



## **Autism and Adults: Finding Independence**

**With 500,000 Kids in America Affected by the Disorder, We Need More Facilities to House Them as Adults**

**By JOHN DONVAN**

**May 30, 2006** — - There's been a lot of attention focused on the unexplained swell of children with autism that began in the 1990s and now affects one in every 166 births in the United States.

But there are adults, like Paul DiSavino, who were ahead of that wave. He was born in 1968 and made it through childhood and adolescence long ago. At age 37, he's well into manhood.

"Adults with autism are adults; they're not just little kids in big bodies," said Dr. Pete Gerhardt at the Organization for Autism Research.

DiSavino has spent his lifetime training hard for the skills most of us pick up with relative ease, such as learning what burns our skin and how to navigate a simple conversation. But despite his achievements, he will always be autistic and will always need a support system.

"He's totally vulnerable," said his mother, Marlene DiSavino. "He's totally naive. He needs to be taught everything."

He's found a place to live his adult life, in a group home in New Milford, N.J., that he shares with other disabled adults.

But places like the group home where he lives -- places that both liberate and shelter an adult with autism -- are still extremely rare. DiSavino waited 10 years to get accepted to the one where he now lives.

"We have a bunch of adults out there, a bunch of adolescents who are turning into adults, a bunch of kids who are eventually going to be adults, who can be contributing, involved but supported members of the community. So let's make that commitment," Gerhardt said.

That, of course, is the challenge. It costs \$75,000 a year to give Paul this place in the world. With an estimated 500,000 kids in America with autism who will be adults before long, the commitment to make this possible for all of them will have to be huge.

*"World News Tonight" continues its series on autism through Thursday, June 1 at 6:30 p.m. ET.*

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