

39TH AJFCA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

MAY 15-17, 2011

The Westin Hotel, Calgary, Alberta

THE GOODMAN AWARD SUBMISSION FORM

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I. General Information

a. Program Title: *Going Places!* Social Club for Young Adults with Asperger's Syndrome and Related Disorders

b. Agency Name: JSSA (Jewish Social Service Agency) serving greater Washington, DC, in partnership with the Jewish Community Center of Northern Virginia (JCCNV), Fairfax, VA

c. Date Program Began: 2007

II. Summary

a. Initial Problem(s) to be Addressed by the Program: *Going Places!* was formed to help lessen the isolation of an underserved population—young adults with Asperger's syndrome, a form of autism—by offering fun, interactive and socially focused monthly social outings. This fills a gap for the many young adults with Asperger's who have "aged-out" of the educational system and therefore have lost essential social services and a broader community connection. These young adults often can't pick up on social cues, have trouble expressing empathy, and struggle to make and maintain relationships with friends, family and co-workers. Because of these social barriers, they find the challenges of living, studying, and working independently extraordinarily difficult.

b. Brief Overall Program Description: *Going Places!* introduces group members to new people, brings them out into the community to have fun, and strengthens their social interactions with others—all within the safety of a structured and therapeutically guided program. Each month, the club members enjoy outings such as museum visits, bowling, and theater evenings. JSSA clinical social workers and JCCNV special needs recreational specialists accompany the *Going Places!* participants. The supervisory staff works with the club members to enhance their communication skills, to feel comfortable interacting with each other and to build their confidence.

III. Components

a. Jewish Component: The *Going Places!* Social Club, open to all faiths, reflects the fundamental Jewish values of both sponsoring organizations—*tikkun olam* and *tzedakah*—to respect dignity and care for others, engender a sense of communal belonging, and foster inclusiveness and support.

b. Outreach Component: As a response to parent feedback from various JSSA support groups, the agency partnered with the JCCNV to actively fulfill the unmet needs of young adults with Asperger's who seek greater independence. Our outreach includes marketing through print and on-line communication and public relations efforts. JSSA and JCCNV staff also network throughout the professional community with targeted outreach focused on local area high schools, colleges, places of worship and other organizations serving this population.

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c. Community-Building Component: *Going Places!* has strengthened our Jewish community by uniting two sister agencies with unique areas of individual expertise. The program has also incorporated volunteers to assist at some events, giving young people opportunities to support those with special needs. For club participants, *Going Places!* has created a critically needed social circle in which they find friendship and inspiration among their peers with similar life goals.

IV. Outcomes

a. Outcomes of the Program to Date: *Going Places!* draws 25-30 people monthly at every gathering, and additional clubs for teens and adults over 30 have been formed both in Northern Virginia and recently in Maryland. Participants and their families have indicated a greater comfort level in social situations and an increased interest in forming and maintaining friendships both within the group and on their own. Some have even reported that for the first time, they are dating. Others are working on improving their job search and life skills in preparation for more independent living and for entering the workplace.

b. Evaluation Method: JSSA and the JCCNV receive consistently high client survey evaluations from members and families praising the program and its leaders. Referrals to friends and others have increased dramatically each year. More people are joining the social club each month, and a core group of club members have now been participating in the program for a number of years.

V. Sustainability

a. Total Program Cost for *Going Places!* Social Club for Young Adults: \$7,500 annually

b. Major Income Sources: Funding for this program is raised through grants, individual donations and a per event fee (averaging \$20) which is waived for those experiencing financial difficulties.

c. Agency's Plans for the Continuation of the Program: Expansion has already begun. As a result of the program's success, JSSA and the JCCNV have launched *Going Places!* social clubs for teens and for adults over 30. We have also expanded the young adults program to our Rockville, MD, location.

VI. Contact Information

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