

Autistry Newsletter - December 2017

Janet Lawson, MFT | December 26, 2017

2017 – what a fabulous year! Last December I wrote that we were “ready to roll up our sleeves and take Autistry to the next level”. I am happy to report that we did just that. We received our Community Care License, became vendorized by the Golden Gate Regional Center, launched the Autistry Comprehensive Adult Program (ACAP), became authorized to award Continuing Education credits, launched the Autistry Professional Development Program with our first seminar, Working with the Autistic Client, and welcomed several new students to the Autistry Core Workshop Program. In 2017, we created a solid foundation and we are now rolling our sleeves up even higher to expand these programs and add more activities in 2018.

Launch of ACAP: We have long envisioned a multi-day program to support transitioning individuals – not just those young adults going from high school to post high school, but also those transitioning from inactivity to engagement, from loss of job to finding one’s way again, and from isolation to community. Working closely with our Autistry students and families we have created a program that embraces and supports life-long learning, vocational readiness, healthy living, and cultural/social awareness. This is easy to conceptualize but a bit more difficult to materialize. It took months of scheduling, organizing, and planning but the reward – a successful first semester!



How does ACAP work? We organize our week around the college course schedule. Most students take at least one college course and usually attend class twice a week. Autistry mentors help students navigate public transportation to get to class, will attend class with them when needed, and provide homework help at College of Marin Learning Labs and at Autistry.

On days of no classes (and if there is no homework to be done!), students work on designated Autistry projects. These projects are each designed to teach specific skills and to create products that are useful for the community. Currently we have 4 major lines of production happening:



1. Art Boxes: These can be used for creating dioramas. Matt teaches the students how to measure, cut, and assemble the wooden boxes. They also learn to use the laser cutter and the ShopBot.

The art boxes will be donated to local art programs.

Our first customers are Oak Hill School, Cedars of Marin, and The Helix School.

2. Screen Guards: At the request of Dan Phillips of the Technology Resource Center of Marin, we are making acrylic keyboard guards that fit over an iPad to help guide one’s fingers to the correct spot on a touch screen. With our unique shop facility and our talented workers in mind, we are exploring other cool projects to create for the TRC.

3. Art Smocks: Gabrielle and Chloe have designed a versatile smock for protecting one's clothes while working with paints and other messy mediums. The basic prototype can be made in 3 different sizes with various pocket options. This project teaches our students how to create and adjust a pattern as well as machine and hand-sewing. The smocks will be donated to schools and nonprofit organizations.



4. Original Ornaments: Allie and several students have designed fabulous animal-themed ornaments – like this octopus snowflake. We will make them in various materials – wood, acrylic, card stock, heavy fabric. The students learn basic design concepts, CAD drawing skills using several different professional programs, and how to use the laser cutter. These we may sell online or at Farmer's Markets as a way to experience the world of commerce.



We also offer the very popular Cooking with Gabrielle. She teaches nutrition and healthy eating along with basic cooking skills. The students have made some very yummy meals – Persian Shish Kabobs, Turkey Pot Pie, Chicken Enchiladas, and Empanadas. And of course there are the scrumptious cakes, cookies, biscuits, pies, and other tasty sweets.

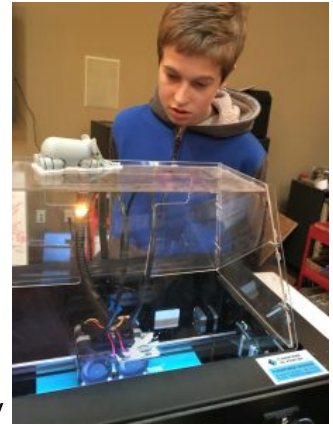
To top off the week, we have Excursion Fridays with Sara. Each week the ACAP students explore the Bay Area. Trips have included the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, a hike through Samuel P. Taylor Park, visit to the Bay Model in Sausalito, a peer-guided tour of UC Berkeley, and a tour of the Marin Civic Center with Supervisor Damon Connolly. The students learn how to utilize public transportation to get out and about in their community.



As you can tell there are lots of moving parts to this complex program but notes like this one from the Dinkelspiel family make all the planning worth the effort:

»“Autistry Studios has been such a vital and wonderful part of our lives, providing our autistic son, Chris with critical help and guidance as he makes his transition into adulthood. The staff has worked with Chris extensively as he navigates his way through classes at the College of Marin, and in teaching him the life skills he will need to live independently. Chris loves Autistry Studios, the friends that he has made there, the many skills he has learned, and the accomplishments he has achieved. We are forever grateful for what Autistry Studios has done for Chris and for our family, and we look forward to continuing to work with Autistry Studios for many years to come. Thank you!”«

CORE Workshop Program: ACAP may have taken much of our energy last year but we never lost focus on the heart of Autistry which is the Core Workshop Program. The Core is a therapeutic Maker/STEAM program where students ranging in age from 13 – 55 create awesome projects of their own choosing and along the way gain fundamental and essential knowledge about themselves.



Some students come to the Core in their early teens, stay with us through high school, through college, and continue to attend workshops as they establish careers. Our younger students often discover that, even though they like to test them, firm boundaries keep one physically and emotionally safe. And, within that safe zone they can settle down and build projects they have been dreaming of for years.

This year we added new electronic capabilities and created several new projects on the 3D printer. Having the right tools and equipment on hand is what makes it possible for students to build such a wide variety of projects. We have 2 new 3D printers on order, the second laser cutter will come online soon, several new work benches have been built during this holiday week, and boxes of Arduino and Raspberry Pi parts keep arriving.

The goal at Autistry, for both the ACAP and the Core Program is to help individuals become as independent as they are capable of being.

»Becoming independent is not a passive process. It takes courage and an inner fortitude to challenge oneself to learn a new skill, break an old habit, or create a dream.«

Your support helps us purchase great tools and state-of-the-art equipment, and attract smart, talented staff – the key ingredients to Autistry’s success. There’s still time for that End-of-Year Donation!

The Autistry Team wishes you all a fabulous new year!