

## **Autism Action Groups**

Seeing a need to develop **local** networks of service providers including agencies, organizations, educators, medical professionals, and families of individuals with autism around the Commonwealth of Virginia, John Toscano, President and CEO of Commonwealth Autism Service (formerly The Autism Program of Virginia, TAP-VA) challenged members of the CAS/TAP-VA Advisory Council to develop *Autism Action Groups* across Virginia.

Didi Zaryczny, a local parent in Bedford, Virginia, was the first Advisory Council member to take up this challenge. Didi initiated the **Central Virginia Autism Action Group (CVAAG)**, which includes representatives of agencies and organizations as well as parents in the areas encompassing Lynchburg, Amherst, Appomattox, Campbell, and Bedford. CVAAG began meeting in June, 2002 and meets on the 2nd Monday of every month from 1:30 – 3:00 at Lynchburg College – Centennial Hall.

Learning about the activities of CVAAG, two occupational therapists in Martinsville, Virginia, Jill Hamlin and Cherie Arnn, attended a CVAAG meeting and decided to initiate the **Piedmont Autism Action Group (PAAG)** to create a network encompassing Danville, Martinsville, Henry, Halifax, Pittsylvania, and Patrick. PAAG meets monthly and offers monthly training for families/caregivers.

In the New River Valley (Radford, Montgomery, Pulaski, Floyd and Giles), the **New River Valley Autism Action Group (NRVAAG)** meets the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of each month.. Meetings begin at 9:00 at alternating locations. .

Shirl Light and Julia Artrip, members of the Commonwealth Autism Service Advisory Council who live in the Roanoke area have created the **Greater Roanoke Autism Action Group (GRVAAG)** which encompasses Roanoke City and County, Salem, Botetourt, Craig, and Franklin areas. GRVAAG meetings take place the first Friday of each month at 9:30 a.m. at the Blue Ridge Independent Living Center, in Roanoke.

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**Participation in Action Groups is not limited to any specific locality. Please feel free to attend any meeting that is convenient for you. If you know of any individual or representative of a service providing entity that would like to engage in collaborative actions on behalf of individuals with autism and their families, ask them to contact**

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AAG activities include:

- Supporting local parent support groups
- Community awareness (1<sup>st</sup> responders, businesses, residents, etc.)
- Training for parents and service providers, including public and private organizations
- Development of local resource guides
- Align activities with mission statement
  - o Commonwealth Autism Service's mission is to provide leadership in the implementation of a statewide system of services to maximize the potential and quality of life of each Virginian with autism across the lifespan
- Link all providers, school systems and families by providing networking opportunities to identify local needs
- Support localities in creating strategies to resolve community needs
- Create transition councils to identify needed supports for adolescents and adults
- Other activities as needed