

# Community Immersion Program

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## **Preparing Adolescents & Adults for Life - *Transforming Possibilities into Abilities***

A state-of-the-art, community- based, specialty education program for individuals with autism

## **PAAL Snapshot**

PAAL allows students with autism to use the community as their classroom in order to prepare them for the transition from school into a more independent life.

Best practices indicate that individuals with autism learn best in their natural surroundings. The PAAL program strives to combine traditional classroom instruction with real-life lessons in maintaining a home, caring for oneself, living and working in the community.

PAAL provides adolescents with autism with the skills necessary to lead an independent life. The program is individually tailored to meet the needs of each student.

## **About PAAL**

Preparing Adolescents & Adults for Life (PAAL) was founded in 2006 by Mission for Educating Children with Autism (MECA). PAAL is a unique, community based program for teens with autism which utilizes the natural environment of the community as our classroom.

PAAL maintains a professional collaboration between the educational system, families, local businesses and the community at large to develop a vision for the student as they travel through adolescents toward adulthood to teach vital Life Skills.

PAAL provides teens with autism the skills necessary to lead productive, socially connected independent lives and to fully participate in their communities. Quality of adult life is the focus of PAAL and is the expected outcome at graduation.

PAAL utilizes 1:1 intensive instruction to maximize skill acquisition which systematically fades to dyad and triad instruction enabling the student to remain productive in the adult world where supports are limited. PAAL program philosophy ensures instructional intensity by providing multiple opportunities to practice skills in real world settings. PAAL relies heavily on strong communication with families, professionals and community partners to ensure consistent instruction across environments and to utilize state of the art technology for easy access to information.

## Community Immersion Experiences

The PAAL Program is a 12 month educational program. The beautiful summer weather and

easy pace of summer provide a natural opportunity to emphasize recreation and leisure skills and allows broader ability to assess life long recreational preferences of our students.

Additionally, summer provides an opportunity for PAAL to extend community participation

beyond school hours with our community immersion summer recreation program. Students are given the opportunity to travel to new settings which provides staff with an opportunity to see firsthand which skills the students are able to carry over and adapt across environments.

The ability for our students to generalize and respond to instruction across environments is a key goal of the PAAL program.

Traveling along with PAAL students are same age typically developing peers. These peers have been specially trained to work with the students. Studies have shown that individuals with autism are able to interact with typically developing peers in a meaningful way. Empirical data has demonstrated positive affect – Students are happier “hanging out” with typical peers. Overnight experiences last from 1 to 7 nights.

## PAAL Destinations

- **The Beach** – Ocean City, New Jersey
- **Hershey Park** – Hershey Pennsylvania
- **Great Wolf Lodge** – Pocono Mountains, Pennsylvania
- **Extreme Sports Camp** – Denver Colorado
- **Split Rock Lodge** – Pocono Mountains, Pennsylvania
- **Marsh Creek State Park** – Eagle, Pennsylvania

Preparing **Adolescents & Adults** *for Life*

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