

SAFE, Inc.

Community-based Autism Spectrum Disorders Outreach and Education Program



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has awarded a grant to SAFE, Inc., in Wilkes-Barre, Pa., to enhance its community-based autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) outreach and educational activities. With this grant, SAFE will continue development of a specialized training and certification program for parents, professionals, and paraprofessionals who serve children with autism. For more information, please visit www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/dd/ddautism.htm.

SAFE, founded in April 1994 by the late Claire T. Shadie, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit group of parents of children with autism interested in seeking out and sharing information, discussing difficulties/issues, and exchanging ideas with the goal of helping people with autism live full and independent lives. SAFE members meet in informal settings to provide the right balance between leisure and productive interaction, where people are exposed to options and methods to assist with current difficulties, and where individuals can learn from and build on one another's experiences.

Overview:

With an 11-year history in successfully planning and implementing support and educational programs for the autism community, SAFE has become a leading voice for individuals and families dealing with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs). As a part of this program, SAFE will continue to educate individuals with autism and their families, but it will also educate the community at large. SAFE believes that community members who are not affected directly by autism play a large role in the development and success of children who have ASDs. This program will allow SAFE to provide the education necessary to decrease stigma and increase inclusion for affected individuals throughout the state.

Outreach:

- SAFE serves as the clearinghouse for autism information in northeastern Pennsylvania, providing materials free of charge to parents, providers, and school districts.
- To increase knowledge and awareness about ASDs, SAFE provides ongoing, research-based training that is available to the community.
- SAFE is listed as a resource at every major hospital in the area for parents receiving a new diagnosis. As parents navigate their way through the sea of information available about ASDs, SAFE provides assistance and support as needed.
- SAFE regularly meets with new physicians in the area to discuss the early signs of a developmental delay. SAFE is a partner with CDC's Learn the Signs. Act Early. campaign and uses campaign materials throughout the community to educate parents and providers to ensure that children are recognized as quickly as possible if they are not meeting developmental milestones.
- SAFE provides a monthly newsletter to more than 500 members of the community including professionals, paraprofessionals, parents, educators, and legislators.
- SAFE leads a three-county Coalition on autism to promote collaboration across agencies.

Training:

In a community assessment, SAFE identified the need to educate the ASD community about—

- Behavioral interventions
- Adolescent issues
- Research-based dietary interventions
- Individual education plan development
- Transition planning
- Stress and coping mechanisms



SAFE provides monthly meetings to address identified issues of concern. In addition, SAFE provides quarterly training sessions across Pennsylvania to bring new and exciting information and speakers to the community. SAFE also plans to offer a community awareness and education component. As a part of autism awareness month, SAFE plans to host a series of informative training sessions at local universities and community gatherings.

SAFE also provides parents with an informational newsletter, and educational materials pertaining to the certain needs and request of the parent.

Statewide Tracking System:

SAFE, through a partnership with Project Lifesaver, facilitates a statewide tracking system for individuals with ASDs. This innovative system allows for the active tracking of lost individuals wearing a specially designed transmitter “bracelet.” This project is intended to raise awareness about the special needs of autistic individuals, but also to relieve families affected by autism of the fears associated with a fleeing/running child. For a child with autism who is nonverbal, this is an essential piece of safety equipment. SAFE plans to provide training sessions and information to communities and advocacy groups and to coordinate a campaign for statewide operation.

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