



Geneva Centre for Autism

Where hope takes wing

Provincial Teachers' Assistant Training Initiative: **Building Knowledge and Capacity**

By **Marilen Miguel**, Community Relations Officer, Geneva Centre for Autism

We know that every child has a right to a good education. Making that a reality, especially for students with special needs, is the goal of every school and every educator, but it is not a simple task.

The need for training of teaching staff in the area of autism spectrum disorders (ASD) has long been identified by educators and parents as critical for a successful learning experience for a student on the spectrum. Classroom support and adequate accommodations are often cited as some of the most challenging issues.

Teachers' assistants play a critical role in assisting with the effective implementation

of a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP). They are an essential member of the team supporting children with an ASD as they participate in the school environment. To enhance the support and capacity of teachers' assistants in Ontario, Geneva Centre for Autism's province-wide training initiative, designed specifically for teachers' assistants, was created with funding from the Ministry of Education.

Gaining knowledge about ASD opens the door to understanding the unique learning needs of each person on the autism spectrum. It increases the capacity of teachers' assistants to successfully support individuals with ASD in a classroom setting.

The *Provincial Teachers' Assistant Training Initiative* hopes to achieve this outcome.

The *Teachers' Assistant Training Initiative* was introduced in 2006 as part of the Ministry of Education's effort to enhance supports for students with ASD in the classroom. Geneva Centre for Autism has been given the mandate to develop and provide training to teachers' assistants in Ontario's publicly funded school boards and school authorities starting in 2006 through 2008. To date, approximately 3000 teachers' assistants have participated in the first round of training delivered by Geneva Centre's provincial autism resource consultants.

What does the Teachers' Assistant Training look like?

The Teachers' Assistant Training consists of an initial 2-day onsite training session on ASD and effective practices. There are subsequent elective sessions available on a variety of topics including the principles of applied behaviour analysis (ABA).

The training program was developed to achieve two main outcomes for teachers' assistants:

1. Participants will learn to recognize the importance of critical observation and critical thinking when supporting students with ASD.
2. Participants will learn to use a range of strategies and resources to support their work with students with ASD.

The training presentations are conducted using the principles of adult learning, which include interactive learning, sharing of experiences and working through case studies.

It is an expectation that participants should have some basic knowledge about ASD prior to taking part in the training. For those who require an introduction to ASD, Geneva Centre for Autism has developed a dedicated e-learning site for teachers' assistants that can be accessed 24/7 at www.autism.net.

Access to Provincial Teachers' Assistant Training Initiative

Geneva Centre for Autism strongly encourages publicly funded school boards and school authorities to access this free training to enhance their capacity to support students in the classroom. This initiative complements the work of Ontario's ASD school support program and school boards' in-service training programs. Teachers' assistants can access this training by contacting their school board. A designated administrator from each school board/authority will then contact the manager of provincial programs at Geneva Centre for Autism to arrange a training schedule.



What participants have to say in their own words

- *Presenter was knowledgeable and prepared. Created interest by speaking from skill base and experience instead of notes; was able to respond appropriately to specific individual questions.*
- *I think this presentation should be given to parents and teachers; Very useful professional development day for educational assistants; Excellent job from both presenters.*
- *The information and strategies are very applicable and user-friendly; really enjoyed the workshop.*

Geneva Centre for Autism is pleased to have the opportunity to work with school boards and their staff to exert our collective leadership. Together we are working to provide the best possible educational experience for children facing the challenges of autism.

A tool necessary for leadership is an awareness to our changing times and roles in the educational system. Being in touch with new methods, ideas and directions is all a part of continued education and a mind set that things

can be done differently than in the past and that these new ideas might even be better than the older methods.

Bishop Fred Colli,
in his address to PQP Part I Candidates in Thunder Bay

For further Information for the Provincial Training Initiatives, contact Debbie Irish, Manager, Provincial Programs, Geneva Centre for Autism at 416-322-7877 ext. 322.



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