

“The Road to Independent Living: From Early Intervention through College”

Moderator: Sofia Lachapelle, Journalist, Telemundo



Sofía Lachapelle has been a reporter for Telemundo’s “Al Rojo Vivo con María Celeste” since 2011. Born in the Dominican Republic, Sofia was a reporter for Puerto Rico’s WAPA TV and Univisión in Miami and New York, where she covered the September 11 terrorist attacks. She returned to the Dominican Republic in 2002 as a news presenter. Sofia’s two sons, Jayson and Maximus, are autistic and were the source of inspiration for “Un Paso a la Vez,” a foundation Sofia created to offer information, education and motivation for the parents of special children. Sofia serves as a champion and personal advocate on autism awareness under El Poder en Ti, NBCUniversal Telemundo Enterprise’s robust community initiative aimed at empowering the Latino community to take action for a better life.

Daniel Emig, Volunteer Leader, Rooster Ranch, and Self-Advocate



Daniel Emig is a 25 year old self-advocate who lives and works on the future property of Rooster Ranch, a neurodiverse intentional community in Colorado. Daniel accesses independent living supports through his roommates in a Host Family Home arrangement. Passionate about woodworking, he also works at Mountain Heart Woodworks and hopes to turn this hobby into a side job one day. Daniel attends a day program and loves bike rides, writing poems, hiking, and hanging out with friends. He attends church and volunteers with a rural jail ministry. His dream is to walk across the wilderness of Canada to raise awareness of the abilities of others with disabilities and raise money for others in need.

Prof. Janet Mulvey, Director, Oasis Program, Pace University



Janet D. Mulvey, PhD is the Director of the Ongoing Academic, Social, Instructional Support (OASIS) program at Pace University in lower Manhattan, NYC. The program provides academic support for students with ASD and other learning challenges. Emphasis on socialization and ready to work skills are an integral part of “learning for Independence”. Dr. Mulvey has been the OASIS Director for three years. She also teaches in the School of Education at Pace and was a building principal for 13 years, developing programs for a diverse population. She travels to Kitale Kenya to assist in literacy education at the Makhanga Hope Academy.

Lisa Parles, Esq., Attorney, Parles Rekem



Lisa McCauley Parles, Esq, the parent of a 26 year old with autism, is a partner at Parles Rekem, LLP. Her practice focuses on early intervention, special education, transition and adult services. She served as the Director of the Leadership Program at Seton Hall University Stillman School of Business and currently teaches as an Adjunct. She is a founder of the special quest Recreation Program and has served on a number of not for profit boards. She is a frequent lecturer and has testified before the New Jersey State Legislature on issues affecting adults with autism and was a panellist at the U.S. GAO program on “Youth With Autism: Services Needed During the Transition to Adulthood.”

Zemi Yenus, Founder and Director, The Joy Center for Children with Autism and other Developmental Disabilities in Ethiopia



Zemi Yenus has pioneered the movement to change society’s awareness and treatment of children with autism and other developmental disorders and their families in Ethiopia. The mother of an autistic son, she leads the Nia Foundation and the Joy Center for Children with Autism, which she founded in 2002, recognizing the desperate need to end the stigma, exclusion and physical confinement that afflicted autistic youngsters in Ethiopia. She is working to assure that social services like education and health care are available for these children and they are included in all aspects of the community’s work. She is working hard to make Nia Foundation’s Joy Center for Autism a center of excellence, offering therapies, trainings, research and other services.