

Friday Knights is a social/recreational program for children kindergarten to grade 12 on the Autism spectrum or who display other social challenges. Siblings are also invited to be participants in the program and serve as peer role models. The program meets several Friday nights from 6-8 pm at The College of Saint Rose during the Fall and Spring semesters. Volunteers from the college serve as counselors and activity leaders and receive onsite support and training from education faculty including Dr. Susan DeLuke who oversees the program. The children chose from a selection of highly structured activities including crafts, science, music, Yoga, Tai Chi, and games. There is also a theatre group that develops their own scripts, create props and perform at the conclusion of the program. Groups are small and based upon the child's needs. Some children receive one-to-one support during the program. The program fee is currently \$25 per semester, but they also accept the Medicaid waiver.

While the children are enjoying the activities, the parents and other families are encouraged to attend a parent group. The parent group is led by Jan Campito and volunteer graduate students that attend the college. There are group discussions, guest speakers, multimedia, and literature aimed to provide valuable information and support for families that have a child on the Autism spectrum. This time also provides them with some respite and an opportunity to network and connect with other parents and caregivers. The family members and parents in the group provide what topics and issues they would like to focus the sessions on, such as advocating for your child's education program, facilitating communication, other family resources, and available recreational programs. The parent group is free of charge for families participating in the program and is something that the participants find very enjoyable and useful.

On a personal note, my son Nicholas (age 9 diagnosed with Asperger's) has participated in this program for several semesters. He absolutely loved the structure of the program (they provide choices and create schedules for the children) as well as the activities. They provide a lot of hands on experiences. This past semester, he took part in the theater group and really enjoyed performing. It is truly a wonderful program. -Sheila