

# A is for Autism Waiver: An Interview with Jonathan

By Emily Fritz, Communications Specialist



The Centers for Disease Control Prevention estimate that autism affects **1 in 110 births**, and that **1.5 million Americans** are believed to have some form of autism.

At EHCA, we want to offer adults with autism a variety of tailored services (e.g., job finding, counseling, community inclusion) to help them feel confident to live independently and enjoy a full, rich life.

If you or someone you know is interested in learning more about EHCA's newest program, the Autism Waiver, please contact:

Bernadett Wilson,  
Program Specialist  
(814) 454-1534 x183  
wilson@ehca.org

I stepped up on the welcoming porch and knocked on the front door. Twenty two-year-old Jonathan Schenk, who lived in the apartment which is tucked off the main street in downtown Corry, opened the door and said, "Hello." We shook hands, and before he invited me in, he said, "So that's what you look like," giggling. He had been expecting me.

I walked through the front door, kicked off my shoes, and immediately was greeted with the aroma of freshly baked muffins. Jonathan's kitchen looked immaculately clean as I did a quick scan around the room. Not many young bachelors keep their apartments that neat, I thought.

Lori Allen, a full-time EHCA employee, was also at Jonathan's for the interview, and we introduced ourselves. She suggested moving the interview into the living room, which was right around the corner, so we all took a seat and got ready to chat.

Jonathan, who has Asperger's Syndrome, is a participant in EHCA's newest program, Autism Waiver. Providers offering this program are helping adults 21 and over by filling a void after childhood services end for those diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder.

Jonathan explained that he had been living with his mom in a very rural area and hadn't had a lot of interaction with others, when his mom began looking for services that would help Jonathan. She was referred to EHCA. In January of 2010, Lori was assigned to work with Jonathan for 40 hours a week to address his personal goals.

"I first met Jonathan at his mom's house," recalled Lori. "He was shy, nervous, and quiet."

With Lori's assistance, Jonathan searched through apartment listings in the newspaper and found his very first apartment. "He has a good landlord, who has confidence in him," said Lori. "He has good neighbors here."

With help from EHCA and other charitable organizations, Jonathan was able to get furniture donated and purchase the rest of the items for housekeeping. Lori is working with Jonathan on budgeting, and she has helped him receive other community services, such as the local food bank. She has also linked him to others who are working with Jonathan on social skills, anger management, and community outreach.

Over the past year, Jonathan has learned how to take responsibility for himself. He does all his own household chores, makes important phone calls, and does his own banking, including keeping track of his debit card purchases and paying his own bills. Adopting a daily routine, Jonathan feels confident living on his own.

"Sometimes I surprise myself," he admitted.

Because Jonathan is cognizant of the importance of physical fitness, he joined a gym and is also eating healthy. He has taken computer classes and a karate class. Regular library visits nourish his hobby of reading. Participating in another group's outings allows him to meet peers and socialize. He enjoys surfing the Internet and working on his computer.

**"He is much more outgoing now," complimented Lori. "He's had a lot of people step up and help him to get where he's at."**

His future goals include meeting more friends and finding companionship. He is also deciding whether he should take online courses to get an education, or find a job at a local store or restaurant to allow him to have some more spending money. Either way, his future is looking brighter, thanks to assistance from EHCA.

"I'm very proud of him," said Lori.