



Connections Education Center of the Palm Beaches
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I am sure this scenario is familiar to someone you may know or even someone in your family.

For some time, a mother and father have been wondering why their son isn't hitting his developmental milestones and doing all the things they thought he should be doing by 2 or 3 years of age. Now Mom and Dad are at the doctor's office awaiting a diagnosis. They have been reading literature and they're thinking about the rising incidence of autism spectrum disorders in this country and around the world. They are remembering the statistics that the chances of having a child with autism spectrum disorders is 1 in 68 (1 in 42 are boys) and that this diagnosis far outweighs the incidence of childhood cancer, diabetes, and AIDS combined. Next they hear, "Your child is on the autism spectrum." The days and weeks afterwards are filled with anxiety, grief, fear and eventually, questions; as parents look towards actions and solutions geared towards helping their child. A familiar refrain for parents is, "Now what do we do?"

If you live in Palm Beach County, FL, there are limited resources and waiting lists for most schools and therapies. It is particularly difficult for families without the financial resources to pay for these much needed services.

All of our staff and the majority of our students were a part of another charter school for children with autism spectrum disorder. The school relocated to the north end of the county leaving some families unable to attend. Several families approached our staff asking if they would start a school centrally located because of the hardship the travel and expense would cause going to the relocated school. A group of supporters came together and in four months, **Connections Education Center of the Palm Beaches (CEC)**, a nonprofit Palm Beach County private school serving children ages 3-14 with autism spectrum disorders, opened its doors in August 2015. We are a tuition free private school and we have been approved by Palm Beach County School District to be a charter school for the 2016 school year. Our school's curriculum is based on the principles of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), and provides quality special education programs that are tailored to meet the unique needs of each student. With a goal for every student to maximize their potential using evidence based practices, CEC is committed to providing a quality education to all their students as well as providing much needed support to parents. The student/teacher ratio is 2:1 and all the teachers are certified ESE teachers. The school has speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, and board certified behavior analysts providing services to our students as well.

We are currently in a building that does not have a playground or enough space to accept all the families on our waiting list. A generous donor/supporter has purchased a vacant Boys and Girls Club for our use. The building has been vacant for over 3 years but it needs a tremendous amount of work before we could occupy it. The building has so much potential including a gymnasium and a swimming pool. It will be a centrally located facility, able to provide much needed services and supports to not only just the children and families, but to the community in general, providing an "autism friendly", inclusive environment. When our board and staff saw this building, they looked past the weeds, the bad roof, and all the other imperfections, and saw a facility that would be able to provide all the "connections" we are trying to fulfil through our mission. The services available will be able to offer life changing as well as lifesaving opportunities for all families, regardless of finances.

We ask that you help us in any way you can. To these families and us it makes all the difference in the world! CECPB is a family-oriented setting that gives the children the structure they need in an understanding and compassionate way. When I think of the possibilities of a new building, tailored to all the children's needs, I am very hopeful that the vision will turn into reality.

Thank you for your time,

Debi Johnson
Executive Director/Principal