



# Connecting the Pieces

serving families along the gulf coast for 14 years

## Steps for Autism - Five years young and growing strong

This month, Autism Pensacola kicks off our 5th Steps for Autism fundraising season! We are encouraging schools, families, and businesses to create a Steps for Autism team and begin fundraising and taking #Steps2Acceptance.

Autism Pensacola Executive Committee member and Steps board chair, Jodi Bell, is leading the charge for this year's fundraiser. "We are setting high goals this year," stated Bell. "We want 60 teams to raise \$60,000 and we hope to have at least 600 walkers in September." API Bookkeeper and event co-chair, Rebecca Aman, herself an autism mom, echoes Bell's enthusiasm. "By kicking everything off in April, we will build momentum and excitement over the next 6 months, involving every aspect of our community," Aman said. "API is at an exciting time in its history, and now is the time for everyone to get involved

and ensure we raise not only the needed funds, but awareness across the community."

API will honor a special family at this year's Steps for Autism. The O'Connell family has been a major part of Autism

Pensacola and its history. Matt and Jacqui O'Connell were founding members of API, with Jacqui serving as its first Vice President. Their oldest son, Jason, created API's web site back in 2002 as his Pensacola High IB Project. He now serves as our web master. Their son, Ryan O'Connell, is our first person with autism on the API board of directors.

What an inspiring family! We hope everyone will follow their example of involvement and start taking #Steps2Acceptance.

Funds raised by Steps for Autism support the mission and programs of Autism Pensacola,

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**Steps For Autism**

**When?**  
Sept. 24, 10 am to 1 pm

**Where?**  
Blue Wahoos stadium

**Info:**  
[www.autismpensacola.org](http://www.autismpensacola.org)

**Want to get involved? See inside for details on how to register your team!**

## idgroup Selects API for Brand on Us™ Initiative

Autism Pensacola is proud to have been selected to participate in idgroup's fourth annual Brand on Us initiative. idgroup will use its Branding From the Core® process to engage Autism Pensacola's stakeholders in developing clarity around our brand identity, image

and culture, as well as create communication materials that express Autism Pensacola's story and promise to the community. "We are excited to be able to continue this program for a fourth year. We believe brands can change the world and through this program we hope to change our corner of the world." Mona Amodeo, idgroup President.

Brand on Us is an initiative designed to support local nonprofit groups. During the seven-month engagement, the organization will receive more than \$100,000 in idgroup services as well as an estimated \$75,000 in services and media placements donated by idgroup partners in local media, print, photography, printing and website programming. "This process is the right thing at the right time for Autism Pensacola," says Becca Boles, API Board of Directors chairperson. "I'm confident it will propel us into our next level of service to our community. We are so grateful for this honor and are excited about the challenge of discovering our core story."

## API celebrates April with #Steps2Acceptance!

This year, Autism Pensacola will celebrate the month of April by appreciating #Steps2Acceptance! We have been working to increase understanding and acceptance in our community over the last several years, and we are excited to see that progress is being made.

Each week, through social media, we will be highlighting a person who has taken #Steps2Acceptance in our community. Watch Facebook for our announcements!

Please help us spread the word of acceptance by sharing your stories, using the hashtag #Steps2Acceptance. Share the stories of positive encounters in the community. Your experience might even become one of API's honorees! This campaign kicks off in April, but we will continue to use #Steps2Acceptance leading up to our fifth Steps for Autism on September 24.

Start sharing!

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## Online, video-based training offered through APD

The Arc of Florida and the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) have partnered to offer an online, video-based training series called "Maximum Potential Kids" (MPK). It is being offered at no cost to family members of APDs customers on the iBudget Florida Medicaid waiver and on the waiting list, as well as approved providers. It's a chance to learn to use Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) techniques while working with individuals to build new skills and manage challenging behaviors.

MPK includes 17 modules (six hours of training) and access to supplemental materials. It can be accessed by requesting a "coupon code" through any APD regional office. Participants can view the modules on the Internet at a pace that fits their schedules. The concepts covered include: the use of reinforcement, prompting, and teaching in the natural environment and the use of behavior management techniques.

MPK training will be available through June 30, 2016.

The Arc of Florida worked with the Family Care Council to review these modules. Arc of Florida CEO Deborah Linton stated, "A priority area for us is to bring training for all stakeholders into the 21st century. A well-educated and trained workforce and stakeholder community will help us to achieve higher quality services and oversight for those we serve." A limited number of coupon codes will be available to approved providers who are interested in enhancing or developing ABA skills. Upon completing all 17 modules, a parent or provider staff member can request an MPK certificate of completion.

If you are interested in taking this training, contact your local APD area behavior analyst. Visit [apdcares.org/region](http://apdcares.org/region) to get contact information for the APD regional office that serves your area.

## Churches serving our families

Many churches serve special needs families in our two-county area. A question was put out on Facebook about places of worship which provide programs for our families. Here is a list of those we know. This list is by no means all-inclusive. Please share with us about other locations that are serving our community.

- Living Truth Church
- Woodbine United Methodist
- Pace Assembly of God
- Hillcrest Baptist Church
- Pine Terrace Baptist Church
- Marcus Pointe Baptist Church
- Coastline Calvary Church
- St. Sylvester Catholic Church
- Sacred Heart Cathedral
- First Presbyterian – Milton
- Perdido Bay United Methodist



Kids for Camp friends team up at last year's Steps for Autism event.

## Everyone can succeed, participate, and make a friend

Finding an afterschool program, day care, or a summer recreational program that understands and serves children and families with special needs can be a challenge. That's why Autism Pensacola is a long-time partner and supporter of the National Inclusion Project's Let's All Play (LAP) program.

For the fifth year, API will host Aron Hall, director of programs for Let's All Play, to train organizations on the principles of inclusion. This free event is set for May 6, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., at Gulf Breeze Presbyterian Church. The daylong training is open to the public – targeting summer programs, daycares, afterschool programs, Girl Scouts, and Boy Scouts.

One of the greatest advantages of the LAP model is its flexibility. LAP has been implemented in YMCA programs, Boys and Girls Clubs, Parks & Recreation departments, privately run camps, and children's museums, in a mix of urban, suburban, and rural areas. In our local area, the Pullum Family YMCA, the Langley Avenue YMCA branch, and the UWF Explore Camps have all been participants with LAP.

For more than a decade, LAP has brought its inclusive program model to over 100 recreational programs in 35 states. Research has shown that the LAP model helps children with disabilities improve self-esteem, social skills, and confidence, while those without disabilities improved their leadership, problem-solving, and empathy skills. The model allows children with and without disabilities to create friendships

and participate together in recreational activities such as swimming, arts and crafts, community service, and more. (2008, The Center for Social Development and Education, University of Massachusetts-Boston)

The one-day training will cover topics such as: Inclusion -- The Right Thing to Do; Setting the Right Atmosphere for Inclusion Success; Making Connections -- Fostering Meaningful Relationships between Children; and No Child Left on the Sidelines -- Keeping Children Engaged.

For more information on the National Inclusion Project and LAP, go to [inclusionproject.org](http://inclusionproject.org).

### The Power of Belonging A Training on Inclusion

**When?** May 6, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

**Where?** Gulf Breeze Presbyterian Church, gymnasium

**What?** Training for organizations who are seeking to become inclusive

**Cost?** No cost to attend

**To register –**

<http://autismpensacola.org/whatsgoingon.html>

## Recreational offerings for individuals with autism

**SeaStars** - Seastars Aquatics provides a swim team, as well as four instruction levels to help children benefit from water safety.  
[www.seastarsaquatics.org](http://www.seastarsaquatics.org)

**Miracle League Pensacola** - The Miracle League of Pensacola provides physically and mentally challenged children a safe and spirited program in which they can hit, run, and catch on a baseball field – just like other kids. For information on registration and league play, go to <http://miracleleaguepensacola.net-at-hand.com/>

**Special Olympics** - Special Olympics provides local individuals with intellectual disabilities opportunities to participate in year-round sports training and competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports. To get involved, contact Michael Stone at [mstone@specialolympicssantarosa.org](mailto:mstone@specialolympicssantarosa.org).  
<http://specialolympicsflorida.org/escambia/>  
<http://specialolympicsflorida.org/santa-rosa/>

**Leaning Post Ranch** -The Leaning Post Ranch's mission is to provide equine assisted activities and therapeutic riding to individuals with disabilities and at-risk youth in Northwest Florida.  
<http://www.theleaningpostranch.org/>

**Art Academy for Autism** - Art Academy for Autism is an arts education initiative designed for children on the autism spectrum.  
<http://www.pensacolamuseum.org/art-classes.html>

**Autism Surfs** - Autism Surfs is a community of friends and families that have come together with the purpose of teaching children with Autism Spectrum Disorder to surf.  
<https://www.facebook.com/AutismSurfs>

**First Tee of Northwest Florida** - Positively impacting the lives of young people by promoting character development and life-enhancing values through the First Tee's "Life Skills Learning Experience" and the game of golf. [LBefi@thefirstteenwflorida.org](mailto:LBefi@thefirstteenwflorida.org);  
<http://www.thefirstteenwflorida.org/club/scripts/public/public.asp>

## Steps for Autism *continued from page 1*

which serves both Escambia and Santa Rosa counties. One hundred percent of the proceeds from the walk stay in our local area to support Autism Pensacola programs.

As an incentive to creating a team in April, every team that registers and raises at least \$25 will receive a special gift. Information packets - including great ideas for fundraising - are available on the Autism Pensacola website.

**Want to get involved?** It's fast, fun, and easy to take YOUR first STEPS to raise awareness and funds for autism! You can register and fundraise online or offline – it's up to you!

### Register online:

Visit [www.autismpensacola.org/steps.html](http://www.autismpensacola.org/steps.html)

1. Click on the Fundraise button on our web site – this will take you to FirstGiving
2. Once on FirstGiving, click on the green "Register" button.
3. If you are new to FirstGiving, you will need to create a FirstGiving account here. If you have used FirstGiving in the past, click the "Sign in via FirstGiving" button.
4. From here, FirstGiving will walk you through the steps for registering, creating/joining a team, and setting up a fundraising page.

### Register offline:

Registration packets are online at [www.autismpensacola.org](http://www.autismpensacola.org). Or stop by the office!

### Have Fun!

Make this a fun event for everyone! There are lots of ways to get family and friends involved. Create your own special team T-shirts to wear proudly at the walk. Hold your own mini-fundraisers before the event (yard sales, car washes, etc.) to boost your team's fundraising success. Hold a competition with someone else's team to see who can raise the most money.

Remember – ALL funds raised will stay in our local area.



The O'Connells volunteer together as a family – (L-R) Matt, Jacqui, and Ryan, Jacqui's brother Alan Goldberg, and Jason O'Connell.

## Welcome to the Board!

Autism Pensacola is thrilled to welcome Ryan O'Connell to the Board of Directors. Ryan bring his unique strengths and skills to our board, and we are grateful for his gift of time and leadership.

Ryan has lived in the Pensacola area for 25 years, moving here with his family as an infant. A graduate of the University of Florida's Horticulture program, Ryan works with the Arc Gateway's Nursery four days a week.

He loves getting his hands dirty and is particularly fond of succulents. He also loves to fish, cook, and spend time outdoors.

As a person with autism, Ryan is optimistic that he can add his perspective to the board and share with the community what it is like to have autism. He hopes to help API understand what is important to those living with autism.



Ryan O'Connell

## API Contact Information

To donate, pay dues, obtain membership forms or for other correspondence  
**mail to address below or visit [www.autismpensacola.org](http://www.autismpensacola.org)**

Email: [info@autismpensacola.org](mailto:info@autismpensacola.org)

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## Summer Inclusion Workshop

**When? May 6, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.**

**Where? Gulf Breeze Presbyterian  
Church gym**

**What? One-day training targeting for  
camps, museums, day cares, scouts**

Topics to be covered at the one-day training:

- ◆ Inclusion—The Right Thing to Do
- ◆ Setting the Atmosphere for Success
- ◆ Making Connections
- ◆ No Child Left on the Sidelines

To Register: <http://autismpensacola.org>

## Wahoo! It's Baseball time

**Date: Sunday, April 24**

**Time: 4 p.m.**

**Cost: PENSACOLA**

**Tickets are \$10 each for API members;  
\$12 each for non-members**

Kicking off the *Steps for Autism* fundraising  
season, join us April 24 at  
Blue Wahoos Stadium as the  
Wahoos take on the Jackson Generals.

All individuals with autism  
receive a free ticket to the game!

Go to [www.autismpensacola.org](http://www.autismpensacola.org)  
to reserve your tickets

## Get "social" with us!



Find out about  
upcoming events,  
get connected



with other parents,  
and join the



conversation!  
Check us out!