Robin Weisman knows her son, Corey, is an outgoing person who loves talking with his friends.

But through his involvement with Going Places!, an activity group organized by the Jewish Social Services Agency and the Jewish Community Center of Northern Virginia, Corey has blossomed into a confident, social and happy young man, eager for the group’s monthly outings and to see the friends he’s made there.

“He just loves it,” she said. “His designated role with the group, he introduces new members because he knows so many of the people there.”

Going Places! is an activities group for young adults with Asperger’s Syndrome, a condition on the autism spectrum in which people may have difficulties understanding social cues and therefore have trouble interacting with others.

The club has been around for a few years, said Dawn Kaye, a clinical social worker with JSSA in Fairfax. There are 25-30 people who gather for the monthly events at the JCC, and the activity each month could be any one of a number of things — in the past, the group has gone bowling or painting pottery; earlier this month, the group went to a holiday lunch at Choices by Shawn, a restaurant in the City of Fairfax.

For the young adults, between the ages of 18 and 30, their involvement in Going Places! might be the first social club they’ve felt comfortable joining, Kaye said.

“It might be the first time they are meeting friends and getting together outside the group,” she said. “Some have gained so much confidence, they’ve gotten jobs. Our group has really bonded, they look forward to getting together each month because it’s a supportive environment.”

Kaye said she runs a social skills therapy group with JSSA, but felt there were limits to the skills her clients to learn and master in that setting. Establishing a group where people get together and go out to restaurants, on hiking or paddling expeditions, and can feel confident and comfortable seemed the next logical step.

“The JCC provides staff and special education specialists, and each month we meet at their facility,” Kaye said. But a person doesn’t have to be Jewish to participate, she said. The group is non-denominational and is open to anyone with Asperger’s.

The outings are organized in such a way that if someone needs to take a few minutes to sit alone, that’s all right, Kaye said. Social workers accompany the group as well, so there’s someone to talk to if one of the participants needs some assistance.

“Some people with Asperger’s have difficulty relating to other people,” said Mollie Katz, a JSSA spokesperson. “One part of the disability is that people with Asperger’s might not be very strong in recognizing body language, facial expressions or tone of voice. It can be difficult to try and connect with other people or to understand humor or irony.”

With the each outing, the members of the group get more confident in their interactions, Kaye said.

The program is getting some outside recognition as well.

In November, Going Places! was named a Merit Finalist for the 2010 Mutual of America Community Partnership Award, which recognizes community organizations and partnerships that have “made a difference” to those people it has served, according to the announcement released on Nov. 18.

Two weeks ago, Going Places! also received a grant that will allow the group to attend a number of cultural events next year, said Melissa Hochberg, a resource specialist at the JCC who helps coordinate the group’s outings.

“We’ll be going to see ‘Sheer Madness’ at the Kennedy Center next year, and to Wolf Trap,” along with other outings that are favorites among the group, like mini golf and bowling, she said.

Going Places! has been so successful among young adults that it has led to the creation of two other groups, one for teenagers and another for adults over 30 years of age, she said.

The young adult group came first because the support system and activities offered by schools disappear when a person turns 21, and there aren’t many other places to turn for people with Asperger’s for support, let alone where they feel safe, Hochberg said.

She’s also started a book club that meets for a half-hour before each monthly outing. While currently only about 10 people are participating in the book club, it is another thing that participants can talk about with their family and friends, she said.

There’s been a tremendous response among the group, and participants often send in comments after the monthly event saying what they liked about the outing. But more importantly, many emails from participants and their parents thanking JSSA and JCC for starting the group in the first place.

Parents like Robin Weisman know that the group is making a difference. They can see it in the faces of their children.

The group has “expanded his horizons,” she said of her son Corey. “He’s open and social. He takes his commitments seriously and he likes the social setting. This group has enhanced his relationships with people. He stays in touch with some of them by email between outings. I think he’s building a good life for himself.”