

Providing Hope and Help for Autism Families

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HIGHER LEARNING: STRIVING FOR SUCCESS



A father and son with unique perspectives discuss strategies for students with autism

BY RITA SHREFFLER

Autism File executive editor Rita Shreffler spoke recently with Dr. Michael McManmon, founder of the College Internship Program (CIP), and his son Dan McManmon, president of CIP. Dr. McManmon was diagnosed with Asperger's syn-

drome as an adult and has a unique perspective on the challenges facing adults with autism. This father-son team brings decades of experience to their work with transition-age students across the United States. Established in 1984, CIP offers summer and year-

round programs for teens and young adults ages 16-26 with autism, Asperger's, high-functioning autism and other learning differences.

DR. MICHAEL MCMANMON ...



... is the author of *Made for Good Purpose: What Every Parent Needs to Know to Help Their Adolescent with Asperger's, High Functioning Autism or a Learning Difference Become an Independent Adult*; *Autism and Learning Differences: An Active Learning Teaching Toolkit*; and *Mploy: a Job Readiness Workbook*, scheduled for publication later this year by Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

DAN MCMANMON ...



... is the president of CIP and has over a decade of experience serving young adults with learning differences. Dan's experience and relationship growing up with his father on the autism spectrum have had a profound effect on his understanding of and compassion for individuals with autism, ADHD and related learning differences.

► **RITA SHREFFLER (RS):** *When should parents start to plan for post-high school programs and who should they involve in that process?*

► **MICHAEL MCMANMON (MM):** They should start by having him or her participate in, and even lead, IEP meetings at school. They should follow the lead of their student's special interests and assist in making goals for his or her future,

▶ **DEVELOPING STUDY SKILLS** —

Academic Coach Jeffrey Connor works with students in small groups to strengthen study skills.

whether that be college or careers. The IEP should reflect these goals that teachers and school personnel can work on together to prepare the student to meet the established goals. Parents should introduce their child to a variety of post-secondary options, finding the right fit for which to apply.

- ▶ **DAN MCMANMON (DM):** We encourage families to participate in Person-Centered Planning, wherein the son or daughter identifies his or her interests and motivators, people who are important to them, and do backwards planning after setting their long-term goals. This puts the individuals themselves in the driver's seat and clearly articulates a road map for their future.
- ▶ **RS:** *Not everyone on the spectrum is a good candidate for higher education as we know—we could say that for all people, but with our ASD kids, does being nonverbal or do other conditions preclude this possibility? Which students are most likely to do well with higher education?*
- ▶ **MM:** Conditions do not limit students' post-secondary options. Self-motivation is the primary indicator of success. A thorough understanding of their diagnosis, and more importantly the supports they need, are indicators of success. Students who are willing to self-advocate and self-disclose when necessary are much more successful.
- ▶ **DM:** While some individuals with ASD can appropriately manage academics in higher education, we see many who have already developed some areas of specialized skills that lend themselves well to employment settings. These individuals often can be coached effectively by linking their areas of strength and/or interest to the critical areas of needs, such as developing soft



skills in the workplace setting. Using logic, this approach connects the importance of their interests and abilities to those critical deficit areas that don't naturally interest or motivate them. Once that connection is made and practiced, it becomes another useful tool on the student's tool belt.

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- ▶ **RS:** *What should parents be looking for when visiting college campuses?*
- ▶ **MM:** Parents should be looking at the quantity and quality of services provided, the size of the school that the student can handle, and the living arrangements and availability of the student's special interest activities on the campus. They need to take into account how the student feels on campus.
- ▶ **DM:** Student housing is also important since having a safe and comfortable “home base” can help alleviate the stress and anxiety that comes with new situations. Some students may do better in non-traditional housing options as well.
- ▶ **RS:** *What do CIP and similar programs offer to students on the spectrum that regular college programs don't?*
- ▶ **MM:** Many colleges and universities have services for individuals with learning differences and on the autism spectrum. Most do not provide social skills groups or social mentors; sensory integration and wellness services; academic and residential executive functioning individual or group services; life skills instruction and specialized recreational programs; individual counseling or specialized weekly advising sessions; internships for all students, etc.
- ▶ **DM:** CIP uniquely addresses each individual student's needs through a comprehensive array of services. Students learn in a supported apartment environment with a tight-knit group of peers. Our program meets the student where they are at and focuses on an abilities-based approach toward the academic, social, career, and life-skills supports necessary for success.
- ▶ **RS:** *Once a college or program has been decided upon, how can*

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► **DRAWING UPON INTERESTS** — CIP students work at internships in their field of interest.

parents help their child get ready to move to campus or prepare for living off campus and attending classes?

- **MM:** Have them do as much for themselves as possible both at home and to prepare for going to college or a post-secondary program. Facilitate procuring extra services that may not be available on campus for their student.
- **RS:** *How can they best support their student once they are enrolled and classes are underway?*
- **MM:** By encouraging students to use the services available to them on campus. By teaching them to self-advocate for what they need. By trying not to interfere in the process but encouraging them to take action themselves.
- **RS:** *Can you tell our readers a little about the history of the College Internship Program?*
- **MM:** CIP was founded in 1984 in Lee, Massachusetts, as an Independent Living Center for individuals leaving residential and institutional programs. It was set



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up as a community-based program where individuals could use all the principles of normalization, utilizing local supports while cooking, shopping, and attending local colleges and vocational internships.

- **DM:** Over time, CIP developed a strong curriculum of supports such as individual therapy, advising, tutorials, social skills and social mentoring, relationship development groups, sensory integration, wellness, executive functioning, residential support, career supports, recreational programming, etc. There are also specialized programs within CIP like equine therapy, visual and performing arts, and other services. Over the course of ten years, based on need, CIP evolved to add an additional five centers across the U.S. and started to offer more specialized services for students on the autism spectrum.

▼ **EQUINE THERAPY** — Students participate in equine programs at select locations.



- **RS:** *What are your long-term goals?*
- **DM:** Our long-term goals for the organization include becoming a research-based, internationally recognized, best-practice and evidence-based model to further meet the needs of neurodiverse individuals transitioning to adulthood. ◀

FIND OUT MORE

- For more information about CIP, its programs and resources, visit www.cipworldwide.org.