable ABA therapy but in other areas as well.

"They need direction. How do you know what is best for your child? How do you know where to go to get services? How do you know how to restore some normalcy to a family life shattered by autism? They also need affordable ABA therapy and help in

negotiating the insurance maze, the confusing paperwork entailed in an Individualized Education Program (IEP), and a basic working knowledge of strategies to communicate with their child. I am proud of the work we do here and inspired to continue by our day-to-day successes."

Three-year old Anthony is one such success story. At an early age Anthony's mother had a sense that he wasn't progressing as he should. She kept taking him to various doctors in an attempt to find out what was wrong and what could be done. Finally, at the age of 22 months, he was diagnosed with autism.

Anthony's Mom, Lori, tells the story best. "At the tender age of 22 months, Anthony

banged his head on floors and walls, made no eye contact, spoke not a word, and had no means of communication. He could not even point his finger at an object that he desired. I didn't know how to communicate with him. He couldn't tell me what was wrong or what he wanted. I felt helpless."

She credits Dr. Lara Morse at St. Barnabas Hospital's Pediatric Developmental Center for finally giving her the support and hope she needed. "Dr. Morse recommended extensive ABA therapy and I believe that has made the difference for us," she said.

"Anthony has been receiving ABA therapy for over a year now and happily, he has...

*...continued on page 3*

## *Help us Go Green!*

Help The Uncommon Thread Go Green! Help us raise funds to provide therapy for children with autism. All it takes is a \$10-\$15 donation from you and seven or eight of your friends. If everybody gives a little, we can do a lot!

Also, go to our website - [www.theuncommonthread.org](http://www.theuncommonthread.org) and register your email address so we can cut down on mailing costs.

**Go Green with us!**



## *New Faces at The Uncommon Thread*

We have two new part-time teachers at The Uncommon Thread. Jane Cannon and Heather Bellovin both have substantial experience working with young, special needs children and are a welcome addition to our growing program. Heather has a Masters degree in Elementary Education and has over 6 years of experience teaching kindergarten and first

grade. She is married, has two children and lives in Warren, New Jersey.

Jane Cannon has a Bachelors Degree in Psychology and is working towards her Masters Degree in School Counseling. She has worked as a case manager for Lovaas Institute for Early Childhood Intervention where she learned the fundamen-

tals of ABA therapy. She has also worked as a Family Support Specialist for Sussex County Arc and currently works as a Behavioral Assistant for ISIS Innovative Specialist providing in-home behavioral services for children. Jane is married, has one child, and lives in Hackettstown, New Jersey.

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## *In Brief*

### ***Needed: Grant writers***

Can you write? No grant-writing experience necessary. We will train you and provide all the information and materials you will need to write a great grant letter or application. All of your work will be proofread, formatted and submitted from our center so you can't make a mistake! And you can add grant-writing to your resume. The Uncommon Thread relies on contributions from individuals and foundations for a significant amount of our annual funding. Because the economy is in such turmoil we believe we need to double the number of grant applications this year. Can you help? If interested call Lois McGuire at (908)604-4500 Ext. 18.

### ***Needed: Swing Set for our Playground***

We would love to be able to create a real playground for the children of The Uncommon Thread this spring. The land is available behind the center. Do you have a swing set your children no longer use? Do you know of someone who is looking to give away a swing set? We asked that the set be in good condition and appropriate for use by children ages two to seven. If you aren't sure, we will be happy to come out and take a look. We will also make arrangements to pick it up. If you can help us or know someone who can, give Greg Carr a call at our center, (908) 604-4500.

### ***Volunteers Needed***

We are always looking for volunteers to help us at the center. There is always filing to do, mailings to be collated and prepared for sending, materials to inventory, and phone calls to make. We can also use the services of retired teachers who could help in developing curriculum materials for the classrooms. With some training, retired teachers could also assist in the classroom with the children.

### ***Summer Shadow Program Available***

Are you interested in sending your child to camp with a shadow from The Uncommon Thread? We have an excellent relationship with the Somerset YMCA. Last year one of our students signed up for a two-week experience with a shadow and only needed the shadow for one week! That's progress. If you are interested, now is the time to make arrangements. We will provide a trained assistant who can accompany your child and provide appropriate prompts which will help him or her participate in camp activities along with typical peers. Call the center to schedule an evaluation to determine if this is a viable option for your child.

## *Staff Attends Professional Enrichment*

One of the cornerstones of our program at The Uncommon Thread is mandatory continuing education for our therapists. Over the past six months staff members have attended two relevant and informative seminars, "Pervasive Developmental Disorder-The State of the Art 2008" and "Functional Analysis and the Treatment of Problem Behavior."

In November 2008, Morristown Memorial Hospital sponsored a day-long conference on Pervasive Developmental Disorder which highlighted the latest diagnostic and treatment strategies for Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Topics such as features of the various ASD's, diagnostic differential diagnosis, understanding the role of seizures, psychopharma-

logical behavioral treatments, and complementary and alternative medicines in ASD were featured. Internationally known clinicians and researchers from Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Yale University School of Medicine, Mount Sinai School of Medicine, UMDNJ, and New York Medical College presented at the conference.

On March 27, therapists attended an all-day workshop on analysis and treatment of problem behavior presented by Dr. Brian Iwata, BCBA who is a Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry at the University of Florida. There he directs research programs on disorders of learning and behavior. He is an award-winning researcher and teacher of national renown.

## *From the Therapist's Desk: Compliance*

Children with autism and other behavioral disorders struggle with compliance - often resisting directions and task demands. Depending on the degree of non-compliance, children can be excluded from mainstream environments including typical classrooms, family outings, and community experiences. This exclusion often only compounds the problem by limiting relationships with typical peers and environments rich in learning opportunities.

Children may be non-compliant because the task is simply too difficult and we as therapists, teachers, and parents need to break the task down to simpler components, or reduce the requirements of the task. We may also see this problem behavior arise when children are unfamiliar with the expectations of the task. Familiarizing a child and providing opportunities to practice the skill can be an effective strategy. Children on the spectrum often lack the verbal repertoire or language needed to communicate their wants and needs. The resulting frustration is unlikely to promote cooperative

behavior.

Unfortunately, we tend to accommodate children who are uncooperative. We allow them to escape the demand rather than working toward a change in the behavior. While teachers can make modifications in the classroom environment and reduce task requirements, they must also consider how disruptive non-compliant behavior effects the learning experience for the other students in their classroom. By becoming an active participant in your child's program, you can help your child adapt to his world rather than escape. If this is a typical experience at home for your child, he or she is likely to meet with that same success at school.

Compliance is critical for three reasons: the degree of compliance directly affects a child's educational placement, opportunities to learn, and development of peer friendships and role models. If you are struggling with this issue and need help, contact The Uncommon Thread. We would be delighted to help.

—Aileen Carr

## *...Success Has Many Faces at The Uncommon Thread*

...transformed into a happy child who is able to communicate in three and four word sentences. He no longer bangs his head on anything. He is able to effectively communicate his wants and needs," she said. "He has a long way to go but with the help of The Uncommon Thread, we hope to integrate him into a typical classroom setting by the time he is in first or second grade."

Perhaps most telling is Lori's summation of her experiences with her son. "One year ago, Anthony could not say mommy or even ma. Today, he says, 'I love you.' There is nothing that warms a mother's heart more than those three little words!" she said.

Successes at The Uncommon Thread are truly meaningful to TUT therapists. Aileen Carr, my wife and co-founder, is an experienced ABA therapist who has certainly experienced her share of success. While Aileen is a therapist at the center, she also "shadows" children at a local nursery school.

"We have the pleasure of working with some incredible children and their wonderful families," said Aileen. "One little boy I worked with has made incredible progress in under a year. His behaviors kept him from the

friends he enjoys today, from a classroom filled with learning activities and preschool adventures," she said.

"He struggled to follow directions and complete tasks. He couldn't always communicate what he needed or wanted. Friends often would take his toys and he just didn't know how to tell them 'no' or that he would like to share. Frustration is understandable when your little one can't protect or help himself. It is heartbreaking for a parent to watch. I know. I've been there," she said.

I've watched this boy learn to talk, to participate in large and small group activities, to wait to take his turn, step outside his comfort zone of one or two or three activities and engaging in countless activities. He didn't take baby steps this year, he took a few giant steps," said Aileen. "My time as his shadow is almost at an end. He has his wings now. It's time he flies on his own. Missing him will be hard, but it helps to know that the skills he has so aptly learned will prepare him for life's obstacles ahead. While he may need some outside supports in the years to come, today he goes to school with friends and the only shadow he will know is his own."



***For more information about Autism go to..  
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## From the Executive Director

### Cope: –verb

1. *to deal, esp. on fairly even terms or with some degree of success*
2. *to face and deal with responsibilities, successfully or in a calm or adequate manner*

We use the word “cope” a lot these days. There are a lot of headlines with which to cope, for instance. When we meet someone who seems to handle pressure well, we say they must have great coping skills. The term has specific meaning in the treatment of Spectrum disorders. All of us, at any stage of development must learn how to cope with the outside

world. Children, no matter how withdrawn or disorganized, are trying to do the same thing. The ability to assess and respond to the exterior landscape is a basic rule for development. The ability to understand others and to express oneself is fundamental to living independently. This coping mechanism becomes disordered in the neurological wiring of the autistic. These create an often disruptive response that self-defeats through misdirected coping. The therapy at The Uncommon Thread trains and reinforces effective coping systems in smaller (sometimes very small) and incre-

mental behaviors that will -over time -be generalized to other areas of living. Next time you catch yourself using “cope,” consider your own unique ways of assessing and responding to reality, and maybe even develop your own new pathways to better coping, better reality-facing and communication skills. And when you struggle to change old habits of thought, or unhelpful behaviors, think about us, and the work that we do; it will surely enrich your compassion and perhaps lead to a stronger commitment to our mission.

- Philip Carr-Jones

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**Don't Forget!!**  
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