

# FSA Today



*A newsletter of Family Service Association* Spring 2010

## Struggling with Adolescence, Teens Find Friends, Trust, and Themselves at The Teen Center

Sam, like many other typical teenagers, walks in the door of The Teen Center and the first thing she does is ask for something to eat. She flops on the soft red couch and looks around at the bright blue walls where the art and poetry created by her friends are displayed.

About 60 teens come to The Teen Center, located at the Oxford Valley Mall in Langhorne, each Thursday and Friday. They can be found talking to each other, laughing, listening to music, playing board games, or drawing. Almost all of them are happy to have snacks and some drinks. For some, this is the only “meal” they have eaten all day.

To the casual observer, The Teen Center looks like another place for teens to just ‘hang out’. But in reality, The Teen Center is an important place in the lives of these teens. It is a place for help. For many, it is home. “This is my happy place,” says Sam, a Teen Center veteran.

Sam started coming to The Teen Center when she was 14. She met a friend at the mall, and they decided to check out The Teen Center. “It was cool. They had hot cocoa and apple cider!” Sam soon began to make friends.

Sam has struggled with mental illness

her whole life and has run away from home several times. “I hated school. I didn’t have friends; I was picked on all the time because I was different.”

Sam dropped out of high school before she graduated but fortunately was able to receive her diploma after being home-schooled. Sam’s parents have taken her to see a counselor and psychiatrist privately, but, while she goes to the appointments, Sam doesn’t respond well. So her parents encourage her to come to The Teen Center each Friday because they know that Sam will talk to a counselor.

“They love The Teen Center,” Sam says about her parents. “They love it because they know when I come here—I talk. I trust people here. And, I don’t trust many people.”

“The other teens understand me. They’ve been picked on. They’ve had bad relationships. They know where I’m coming from.”

Since 1996, The Teen Center has been a place where teens can just relax and, when they are ready, turn to a professional counselor for assistance with issues such as peer relationships,



**Thanks to The Teen Center, Sam found counselors she trusts and received the help she needed.**

anxiety, depression, dating, family relationships, loss and grieving, sexuality, substance abuse, changes in self, and independent living.

Many youth who come to The Teen

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### *A Message to Our Friends*

Every four years, the Family Center Board and Staff develop a Strategic Plan for the agency that sets our course for the future. Suggestions from agency partners, donors, and clients are gathered and addressed in the Plan. Our 2008-2011 Plan calls on us to recognize the current and emerging needs of the community and to provide high quality services to meet those needs.

In January 2010, we assumed responsibility for The Coffeehouse Center of Bucks County, which serves young men and women, ages 18-26, with Asperger's Syndrome and PDD/NOS, as they transition into adulthood. Currently, the Coffeehouse has 30 Members.

The Coffeehouse was established through the efforts of parents and community leaders who were concerned about the lack of programs for adults with Autism, and it is a first step in filling a significant service gap. We are excited to be joining with them in order to meet this growing need in Bucks County.

Over the months ahead, we will expand the Coffeehouse, which focuses primarily on socialization, and create a more comprehensive program called **AACES** (**A**sperger's **A**wareness, **C**ommunity **E**ducation, and **S**upport). **AACES** will serve a larger and more diverse group of young men and women than the existing Coffeehouse Center. And it will address more of their needs including preparation and support for employment, education, and independent living.

Through the **AACES** program, transition aged young adults living with Asperger's or PDD/NOS will receive the services and support they need to achieve personal growth, greater self direction, improved communication, community integration, and independence.

I am pleased to welcome the **AACES** program to our family.

*~Audrey J. Tucker*

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Center are struggling with increased stress within their homes as their parents face job losses, financial difficulties and other problems resulting from current economic conditions.

Teens can respond to the stress in their lives by abusing drugs, cutting school, harming themselves, entertaining thoughts of suicide, acting out in violent manners, committing crimes. The Teen Center strives to assist these young people in managing their stress and behaviors in healthier ways.

According to Federal estimates, one out of 10 adolescents in the US struggles with a mental health problem severe enough to cause significant impairment. The Teen Center is a non-threatening, convenient place where teens can be linked to other services. Skilled counselors understand that adolescents may be slow to embrace professional help.

Teen Center staff carefully build trust with teens, which is so important for an effective relationship. "When they trust us, they are also more likely to respond to our referrals for additional services as well," explains Marie Turco, Coordinator of The Teen Center.

"Many adolescents won't go to 'traditional' counseling in an office setting. They aren't comfortable in such a formal environment. But when they come to The Teen Center, they are comfortable because they are with their peers. They see and talk with other kids who are struggling with the same issues. That gives them more confidence to be able to talk to the counselors."

"I think we have all learned to feel better about ourselves. We've learned how to deal with things without suicide, drugs or cutting," Sam explains when

asked what teens get from coming to The Teen Center. "Me? I've learned I'm not normal. What *is* normal? I am unique!"

The Teen Center offers educational groups to its members. Topics are usually suggested by the teens themselves, and the staff will bring in experts to lead the discussion with the teens. Recent topics have included Gender & Sexual Identity, Bullying, and Suicide.

"The groups are great," says Sam "I remember attending one about sexual identity. I wasn't sure about mine. I had never had anyone to talk to about it."

After coming to the Teen Center for many years, Sam feels she is ready to move on with her life. The Teen Center staff has encouraged Sam to continue to see her psychiatrist and to work with her case manager to assist her in becoming more independent. Sam has more confidence in herself and is excited about her future.

When asked what those future plans are, Sam replied, "I'm heading to the food court. I'm hungry!"

*The Teen Center is open on Thursday 3:00pm – 8:45pm and Friday 1:00pm – 8:45pm for teens ages 14-19. It is funded by the Bucks County Children and Youth Social Services Agency and the United Way of Bucks County. If you would like to support The Teen Center, please visit, [fsabc.org/mission/teen](http://fsabc.org/mission/teen)*

## National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day is May 6<sup>th</sup>

### Children's Mental Health Matters. Here's why.

**An estimated 9% of 12- to 17- year-olds experienced at least one major depressive episode during the past year.**

- 60–80% of teens who suffer from depression go untreated.

**Complications of untreated teen depression are far-reaching and may affect many aspects of a young person's life. These include:**

- School absenteeism and decreased performance.
- Strained relations with parents and siblings.
- Withdrawal from peers leading to reduced support systems.
- Emotional distress.
- Increased chance of smoking and excess alcohol and drug use.
- Potential for suicide.

**Suicide is the third leading cause of death in 11 to 18-year-olds. In the past year:**

- 15% of high school students reported serious thoughts of killing themselves.
- 11% of high school students reported making a suicide plan.
- 7% of high school students reported attempting suicide.
- 2% of high school students reported having made a suicide attempt that required medical attention.

**The majority, 63%, of teen suicide victims exhibit psychiatric symptoms for more than a year before their deaths.**

- For every completed suicide, an estimated 8 to 25 attempts occur.
- Over three million youth are at risk for suicide, yet only 36% receive treatment.

*Source: TeenScreen National Center for Mental Health Checkups at Columbia University*

Parents and family members are usually the first to notice if a child has problems with emotions or behavior. Your observations, along with those of a teacher and other caregivers, can help determine your need to seek help for your child.

Early detection, diagnosis and treatment can help children reach their full potential. If you suspect a problem or have questions, talk with your child's pediatrician or contact a mental health professional.

Visit our website for information on all our child and adolescent programs: [www.fsabc.org](http://www.fsabc.org)

Founded in 1953, Family Service Association is a private nonprofit, non-sectarian, human service agency providing services to individuals and families in Bucks County, PA. FSA is accredited by the Council on Accreditation for Children and Family Services, Inc. FSA is licensed by the Commonwealth of PA to provide outpatient mental health assessment and treatment services, and out-patient drug and alcohol assessment and treatment services.

#### Lower Bucks and Administrative Office

Cornerstone Executive Suites  
4 Cornerstone Drive, Langhorne, PA 19047  
215.757.6916 Fax 215.757.2115

#### Central Bucks Office

708 N. Shady Retreat Road, #1B,  
Doylestown, PA 18901  
215.345.0550

#### Upper Bucks Office

312 W. Broad Street, Quakertown, PA 18951  
215.538.1616

#### Kelly Family Center

2 Canal's End Road  
Canal's End Plaza, Ste. 201G, Bristol, PA 19007  
215.781.6602

#### The Teen Center at the Oxford Valley Mall

Langhorne, PA 19047  
215.757.7823

*The official registration and financial information of Family Service Association of Bucks County may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free within Pennsylvania, 800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.*

FSA Today is published quarterly by Family Service Association of Bucks County.

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Join us for  
**Drive for Youth**  
June 14, 2010  
**Jericho National Golf Club**

[www.fsabc.org/news-events](http://www.fsabc.org/news-events)

# Painting for Child Abuse Prevention

Over sixty parents and children participated in the “Painting for Child Abuse Prevention” project in Bristol Borough in April. The project is spearheaded by the Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance to spread the word that child abuse can be prevented by strengthening families and supporting parents. Each year these efforts result in the creation of unique, collaborative murals which serve as ongoing reminders of “April is Child Abuse Prevention Month.”

Along with professional artists from Heart to Art, (a woman-owned arts education organization), families painted a 4’x8’ mural of the Bristol Borough community that will be displayed in the Borough. Each person who participated in the painting signed their name on the back of the mural.

The evening was part of the bi-monthly Family Night program, an activity of the Kelly Family Center’s Family to Family Initiative. The Kelly Family Center is a cooperative program of the Bucks County Children and Youth Social Services Agency and FSA. The Kelly Family Center was one of three locations chosen to participate in this year’s mural project.

Visit [www.fsabc.org](http://www.fsabc.org) to see color photos of Painting for Prevention.



Children and families paint for prevention.

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A New Addition to the FSA Family

Join us for Drive for Youth  
June 14, 2010  
Jericho National Golf Club

 **Family  
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4 Cornerstone Drive  
Langhorne, PA 19047

**... Strengthening Individuals, Families and Communities since 1953**