



dis-Abilities Celebration Connection

SPRING 2012



Celebrating Special Children is 10 Years Old!

I'll never forget the day in early 2001 that Cheryl Hughes, then Editor of New Town Publication's *Virginia Parent News* (VPN), walked into my office – I was the sales manager and sometimes writer for VPN – and told me about a woman who had contacted her with an intriguing idea for an add-on publication to VPN.

The woman was Fran Nickey, a writer/editor from Maryland who had been instrumental in creating *A Special Edition*, a publication of *Baltimore's Child* and funded by the Maryland Department of Education. *A Special Edition* was designed to furnish information for and about children with special needs, their families and the professionals who care for them. She was interested to create a similar project in Virginia and was in the process of obtaining funding from the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities (VBPD).

Fran did obtain that funding, an innovative grant from the VBPD; innovative because information for this population had never been put together in quite this way and distributed at no cost to the reader.

So we went to work, writing articles, researching resources, and seeking distribution points for our new publication, which we had named *Celebrating Special Children*. And did we have our work cut out for us! It was one of my jobs to verify some of the resources, using piles of pieced together paper files that Fran had brought with her from Maryland. Remember it was 2001 and I was working on my iMAC G3, using my excruciatingly slow dial-up internet connection.

At this point, it's important to speak of our gratitude to the staff of the Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center (PEATC) who provided invaluable support in the form of writers, tech people and lists of resource materials. It was like being pregnant and giving birth, months of preparation, with PEATC and the VBPD as the midwives, and culminating in our

new baby, *Celebrating Special Children*.

We printed 50,000 copies with distribution limited to Northern Virginia. The publication was so well received that in 2003 the VBPD provided a grant of \$150,000 to expand distribution throughout the state. After publishing an expanded Northern/Central Edition in 2003, we began extending coverage throughout the state, publishing separate editions for the Southwest/South Central and Tidewater regions in 2004. In order to better serve the needs of our targeted population, *Celebrating Special Children, Inc.* was formed in 2003 and received 501(c)(3) nonprofit status in 2004. In 2007 and 2008, a single statewide publication was created and distributed to hundreds of locations, including the Special Education departments and Parent Resource Centers of all the counties and incorporated cities in Virginia.

And so, here we are today ten years older and hopefully, wiser. Some things have changed; we are no longer a hard-copy publication but an online presence; we don't receive funding from the VBPD, but citizens can make donations through their tax returns. And because our focus has changed from children, birth - age 22, to the cover the life span, our newsletter name changed accordingly.

But our commitment has never waived. We are still all about empowering parents, educators, professionals, and individuals by providing an extensive source of services, programs and support available in Virginia to ensure that everyone with a "dis-ability" may realize their fullest potential of development, independence and quality of life.

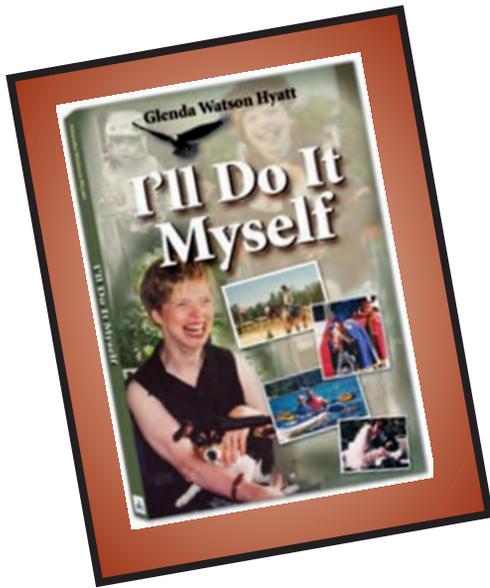
Thanks for taking the journey with us and here's to another 10 years!

Laura Nelson, Editor

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The Wisdom of *I'll Do It Myself*

By Carrie Smoot

In 2006, Glenda Watson Hyatt achieved the dream that first entered her mind at the age of ten—writing her autobiography. “[H]aving cerebral palsy is not a death sentence, but rather a life sentence,” Watson Hyatt says in her introduction. She speaks primarily to youth, young adults, and their parents about how she has managed her life. But at the same time, she gives anyone who has a disability a sense of comfort, strength, and hope. And she educates the wider world about what people with disabilities can do. On page 9, she recalls: “I would be required to prove my capabilities and potential countless times throughout my life as so many people don’t see beyond the cerebral palsy to see me.”

Watson Hyatt was born in Vancouver, British Columbia, in November 1966. She has the type of CP called athetoid quadriplegia, which affects her speech and motor functions. Her body movements are jerky. She uses a scooter, but cannot walk without support. Her right hand is often curled into a fist, but her dominant left hand has some

movement. From the age of five, she has used her left thumb to type, and is known as the Left Thumb Blogger. A scare with carpal tunnel syndrome led her to explore assistive technologies. She loves the iPad and the latest computer software and tools, which gave her a synthesized voice, Kate, to speak at conferences, to podcast, and to participate in everyday life. No longer would people have to translate Glenda-ish, the nickname Watson Hyatt has given to her natural speech. “I feel like a butterfly, emerging from my cocoon of silence,” she says of her ability to podcast and to speak. “It’s like by becoming verbal, I became visible, too.” (p. 170).

She relates how parents of children with disabilities in the late 1960s had little or no support systems, and very often, they were left to figure things out on their own. Rejecting doctors’ advice to institutionalize their daughter, her parents took Glenda home and loved and supported her. Along the way, three younger brothers joined the family. Her mom, who became a special education teacher, was an added support.

Early on, Watson Hyatt tried to do things independently, such as feeding herself and getting in and out of bed—even though these activities took a long time.

Although no one else’s life is a carbon copy of another’s, readers will identify with many of Watson Hyatt’s experiences—from attending a special education school, to mainstreaming, and to attending a regular school full time. With gratitude and humor, she reflects on the people who helped to shape her life. Readers also see her enjoyment and leadership experiences in Girl Guides, horseback riding—for which she won a gold medal—and traveling.

What person can’t relate to figuring out career goals, finding a life direction, and wanting to see more of the world by going to college and living independently, with some assistance? Watson Hyatt shares her employment experiences—and the fortuitous job she accepted which led to meeting her husband, Darrell.

As for the people who haven’t been supportive or kind, Watson

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Hyatt does her best to forget them and to stay positive. Overall, she would say she has led an ordinary life.

I'll Do It Myself is available in paperback and Kindle. Enjoy the Do It Myself Blog at www.doitmyselfblog.com

Very graciously, Watson Hyatt agreed to an e-mail interview. Her responses are below.

1) What else would you include if you were planning an updated edition of *I'll Do It Myself*? Are you planning another book in the future? If so, what will it be about?

The update would likely be shared in a second book, in which I'd like to focus on my journey in communication – from being labeled with the damning “functionally non-verbal” through my various means of communication, to finding my voice with blogging and other social media, to finding a way to deliver engaging presentations at conferences, to my life-changing iPad and beyond.

2) In addition to young people who have disabilities, what advice and insights would you give to those in middle age and older?

Be yourself. Focus on what you do have and on what you can do. Go ahead...try...see how far you can go, how much you can accomplish, how much you can become.

3) How does someone know what his or her “summit” actually is?

That is [a] tough question. I'm not sure one can know until actually there, and once there, it is quite

likely to go a little further, to grow a little more, or to give a little extra. Of course, reaching one's summit depends on one's motivation, determination and available opportunities.

4) Do you still feel that “a lot of people are counting on you”?—Was that statement ever burdensome to you? Why and why not?

At times I feel much pressure to say something inspiring, motivating or upbeat. But I try to be realistic and realize that isn't always possible, and that I'm being more authentic by not always being “on.”

5) Does Soaring Eagle Communications focus solely on Web accessibility now? What other areas have you branched out in? I'm also intrigued about your 4-hour workday. How do you make that happen?

Soaring Eagle Communications is undergoing a shift of focus. Rather than focusing solely on accessibility and disability-related issues, I'd like to take what I have learned from living with a disability and help people to experience their lives more fully. It is still very much a journey in progress.

Feeling drained, tired, unmotivated for months – no amount of dark chocolate or extra-large mochas helped for long – led me to implement the 4-hour work day at the beginning of 2012 in hope of renewing my health and regaining balance. Although turning off my computer after four hours and going to do something else remains a work in progress – some days more than others – I am experiencing the benefits of

choosing to live a somewhat more balanced life. It takes a conscious effort to make it happen.

6) Is Web accessibility improving? If so, in what ways?

The awareness of the need for accessible websites and the various legislation requiring sites to be accessible has helped, but, sadly, there is still much room for improvement.

7) How did you become interested in blogging, and what advice would you give to people about starting?

I began reading and commenting on others' blogs, which led to meeting a few people online. I read and learned about blogging; Andy Wibbels and Pam Slim were two of my early blogging mentors. Intrigued, I started my own and haven't looked back.

For those considering [starting] blogging: read and follow a handful of blogs to get the feel of how it works, ask questions, then start (the first few posts need not be long or perfect, the key is to start), keep writing and learn as you go.

8) Any particular career advice, since you have done many different jobs?

Actually I have only had one part-time job; everything else I have done as a self-employed, solopreneur and I am still figuring it out. The most important advice that I can share is do what you love, what interests you, what challenges you or what you are passionate about. If a job is just a J-O-B, unless you are in survival mode, it will impact other aspects

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of your life. Life is too precious, too short not to enjoy your work. If doing what you love is not possible at this point in your career, then, at least, have a hobby or volunteer or something to create that balance, so that you do have something you enjoy and look forward to.

9) You said that growing up, the word “can’t” wasn’t allowed—only try. But have there been situations when it was okay to say, “I can’t”? How did you handle these situations, and how did you come to acceptance?

It depends on the situation: becoming a brain surgeon or a marathon runner only required a small dose of reality that those weren’t options for me. In other situations, I realized that it was okay to ask for help. “No man is an island.”

10) Tell me more about the power wheel camera. I liked your spring flower photos (with outtakes) on the blog.

Photo wheels – a spin on the term “photo walks” – are when my husband (also has cerebral palsy and uses a power wheelchair) and I grab our respective cameras and head out somewhere we can easily get to. These photo wheels have become an outside activity we are able to enjoy together.

11) Our reading tastes regarding disability books seem very similar. What non-disability books and authors have meant a lot to you?

“Life is too precious, too short not to enjoy your work. If doing what you love is not possible at this point in your career, then, at least, have a hobby or volunteer or something to create that balance, so that you do have something you enjoy and look forward to.”

I tend to enjoy autobiographies and other non-fiction. I recently read “Start with Why” by Simon Stinek, which I wish I had read years ago. I’m now reading “Tell to Win” by Peter Guber. I also

enjoy curling up with an issue of O Magazine.

12) Do you now use a different type of AAC, or do you still use ReadPlease on your iPad? What are some of your favorite computer technologies?

To clarify, I used the text-to-speech program ReadPlease on my computer. For communicating with my iPad, I use the AAC app Proloquo2Go.

Some of my favourite computer apps include Evernote, SnagIt, DisplayLink to use my iPad as a second monitor, and WordQ.

13) What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

I enjoy macramé, photography, reading, napping with my kitty, and spending time with my husband.

Carrie Smoot is a Northern Virginia freelance writer.

Look for the next issue of *dis-Abilities Celebration Connection* to be posted during the month of July 2012. Remember to send us story ideas, interesting links, and events.

We can’t do it without you!

*dis-Abilities
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Questions? Comments? Please
use the CONTACT US form at
www.celebratingspecialchildren.org

Summer Camps & Recreation Not Just for Kids



Compiled by Gregg J. Donaldson

Editor's note:

This article lists adult only or adult/child recreational opportunities. Some of the information listed here was gathered from various websites and lists already in existence and is currently posted under the Community Resource Tab on the CSC homepage. Although every effort was made to verify the information in these listings, we urge you to contact the camps directly to discuss the programs, fees, and availability of camperships and sliding fee scales. It's also extremely useful to visit each facility you are considering. There are certainly programs that we have missed. We encourage you to call your local Parks and Rec Department to see what opportunities are available.

Camp Greentop for People with Disabilities -

Nestled in the heart of the Catoclin Park in Thurmont, Maryland a mile and a half from Camp David, Camp Greentop is sponsored by the Baltimore League and has year around recreational opportunities for everyone. This year, marks Camp Greentop's 25th year.

Adult Camp: Camp Greentop offers adult campers the ability to be more independent and choose their activities with a more relaxed atmosphere. Campers choose traditional camp programs in which to participate such as swimming, crafts, music, sports, and much more. In addition, we offer adult campers the opportunity to participate in day trips. Each day, two trips leave camp. Adult campers choose from trips including baseball games, the rodeo, dinner theaters, jazz concerts, the race track, tubing, fishing, and more. While the abilities of the campers may vary, the camp staff assist campers in making their daily activity choices as well as modifying the activity to each camper's individualized ability. The staff, at a 2:1 camper to counselor ratio, are also available to assist with any aspect of daily care.

There are also two travel camps to Williamsburg Virginia July 27-31 and Ocean City, Maryland August 5-9.

- 410-323-0500
- <http://leagueforpeople.org/programs/camping-therapeutic-recreation/summer-programs/registration-information>



Arlington County Dept of Parks, Recreation and Community Resources

Provides specialized recreation services/programs around prevention and intervention to meet identified needs not met through traditional recreation programs. Adult classes include: Adapted Aquatics, Adapted F.I.T. Walks and Adult Arts and Crafts.

- 703-228-4740 • 703-228-4743 TTY
- www.arlingtonva.us/departments/parksrecreation/scripts/assistance/page79701.aspx



Camp Baker

Located in Chesterfield, residential and day programs are offered by the Richmond ARC for adults and children with moderate to profound developmental disabilities. Activities include swimming, music, hiking, arts, and crafts, horseback riding and canoeing. Camp Baker's Day Support program operates year round providing services to adults with intellectual disabilities, age 21 and older. Additionally, the program offers year-round weekend respite care for families.

- 804-748-4789
- www.richmondarc.org/Home/Learn/Services/CampBaker.aspx

Please be aware that when website names are printed on two lines they may not be able to be accessed by simply clicking on the link. If necessary, use a search tool to get to the particular department of the organization.

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Camp Bruce McCoy



The Brain Injury Association of Virginia (BIAV) will host the 29th year of Camp Bruce McCoy at the Triple-R Ranch in Chesapeake,

Virginia. The program, named in memory of a former camper, is designed to provide an outstanding recreational program with the highest level of safety possible. Camp activities will be adapted to each person's ability and interest and are designed to provide challenges, build confidence, foster new friendships, and most importantly, be fun.

- 804-355-5748
- www.biav.net/camp-bruce-mccoy.htm

Camp Easter Seals UCP

Offers children and adults with disabilities the opportunity to enjoy fun and challenging activities in a supportive and cooperative atmosphere. From campfire sing-a-longs and talent shows to canoeing, nature walks, swimming and arts & crafts, Camp Easter Seals UCP provides the excitement and activity of a traditional summer camp program in a beautiful, accessible setting. To best determine a camper's eligibility, Easter Seals UCP staff will carefully review each camper's application.



- 540-777-7325 x107
- www.campeastersealsucp.com

Camp Horizon for Children and Adults with Disabilities

Located in southeastern Virginia, the Up Center, (Formerly Child & Family Services of Eastern Virginia), provides a day camp program for individuals with developmental disabilities.



- 757-622-7017
- www.theupcenter.org/For_People_With_Disabilities/camp_horizon.htm

Charlottesville Therapeutic Recreation

For individuals, ages 8 and up, with physical and or mental disabilities whose recreational needs cannot be met by regular programs. The goals of the activities are to improve self-esteem, health, social skills, recreation skills, safety skills, and independence while having fun.

Therapeutic classes are offered for 6 weeks in exercise, hiking, swimming/water exercises, crafts, ceramics, cooking, social relationships, anger management, community outings, and others, for specific classes this season, please refer

to Classes & Services listings on the web site or

- 434-970-3269
- www.charlottesville.org/recreation

Other activities include (but not limited to):

❖ **Wheelchair Basketball** - The Charlottesville Cardinals encourage teens and adults with mobility limitations who are interested in competitive wheelchair basketball to join their weekly Thursday evening practices. The local team plays games against teams from Virginia Beach, Northern Virginia, Richmond, Maryland, North Carolina, and other east coast teams.



- 434-971-9629
- www.cardinalsbasketball.com

❖ **Day/Overnight Trips** - Day and overnight trips are planned for individuals with disabilities. The goals are to help with independence and self esteem as well as having fun while learning about local and state-wide attractions.

- 434-970-3269

❖ **Activities for Individuals with Visual Impairments** - A lunch and activity is held once a month at the Key Recreation Center for individuals with visual impairments.

- 434-970-3264
- www.charlottesville.org/Index.aspx?page=763

Chesapeake Parks and Recreation

Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialists are dedicated to maintaining an atmosphere which promotes leisure awareness, social interaction, and personal achievement with the goal that recreation can enhance health, independence and quality of life.



- 757-962-5828
- www.cityofchesapeake.net/Government/City-Departments/Departments/Parks-and-Recreation-Department/Therapeutic-Recreation-Programs.htm

Chesterfield County Parks and Rec Dept

Offers a variety of programs that change from year to year, but usually include activities such as summer day camps, golf, challenge/ropes course, bowling, Special Olympics, therapeutic horseback riding, sign language classes, arts and crafts, and other therapeutic and inclusive recreation programs.



- 804-751-4134
- www.chesterfield.gov/content2.aspx?id=3134

City of Alexandria Therapeutic Recreation Programs and Services for Children and Adults with Disabilities

Among the programs offered: eight weeks of summer fun for children with physical, cognitive and developmental disabilities. Day Camp activities include swimming, field trips, sports, games and more. Qualified staff members with therapeutic recreation, special education or other related backgrounds, supervise campers.

- 703-746-5422
- <http://alexandriava.gov/Recreation>

Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind

Circle of Friends is a support group organized by Columbia Lighthouse for the Blind for adults experiencing vision loss. Members of the Circle of Friends participate in a multitude of activities including: cooking classes, arts and crafts, exercise, swimming, attending hands-on trade shows, hearing special guest speakers, discussing various topics and much more! With groups meeting twice a month in Riverdale, MD, Silver Spring, MD and Arlington, VA.

- 240-737-5100
- <http://clb.org/adults-services>

Danville Parks & Recreation - Stonewall Therapeutic Recreation Center

Provides opportunities for individuals with disabilities to explore self and community through recreation and leisure activities. The staff strives to address the physical, social, emotional and cognitive needs of participants.

- 434-799-5199
- www.danville-va.gov/index.aspx?NID=701

Fairfax County Community and Recreation Therapeutic Recreation Programs for Adults

Provide opportunities for individuals with disabilities so they may acquire the skills that enable them to participate in the recreation and leisure programs of their choice. Staff is committed to providing services, education, and resources that meet participants' interests, needs, and abilities. Staff also provides support and advocacy to individuals who wish to participate in general recreation activities.

- 703-324-5532 • 711 TTY
- www.fairfaxcounty.gov/ncs/trs/adults.htm

Henrico County Therapeutic Recreation

Classes, clubs, field trips, workshops and special events for families of children and adults with developmental disabilities, emotional disabilities and special health care needs.

- 804-501-5112
- www.co.henrico.va.us/rec/at-your-leisure-program/therapeutic-recreation.html

James City County Parks and Recreation

Provides leisure opportunities and recreation programs, which are open and accessible to all citizens in the county regardless of mental or physical ability.

- 757-259-3200
- www.jccegov.com/recreation/

Loudoun County Parks & Recreation - Adaptive Recreation

A wide variety of events and activities are offered throughout the year including: adapted aquatics, bowling, camping, community outings, outdoor recreation, overnight trips, Special Olympics and VSA Arts.

- 703-777-0100
- www.loudoun.gov/index.aspx?NID=1185

Newport News Therapeutic Recreation



Provides a wide range of recreation programs and leisure opportunities for children and adults who have special needs

that may limit their involvement in recreation programs often offered to the general public. All programs are developed and supervised by a nationally Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist.

- 757-926-1400
- www.nngov.com/parks-and-recreation/therapeuticrecreation

Norfolk Dept. of Parks Therapeutic Recreation Center

Programs utilize recreation to help individuals with temporary impairments, health conditions, and disabilities to increase independence, strengthen leisure skills, and enhance personal well being – physically, cognitively, emotionally, and socially in a rehabilitative environment.

- 757-441-1764
- www.norfolk.gov/rpos/Therapeutic.asp

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Roanoke Valley Therapeutic Recreation Services

Empowers people with disabilities to gain the knowledge and skills for the development of a quality leisure lifestyle to meet their interests and needs.



- 540-772-7529 ext 2
- www.roanokecountyva.gov/index.aspx?NID=661

Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH Intl.)

Formerly North American Riding for the Handicapped Association, Inc. (NARHA). This organization that promotes the benefit of the horse for individuals with physical, emotional and learning disabilities. Call or click to locate a participating riding program near you.

- 800-369-RIDE (7433)
- www.pathintl.org

Cerebral Palsy of Virginia Summer Camp

Summer activities such as computer software games, art and crafts projects, daily field trips to museums, bowling and the movies.



- 757-497-7474
- www.cerebralpalsyofvirginia.org

Special Olympics Virginia

Year-round program of sports training and athletic competition for children and adults with intellectual disabilities. Website has listings of local offices/locations.



Special Olympics
Virginia

- 804-346-5544 • 800-932-GOLD
- www.specialolympicsva.com

Sportable

Organization focused on providing recreation and sports opportunities for individuals with physical disabilities in the Richmond area.

- 804-340-2991
- www.sportable.org

Therapeutic Adventures

Committed to providing greater access to adaptive outdoor recreation for persons of all ages who have a disability (physical or developmental), a chronic illness, or other special health needs. The integrative approach to adaptive outdoor recreation consists of Adaptive Water Sports, Adaptive Snow Sports, and Adaptive Wilderness Sports.



- 434-981-5834
- www.taonline.org/ta

Beacon Lodge Camp

Beacon Lodge was established in 1948 as a summer camp for blind residents of Pennsylvania and is now a beautiful five hundred and eighty-three acre summer camp for children and adults with special needs including blindness, deafness, and many other physical and mental challenges. It is nestled in the natural woodlands along the Juniata River of Central Pennsylvania near Mount Union.

- 804-542-2511
- www.beaconlodge.com/campers

Virginia Beach Department of Parks and Recreation Therapeutic Recreation Services

Offers a variety of activities for all ages, including opportunities in community recreation participation, swimming, after school activity, fitness programs, and summer day programs.

- 757-474-8877
- www.vbgov.com/government/departments/parks-recreation/patrons-disabilities/therapeutic-recreation/pages/default.aspx

Additional Camp Locator Resources

- USA TechGuide:

A Program of United Spinal Association, has 46 Links of Summer Camps for Youth and Adults with disabilities
www.usatechguide.org/techguide.php?vmode=1&catid=405

- ACA Virginia
www.acavirginiascamps.org

- Easter Seals
www.easterseals.com

My Journey from Parent to Advocate

A Parent Perspective



By Sheree Brown-Kaplan

In 1995, two events occurred that have greatly affected my family; the Fairfax County School Board became an elected body and I became a first-time parent. When my daughter was diagnosed with a developmental disability in 1999 and began receiving special education services through Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS), I became interested in the FCPS policies and programming that would dictate my child's success or failure. Later, after I became a PTA volunteer and started advocating for students with disabilities and their parents at a county-wide level, I discovered that most of the school board members and FCPS leadership had no fundamental understanding of special education and the needs of these children.

Unfortunately, that situation has not changed significantly over the years. Experience has taught me that my daughter can rely on only two people to know about her disability and her rights under Virginia's special education regulations — her parents. I

also learned that protecting my child's rights required constant vigilance. During the last revision of state's regulations, school boards across the state attempted to end one of the major rights of Virginia parents: the right of consent to the termination of special education services. That marked the beginning of a three-year fight to protect not only my child's rights, but those of thousands of other children with disabilities across Fairfax County.

Working together with other parents, I used my previous experience as a Capitol Hill staffer and lobbyist to create a grassroots effort to convince the Virginia Board of Education to reject the proposal. That effort centered on drafting model comments for parents to submit on the proposed regulations and working in coalition with disability groups from across the state to ensure our voices were heard. As a result, parents throughout Virginia weighed in on the proposal and submitted 38,000 comments, the most of any regulation in the history of the state.

In a direct meeting with then-Governor Kaine, we secured his agreement to retain in the final regulations this important Virginia-specific parental right.

We succeeded because we worked together as parents and citizens. It took energy and commitment, but also an understanding that we don't have to accept the status quo. The time has come for parents of children with disabilities to again work for change in our public schools.

Recent FCPS discipline policies underscored the school board's inability to understand the needs of students with disabilities. As demonstrated by 2010 data from the Hearings Office, FCPS discipline policies result in students with disabilities accounting for almost 44 percent of their cases despite constituting only 14 percent of the total population. In practical terms, a student with a disability has a 500 percent greater chance of being the subject of a suspension and reassignment case than a general education student.

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Despite efforts in 2011 to bring this inequity to the attention of the school board, it took no steps to correct the disproportionate suspensions and reassignments of students with disabilities. That experience prompted me to take a step I previously thought unimaginable; I ran for an At-Large position on the Fairfax County School Board. It was my aim to ensure that at least one member of the school board understands the needs of students with disabilities and the federal and state mandates governing their services.

The results of the election were close. Many people agreed with my goals and I garnered almost 82,000 votes, falling only ¾ of a percent from winning a seat. After the election, I considered how I might best continue my advocacy for students with disabilities. I reviewed the local disability organizations available to parents, focusing on their missions and how they serve children with disabilities. I found that a number of organizations highlight parent education, others represent specific disability categories, and some are willing to advocate before the Board of Supervisors. However, I failed to find any organization that focuses on

student outcomes and empowers parents to advocate for students with disabilities before the school board.

Consequently, in January of this year, I joined forces with recently retired school board member, Tina Hone, to help launch The Coalition of The Silence (COTS). The mission of COTS is “to empower communities to insist upon improved outcomes for African American, Latino,

We succeeded because we worked together as parents and citizens. It took energy and commitment, but also an understanding that we don't have to accept the status quo.

economically disadvantaged, and students with disabilities as indicated by the closing of the achievement gap at all levels and the elimination of the disproportionality in the discipline system.” Our aim is not to speak on behalf of these communities but to assist them in advocating for themselves.

As a parent and active volunteer, I have found that change only comes when we speak up as a community and work together on common issues.

The recent school board election gave us an opportunity for real improvements because half of its membership is new and receptive to ideas that will better the quality of our children's education. It's important for parents to get involved; to join with other parents and let local school boards know that we want improved opportunities that will fulfill the three purposes of IDEA, further education, employment and independent living. ■

Sheree Brown-Kaplan is a native of Northern Virginia, a graduate of Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) and has a degree from George Mason University. Sheree has served legislators in both the Virginia House of Delegates and US House of Representatives and as a political appointee in the Office of Management and Budget. She has worked in government affairs for a Fortune 500 company and a trade association representing small, family-owned businesses. Married and the parent of two children with disabilities who attend FCPS, Sheree has a wide range of local PTA experience. She has also served as a member of the Executive Board of the Fairfax County Council of PTAs and chair of its Special Education Committee. Sheree is a past member of the Advisory Committee on Students with Disabilities and a graduate of the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities' nationally recognized advocacy training program, Partners in Policymaking. Most recently, she ran as an At-Large candidate for the Fairfax County School Board.

*For more information, visit the COTS website and sign up for updates:
<http://coalitionofthesilence.org>.*



Links I Love~



Editor's Note:

With the coming of Spring, it seems like a good time to highlight outdoor recreational opportunities. The Camp article in this issue presented organized camps and programs for adults (as well as children). This page will showcase Boundless Playgrounds, a company whose mission it is to "To build truly inclusive playgrounds where children — and adults — of all abilities can play and learn together in a fun and welcoming environment."



Since 1997, Boundless Playgrounds has been the leading national nonprofit developer of nearly 200 truly inclusive playgrounds in 31 states and Canada. There are currently over 100 projects under development. For more information visit www.boundlessplaygrounds.org



Newport News, Virginia Boundless Playground at Deer Park

11532 Jefferson Avenue • Newport News, VA

Local Contact Information
City of Newport News - Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism

Playground Opened: January 2, 2004

Hours of Operation: From dawn until dusk

Virginia Beach, Virginia • Kids Cove
Mt. Trashmore Signature Park • 300 Edwin Dr • Virginia Beach, VA

Local Contact Information
City of Virginia Beach, Parks & Recreation Department

Hours of Operation: From dawn until dusk



Warrenton, Virginia Claude Moore Fun For All Playground

Warrenton Aquatic Recreational Facility
800 Waterloo Rd • Warrenton, VA

Playground Opened: September 2010

Hours of Operation: From dawn until dusk