

Common Bond

March 2006

www.p2pswmi.org

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A Grandparent's Perspective

by Jayne Weaver

I've been thinking that grandmothers of grandchildren with special needs have a unique perspective, as from the sidelines, as we watch our adult children and grandchildren navigate the educational system. I grieved heartily when my grandson was diagnosed with Autism. But, I grieved for two, my grandson who I love with every ounce of my being, and my own child, his mother. Because I have raised three adult children, or, in other words "have been there and done that," I am pretty tuned in to how the self-esteem of an individual child can be sacrificed for the welfare of the whole.

I have observed that every time my grandson hits a bump in his travel through the elementary school system this family (including the grandparents) grieves again. Our continual visits to the grieving cycle could be decreased if before sending a communication the professionals who work with my grandson would stop to think to themselves, "How would I feel if I were in this parent's shoes and this were my child? What is the most open, understanding and respectful way to communicate with this parent? How can I communicate that I value the child's numerous strengths, have high expectations and am not *only* focused on the skills needing more work?" A reminder to those who work with my grandson, he is a work in progress, a youngster both loved and cherished by his family. To describe a child's indiscretions as one might describe the behavior of an animal is not acceptable. To remind the parent of a lower elementary school student that the system has a "code of conduct" seems totally irrelevant when, in order for the family to live in harmony in the world, they work continuously to teach the child social standards. Code of conduct is something they are very aware of!

Maybe it is forgotten that for several years after the diagnosis his family has struggled to find services to meet his special needs; that they have given unselfishly of themselves while their lives have been turned inside out. But, is it necessary to keep the parents on edge on a daily basis wondering, what's next? Rather than meet the concern eye to eye with the parent in a nonjudgmental fashion, it seems that a problem is viewed by some professionals in the system from a less than enlightened point of view; through adult rather than child eyes. To the parent the "intolerance" light begins to flash. Generalized definitions of behavior and conventional notions seem to drive the responses. The message often seems to be driven more from fear of repercussions than understanding the child and helping him learn that a particular behavior is not acceptable. Maybe in actuality, talking with a parent about a delicate subject is hard for the professional too.

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What can all of us do to work together to help all children become the best they can be minus the hurtful messages that pass from one to the other?

Here are a few ideas:

Ask each other "What is the preferred way to communicate with you?" Maybe the parent would like to choose the person they feel most comfortable with as the main communicator. With serious matters a personal phone call should be made immediately so there is no chance of confusion or misunderstanding. Remember that you may be adding additional stress to what may have been an already stressful day.

All children have strengths. Please let the parent know that you acknowledge those strengths. Parents have reason to be hopeful and hope is a parenting tool. We are making great strides in teaching children with special needs and have discovered that in the past many mistakes were made. Be open to all possibilities.

Inclusion is beneficial to all children. It works the same for the parent and the school. Parents of children with special needs may feel self conscious about becoming active in the school environment. An invitation could be extended to the parent to get involved in meaningful activities at the school so they could meet other parents, feel at ease in the building, and raise their comfort level.

Hear the parent. They have important feelings to express. Encourage parents to be open and honest with school personnel and vice versa. Being afraid to say what is bothering you destroys trust. Expect that parents of children with special needs may be sensitive. Sensitivity is necessary in order for them to protect and advocate for their child.

Encourage the protective parent; work with them. If they are showing signs of hovering they may have very good reason to hover. Be patient and build trust so that they will feel their child is in a safe environment and the need to hover will diminish.

Turn negatives into positives. Early on one teacher told us at an IEP to celebrate when my grandson did naughty things. I thought, how odd to hear this from a teacher. But, it made so much sense because when he was naughty here was an opportunity to teach. From that point on we have had to remind ourselves to celebrate each indiscretion. Wouldn't it be great if the message that came from all school personnel recognized this teaching opportunity rather than sending the negative hopeless message that this is a bad child and the behavior will not be tolerated!

Where to Find Us:

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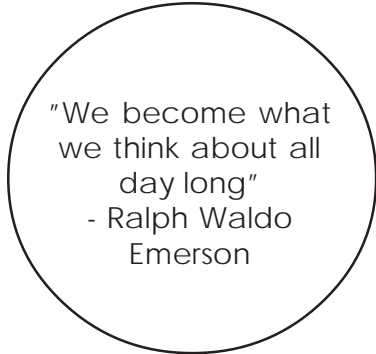
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"We become what
we think about all
day long"
- Ralph Waldo
Emerson



Welcoming children of all abilities!

Recreation Expo

& Fitness Fair

Saturday March 4, 2006

10:00 am to 2:00 pm

at

Kalamazoo Valley Community College

Texas Township Campus

6767 West O Ave

Kalamazoo, MI 49003

Come and see what is available in SW Michigan for fun and fitness for kids of all ages. Meet representatives from area recreational programs, camps and organizations.

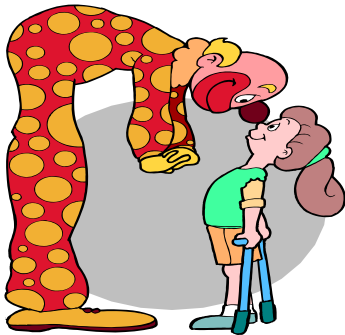
Expo admission is free. Fun activities for the entire family!

A sampling of participating vendors:

Pirates Island
Walkers Tae Kwon Do
Juice Plus/Wellness Plus
Gymboree Play & Music of Kalamazoo
Kalamazoo School of Music & Dance
Cedar Lodge Summer Camp
Allegan County 4-H Camp Kidwell
Allegan County Exceptional Equestrians
Kalamazoo RESA Great Start Programs
City of Kalamazoo Department of Parks & Rec
Sherman Lake YMCA Outdoor Center
Kalamazoo County Family YMCA
Tutor Time Learning Center
The Kalamazoo Nature Center



Kalamazoo Kings
Miracle Camp
Cheff Therapeutic Riding Center
Family & Children Services
Simply the Best
Marshall Music Co.
Wellspring Cori Terry & Dancers
Discovery Toys
Girls in Step
Child Abuse and Neglect Council
Calvary Bible Church
Beadventure
Challenger Little League
Binder Park Zoo



Sponsored by

Parent to Parent of SW MI
Community Advocates
Family Support Advisory Council



Scholarships and Prizes
Plan to attend!
For more information call 269 345-8950
www.p2pswmi.org

Referrals Coordinator and NICU Representative

The following letter was written by Jayne Weaver. Jayne is our new Referrals Coordinator and NICU representative at Bronson Hospital through a grant we received from the Children's Trust Fund. We are happy to add her to our staff.

"I feel privileged to be a part of the Parent to Parent staff and look forward to sharing the hope that I have for our children's future with you.

One point of interest about me is that I am a Grandmother of 5 - talk about shock and awe! The oldest is 8 and diagnosed with Autism. He has stolen a significant piece of my heart, and since his diagnosis I have literally absorbed any and all information I can find on the subject. It is because of this little boy with the magnetic personality that I have found my way to Parent to Parent. I am adamant that all parents can use support at varying times in their lives, but parents of special needs children are deserving of every support we can give. I also believe that we are failing all children if we do not advocate for the inclusion of all children with disabilities in our community. I think that separation lowers expectations, leads to arrogance and nurtures fear and exclusion later on when our children become adults.



For the past 6 years I've been a full-time Administrator at People's Church. Currently I have switched to being their part-time Administrator, juggling both that job and the job at Parent to Parent. My specialty field is Social Work. Previous to being a Church Administrator I worked as a Social Worker in the Early Intervention Program, with the GIVE program at Senior Services, as an Interventionist at KPS, and also at Family and Children Services. In addition, I share pieces of my heart with my husband (Sid), my 3 adult children, 4 other grandchildren, our new puppy, and my lovely gardens.

All the above experiences make me sound old, and I won't kid you, I am one of the older baby boomers. But, I love children and still have lots of energy to give. I look forward to meeting and sharing with you!"

Jayne Weaver

Calendar of Events

All Kids Can! Rec Expo

Saturday, March 4, 2006
10 am – 2 pm
KVCC

Kalamazoo/Battle Creek Chapter Autism Society Walk about - Talk about Autism Walk

April 22, 2006
Celery Flats, Portage, MI

Achieving Everyone Together Conference

April 28, 2006

Garden Arts and Plant Sale

May 27, 2006

"The person who believes he or she can do something is probably right, and so is the person who believes he or she can't" Author unknown

FOR SALE:

STEP 2 Childs Art Desk and Chair.
Excellent condition. \$30.
Call Michelle at 269-345-8950 for more info.



We are grateful to the following people who have donated to Parent to Parent.

Eleanor Vallie and Robert & Renee Griffin
for the DeWain Vallie Memorial Fund
Amy and Kelvin Oliver
Tom and Barb Roy
Sally Walker
Steve and Jane Higgins
Mary Connors
Mark and Kathy Rozek
Kristen Earl

Margaret Peterson- our Monday afternoon volunteer

Student Council for Exceptional Children- for providing us with childcare at all of our Parent Network meetings

Kalamazoo Jaycees for the money from the Haunted House Sale

Great Lakes Family Magazine for the wonderful article

What Your Donations Support

Some highlights from 2005

- We responded to 415 families and 135 professionals who requested help or information from us
- We hosted Parent Network meetings in Allegan and Kalamazoo counties (Kalamazoo began September 2005) with 170 people attending
- We matched 93 families just receiving a diagnosis on their child to mentor parents
- We hosted the All Kids Can! Rec Expo for the 4th year with 47 exhibitors attending
- We held our 1st All Kids Can! Day in October

Kalamazoo Parent Network Meetings

Sponsored by Parent to Parent of SW MI

Portage Public Library
300 Library Lane - Gourdneck room
Child care available (please call ahead)

February 23rd
March 23rd
April 27th
May 25th

For more information call
(269) 345-8950 or p2pswmi@sbcglobal.net

Seeking Donations

Parent to Parent is seeking donations for a raffle for the Garden Arts and Plant Sale in May. We could use any garden related items such as planters, potting soil, shears, wheelbarrow, or even a free snowplow or lawn mower, etc. We need to be notified of any donation no later than March 10th. The raffle will begin in May and winners will be chosen after the Plant Sale on May 27th. Anyone interested in making a donation should contact Laura Holloway at (269) 353-8866.

Volunteers Needed

**Coordinator for the Hospitality Tent
at the Annual Garden Arts and Plant Sale**

Duties Include:

- Need to be available to work day of sale or solicit a volunteer who will be responsible for the Hospitality Tent on the day of sale.
- Help obtain volunteers to work day of sale (May 27, 2006) in the Hospitality Tent
- Solicit Donations for food to sell and to feed volunteers

**All Kids Can! Awareness Campaign
Planning Committee**

Need individuals who are interested in helping to plan our 2006 All Kids Can! awareness campaign. This campaign is about engaging the community to recognize the potential of all children, including children with disabilities. Ideas, suggestions and input are needed to make a bigger impact this year and enlist more community members. We meet one evening a month for two to three hours. All Kids Can! day is in October.

ACHIEVING EVERYONE TOGETHER

SPRING 2006 CONFERENCE

UNIVERSAL EDUCATION

Redrawing the Lines in the Sand

A strategy for educating ALL children, including those who have special needs in the general education classroom.



Presenting:

Alice Udvari-Solner, Ph.D.

Friday • April 28, 2006

9:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

Cost is \$25 per person

(incl. continental breakfast and lunch)

Gaines Township Hall
8555 Kalamazoo AVE SE
Caledonia, Michigan

for registration form go to www.wmin.org
or contact
West Michigan Inclusion Network at
616-889-8892

- This one-day event is for parents and educators who are concerned with understanding inclusive education practices for ALL children in our schools, and the practical strategies for making it work for your child or your students.



Everyone Together is a joint project of United Cerebral Palsy of Michigan and United Cerebral Palsy of Metro Detroit and is funded by the Michigan Developmental Disabilities Council.

Dr. Udvari-Solner is a national consultant in education and holds a joint appointment at the University of Wisconsin-Madison between the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and the Office of Education Outreach. The graduate and undergraduate courses she teaches on the topic of accommodating diverse learners in general education settings are integral to the elementary, secondary and special education teacher certification programs. Differentiation, the design of effective curricular adaptations, collaborative teamwork among educators and paraprofessionals, and systems change toward inclusive education are key areas that are central to her research and teaching.



Our Inclusion Support Network meets every month to share strategies on promoting successful inclusion in our schools and community settings. This parent group meets on the first Wednesday of the month at 9:15 am at the home of Patti Chen. For more information call 269-345-8950.



We want your photos!

We need your help. We would like you to start taking photos of your children, or children you know, doing activities that represent the All Kids Can! philosophy. Photos should demonstrate that given the support and opportunities, All Kids Can! participate and be valued members of our community. We would like to save these photos to be utilized in the 2006 All Kids Can! Awareness campaign. If you or someone you know has photos they would like to share, please e-mail them to us at p2pswmi@sbcglobal.net.

Saying Goodbye . . .

We would like to thank **Adam and Jenn Parsons** for their service to Parent to Parent's Board for the past year and a half. They are moving back to their home state of Pennsylvania to be closer to grandparents and family. We will miss them and wish them well.

Saying Hello . . .

We would like to welcome two new Board members to P2P, Heidi Ellis and Laura Holloway.

Heidi Ann Ellis is a special education teacher at Hillside Middle School. She has been a teacher for 10 years. She is also a professor at Western Michigan University, teaching introduction to Learning Disabilities. In her spare time she loves to read and garden and has recently become interested in Yoga. She has been married for 3 years, has a wonderful 18-month-old son and is expecting a baby in August.

Laura Holloway is the mother of three children: Ashley (8), Alec (7) and Nicholas (4). Alec has Down syndrome and Nicholas has language delays. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education and a Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education. She looks forward to sharing her experience as an educator and as a parent of a special needs child with the P2P network.

You Are Invited

Kalamazoo/Battle Creek Chapter Autism Society's 3rd Annual Walk about-Talk about Autism Walk!

Saturday April 22, 2006
At The Celery Flats in Portage MI

Registration Begins at 10am, the event will begin promptly at 11am
The rate is \$15.00 per person / children 10 and under are free
(Free t-shirt included with adult registration, additional t-shirts \$10.00 each)
Shirts will be available on a first come first serve basis.
Registration fees will still apply.

Registrations are due by APRIL 1st!!

Refreshments will be provided following the event!

Make checks payable and mail to:
Kalamazoo/Battle Creek Chapter Autism society
2682 Sleepy Hollow
Portage MI 49024

Contact Trina Wood with questions or concerns @ (269) 372-1509
Or send e-mail to wooddoug@sbcglobal.net



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You may use the form below to send a donation or to request that your name be added or deleted from our mailing list.

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- Please add me to your mailing list
- Please remove me from your mailing list
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- Professional

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Amount \$ _____

Please make checks payable to Parent to Parent, 406 E. Michigan Ave., Kalamazoo, MI 49007