

Amy Bhagaloo  
Special Education Law  
Professor Audrey Bartholomew

### Reflection:

After learning about the work done by the Autism Society of Maine (ASM), I recognized that this non-profit organization has a variety of mediums to spread awareness about autism and the services they can provide. ASM organizes multiple events within the community in order to make their services known, such as walk/rides for Autism, summer camps, and family retreats. They also distribute brochures during community events, which come in different versions depending on the audience, such as kids, law enforcement, or the general public.

Once people find out about this organization, there are plenty of ways that people can join the cause. First, donations are greatly appreciated since ASM relies heavily on donations to cover the cost of running the programs and activities that bring awareness and community to individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Secondly, there are a variety of volunteering opportunities that first require submission of a volunteer application. Some of these volunteering opportunities include setting up events, fundraising within the community, legislative outreach, raising Autism awareness in the month of April, and serving on the ASM Board of Directors. The involvement that I would be most interested in is becoming an Autism Information Specialist Program. These Information Specialists are qualified individuals who have been trained to provide resource information to the community to support individuals with ASD. They are active in this area through attending educational, transitional, and vocational planning meetings. They also present workshops to other community organizations such as law enforcement and first responders. ASM makes it accessible to become an Information Specialist, by paying based on a per diem status and even covering the mileage for individuals to attend the 2-day training.

I was happy to learn about the University of New England's efforts in this cause. In past years, our campus has been a location for the Finding the Pieces Camp for children who have autism within ages kindergarten to fifth grade, to celebrate differences and interact with others varying on the spectrum. This summer camp experience is supervised by 2 professionals and serves as field experience for around 10 students. This is a great educational opportunity for college students who are studying special education to better understand the behavior of children with autism and how to foster an inclusive environment where they can safely practice social interaction strategies.

I viewed the ratings on the Autism Society of Maine located in Winthrop, ME. In the past 4 years, it has received 4 reviews that all rated it 5 stars. The top comments say that it is a "great place with so many resources and super friendly staff". A few people commented that the newsletter is very informative. The only criticism is that some people wished that the ASM had a location around Portland to increase accessibility of in-person services to a larger population.