

DEVELOPMENT AND BEYOND NEWSLETTER

A monthly newsletter by
The Autism Program at
Boston Medical Center
for families and individuals with
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) &
other neurodevelopmental diagnoses

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Dear Friends & Families,

Happy October!

With the changing weather, it's finally starting to feel like fall. One of the most important things **this October is the Open Request Period for the DDS Autism Waiver Program**. It only happens once a year, so if you have a child under 10 with autism, see page 3. The Open Request Period is from October 16th through October 30th.

Halloween is right around the corner. This can be one of the most exciting nights of the year, but some people struggle to feel included. There can be schedule changes, unfamiliar sensory experiences, and more. Everyone deserves to participate- **Check out page 4 for some Autism-friendly Halloween events, and page 6 for tips to make your Halloween more inclusive.**

Did you know: October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month. This was established to raise awareness of hiring workers with disabilities. **To explore these topics, I interviewed Will Burns, an employed autistic adult.** Turn to page 8 to see what Will had to say about his experience in the workplace.

Let's work together to make this October the best one yet!

Warmly,

Phoebe Grabowski

The Autism Program at
Boston Medical Center

Transition Journeys 2026

Saturday, October 24, \$125 regular admission \$150 CE credit admission, (Framingham, MA)

Please join The Arc of Massachusetts for a conference on planning for transition to adulthood tailored for patients, self-advocates, and providers. Whether you're a parent planning for your child's future, a self-advocate exploring new opportunities, or a professional supporting transition-age youth, Transition Journeys 2026 offers practical resources, expert presenters, and valuable connections.

Register today at thearcofmass.org/conference.

Department of Developmental Services

Autism Waiver Program

What is it?

The Autism Division of the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) administers the Children's Autism Waiver Program (AWP) which provides one-to-one interventions to help children diagnosed with autism who exhibit severe behavioral, social and communication challenges through a service called Expanded Habilitation, Education (intensive in-home services and supports). This service occurs in the child's home or other natural settings under the supervision of trained clinical staff and is available for a total of three years. AWP also provides related support services such as community integration activities and respite. At the conclusion of the three years of intensive services, a child may access supplemental services that meet the child's needs and help with the transition out of the intensive AWP until the child's 10th birthday.

Who is eligible?

To qualify, a child must have a confirmed diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), be under the age of 10, reside in Massachusetts, meet DDS and Masshealth eligibility requirements, and be safely supported at home and in the community.

How do I apply?

An Open Interest Application is held annually in October, and this year it is open from October 16- October 30. You can submit the application by mail, email, fax, or complete it online. You will need your child's date of birth, social security number, and MassHealth ID number. The application is available in multiple languages.

**DDS Autism Waiver
Program Website:**

<https://www.mass.gov/lists/autism-waiver-service-program-open-request-period-2026>



*Open
October
16th- 30th*

October Activities



Especially for Me, Autism Friendly Evening at the Museum

October 10, FREE (Acton, MA)

Join the Acton Discovery Museum for an evening of fun! Resources such as headphones and social stories will be available. There will also be a sensory map of the museum! This event will be from 5 PM to 8 PM. Registration is required.

<https://26033.blackbaudhosting.com/26033/Especially-for-Me-Free-Autism-Friendly-Evening-10Oct2026>

Halloweenie Trunk or Treat with Autism Connections

October 11, FREE (Whately, MA)

Autism Connections is hosting a Trunk or Treat event with the Westfield Cruisers. Come to see show cars, decorated trunks, and have some Halloween fun! All ages, open to the community.

<https://spedchildmass.com/event/halloweenie-trunk-or-treat-with-autism-connections/>

Sensory-Friendly Trunk or Treat

October 16, FREE (Medway, MA)

Come Trunk or Treat with the Medway Special Education Parent Advisory Council, at Medway High School! There will be a food trunk, DJ, and a basket raffle. *Advance registration required by October 11th.*

<https://spedchildmass.com/event/sensory-friendly-trunk-or-treat-medway/>

Adaptive Sensory-Friendly Song & Movement Program for Ages 3-8

October 17, FREE (Salem, MA)

Family Circle time is a program that brings families together to learn and play in a supportive environment. The song and movement program is a fun way for kids to share time with their families. Advance registration is recommended.

<https://spedchildmass.com/event/adaptive-sensory-friendly-song-movement-program-for-ages-3-8-8/>



Even More October Activities



Sensory-Friendly Boo in the Barnyard at Weir River Farm

October 17 and 31, \$5 for Trustees members, \$10 for nonmembers (Hingham, MA)

This program has a dedicated hour with reduced guests and a quieter environment. Come wear a costume (no capes) to meet Petunia the Pig, Betty the sheep, Pepper the goat, and more barnyard friends! Advance registration is required.

<https://thetrustees.org/event/448759/>

Dedham Trunk or Treat with Sensory Friendly Time

October 24, FREE (Dedham, MA)

Dedham's annual Trunk or Treat event has options for autism inclusion! For half an hour, from 2:30-3:00 PM, there will be a reduced sensory environment. Join for candy, games, music, and more!

<https://dedhamsquarecircle.org/trunk-or-treat>

Especially For Me: Sensory-Friendly Halloween at the Discovery Museum (All Ages!)

October 30, FREE (Acton, MA)

Join the Acton Discovery Museum for an inclusive Halloween celebration! Kids and adults can wear costumes, explore exhibits, and enjoy reduced crowd sizes, lower lighting, and designated quiet spaces. Advance Registration is required.

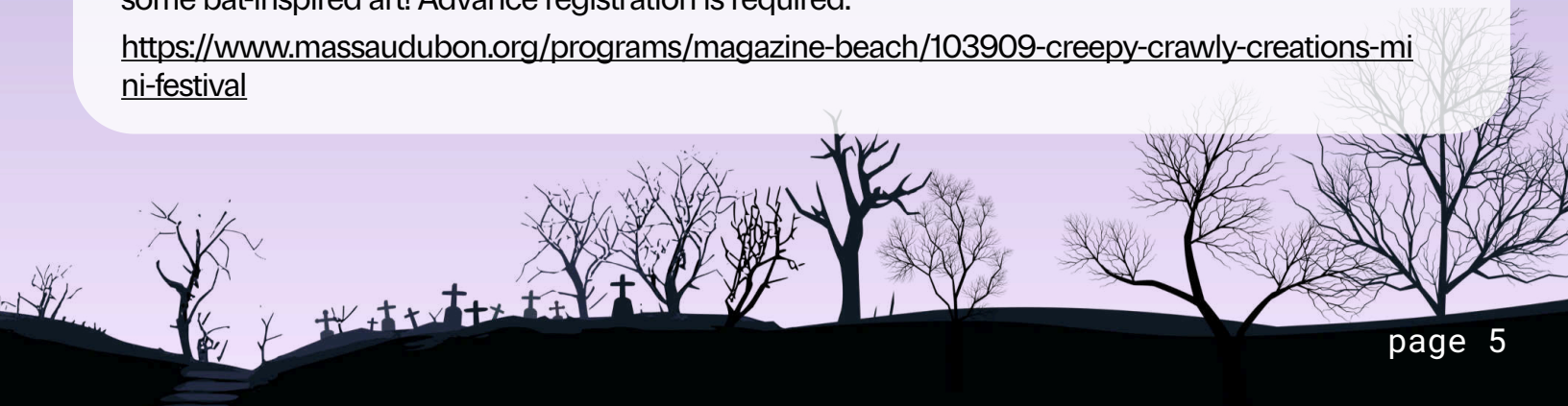
<https://26033.blackbaudhosting.com/26033/Especially-for-Me-Sensory-Friendly-Halloween-30-Oct2026>

Creepy Crawly Creations: Mini Festival

October 31, FREE (Cambridge, MA)

The Magazine Beach Park Nature Center is holding an event all about spooky Halloween animals! Come explore the park and look for creepy crawly animals, or visit craft stations to make some bat-inspired art! Advance registration is required.

<https://www.massaudubon.org/programs/magazine-beach/103909-creepy-crawly-creations-mini-festival>





Ways to Have an Inclusive Halloween



Discuss Halloween before the holiday!

Explain how the family plans to celebrate, and what to expect. There will be new sounds, smells, and sights. This is a great time to use social stories.

Check out this link for a Halloween social story and even more tips:
<https://www.autismparentingmagazine.com/halloween-fun-activities/?srsltid=AfmBOooam7PQp5ZwgEid4kleCmDsPCdgkcmOw-0vQ47iuSSEyS4miTpq>



Ear protectors:

worn by construction workers and musicians

High - Visibility Vest:

worn by airport crews, hunters, and security



Name tag or badge:

worn by retail workers, medical staff, and more

Practice Trick-or-Treating at home. Give your child a chance to get dressed and ready, to see if they need any changes in their costume. Have them knock on doors around the house for candy, while saying 'Trick or Treat!'. Practice like this will make the actual night easier.

Be understanding. Your child might not want to Trick-or-Treat, or participate in Halloween at all. The best part of this holiday is that no one can tell you how to celebrate it. You might have fun watching Halloween movies, making art, or just hanging out!

Plan sensory-friendly costumes. Some people love to play dress-up, but others might find it uncomfortable. For kids that don't like costumes, try DIY costumes, like overalls for a gardener. Pajamas and onesies that look like costumes can also work, or t-shirts with character designs.





Inclusive Halloween Continued



Teal Pumpkins: The Teal Pumpkin Project is a way for kids with severe allergies to trick-or-treat! Houses with a teal pumpkin will have non-food treats and trinkets for kids, instead of candy.

Follow the link or QR code for more about the Teal Pumpkin Project, and a map of participating homes:

<https://www.foodallergy.org/our-initiatives/awareness-campaigns/teal-pumpkin-project>



Have something on hand: If you're trick-or-treating, carry some treats that are approved for your child. Then, you can swap it out with anything they get that might be unsafe.

Did You Know?

Coconuts are no longer considered a tree nut by the FDA, because coconuts are fruits! It is no longer legally required for coconut to be listed as an allergen. If it is an ingredient, it will be listed. It will NOT be listed under the allergen information.

*The top 9 food allergens are
milk, eggs, tree nuts,
peanuts, fish, shellfish,
wheat, soybeans, and
sesame.*

Read The Label: Teach your child to read food labels! This is the easiest way to help them stay safe. In the USA, immediately after or next to the food ingredient list is a 'CONTAINS' list. This tells you if any of the top 9 food allergens are present.

Ways to communicate: Everyone deserves to participate! Check out this resource for some Trick-or-Treat communication cards.

<https://nationalautismassociation.org/halloween-trick-or-treat-cards/>



National Disability Employment Awareness Month

Autism in the workplace: a conversation between two autistic adults



October is
National Disability
Employment

Awareness Month!
This holiday is
meant to highlight
the positive impact
of disabled people
in the workforce.

I interviewed Will Burns- an autistic adult who currently works at an age 65+ assisted living facility. He also speaks at educational events on ASD. I sat down with Will to discuss the job search, self-advocacy, and more.

So, Will, can you start by telling us a little bit about yourself?

My name is William James Burns of Swampscott, Massachusetts. I am 22, almost 23 years old [...] I was diagnosed with autism, specifically Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD) when I was three years old. Thankfully, I was able to get services from an early age, including physical, occupational and speech therapy.

I prioritize reality every day of my life because there's nothing more special about the real world than what there already is. My peers and I are on this big mission to help people with autism find

their place and purpose in life. We feel very grateful that we take on these initiatives, not alone, but together.

It sounds like you're really involved in a lot of self-advocacy spaces.

I very much am, and I did mention before that I am currently employed at an assisted living facility, but it's not the first job that I've had in my life. I have a full resume of experience, [mostly] hospitality and customer service. It gives me a great opportunity to increase my confidence, my social skills, and my personal awareness as I grow as a person.

And what kind of responsibilities do you have at work?

My responsibilities include helping out in the kitchen, folding napkins, stocking items, taking orders for residents, [and] being very communicative with my coworkers. Also, I have been in charge of coordinating certain events for the residents. It's been super fun.

I am also in charge of taking responsibility by speaking at every staff training per month. It has been very informative, but it's given me a very great chance at showing people what I'm made of- who I wish to become as a person, and [what to work toward] so that the world can become a much better and more secure place.

That's really cool. How did you get this job in the first place? How did you apply? Were you referred?

In summer of 2023, I was applying to more than 10 jobs. Although I was able to fill out applications with some support and attend interviews by myself, a lot of them didn't work out too well. However, what I did find was something very close to me, and I was able to figure out that this company could be a really great workplace for me at some point. So I applied for the server position during that summer. I went to orientation that August, but didn't start working until September when I turned 20.

How did you pick this job in particular? Like, how do I know what career I want to do? How did you make such a big decision?

Based on my resume, I have [substantial] experience within customer service. So something I very much enjoy is being around people, having full conversations, but [also] understanding certain basics on knowing how to go behind the scenes. I really like to dig down deep inside of things. Part of that is going into the kitchen, understanding the ropes, figuring out new recipes. [...] So just being around people, especially the elderly, who understand me, is such a big honor.

Next up, I want to ask you some more specific questions about employment with autism. What do you think is your greatest strength as an autistic employee?

My greatest strength as an autistic employee is maintaining a great memory. A lot of times, I like

to make sure that I understand a resident's routine right away so that I don't have to be asked too many times.

ASD can mean a lot of strengths as well as weaknesses. What are some things you struggle with as an employee?

Yeah, so some of the tasks that I struggle with would include understanding certain concepts at first. Having certain changes within schedules, and also trying to figure out certain ways people talk when it comes to adjusting things [...]

Sometimes there are changes within the menus due to rotten food or cross-contaminations, [or] last minute changes. Sometimes that can be a bit frustrating along with staff shortages.

This is an age-old question- when did you disclose that you have autism? Was that something you communicated before the interview, or after being hired?

I had communicated my autism during the interview process. My former boss, who still works with me, his son is autistic. As a matter of fact, too, [he] has a tattoo that has a puzzle piece because it shows that his son is autistic and it very much made me smile. It gave me such a warm feeling inside as this was going to be the start to a very nice friendship. I thought that it was going to take off so brilliantly. It easily did. I could not feel more blessed.

So a lot of people with autism struggle to prepare for something like school, and then they have difficulties with the transition back from school to home.

There's also autistic burnout. How do you handle the major day-to-day transitions of employment?

I would say I try to keep myself motivated. I always find a way to understand who I am, look around my surroundings, but think about people who I look up to and that look down on me. I think that if I appreciate myself for what and who I am, I know that I will feel better within every moment of every day that I am granted to live, because my presence is what makes me possible.

What would you say to an autistic adult who is currently applying to and interviewing for jobs?

Know that you are possible. Never doubt yourself. Always try to remember that if you are present within each hour of every day you're granted, whether standing, sitting, or moving, you know that you are capable of making someone, including yourself, very joyful. Because if you feel that you're not making [someone] feel as if they can be who they are, think thrice. Because if you know that you are putting in efforts while showing people who you wish to become, the world is your oyster.

The parents of those autistic adults we just talked about, they're probably reading this too. So what would you say to them?

Love your children. Always nurture them for who they are, not what they're labeled. Give them the room that they can become to shine. Because if they're the stars in your galaxy, you know that your days, your months, your years, and your quality within your life will just improve.

Nice. And so specifically, like when you were applying for jobs, was there something really helpful or a hindrance that [people in your life] were doing?

If my parents weren't managers, then, you know, it'd be a bit complicated, but at least there could be something done. However, when my mom helped me update my resume, I felt so much better and it was such a [better] look [...]

I'm proud of it because it showed me that I'm very much putting in so much effort. It took a lot of time, but it's more professional as well. It shows employers that I care. It gives me a chance to seek a new opportunity.

This has all been so great. To tie it up, do you have anything you want to promote, or anything you're doing right now that you want to shout out?

I just want to promote the importance of hiring autistic employees within businesses. This is my big dream before leaving any workplace. So what I want [employers] to do in all the workplaces that my peers and I have worked at is promote an importance of giving people on the spectrum the opportunity to work because I feel so bad for these folks who don't have the employment or don't have this life that they're looking for. [Because] regardless of what statuses someone faces, equal treatment is a human right. You know, we can make ourselves feel better when we help others, even with small, singular acts of kindness. But let that be genuine. Don't pretend that you're being kind: actually, genuinely be kind.

OCTOBER LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

What is Transition-to-Adulthood?

October 7 FREE, (Virtual)

This workshop provides guidance, resources, and more for peoples aged 14-26 with disabilities. These skills will help them prepare for life after high school, and prepare for independent living. Advance registration is required.

<https://fcsn.org/event/what-is-transition-to-adulthood/>

Introduction to Autism for Autistic Adults

October 19 FREE, (Virtual)

Come explore your understanding of autism! This discussion will cover misconceptions of autism, and elaborate on autistic strengths/weaknesses. This is a great opportunity for a newly diagnosed adult! Advance registration required.

<https://aane.org/events/workshop-introduction-to-autism-for-adults-10-5-26-700-pm-830-pm-et/>

Voting Rights Event with Massachusetts DDS

October 15 FREE, (Bedford, MA)

October 20 FREE, (Chelmsford, MA)

DDS invites those with intellectual/developmental disabilities to a free presentation on their voting rights! Learn how to vote, the rules under guardianship, and more! This event has two dates.

<https://spedchildmass.com/event/voting-rights-events-with-the-mass-department-of-developmental-services-5/>

Housing Workshop (English & Spanish)

Spanish: October 14, (Virtual)

English: October 21, (Virtual)

Do you need affordable, accessible housing? This workshop by the Boston Center for Independent Living provides information on your options. It includes information on reasonable accommodations, voucher completion, and more. Advance registration is required.

Spanish <https://bostoncil.org/event/spanish-housing-workshop-taller-de-busqueda-de-vivienda-en-espanol-6/>

English <https://bostoncil.org/event/housing-workshop-3-2-2/2026-10-21/>

Estate Planning for Special Needs

October 20 FREE, (Virtual)

Join a certified Tax Attorney and an Elder Law Attorney, to explore your estate options. Learn strategies to keep your loved ones safe, and reduce estate death taxes. Advance registration is required.

<https://spedchildmass.com/event/estate-planning-for-special-needs-2/>

Workshop- Love, Sex, and Autism: Practical Guidance for Authentic Intimacy

October 22, \$35 no CE, \$60 for CE registration (Virtual)

Candice Christiansen will discuss her #1 bestseller Love, Sex, and Autism. Her work is centered on the idea that autistic people are capable and deserving of love and intimacy. Join for an exploration of intimacy on the Autism spectrum.

<https://aane.org/events/ce-workshop-love-sex-and-autism-practical-guidance-for-authentic-intimacy-10-22-26-1200-pm-200-pm-et/>

Financial Literacy Workshop

November 2 FREE, (Virtual)

This 2-hour workshop will cover identifying fraud, identity theft, and other scams. This event is led by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) alongside AANE. Advance registration is required.

<https://aane.org/events/financial-literacy-workshop-financial-responsibility-decision-making-preventing-financial-fraud-for-adults-11-2-26-630-pm-830-pm-et/>

Resources For the Upcoming Holidays

Clothing

Catie's Closet is a nonprofit organization that provides free clothing and toiletries to children in K-12 education. Children can go to their Catie's Closet during school hours. This is a great way to discreetly get the things you need, without a complex financial screening process. Check out the link below to see a map of schools with Catie's Closets.



<https://www.catiescloset.org/locations/>

Meals

There are lots of resources for **free or low-cost food**! The best way to find them are to search by your geographic area. The Mayor's Office of Food Justice worked with the Boston Public Library to make a list of food resources by Boston region! Follow the link or QR code to select your area, and see what's available! Multiple languages available.



<https://guides.bpl.org/guide4help/food>

Gifts

The **Autism Spectrum Disorder Foundation (ASDF)** has a **holiday gift card program**! This program provides e-gift cards to families with financial need and a child with ASD. Applications are online, and open from November 2- November 16. Proof of ASD diagnosis is not required for entry, but is required to receive a gift.



[Find more information here!](#)

Travel

Wings For Autism helps children with **ASD** to prepare for air travel. This free program gives families a half-day to experience and acclimate to the airport. The program includes airport entry, bag checking, security screening, and boarding/exiting the plane. Events on October 3rd and November 7th.



<https://www.charlesrivercenter.org/news-events/major-events/wings-for-autism/>

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Resources

The Autism Program is continues to support families in many ways both inside and outside of Boston Medical Center. Check out our website to learn more about the services, supports and programs we offer including our Autism Friendly Hospital Initiative, Teens Engaged as Mentors (TEAM) program, and our training offerings. We also have a huge resource library where you can access free information on a variety of topics such as safety, behavioral support, transition to adulthood, insurance and more!



www.bmc.org/autism

[@BMCAutismProgram](https://twitter.com/BMCAutismProgram)

autismprogram@bmc.org

Clinic

Our DBP clinicians are available for developmental evaluations, assessments and follow up. To connect with the clinical team, please call 617-414-4841 and follow the prompts for Developmental Pediatrics.

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Arathi Reddy, DO

Rachel Amgott, NP

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Audrey Christiansen, MD

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About this newsletter...



Development and Beyond is brought to you by the Autism Program at Boston Medical Center, a family support program of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics. Join our mailing list for future newsletters, community resources and more - just scan the QR code to the right!

