



Preliminary Proposal: Community-based Social Skills Summer Programming Curriculum:

Using the Community as a Classroom

The community is the perfect place for an individual to practice being social. Great opportunities exist for the generalization of learned social skills exists through practice out in the world. With guides who understand how a child individually processes information, faster growth in connecting with the social world is bound to occur. It is also a chance for classmates to share unique experience together that will hopefully serve to create greater bonding in the school years to come. Social practice brings about the ability to find the most effectively consistent ways to enjoy engaging the world and the other individuals in it. The idea is to learn and have fun at the same time.

1. Learn practical life skills during daily trips into various community settings.
 - Travel training using public transportation
 - Engaging the public
 - Learning to use money (a daily activity allowance for each child is included)
 - People watching as a way to learn and enhance interpreting non-verbal information (body language, tone of voice)
 - Learning to be social in a group while in the community
 - Learning different social rules depending on the place being visited (museum, café/restaurant, department store, train/bus)

2. Sharing and learning about each person's interests in the group
 - Each child over the course of the six weeks will work with the staff to plan a fieldtrip day that centers around sharing a main interest
 - For example: One child may love the violin and classical music so she might plan a tour of symphony hall and a sampling of favorite pieces for the group to hear.

3. Improvisational Training
 - Theater games have proven to be an excellent (and fun) vehicle to teach a multitude of social skills simultaneously:
 - Perspective taking
 - Literal/Figurative
 - Interpretation of body language
 - Functional Use of Eye Contact
 - Thinking on Your Feet
 - Emotional Flexibility
 - Making Transitions
 - Maintaining dialogue
 - Building/Maintaining Relationships
 - Improving Self Esteem





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To Whom This May Concern,

Brian Gordon developed and administered a Social Learning Program for a group of middle school students who struggle with having a positive sense of self and the ability to navigate the social arena independently due to processing and anxiety issues. This addressed a need in the Beverly Schools by providing a program that would prevent regression during the long summer break. Brian and his staff worked closely with six students and their parents. The students, who call themselves the "Original 6", appropriately named the program "School's Out". Through community building, structured activities, and trips to places of interests these students were explicitly taught skills that they have generalized and demonstrated during this school year. Parents and students have been empowered to take control of their social lives and are still meeting once a month, as a group. Reports from parents and students have been extremely positive and we hope to build upon this program to reach more students who would benefit from these practical, hands-on interventions. Brian has made a significant difference in the lives of our students. We owe him a debt of gratitude.

Brian Gordon has a keen sense of the needs of children and young adults falling within the Autism Spectrum. He understands the importance of teaching communication and social skills to help students feel more confident and competent, opening the door for risk-taking. His "think outside of the box" approach to using the community as a teaching ground to provide students with real life experiential and situational learning opportunities proved to be invaluable for our students programming this past summer. He has an uncanny and amazing ability to make learning relevant, interesting and fun, creating long-lasting impact. We look forward to our continued work with Brian connecting students with their peers and community in the coming year.

Debra O'Connor
Director of Pupil Personnel Services, Beverly Public Schools

Karen Wilk
Out of District Administrative Team Chair, Beverly Public Schools

Biography

Brian Gordon (of BSG Social Learning) works with children and adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders and other related social/emotional challenges. He served as Director of the Northeast Arc's *Spotlight Program*, a drama and experience-based clinical intervention, and recently piloted successful community-based social skills programs in several public school systems. He regularly consults to schools, organizations, and families, provides in-service training to educators and other professionals and speaks regularly at local and national conferences.

Brian's recently published article, "*Comedy and Autism: A Parallel Universe*" (*Journal of the International Association of Theatre for Autism*, winter 2010) explains the relationship between performance arts and teaching social pragmatics to individuals with ASD.

BSG Social Learning resources and services can be found at www.bsgsociallearning.com:

"Brian Gordon is one of the most innovative professionals working in our field. With a background in standup comedy, one of the toughest professions around, Brian opens doors to communication and confidence for young people with autism spectrum conditions. He gets how making mistakes can become fertile ground for learning. He is optimistic, fun, brilliant, and so are his teaching methods. I highly recommend Brian's work in your school, agency, community or program!"

— Valerie Paradiz, PhD
Author of *The Integrated Self Advocacy ISA® Curriculum* and *Elijah's Cup*

