

The Ohio State University Nisonger Center  
A University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities

## ASPIRATIONS

- PURPOSE** A social and vocational support group program for young adults with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Group leaders facilitate in an atmosphere of acceptance and friendship. The program was established in 2002 by the OSU Department of Neurology and the Nisonger Center.
- GOALS** Develop self-awareness and insight, learn to experience positive social interactions and relationships, foster insight into the importance of rewarding employment, explore solutions to challenging situations in our personal and professional lives, and foster friendships.
- PERSONS SERVED** Higher-functioning young adults and teens on the autism spectrum, ages 13–30.
- STAFF** Tom Fish, MSW, LISW-S, Director of Family and Employment Services; Jeff Siegel, MSW, LSW, program coordinator; Angela Suell Denny, PhD, CRC, co-facilitator; Pat Cloppert, BSFS, faculty parent advocate. Graduate social work & psychology trainees also serve.
- SERVICES** Group sessions focus on issues of friendship, responsibility, work, and independence. Participants are guided in discussions about vocational planning, teamwork, self-awareness, and understanding others. The program helps participants build self-confidence, learn from one another and establish skills leading to more positive work and social relationships.

**FAMILY SUPPORT GROUP:** Both the eight-week programs and Recap events have parallel sessions for family members providing resource information and validation. These programs also maintain parent and peer mentors who provide friendship and guidance. Our family support component is almost exclusively family-driven and facilitated.

**LOCATION:** All Aspirations groups meet at Nisonger Center unless noted below.

**EIGHT-WEEK SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING PROGRAM:** Two groups of 7–9 members meet one hour a week for eight weeks. The Teen group meets on Monday 7:00 – 8:15 PM; and the Adult group meets on Tuesday 6:30 – 7:45 PM. There is a \$300.00 charge for the eight-week program.

**RECAP (ASPIRATIONS ADULT REUNION GROUP):** Graduates of eight-week program meet monthly on the first Wednesday **ASPIRATIONS ABRIDGED (TEEN REUNION GROUP):** Teen graduates of eight-week program meet monthly on the second Wednesday.

**OUTREACH:** Aspirations reaches out to members of the ASD community through its book clubs (Adults every 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Thursdays at Barnes & Noble High Street and Teens every Saturday at Barnes & Noble Easton).

**Women of Aspirations (WOA):** Young adult females on the autism spectrum meet monthly every 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday; contact [womenofaspirations@gmail.com](mailto:womenofaspirations@gmail.com). **Aspirations Guys:** Young adult males on the autism spectrum meet every 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday, 4:30 – 6:00 PM; contact [guysofaspirations@gmail.com](mailto:guysofaspirations@gmail.com). The hope is that by being a part of the book club and smaller groups, people will become interested in joining our eight-week social skills training program.

**RESEARCH:** A professional article regarding the program and outcome data from a research project appeared in the journal, *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, Summer 2007. A follow-up article was published in January 2011.

**CONTACT:** Jeff Siegel Phone: 614-685-3188 Email: [Jeffrey.siegel@osumc.edu](mailto:Jeffrey.siegel@osumc.edu) 257C McCampbell Hall 1581 Dodd Drive Columbus OH 43210 <http://nisonger.osu.edu>