

# Looking for Help? Parent Resource Centers Might be the Answer

by Marsha Goldberg, Ed. D.

*Andrea and Mark are feeling shocked, upset, and sad. They have just come from a visit with a doctor who told them that she thinks their two-and-a-half year old daughter has autism. Their family lives far away; they don't know where to turn.*

*Sue is concerned about her six-year-old son. A first grader, he doesn't seem to be able to read as well as her friends' children. He still struggles with the alphabet. And while he loves it when Sue reads to him, he will not look at a book on his own. The school has indicated that her son may need some special help, but first Sue would like more information.*

*The Baileys are distraught. Their bright and beautiful 15-year-old daughter seemed to become a different person last year. She started to show signs of anxiety and depression. She couldn't sleep, lost weight, and was failing in school. The problem became so serious that she was eventually hospitalized, first in a residential mental health facility, and now in a day treatment center. She is about to be released and will return to school but the Baileys are worried about how the school can meet their daughter's needs.*

The parents in each of the situations above have serious questions about the services that their schools offer. Fortunately, they can all begin to find answers with just one phone call to their Special Education Parent Resource Center (PRC). Many school districts in Virginia have funded PRCs to help parents get answers to their questions about the special education process, the procedures that are involved with the process, and the services that schools provide to children with disabilities or learning differences. Many school staff members use PRCs as well to find materials that they can pass on to parents or use themselves.

Parent Resource Centers offer a variety of services at no cost to parents. They maintain libraries with books and materials about the special education process, about specific disabilities, and about techniques and strategies that are used to help children in areas such as reading, math, homework, writing, and social skills. PRCs offer workshops throughout the year addressing topics such as technology, study skills, positive behavior supports, Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)

and 504 plans. Both parents and staff members attend PRC workshops.

Staff members at the PRCs often meet individually with parents, talk with them on the

phone, or communicate via e-mail. They can answer questions and address concerns that a parent may have specifically about his or her child. The Centers encourage parent participation in the educational decision-making process and they are committed to the belief that parents are more effective in this role when they are better educated about it.

The staff members at the PRCs typically include a professional educator as well as a parent of a child who receives special education services. This represents the most important goal of the PRCs: to have parents and staff members work together as a team to meet the needs of children. ■

Please note: Not all areas have access to a Parent Resource Center; it is a voluntary action on the part of individual school districts. Please see The Special Education Directory on p.54 for a contact number for the Parent Resource Centers operating within the distribution area of *Celebrating Special Children*.

*Dr. Marsha Goldberg is the educational specialist at the Parent Resource Center (PRC) of Fairfax County Schools. The PRC promotes parental awareness of the services provided by Fairfax County Public Schools for children with special needs and their families. The center provides seminars, training programs, and information to foster the parent/professional partnership. It publishes a special education parent handbook which parents can view and download from the PRC Web site at [www.fcps.edu/DSSSE/prchomep.htm](http://www.fcps.edu/DSSSE/prchomep.htm).*



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