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# Media Kit

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## Media Inquiries

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Please contact us for:

- Information or interviews about the PLAY Project
- Interviews with Dr. Solomon as an autism expert
- Additional information on the organization, its affiliates, and continued research
- Photos, video clips, digital images, and logos



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## Program Backgrounder

For the past decade, The P.L.A.Y. Project has been training parents and professionals to provide affordable and effective interventions for young children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

### Beginning the PLAY Project

The P.L.A.Y. Project (Play and Language for Autistic Youngsters) began in 2001, when Richard Solomon, MD, created an affordable early intervention program for young children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in Ann Arbor, MI. As a developmental and behavioral pediatrician, Dr. Solomon realized that families who received a diagnosis needed guidance, support and effective treatment options.

Dr. Solomon designed The P.L.A.Y. Project Home Consulting program as a response to the lack of services in his community and across the country. He saw that most families could not afford to pay \$40,000 to \$60,000 per year for the intensive interventions recommended for young children with ASD. The P.L.A.Y. Project, by comparison, trains parents to provide the hours of intervention their children need, reducing the cost to around \$4,000 per year.

Supervising a small number of qualified therapists as Home Consultants, Dr. Solomon began offering The P.L.A.Y. Project in 2001 with 75 families. Through structured monthly home visits, the consultants trained parents to effectively engage their children with ASD in day-to-day interactions, emphasizing the importance of helping parents become their child's best play partner.

What began as a community-based program quickly grew into a model that has been replicated around the world.

As of 2011, there are nearly 100 agencies in 27 states and 7 countries outside of the U.S. providing families with the intensive programming they need.

The intervention is based on the Developmental, Individualized, Relationship-based (DIR) approach of Dr. Stanley Greenspan, popularly known as Floortime. The methods and techniques are designed to help children resolve the three core deficits of autism: 1) self-isolation and impaired social skills, 2) language delay, and 3) impaired communication.

Results of an initial evaluation of the model indicate that parents can learn and successfully use play-based approaches. Overall, there was a significant improvement in the children's development. Nearly half of the children using The PLAY Project Home Consulting model in the study made good to excellent functional developmental progress, and 90% of parents were satisfied with the services provided. The research was published in the peer-reviewed journal, *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice*.

Dr. Solomon is currently conducting a 2-year, randomized, controlled clinical trial of The P.L.A.Y. Project, in partnership with Easter Seals and with the help of a \$1.85 million grant from the National Institute of Mental Health. The results are expected by 2013.





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## The P.L.A.Y. Project

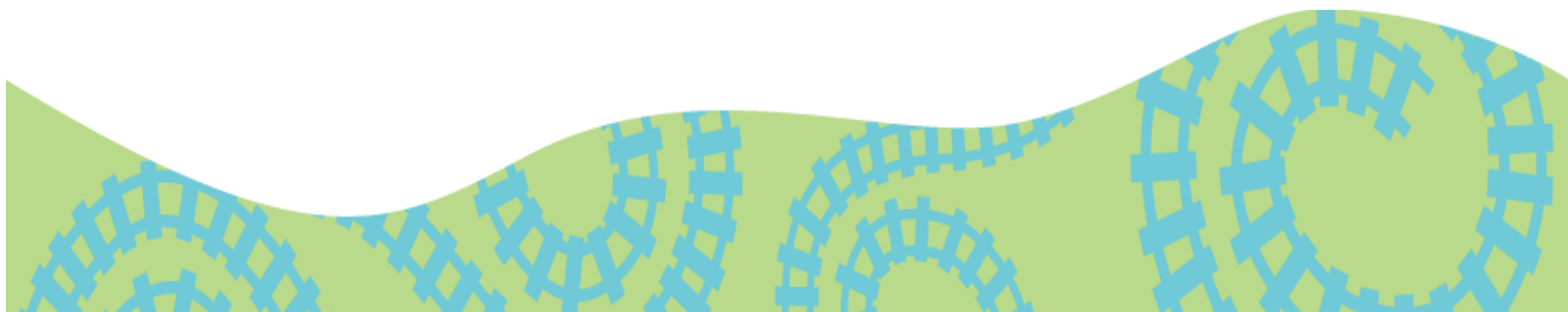
The P.L.A.Y. Project is a proven therapy program for children with autism. PLAY Project therapists train parents to help children connect, communicate and build relationships with others.

## The P.L.A.Y. Project Vision

The P.L.A.Y. Project is a community based/regional autism therapy training and early intervention program dedicated to empowering parents and professionals to implement intensive, developmental interventions for young children with autism in the most effective and efficient way.

## The P.L.A.Y. Project Mission

- Promote early identification and early intervention
- Educate community regarding National Academy of Sciences recommendations:
  - Begin interventions early (18 months to 5 years)
  - Use intensive intervention 25 hours per week
  - Have a teacher/play partner to child ratio of 1:1 or 1:2
  - Use interventions that are engaging
  - Have a strategic direction (e.g. social skills, language, etc.)
- Use community based approaches to promulgate Developmental, Individualized and Relationship-based interventions (DIR®)
- Support families in a parent-professional partnership
- Scientifically evaluate effectiveness of program





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# Research Overview

## NIMH Grant—2010

With preliminary evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of the parent-training model, The P.L.A.Y. Project continues to scientifically evaluate the effectiveness of its program. Through the support of a \$1.85 million grant from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) and the help of Easter Seals, a major national partner, the PLAY Project is currently testing whether The P.L.A.Y. Project intervention model can:

- Improve developmental outcomes for young children with autism compared to controls.
  - Be replicated effectively in a community setting.
- Serve as a model program for effective intensive interventions for young children with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) in U.S.

## Details of the Study

Richard Solomon, MD is the primary investigator. With research-design guidance from Michigan State University, and drawing participants from five Easter Seals autism service locations, this clinical trial compares the outcomes of 120 children with autism, making it the largest study of its kind.

**Controlled:** The study compares the outcomes of 60 children who participate in The P.L.A.Y. Project with the outcomes of 60 children who receive standard, community interventions. Before and after the 12-month intervention, each child is assessed with a battery of tests to measure developmental level, speech and language, sensory-motor profile, and social skills.

**Community-based:** The study is designed to assess how The P.L.A.Y. Project model operates in a community where the therapists have been trained by Dr. Solomon, but are not under his direct supervision. The results will demonstrate the program's effectiveness when disseminated in communities around the world.

### Reasons for this study:

- The number of children identified with ASDs is increasing.
- There is a national shortage of personnel trained in intensive approaches as recommended by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) (Lord et al, 2001).
- Most states do not typically provide broad support for intensive interventions, and the unmet national need is enormous.
- Preliminary clinical evidence demonstrates that this parent training model is effective.
- Early dissemination of the model into community agencies, schools and hospitals has also been successfully accomplished.
- The P.L.A.Y. Project has established an alliance with a major national partner – Easter Seals.

A successful trial will provide a replicable method of early intensive developmental intervention for young children with ASD. By using an efficient train-the-trainer model at relatively low cost to parents and society, the model could be broadly and quickly disseminated to serve a growing, yet unmet national need. Ultimately, positive results would encourage private insurers and government agencies to increase funding for intensive services for children with autism.





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## Pilot Study—2007

**Research Finds Play-based Programming Effective for Autism\*** In a recent study, 74 young children with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) participated in a year-long PLAY Project Home Consulting (PPHC) program. Home consultants trained parents through structured monthly home visits to use social-pragmatic (play-based) methods of intervention. Videos of the children were rated at the beginning and the end of the PPHC intervention.

Overall, there was a significant increase in the children's development. Nearly half (45.5%) of the children in the study made good to very good functional developmental progress.

## Details of the Study

Autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) are increasing dramatically. The National Academy of Sciences recommends individualized, comprehensive, and intensive therapies, yet such interventions are not readily available. The Michigan PLAY Project Home Consulting (PPHC) program appears to be a cost effective, clinically efficacious and replicable intervention program.

**Purpose:** To present the program evaluation results for the first year's pilot of 74 PPHC program families.

**Design/Methods:** 74 young children (ages 18m-6y) diagnosed with ASD, participated in the PPHC program. Parents were encouraged to deliver a minimum of 15 hours per week of 1:1 interaction. Video measures by blind raters before and after intervention documented children's functional developmental gains and parents' interactional skills. Clinical and standardized measures of autism severity, and parent satisfaction were also obtained before and after the first year of intervention.

The study showed an overall rate of 90% parent satisfaction with the services provided.

**Results:** 68 of 74 children completed the 8-12 month program. Average age was 3.7 years. Most parents had some college education. Pre/post ratings of videos by blind raters using the Functional Emotional Assessment Scale (FEAS) showed significant increases ( $p < 0.0001$ ) in Child Sub-scale scores. Translated clinically, 45.5% of children made good to very good functional developmental progress. Based on home consultants clinical ratings, 66% showed significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) progress. Low fidelity (fewer hours) of intervention yielded a trend toward poorer outcomes ( $p=0.09$ ). Pre/post ratings of FEAS Parent Sub-scale score of parents' abilities to interact contingently with the autistic children showed no statistical differences. Satisfaction with home consulting services showed an overall satisfaction rate of 90%. Average cost of intervention was \$3500/year.

**Conclusion:** Nearly half the children participating in the PPHC program made good to excellent progress in the first year of intervention. Parents have the interaction skills necessary to effectively engage their children with autism. More hours of intervention resulted in improved outcomes. The PLAY Project Home Consulting program shows promise as a cost-effective intervention for young children with autism.

\*Solomon, R., J. Necheles, C. Ferch, and D. Bruckman. "Pilot study of a parent training program for young children with autism: The P.L.A.Y. Project Home Consulting program." *Autism* 11, no. 3 (2007) 205-224.





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## P.L.A.Y. Project Overview

**What is The P.L.A.Y. Project?** “P.L.A.Y.” is short for Play and Language for Autistic Youngsters. Created by Richard Solomon, MD and based on the DIR® (Developmental, Individualized, Relationship-based) theory of Stanley Greenspan, MD, The P.L.A.Y. Project emphasizes the importance of helping parents become their child’s best P.L.A.Y. partner. The P.L.A.Y. Project is a national autism training and research center, with these key components:

**Early Autism Diagnosis:** Dr. Solomon has presented to hundreds of pediatricians and primary care providers to educate them about the importance of early diagnosis and referral. A key component to The P.L.A.Y. Project mission is early intervention.

“By doing what your child loves, your child will love being with you.”

—Richard Solomon, MD, Founder of The P.L.A.Y. Project

**Home Consulting:** The P.L.A.Y. Project Home Consulting Program provides training and support for families of young children (18 months to 6 years) with autism. Trained consultants teach parents techniques that are effective, fun, and useful in day-to-day interactions with their child with autism. By providing training in the home, consultants see the family in an environment where the child feels comfortable, rather than in a setting unfamiliar and possibly intimidating to the child.

Home Consultation typically costs around \$4,000 per year (compared to other interventions that can be \$40,000 to \$60,000 annually). The program includes:

- Family support
- 10 home visits per year
- 3 hour sessions roughly divided between 1 hour of modeling, 1 hour of coaching the family and 1 hour of feedback.
- Selected video of home visit interactions, followed by video analysis, written evaluations and feedback.
- Assistance with educational programming.

**Training and Education:** Through community workshops and agency trainings, Dr. Solomon teaches the specific methods that have worked for families and their young children with autism around the world. To date, nearly 500 agency professionals have been trained in The P.L.A.Y. Project methods and thousands of parents and professionals have attended Dr. Solomon’s community workshops.

**Agency Training:** Trains agency professionals to provide home consultation services to families. Home Consultants attend a 4-day training retreat, followed by a year of supervision from Dr. Solomon and his team of experts.

- Nearly 100 licensed PLAY Project agencies in 27 states and 7 countries.
- Non-profit organizations such as Easter Seals, state-level Early Intervention agencies, Community Mental Health agencies, and private therapy institutions.

**Community Workshops:** Helps parents and professionals learn about autism and the benefits of early intervention.

**DVD:** Teaches parents and professionals the basics of play-based therapy. This educational DVD has dozens of the best video clips of parents demonstrating effective play-based interventions with their children with autism, chosen from hundreds of home visits and analyzed by Dr. Solomon.

**Research:** The P.L.A.Y. Project is committed to evidence-based practice. Evidence is gathered routinely within the intervention model. The video documentation and analysis that is used to train parents has also been a useful tool for assessing program effectiveness.



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# Frequently Asked Questions

## Which children benefit most from The P.L.A.Y. Project?

The P.L.A.Y. Project is most effective for young children with autism: 18 months to 6 years of age. The intervention continues to be effective for older children but progress occurs more slowly, as all children over 7 years old enter into a new, less flexible neurological stage of growth. The P.L.A.Y. Project has been shown to be effective for the whole range of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs).

## What is Autism?

Autism is a neurological, developmental disorder. Evidence is accumulating that autism is a genetic disorder, though other factors (e.g. toxic exposures) may contribute to its cause. The three core deficits of autism are: 1) self-isolation and impaired social skills; 2) language delay and impaired communication; and 3) stereotyped or repetitive behaviors.

## Is there a cure for Autism?

Unfortunately, there is currently no cure for autism. However, there are treatment options for children who receive a diagnosis. The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) 2001 report recommends intensive interventions beginning as early as possible, providing 25 hours per week of 1:1 or 1:2 adult:child ratio using intervention that is engaging and has a strategic direction.

## What is intensive intervention?

The National Academy of Sciences defines “intensive” programming as 25 hours per week of one-on-one interaction. The P.L.A.Y. Project is an “intensive intervention.” This means that children receive many hours of engagement.

## What skills are targeted in The P.L.A.Y. Project?

The P.L.A.Y. Project focuses on helping children with ASD build emotional connections and engage in meaningful relationships with their family and others. By focusing on relationships, we help children gain skills, by moving up the six Functional Developmental Levels (FDLs):

1. Shared attention & regulation
2. Engagement
3. 2-way communication and initiation
4. Complex 2-way communication
5. Shared meaning & symbolic play
6. Emotional thinking

## What is DIR/Floortime?

“DIR” is short for **D**evelopmental, **I**ndividual-differences and **R**elationship-based. “Floortime” refers to the practice of getting down on the floor and playing with the child at his/her level. In this model therapists apply techniques that match the child’s developmental level—in other words, “meet ‘em where they’re at,” —helping the child gain social skills and language by building strong relationships with adults, and eventually with peers.

## What is the difference between The P.L.A.Y. Project and DIR?

The P.L.A.Y. Project is a practical, family-friendly, and affordable application of the DIR framework. Based on the DIR theory, the home consultants train parents to deliver intensive, one-on-one interventions that are individualized and engaging. The P.L.A.Y. Project is a much more structured version of DIR, providing a community-based delivery system through Home Consultation. Dr. Greenspan and Dr. Solomon were colleagues and Dr. Greenspan fully supported this structured application of his theory. Dr. Solomon is also on the faculty of Dr. Greenspan’s Interdisciplinary Council on Developmental and Learning Disorders (ICDL).

## How does The P.L.A.Y. Project compare with ABA?

P.L.A.Y. and ABA (Applied Behavioral Analysis) are complementary and have different strategic directions; however, many families are choosing to apply both methods. Developmental interventions (such as The P.L.A.Y. Project and DIR) are much more flexible than behavioral approaches (such as ABA) and are especially helpful in addressing the social deficits of children with autism. P.L.A.Y. Project strategies are child-centered with activities based on following the child’s lead; ABA is program-centered with a skill-and-drill based curriculum.



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## Dr. Rick: A Biography

### Founder and Medical Director of The P.L.A.Y. Project

Board-certified in general pediatrics and developmental and behavioral pediatrics, and Medical Director of both The P.L.A.Y. Project and The Ann Arbor Center for Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, Dr. Solomon has been diagnosing and treating children with autism for more than twenty years. Dr. Solomon's interest in young children with autism and their families, however, began even before he even began medical school.

From 1975-1977, Dr. Solomon worked with elementary school aged children in a small special education program in Ann Arbor, Michigan. As a 'mental health worker' he spent 40 hours per week, interacting with the children and developing a fondness for play-based therapy, which was used with the many children with autism in the program. Subsequently, as a fellow in the National Center for Clinical Infants Program in 1983, he met Stanley Greenspan, MD, learned about Dr. Greenspan's DIR (Developmental, Individual differences, Relationship-based) approach, and was hooked.

After meeting Dr. Greenspan, Dr. Solomon formally studied DIR, attending the annual conferences and training institutes of Dr. Greenspan, who eventually formed the Interdisciplinary Council on Learning Disorders (ICDL). Dr. Solomon is now a board member of council, and a medical editor of the ICDL Newsletter.

From 1989 to 1998 Dr. Solomon was the director of developmental and behavioral services at Allegheny General Hospital in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. There, a Pennsylvania state Medicaid law provided all children diagnosed with ASDs, regardless of parental income, as much intervention as the physician ordered—commonly between 20-40 hours per week—free of charge. With parent support, a dedicated staff, close working relations with the early intervention providers, and educational systems and large mental health agencies, Dr. Solomon played a central role in organizing community-based training programs and services for young children with autism.

After arriving at the University of Michigan in 1999, Dr. Solomon discovered that without Medicaid reimbursement for the intensive treatment of young children with autism in Michigan, many children were without any services at all. In fact, to this day most states, including Michigan, offer very few intensive and comprehensive services of any kind. It was this lack of intensive services that led Dr. Solomon to develop The P.L.A.Y. Project Home Consulting Program.

### A Brief Biography

- MD, Residency and Fellowship: Michigan State University
- B.S. Psychology: University of Michigan
- DIR Certified Faculty by the Interdisciplinary Council on Developmental and Learning Disorders
- Fellow, American Academy of Pediatrics (FAAP)
- Adjunct Clinical Associate Professor, University of Michigan
- Chairman of the Autism Committee for the Michigan chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)

### Research Articles

Solomon, R., J. Necheles, C. Ferch, and D. Bruckman. "Pilot study of a parent training program for young children with autism: The P.L.A.Y. Project Home Consultation program." *Autism* 11, no. 3 (2007) 205-224





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# Testimonials

## Trainings and Workshops

### Dr. Rick

"I've known Rick Solomon for many years and he's not only a pioneer and a leader in Michigan, but also one of a small group of clinicians and researchers who are transforming the way we care for infants, young children and families with various challenges throughout the world."

—Stanley Greenspan, M.D.

“It just plain makes sense.”

### Agency Trainings

"This was the most engaging and user-friendly training I have ever attended! I left this training knowing that I have an approach with tactics that I can actually use."

—Brooks Davis

### Agency Trainings

"The P.L.A.Y. Project training organized everything I have been studying about autism for years. It helped me better understand the basis of the development of the mind. I feel I now have the tools to offer the families I work with a treatment through guidelines that are at the same time, easy, fun and profoundly healing, not only for the child but also for the parents."

—Carolina Pimenta  
California

### PLAY Project Workshops

"[This] was the BEST conference I have ever attended. It has made a world of difference for me in the way I approach my students who have Autism Spectrum disorders."

— Dorothy Olson  
Wisconsin

### PLAY Project Workshops

"We listened to the whole seminar . . . and we thought, Okay, this is something we can do. It felt like the most natural thing for us to do."

—Mick Katschor, parent

### The P.L.A.Y. Project DVD

"The P.L.A.Y. Project DVD is an effective resource in teaching parents the basic concepts, functional developmental levels, and techniques of Floortime and The P.L.A.Y. Project. Parents have the ability to review the materials at their own pace and go back as much as they want for clarification."

—Sara Scott

“BEST conference I have ever attended.”

### PLAY Project Workshops

"I was very impressed with the P.L.A.Y. model – it just plain makes sense in terms of reaching the population through community trainers. Added bonus – all the presenters made learning a very enjoyable experience."

Barbara Stender  
Ohio



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# Testimonials

## Home Consulting Program

"[The P.L.A.Y. Project] has provided a cost effective and realistic program to enhance our daughter's potential for development. We have seen her grow and connect [and] we are excited to see what the future holds for her. It has filled us with optimism and useful tools to continue her progress and her journey."

—Steven and Kelly VanSingel, parents

"We are very pleased with the results we've seen with our son after only three months with the P.L.A.Y. Project. We've been able to connect with him in a way that was not possible before. He's showing great eye contact, attention and has tried speaking more and more. We're very pleased with his progress thus far and look forward to seeing future results."

—Edward and Heather Yest, parents

“ Not only has The P.L.A.Y. Project helped our son dramatically, it has helped our family as a whole. ”

"The P.L.A.Y. Project has been truly inspiring to our family. When you never know if you are doing enough or all the right things, this plan helps us as parents to ensure that we are doing all and everything we can to help our children. Not only has it helped our son dramatically, it has also helped our family as a whole, our everyday quality of life and all those others who are blessed to have contact with our wonderful son, Dominic."

—Brian and Lorrie Gray, parents

"The P.L.A.Y. Project has offered us the training and avenues to move our child forward. The video feedback allows us to revisit training and provides us guidance. It helps strengthen our skills and provide positive feedback. We feel we are not alone in the new world of autism."

—Amy Suhrheinrich, parent

"The paradigm which you granted me arrived in the nick of time and has made a world of difference in how I implement every approach with Gabriel. Once designing and managing activities, new experiences and various therapies became fun for me and his progress excelled beyond our ability to keep track of benchmarks...It is no small doubt in my mind, after my experience, that PLAY therapy is a prerequisite for children with autism to receive within the span of their early brain development. This therapy is absolutely vital for parents of children with autism to understand."

— Jared, parent





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## About Autism

Autism is a complex neurobiological disorder that typically lasts throughout a person's lifetime. It is part of a group of disorders known as Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Today, 1 in 10 individuals is diagnosed with autism.

It occurs in all racial, ethnic, and social groups and is four times more likely to occur in boys than girls. Autism impairs a person's ability to communicate and relate to others. It is also associated with rigid routines and repetitive behaviors, such as obsessively arranging objects or following very specific routines. Symptoms can range from very mild to quite severe. (Taken from Autism Speaks: [www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org))

Autism is the fastest growing disability in the United States. Based on statistics from the U.S. Department of Education and other governmental agencies, autism is growing at a startling rate of 10-17% per year.

## Autism Treatment

The National Academy of Sciences recommendations for the education of young children with autistic spectrum disorders states that parents and professionals should:

- Begin interventions early (18 months to 5 years)
- Use intensive intervention 25 hours per week
- Have an adult to child ratio of 1:1 or 1:2
- Use interventions that are engaging
- Have a strategic direction (e.g. social skills, language, etc.)

## Autism Information Sources

Organizations and websites with information about autism spectrum disorders:

- Easter Seals: [www.easterseals.com](http://www.easterseals.com)
- Autism Society of America: [www.autism-society.org](http://www.autism-society.org)
- Autism Speaks: [www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org)
- Interdisciplinary Council on Developmental and Learning Disorders (ICDL): [www.icdl.com](http://www.icdl.com)
- Your Child: [www.med.umich.edu/1libr/yourchild/](http://www.med.umich.edu/1libr/yourchild/)



## Autism in the Media

Check the PLAY Project News Page for the latest autism news: [www.playproject.org/news.php](http://www.playproject.org/news.php)