

## NEWS RELEASE

### Rutgers Announces Initiative to Launch Center to Support Adults with Autism

Rutgers Center for Adult Autism Services' vocational and residential programs aim to integrate adults with ASD into university community

Wednesday, November 4, 2015

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. – Rutgers is launching an initiative to establish a center that will provide adults with autism a unique opportunity to live and work independently within a university setting.

The Rutgers Center for Adult Autism Services (RCAAS), to be located in two buildings on the university's Douglass Campus in New Brunswick, will offer up to 60 adults with autism, who are living off campus, with university jobs supported by clinical staff and graduate students. A second phase of the center will offer a pilot residential program for 20 adults with autism who will work on campus and live alongside Rutgers graduate students in an integrated apartment-style residence.

Key leaders in the private fundraising project are former CEO of Viacom, CBS and Sirius XM Radio Mel Karmazin and his daughter Dina Karmazin, executive director of the Mel Karmazin Foundation, in partnership with the Rutgers University Foundation. Dina Karmazin's son, Hunter, was diagnosed with autism at age 2, and the Karmazin Foundation has been active in autism causes.



“The Rutgers center will offer adults with autism a one-of-a-kind support program that makes independent living and a fulfilling life possible,” said Mel Karmazin. “It will rise to the challenge of giving program participants the tools they need to achieve their potential – from earning a living to navigating social interactions to building meaningful relationships.”

[Click here to watch Mel Karmazin discuss the initiative on CNBC](#)

An estimated one in 68 children nationally – and one in 45 in New Jersey – are diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), a developmental disability that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges. Through high school, children with autism can get tutoring, mental health services, transportation and other resources to accommodate their unique needs. But once they leave the public school system, services diminish dramatically, leaving adults with little support outside of their families.

Rutgers President Robert Barchi said the university intends to demonstrate how educational institutions can become part of the answer by providing a model that integrates academic research, student training and community

Photo: Courtesy of Dina Karmazin  
Mel Karmazin

[High Res](#)

Inclusion of adults with ASD.

“Rutgers has tremendous autism expertise and unmatched services that can be employed to create a model unlike anything that currently exists,” Barchi said. “The Rutgers Center for Adult Autism Services will become a hub, yielding the most advanced clinical and applied research in support of adults with autism. Ultimately, the findings that grow out of our work will help inform education, intervention and public policy.”

The new center will be led by the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology, which provides leading education and hands-on clinical training opportunities for students working with those challenged by ASD. The university is also home to leading autism research facilities, such as Rutgers University Cell and DNA Repository, which contains the world’s largest collection of autism biomaterials, and the Douglass Developmental Disabilities Center, which includes an on-campus K-12 day school for children with autism from across New Jersey.

The goal of the RCAAS initiative is to raise at least \$35 million to fund two buildings that would establish a centralized location for customized vocational and residential programs, student training and interdisciplinary research collaborations.

The first building, for which 50 percent of the funds have been raised, will house the workday program as well as staff offices, professional kitchen equipment, state-of-the-art computers, conference rooms and life skills teaching areas. It is slated to open fall of 2018. A second building nearby will accommodate 20 adults with ASD and 20 Rutgers graduate students living side by side. The apartment-style building will consist of one-, two-, three- and four-bedroom residences, each equipped with its own kitchen as well as dining, living and laundry rooms.

The RCAAS complex will be within walking distance of amenities like the Douglass Student Center, recreational facilities as well as bus service, which will shuttle participants from job sites to recreational facilities.

“The RCAAS initiative couldn’t come at a better time,” Karmazin said. In the coming decade, experts predict as many as 500,000 children with autism in the United States will reach adulthood. The demand for support, programs, employment and housing already has reached crisis levels.

Last year, Karmazin, together with his daughter Dina Karmazin and Michael and Amy Lillard, helped support an endowed chair in adult autism at the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology to recruit an outstanding faculty leader. The Karmazin Lillard Chair in Adult Autism, the world’s first in the area of adults, is an integral part of the RCAAS.

“These initiatives,” Karmazin said, “will position Rutgers – long known for its research, training and service in support of families with autism – as a national leader in studying the challenges faced by adults with autism and in finding innovative solutions for inclusiveness that can be replicated in future generations.”

For more information, visit [rcaas.rutgers.edu](http://rcaas.rutgers.edu) or contact [info.rcaas@rutgers.edu](mailto:info.rcaas@rutgers.edu).

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EDITOR’S NOTE: ATTENTION REPORTERS, ASSIGNMENT EDITORS To arrange an interview with Mel Karmazin and/or clinical faculty with the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology, email Mary Chrow at [chrow@rci.rutgers.edu](mailto:chrow@rci.rutgers.edu) or call 848-445-3959 or 973-943-0992 (cell).

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**Media Contact:**

Carla Cantor

C:718-930-6727

[ccantor@ucm.rutgers.edu](mailto:ccantor@ucm.rutgers.edu)

Mary Chrow

O:848-445-3959

C:973-943-0992

[chrow@rci.rutgers.edu](mailto:chrow@rci.rutgers.edu)

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