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## Improv helps autistic Atlantans take center stage | News

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Submitted by [Jaye Watson](#) ([profile/64140/jaye-watson](#)), 11Alive Reporter  
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MARIETTA, Ga. -- A good evening of improv theater transports the audience, elevates the actors, brings everyone together.

The tenants of improvisation - spontaneity, and the ability to go with whatever you're thrown - are not second nature for the Shenanigans actors.

Seventeen-year-old James Revis recalled, "I kind of got kicked out of Curtain Call, and that's why my grandmom, made Shenanigans."

Revis has Asperbergers. His non-theater background grandmother Sandy Bruce started Shenanigans, improv theater for people with autism.

Bruce said "With autism, the deficits are in understanding, being able to decode facial expression, body language, what you're saying."

Many members of the group have trouble communicating, getting their thoughts out. That doesn't mean they can't do improv.

"I got good acting skills," Revis said.

It does mean that sometimes they struggle, refusing to take part in exercises, withdrawing from the group. That's where the skills learned at Shenanigans help these actors in the real world.

"What we teach them is that when things happen, accept it," Bruce said.

Acceptance eluded 14-year-old Sammy, until Shenanigans. Sammy's mom Christina Seidel said "He's had a real rough many years of not fitting in. It's given him self esteem, more confidence and he's just happier."

At Shenanigans there's no judging.

Forty-two-year-old Leisa Eman has autism. "We have a lot more in common and we're a lot more sympathetic with our deficits and such so, it's just a lot easier. It filled a void that I had. It gave me friends."

Sammy said, "We get to see who each other are."

These actors have so much inside. Shenanigans helps them get it out.

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