

The Wallet Card™ Project

By: Deborah Dietz

We are so proud of this project and we strongly believe in what we have created and what we are doing. The Wallet Card™ Project was created for independent individuals with either an Autism Spectrum Disorder, Developmental or an Intellectual Disability. We have made over 3,000 cards and have had several more requests. The purpose of The Wallet Card™ is as a tool to assist persons with disabilities to self-disclose his or her disability to law enforcement. However, we have had a number of requests from parents that would like a card for their child who has a disability that is under 14 or that is non-verbal, and would not have independent interactions with law enforcement. We have revised our online application to now ask these two questions.

We understand the need for a second type of card and we are working to create one. But, it is not ready yet, and we don't want to make cards solely as identification and not a tool for independence for persons with disabilities. This project was created with DIG – a disability rights organization, UM-NSU CARD – an academic resource on autism, and the Coral Gables Police Department – an expert on the police, and it is very well thought out and a lot of planning went into the development of every aspect of the project. We do not want to create a second card without the same careful thought process.

The needs of less independent, younger, and non-verbal people with disabilities are very different than the needs of our target audience right now. We want to ensure that this second card correctly addresses the needs of this population. We also want to make sure that we create a companion training for the police. For example, a major element in training of the use of The Wallet Card™ is the person with a disability asking permission to reach into his or her pocket to take out the wallet card, so law enforcement understands why a movement is made. If not, the officer may not understand why the movement is being made, and if the person is reaching for a weapon. If a non-verbal individuals will not be able to ask permission to show their card we need to find a solution that works both with the needs of a person with a disability and the safety needs of the police.

Once we have designed the card and the mechanism in which it can be shown to the police, we will start making the cards. We have very limited resources and would appreciate your patience in this situation.

On a positive note, several police departments have reached out to us and have received the training. The training for the police is designed to be an introduction to Autism Spectrum Disorders and how people might behave and how they should use the Wallet Card. It is not a comprehensive complete training but a perfect introduction to the subject and a starting point to open the conversation about people with disabilities in their community.

The training can be used by any police department, it is not just for Miami. If you want your local police department to have access to our training, please have them fill out the request form on our website (<http://www.justdigit.org/wallet-card-project/>) or they can email me directly at debbie@justdigit.org. The training and materials are completely free and available through our website.