Tennessee Disability Pathfinder’s Autism Portal

by Lydia Wingo Kane

A new Autism Resources Portal is being developed through the work of the Tennessee Disability Coalition and the Statewide Autism Planning Council. Last year, in their efforts to develop a statewide, coordinated system of care for children and youth with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorders), the Planning Council conducted a needs assessment consisting of two parts: a family survey and a series of Community Conversations. A one-stop resource for autism information was chief among the needs identified in this statewide effort.

Since Tennessee Disability Pathfinder is a clearinghouse for disability information, it was selected to house the portal on its website, www.familypathfinder.org. Vanderbilt

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Kennedy Center’s TRIAD program is lending its expertise to the project by providing the content for the portal, which is being created in consultation with family-centered advocacy groups like the Autism Society of Middle Tennessee. Content will be continually updated with input from these groups, as well as TRIAD, to ensure that the information provided remains current and user-friendly.

The purpose of the Autism Resources Portal is three-fold: it seeks to be a guide to autism information; to help families connect to resources and information in a more convenient and simple manner; and to provide access to agencies and services in families’ communities across Tennessee.

The development of this portal is important because there is so much information on autism and it can be confusing for parents and individuals to decide what is good, relevant, accurate and research-based.

The portal is unique because it provides general information as well as resources in the community. Most websites only have one or the other. For instance, if a parent wants information on early intervention services, the portal provides a description of what those services are, who is eligible to receive the services, agencies in the area to go to for testing, and other connections to their community for early intervention resources and service providers.

The portal is also unique because it provides resources across the lifespan. Typically, autism resources focus on one select age group. Here resources for teens and adults as well as children are addressed.

The portal is set up using general questions that someone may have about autism, from an initial diagnosis to issues of adulthood and everything in between. Basic information is covered such as what is autism, how to access services and how to deal with the diagnosis. The aim is to make the information as accessible as possible by using language that is easy to understand, presented in a simple, clear format.

The portal should be ready for use later this year. When up and running, you’ll be able to access it by going to www.familypathfinder.org and clicking on the Autism Resources button. For more information on autism or disability-related resources, call 800.640.4636.

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