



MAKING THE *Connection*

DECEMBER 2014 • DOWN SYNDROME CONNECTION OF THE BAY AREA

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Holiday Fun for All

Nancy LaBelle



It was a great day on December 7 when more than 200 filled the Los Cerros Middle School (thanks to Principal Phyllis Roach and DSCBA friend, Tami Castelluccio) for our Holiday Party. Moms, dads, sisters, brothers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and many family friends joined

the festivities. We had many fun crafts this year thanks to Marianne Iversen and Nancy Ferguson; they gave their hearts to planning activities kids will love. We are very grateful to our young community volunteers who came out and helped the children at the craft tables. An abundance of yummy goodies, donated to us by the National Charity League Diablo Valley Chapter, were enjoyed by all.

We had a couple of new games this year, and my favorite was Reindeer Ring Toss! Thank you to volunteer Conner Anthony for being an awesome Reindeer for the day and to his mom, our hard-working Office Manager, Peggy Alreck-Anthony, for tending to the sweet deer and the players. The bell choir is always a treat thanks to our treasured Music Therapist Nicole Patton, who led the jingles all the way. A big thanks goes to our volunteer Face Painters, Roxy Rymland and Meabh Tangney. They created beautiful designs on many happy faces all day.

One of the many highlights each year is when K. Leigh Alfrey, who happens to have Down syndrome, plays her clarinet for the crowd. "Jingle Bells" and "We Wish You a Merry Christmas" were enjoyed by all. It surely gets everyone into the holiday spirit. K. Leigh reminds us of not only her many talents and gifts but also the abilities in all of us when you work hard at something you love.

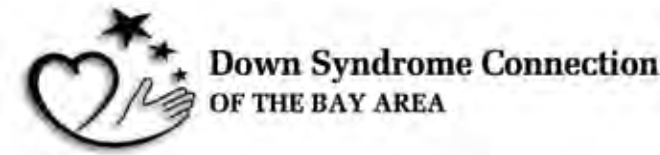
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Above: Joey Travolta & Sam Small making friends



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2015 Board Meetings

The board meets every third Tuesday of the month. To attend or bring a guest please contact Board President, Mike Zolnier, at 925-819-1009 or mike@vdbprop.com. (Note: dates can change so it's best to call before attending).

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A Note from Nancy

Nancy LaBelle, Executive Director

Based on the research done this year regarding inclusive learning and children with Down syndrome, I am happy to report that we are on track with our programs. DSCBA programs focus on education and communication, and we continue to support families regarding inclusive opportunities in both community and education.

A recent study out of Ohio State University, which focused on language skill development in an inclusive classroom, found that children with disabilities in classrooms with highly skilled peers outperformed by 40 percent those that were surrounded by the lowest skilled youngsters. This is very important information because many of our students with Down syndrome enter school and continue through many grade levels with limited language due to speech delay, Apraxia of Speech, and low muscle tone, for example.

Another study published in October, 2014, showed that pre-schoolers with Down syndrome do not yet show the learning and memory impairments seen in adults with Down syndrome. The results reinforce the idea that early childhood may be a critical time frame for targeted early intervention.

Lastly, research also shows that Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) interventions reduce challenging behavior across a wide range of participants, including children and adults with a variety of developmental disabilities.

How are we at DSCBA paving the way for inclusive opportunities in community and school?

- We train entire general education teams on how to adapt and modify the school environment based on individual needs, setting the child up for success in an inclusive or SDC environment.
- Our strong partnership with schools continues to open the lines of communication between school, home, and the DSCBA. Ultimately the child wins if included in general education or attends Special Day Classes (SDC), and we become the experts, which is a position of strength to be in.
- The intensive work we have been testing the benefits of for two years now in a Summer Communications Readiness Program focuses on language, literacy, and AAC for children who have limited language. The program prepares students to enter school and learn in an inclusive setting. The children and the education team receive the actual tools and ongoing

supports that they need for success and that they would not have had otherwise.

- Our AAC consulting work with parents and educators gives a child with no or limited language a better chance to be successful, to participate, and to learn alongside their peers. We create language opportunities, based on individual needs, for the classroom and home.
- Our ability awareness work through the Down Syndrome Education Alliance (DSEA) program sets the stage, dispels the myths, and takes the mystery out about people with Down syndrome by sharing information and stories. This creates an environment where friendships can be fostered in inclusive classrooms, from kindergarten through higher grades.
- The IEP consulting work we do assists the parents in building a roadmap with challenging individual-based goals for their child to be successful in any setting. We are finding more parents want their children included in general education now. We advise how this can be possible and assist them in obtaining their goals. We offer outside resources to help. We stand by their side until they get what they want.

Programs and efforts such as those mentioned above are designed to develop communication skills as early as possible. I will remain passionate in this pursuit because the ability to participate and to be independent, in my opinion, starts with the ability to express your basic needs. Everyone should be offered the opportunity to make choices. When I started here seven years ago, I saw many children with DS offered only special education opportunities because they couldn't speak. Schools claimed they had no way to accept our students into the schools with their siblings and neighborhood friends because they could not support their needs appropriately. "Those services are not offered here." Non- or limited-verbal children were being and continue to be labeled by schools as "moderately to severely disabled" simply because they cannot speak. Children with DS continue to be underestimated and deemed not capable of inclusive learning because they can't express themselves. Behaviors were not—and, in some cases, still are not—looked at and treated as a form of communication. Today, we do not allow school districts to use excuses to get out of providing inclusive services. It is against the law, and we remind them of that.

We have made significant change in these areas, but there is always more to do. When I look at the data we have collected, I realize how much we accomplish annually with our small and awesome staff. Since the data also shows that our education and communication efforts are on track, we will maintain these areas of focus and document best practices, expanding into the future at a pace we can successfully support.

Ultimately we all want everyone to be accepted into their communities, become independent, and have a happy, good quality of life. We want our very capable members to find viable, interesting work and create lasting friendships—and we have many inspiring members who are achieving this!



Holiday Fun for All ← page 1

Santa is always a big hit! It is amazing that we have had the same giving and caring Santa Claus for more than seven years, seeing how busy the jolly man is at this time of year. We know our friend, Mike DeMasi, must have (shall we say) some pull at the North Pole. As Santa entered the room, he was literally rushed by many children of all ages for a great big hug. “Ho, ho, ho,” Santa said, as he greeted children and their families and made his way to the stage to take his throne by the Christmas tree. A big thanks to my friend, Jennifer Kearns, for volunteering to take photos, some of which you see here in the newsletter.

We were honored to have Joey Travolta—actor, singer, director, recording artist, and now Founder and Creative Director of Inclusion Films—at the party. Joey’s Inclusion Films crew worked hard all day. The crew included Jeff Smith, an awesome adult who happens to have Down syndrome. Joey’s group specifically employs people with developmental disabilities to work in the film industry, and we are honored to hire the group to work for the DSCBA. The crew shot the festivities in preparation for a short film being made about the Down Syndrome Connection that will debut at our red-carpet event, the Gala, on May 2. Thank you to the many families who shared their personal stories on camera at the party.

It surely was another successful Holiday Party that warmed everyone’s hearts. We were honored to meet new parents, enjoy families that have been members for years, and greet sweet new additions to our members’ families, beautiful supportive family members, and friends who love so unconditionally each and every day.

From all of us at the Down Syndrome Connection of the Bay Area, we wish you a very happy and healthy New Year!





Board President Mike Zolnier and member, Veronica Barillas

Fashion Show Photos by Jennifer Kearns

A Fashion Show to Remember

Nancy LaBelle



When the Danville Children's Guild informed us that we would be the recipient of their Celebrate the Children, Annual Fashion Show and Luncheon event, we were very excited. Each year, the beautiful ladies of the Guild choose a different organization serving the needs of children to benefit from this event. The Guild has been proudly serving the San Francisco Bay Area since 1975.

The show was sold out with 300 attendees and held at the beautiful Diablo Country Club. Many vendors sold their products and services and generously donated 20 percent of their profit that day to our organization. It was exciting to meet Kristi Yamaguchi, who was in attendance selling her cloth-

ing line. While enjoying appetizers and cocktails, everyone had the opportunity to bid on many generous silent auction items. There were also raffles for a \$2,600 diamond necklace donated by B. Allan Jewelers of Danville and a large quantity of quality wines.

The luncheon started with speakers from the Guild, followed by our Board President, Mike Zolnier, and me. After a delicious lunch, we went on to a very exciting part of the day, the Fund-a-Need Auction. The Guild chose to raise funds for our 2015 Stride with Pride Bike Camp. Jessica Aguirre, NBC Bay Area News Anchor, was the MC for the afternoon, and she did an amazing job pumping everyone up to donate. The fun began as Katie Mack, a beautiful

five-year-old who happens to have Down syndrome, took the stage with a Strider bike she has been practicing on, through our bike lending program. She showed the crowd how a no-peddle bike can get kids of any age on a two-wheel bike with confidence, hard work, and motivation. As Katie pushed herself down the catwalk, Jessica asked everyone to raise their paddles. After \$500, \$100, and \$50 were called out, it looked like all paddles were raised. We are not aware of the total raised for the bike camp during this event; however, we know it was enough money to allow us to staff and conduct several bike camps for all ages, as well as to provide Strider Bikes and helmets for every camper. Danville Town Council members Newell

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Fashion Show ← page 6

Arnerich and Renee Morgan deserve a special thank you for attending and for their generous donations to our camp program.

The day continued with the main event. Many of our members' children and local community kids and adults volunteered to walk the catwalk in beautiful clothing from local designers and establishments, showing off their inner and outer beauty. It was so much fun to watch K. Leigh Alfrey, Addie Bender, LuLu Jensen, Katie Mack, and Will and Katy Drucker from the DSCBA take the runway in style. Thank you to all the DSCBA families who attended or volunteered to be part of this event.

We are truly grateful for the hard work and commitment from the ladies of the Guild for creating an elegant luncheon and a successful event that offered us a chance to gain community awareness and the funds necessary to continue our vital programs, which support Bay Area families who have children born with Down syndrome.

It was indeed a fashion show to remember—one I will never forget. A warm and sincere thank you again from all of us at the Down Syndrome Connection of the Bay Area to all of the generous ladies of the Danville Children's Guild for this amazing gift!





Superheroes Step Up for Down Syndrome

Nancy LaBelle

It was a superhero day for a mile walk at the Little Hills Ranch in San Ramon! Thanks to everyone who came out to participate and join the Step Up fun. We collected over \$120K online thanks to our families who raised the funds by simply sending out an email to their family and friends. A special shout-out to the Zolnier, Garcia, and Drucker families—our top three fundraisers brought in almost \$30,000, collectively. Thank you to everyone who sent out a page: no matter how much you raised, it will make a significant impact on our ability to continue the vital work that we do.

Together we raised \$140,000 before expenses for DSCBA programs and services. A big thank you goes to our generous event sponsor of three years, Macy's. Scott Ferguson and his team from Macy's set up their pretty red booth and gave out fun prizes, including Macy's gift cards, to everyone who spun the wheel in their booth.

We were literally surrounded by superheroes from the Avengers Initiative as well as Star Wars sand troopers, storm troopers, and Darth Vader from the Golden Gate Garrison-501st Legion. The inspiring non-profit Capes4Heroes came out to drape everyone who crossed the finish line with handmade satin capes embroidered with the DSCBA logo. Children of all ages literally flew over the finish line proudly, as the Dougherty Valley High School cheerleaders, the Knights of Columbus, and the St. Joan of Arc Light Youth Light Group volunteers cheered them on.

There are many more to thank: we have listed them in our acknowledgment section of this newsletter. It takes a lot of behind-the-scenes superheroes to make this event the success it is—not only for raising funds but for bringing families together and raising awareness.





Integration of Speech Clarity Techniques

Heather Peterson, MS SLP-CCC

This past September, I had the pleasure of meeting 12 Bay Area school-based speech pathologists who came to learn about "Speech Clarity in the Down Syndrome Population." We had a variety of school districts and age ranges represented. It was an incredible collaboration: knowledge was transmitted, ideas exchanged, and a huge step taken in the right direction for inclusion of sensory motor and Oral Placement Therapy (OPT) strategies into the school setting.

Components of the talk included:

a) how strength, stability, and tone affect speech intelligibility, b) demonstration of therapy techniques, c) Individual Education Plan (IEP) goal writing, and d) discussion of specific cases. The therapists reported learning the following key points from the talk: the importance of jaw stability in speech clarity; most children with Down syndrome have dysarthria and some also have Apraxia of Speech; muscle tone is innate and



Heather Peterson and Felicie

cannot be changed but stability and muscle strength can; feeding strategies can be very important therapy techniques for speech clarity development; and demonstration of tools and therapy techniques to help place specific sounds.

I am truly thankful for the Down Syndrome Education Alliance (DSEA) for making this dissemination of information possible. The past six years practicing at the Connection has confirmed one of my professional goals, to reach out and provide education to Bay Area professionals (educational, medical, dental). My hope is, through grant-funded programs like the DSEA, that the spreading of effective therapeutic techniques like OPT will affect hundreds of Bay Area children and families. My hope is for improved speech clarity for all.

As time has passed since the talk, many therapists continue to email, to come in for training with specific students, and to request information and further training. If you are interested in holding a talk for your area, please contact Nancy Ferguson at nferguson@dsconnection.org. If you are interested in learning more about how OPT can be integrated into your school environment, please feel free to contact me at heather@happykidstherapy.com.

Down Syndrome Education Alliance Update

Jennifer Cooper, Director of Education

The Down Syndrome Education Alliance (DSEA) started off the school year strong. We met with most of the educational teams of the children that were served in the summer Communications Readiness Program. We also provided several successful trainings and consulted with numerous educators and parents regarding goals, curriculum, settings, ability awareness, and best practices for educating students with Down syndrome.

Communication Readiness Program

The 2014 summer Communications Readiness Program (CRP) successfully worked with 10 students, ages five to six, with Down syndrome and their families for seven weeks. It was satisfying and reaffirming to see that every student made progress in their communication development. Staff from the CRP summer program and DSCBA have met with 9 out of the 10 educational teams regarding those students, their Augmentative

and Alternative Communication (AAC) needs, our observations, suggestions, and what we hope to continue to offer those teams in order to best support the students. (Note: the last meeting is scheduled.) All teams have been open to establishing a relationship with the DSCBA and are appreciative of our input and supports. We encourage them to utilize our lending library and access experts, consultants, and training opportunities.

Training

We have hosted several successful trainings in 2014: over 1,000 students and educators were trained in subjects relating to Down syndrome. Topics for educators have ranged from "Visual Supports in Communication and Literacy" to "Speech Intelligibility in Students with Down Syndrome," as well as our foundational and informative "Down Syndrome 101." The 101 training continues to evolve and change with almost every presentation (I'm never satisfied and keep learning)—so it behooves educators

to attend more than once. We continue to offer trainings in Danville as well as traveling to districts when they guarantee us a minimum of 25 participants.

We have an informative and important training on the relationship between visual skills and cognition scheduled for March 4, 2015. This is a much overlooked and misunderstood area of development. There are tangible things that parents and educators can do to improve visual skills and to use them for learning. Watch for details about the training—it will be open to parents and educators.



up with the many requests for presentations this year. Because of that, my current strategy is twofold: to do presentations for those students for whom I have not yet done a presentation and to work with parents and educators as much as possible to give them guidance in doing presentations on their own.

We have had several parents and educators be successful and more than satisfied with

To openly discuss Down syndrome, to let students ask questions and, most importantly, to learn that their peer with Down syndrome is more like them than unlike them is powerful and a necessary brick in the foundation of friendships and acceptance.

Ability Awareness

The Ability Awareness trainings remain one of my favorite things to do. I feel strongly that it is a critical and powerful element to the success of any student who is getting mainstream time or is included in general education. To openly discuss Down syndrome, to let students ask questions and, most importantly, to learn that their peer with Down syndrome is more like them than unlike them is powerful and a necessary brick in the foundation of friendships and acceptance.

The good news and the bad news is that I could not keep

this model. Kudos to these parents and educators who took that step! Let me know if I can offer you or your child's team guidance with an Ability Awareness lesson - I have a virtual toolbox of ideas, books, activities, and goals.

One of the goals of the DSEA is to create circles of supports between the school, home, community, and DSCBA. By looping all involved providers and parties together, we increase the odds of success and maximize a student's strengths and potential. Let us know how we might be able to help you to build bigger and stronger circles.



Stay Socially Connected

Don't have a Facebook account? Follow us on our website Facebook feed under the "resource" tab.

WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/DSCBA

**GET UPDATES FROM THE CONNECTION AND
LEARN ABOUT EVENTS. FANS CAN POST
TEXT, PHOTOS AND VIDEOS**

**More than 2,600 followers now
Why don't you become one too?**

Benicia and Step In News

Tamara Reed



Bottom row center: Martin Gonsalves of the Benicia Step group caught his first big one! Martin says, "We throw them back because fish need to be free." Way to go, Martin!



Top left and second row center: In October, the Step In and Benicia Step groups held a taco night. Group members planned, prepped, and set up the meal. Taco night was a huge success—all enjoyed eating together!

Top row center (back row on the right): Our first ever virtual volunteer, Brian Fruchey, came all the way from Findlay, Ohio, to visit. What a great week. Thank you, Brian, for your dedication to the adult groups at the connection. It was fun to finally meet you in person!

Top right: The Benicia Step group holds a planning meeting at a local restaurant. Planning for the yearly Christmas party is hard work! Why not add lunch out to help the creative juices flow? Back Row, left to right: Rachel Warren, Lisa Silva, Martin Gonsalves. Front row, left to right: Damien Carlon, Michael Rury, Andrew Vasquez

Steppin' Up Falls into Autumn

Laura Briggs

Our newly formed Steppin' Up class had a terrific time ushering in the fall by baking pumpkin muffins. We took turns reading the recipe and adding in the ingredients. Then we each took a turn stirring it up until it was ready to spoon into the muffin tins. As the muffins baked, we danced and did a quick check-in. Then it was on to the serious business of eating the best pumpkin muffins ever!

Left, Alex Walters pouring in the sugar
Right, Michael Lopez-Guerra mixing in the pumpkin



Above left, Jonah Zimmerman-Bloch tasting the yummy muffin
Above center, Lauren Schulte pouring in the oil
Above right, Rohan Bhupatiraju enjoying the results



Step In Celebrates October

Tamara Reed

Step In celebrated October by visiting a wonderful creation at the Danville Livery by artist, professional pumpkin carver, and farmer, Mike Valladao, of Half Moon Bay.



A Grateful November in SF Step

Harold Burns and Christina Lewis

Emma Darby is grateful to have Thanksgiving with her grandfather, her dad, and her siblings.

Matt Hillman is grateful for his friends, parties, food, and his SF Step class.

Emma Yungert is grateful to be a part of her family, to be going to New Zealand to visit her sister, and for her friends (especially Robert). She is also thankful for her job at the California Academy of Sciences and a pay raise!

Shanna Jimenez is grateful for her parents, who are always there for her, and for Christina and Harold accepting her into the SF Step class.



SF Step participants exploring circus skills as a way to practice and foster collaboration

Chris Vidales is grateful that his sister is coming home for Thanksgiving, for Thanksgiving football games, and for train maps.

Christopher Annin is grateful for his parents, his grandparents, and his two dogs.

Robert Humphreys is grateful for pumpkin pie, his immediate and extended family, his one and only grandmother, his grandfather who passed away, his clown school, and his job.

Corine Raper is grateful for her friend Wendy, her dog, and for her work making art at Creativity Explored.

Next Step Welcomes the Fall

Marianne Iversen

The Next Step class spent some time this fall working on relationship building, which included discussions on public vs private and personal boundaries, with the guidance of a guest teacher, Ileana Arganda.

For our autumn project the class made individual bowls from silk leaves. After the bowls dried, the class filled them with fall potpourri for a beautiful fall decoration.



2015 Empowerment Forum

Step Out Reflects on Gratitude

Harold Burns



The Step Out crew is grateful for:

- our Step class and our teacher
- our family and friends
- our boyfriends and girlfriends
- our caregivers and helpers
- being independent and being able to figure things out on our own
- being able to help others, especially friends
- music and music classes
- our church communities and singing in choirs
- having a job and keeping it
- cooking and baking and eating
- exercising and Richard Simmons
- the practice of making art with paint, markers, colored pencils, and collage

Upcoming Events • Save These Dates

January 24, 2015

A DSCBA Forum: Inclusive Approaches in Daily Life and Education

at St. Andrews Church, Pleasant Hill
See page 17



March 21, 2015

World Down Syndrome Day

Let's celebrate with a day of fun at Matteo's Dream Park in Concord. *More details to come.*

May 2, 2015

Gala for Giving

at the Diablo Country Club See page 12

For details and updates go to
<http://www.dsconnection.org>

Inclusive Approaches to Daily Life and Education

Hosted by the Down Syndrome Connection of the Bay Area

Saturday, January 24th, 2015 • 9:00 a.m. – 1:45 p.m.

St. Andrews Presbyterian Church • Celebration Room 1601 Mary Dr., Pleasant Hill
Continental Breakfast and Lunch Included • Childcare Available All Day



Keynote Speaker

Joey Travolta

Founder and Creative Director of Inclusion Films



Born into a show business family, Joey Travolta began his career as a performer in 1978 as a recording artist. He went on to star in many performances on Broadway and the big screen, along with his brother, John. Prior to becoming a successful performer, Joey worked as a special education teacher in New Jersey. Today, Joey merges his passion for working with individuals with special needs and with film by creating workshops and camps that educate students about filmmaking.

At Inclusion Films adults with developmental disabilities are trained in the nuts and bolts of filmmaking, including writing the script, building sets, and using film and editing equipment

with the goal of finding them jobs in the entertainment industry or some other field. Students with autism, cerebral palsy, and Down syndrome are mentored by working cinematographers, set designers, actors, and other professionals who are active in the industry.

"Film is the greatest teaching tool," Travolta says. "There are so many life skills in the filmmaking process."

Joey has cultivated Inclusion Films into a growing network of programs supporting individuals with special needs, his greatest professional achievement thus far. You don't want to miss hearing Joey's inspiring stories, seeing a film made by Inclusion Films, and hearing about his promising plans for the future.

Incorporating Inclusive Practices throughout the School Day*

Ann England

Assistant Director and CAPTAIN Leader

Ann England, MA, CCC-SLP-L, works with The Diagnostic Center, Northern California. The center provides high quality, research-based and practical skills to special education students, their families and their educators. Ann England will discuss the various uses of an "Activity Matrix" – a tool to include students with disabilities into all components of the school day. Uses of the matrix will be discussed in the context of diverse educational settings (SDC, general education, recess, assemblies, etc.). The collaborative process of developing such a matrix will be detailed. Meaningful ways to engage with the curriculum and address both IEP goals as well as link to common core standards will also be discussed.

*Applicable to students learning in inclusive and SDC settings.

Inclusion in Community, Life and Friendships

Jennifer Cooper

DSCBA Director of Education

Jennifer Cooper, MA Ed, has worked in the field of education for over 20 years. Her co-presenter at the forum is her 18-year-old son Eli Cooper, Educator & Rocker, who will graduate from Berkeley High School this spring. Jennifer and Eli will share stories about Eli's experiences and successes throughout his K-12 education: in the classroom, on the playground, in friendships and now embarking into the employment world. Through these stories, Jennifer will share specific strategies and methods for encouraging such successes.

DSCBA Excellence in Education Award

Register and nominate someone today who has made a significant contribution to your child's positive educational experience.

Go to: www.dsconnection.org/forum

2015 Winter–Spring Schedule of DSCBA Classes and Parent to Parent Groups

Danville Location Classes

Music Therapy

Saturday: 10:00–11:30 a.m.

Jan. 10, Feb. 7, Mar. 7 Apr. 11, May 2, Jun. 6

Baby & Me

Wednesday: 10:30 a.m. –12:00 p.m.

Jan. 21, Feb. 18, Mar. 18, Apr. 15, May 20, Jun. 17

Small Steps

Monday: 3:30–5:00 p.m.

Session 1: Jan. 5 through Feb. 9

Session 2: Feb. 23 through Mar. 23

Session 3: Apr. 13 through May 18

Steppin' Up

Wednesday: 4:00–5:00 p.m.

Session 1: Jan. 7 through Feb. 11

Session 2: Feb. 25 through Mar. 25

Session 3: Apr. 15 through May 20

Next Step

Tuesday: 4:00–5:00 p.m.

Session 1: Jan. 6 through Feb. 10

Session 2: Feb. 24 through Mar. 24

Session 3: Apr. 14 through May 19

Step In

Thursday: 4:00–5:30 p.m.

Session 1: Jan. 8 through Feb. 12

Session 2: Feb. 26 through Mar. 26

Session 3: Apr. 16 through May 21

Adult Classes throughout the Bay Area

SF STEP

Tuesday: 4:00–5:00 p.m.

Session 1: Jan. 6 through Feb. 10

Session 2: Feb. 24 through Mar. 24

Session 3: Apr. 14 through May 19

STEP OUT (Oakland)

Wednesday: 4:00–5:00 p.m.

Session 1: Jan. 7 through Feb. 11

Session 2: Feb. 25 through Mar. 25

Session 3: Apr. 15 through May 20

BENICIA STEP

Wednesday: 4:00–5:00 p.m.

Session 1– Jan. 7 through Feb. 11

Session 2– Feb. 25 through Mar. 25

Session 3: Apr. 15 through May 20

Parent to Parent Groups

Parents with School-Aged Children

Facilitator: Laurie Hawley

Location: DSCBA, Danville

Wednesday: 7:00–9:00 p.m.

Jan. 7, Mar. 4, Apr. 1, Sep. 2, Oct. 7, Nov. 4

Parents with Teen and Adult Children

Facilitator: Marianne Iversen

Location: DSCBA, Danville

Thursday: 7:00–9:00 p.m.

Feb. 19, Apr. 16, Aug. 20, Oct. 15

Grandparent to Grandparent

Facilitator: Martha Hogan

Location: DSCBA, Danville

Wednesday: 10:00–11:30 a.m.

4th Wednesday every month except Nov. and Dec.

Jan. 28, Feb. 25, Mar. 25, Apr. 22, May 27,

Jun. 24, Jul. 22, Aug. 26, Sep. 23, Oct. 28, No meeting Nov., Dec. 2

Parent Mentor

The Parent Mentor program consists of parents who have been trained to mentor a new family or a family that has moved into the Greater Bay Area. Mentors will be matched with a family according to location, needs, and common interest. For more information, please contact Martha Hogan at Martha@dsconnection.org, 925-362-8660.

Sibling to Sibling

If you are interested in learning about the possibility of a sibling group, please call the Connection at 925-362-8660.

For questions or to register or
RSVP for classes or meetings

Contact Marianne at 925-362-8660

or go to:

www.dsconnection.org

Empowerment Forum Registration: <http://www.dsconnection.org/forum>

No More Torture!

Pam Bonsper



SLP Alexia Galakatos, at Well Said Speech

Speech. Talking. Communication. My grandson was doing all of these things. So why did he need a speech therapist? Because his speech was almost entirely through his hands, a result of hours of Baby Signing Time DVDs, and most of the signs he made were his own creative interpretations. Because his talking was a wonderful assortment of sounds that no one could understand. And because his communication, while combining both his adorable signs and incredible sounds (his pig “oink” was far superior to any we had ever heard) was physically painful—to us! His preferred method of communication was grabbing the nearest adult by the pinkie and dragging him or her to what it was he wanted. This strategy, he soon learned, was highly effective when he wanted to draw attention to something under the table or on the ground. A hard downward pull while at the same time twisting sharply enabled him to put the toughest of us on our knees! When we found ourselves balling our fists when he was around and using copious amounts of Tiger Balm on our fingers at night, my son and daughter-in-law decided it was time for a therapist. Of course, my husband and I, who were often the ones he picked on the most with his torture tactics, agreed.

The results have been so gratifying. The therapist reaffirmed what we already knew—we were being treated like dogs on a leash. “No more letting him drag you around,” she said (in a much more professional manner than that). What a relief to think we would no longer be tortured! And what a joy when our grandson started to say words that actually sounded like real words. Next he began using two words in a row, then three. Then instead of reaching for a finger to tug, he began to say, “GaGa (or Pop-Pop), sit down.” And then, “GaGa, sit down, please.” Tears of joy and sighs of relief. His speech therapist has been a godsend. She has opened up a new world to all of us. My grandson is now capable of speech, talking, and communication. Albeit slow and steady progress, and not without its moments of difficulty, speech therapy has been successful and rewarding. However, my grandson still retains his original “oink,” and no one is trying to change that.

Taking an Active Role in Ability Awareness

Jennifer Dodge

I had the opportunity to participate in the ability awareness talk in Ainsley’s second-grade class. While I was nervous about the kids’ questions and my emotions, I wanted to be part of sharing some of Ainsley’s similarities and differences with her classmates. I am so happy I pushed myself to take an active role in this activity. It was a great experience all around.

Following Jennifer Cooper’s roadmap, the Inclusion Specialist (IS) and I shared some information about Down syndrome by reading an edited version of Taking Down Syndrome to School; showing a few photographs highlighting some of Ainsley’s interests, family life, and adventures; leading the children in “the marshmallow exercise” (one kid puts a marshmallow in his/her mouth and tells the other kid what he/she had for breakfast); and answering questions.

From my perspective, these are the highlights of our 40-minute talk. First, reading the book while weaving in explanations of why Ainsley has all this “stuff” (e.g. iPad, sticker chart, red button, extra helpers, etc.) in class demystified a lot for her classmates. Additionally, during the marshmallow activity her classmates experienced some of the frustrations Ainsley faces trying to communicate; it helped them understand they need to be detectives at times to figure out what she is trying to communicate. Lastly, the five photos we shared were magical—the kids made instant connections to Ainsley. I heard comments like this: “Hey, I have a black dog, too”; “I love to swim, also”; “I play kickball with Bennett” (Ainsley’s big brother); “My sister is in class with Gavin” (Ainsley’s little brother); “Oh, she got to zip line. Wow, I want to zip line.” It was really cool to see their genuine desire to get to know Ainsley. These photos illustrated things most typical kids share with one another on the playground and throughout the day in the first few weeks of the new school year.

Afterwards, Ainsley’s teacher was very enthusiastic about the experience. She thought it was fantastic and just what the class needed. Additionally, it gave her insights and information to answer questions and explain situations that come up throughout the day.

As Jennifer Cooper said, if parents can steel themselves emotionally, the ability awareness talk is best coming from parents. From the classmates’ perspective, this is not a big deal that requires an outside expert. It is just a mom talking about her kid: explaining some differences, demystifying the equipment, and highlighting the similarities.

Connecting with Ainsley’s classmates felt great. I encourage other parents to utilize Jennifer Cooper’s wisdom and advice and to take an active role in your child’s ability awareness talk.

Ainsley Dodge (left), with friends at school on Halloween



Eli Rocks His Job at Thousand Oaks Elementary

Eli Cooper



Eli at work

My job is helping out at Thousand Oaks Elmtery School. i get paid though Workability. My job is helping out in a first grade class and getting coffee for the staff. I make copies for the teacher and listen to kids read. I have been working for over two years. I like my job because it is fun because the school is my alma mater and I get to see lots of old teacher friends. There is nothing that i do not like about my job. My goals for my job are keeping this job for all that i can and forever. I want to thank my mom and teacher Becky for helping me to set up this awesome job.

Vikram on the Job and Giving Back to DSCBA

Jeyashri Ramiya

We are grateful to DSCBA for giving Vikram the opportunity to participate at the Step Up for Down Syndrome walk to raise funds for the event. Vikram, who has his own ice cream cart, was so happy selling Dippin Dots ice cream to raise funds. When I explained the concept of giving back to the community, Vikram didn’t flinch in giving all the profits back to the event. He appreciated every customer he met during the event. Prem and I were thrilled to see him being courteous and patient at his job. It was such a delightful experience for me to see him so responsible at his work behind his cash register. It was heartening to see him among our community, who didn’t judge him for his shyness. I can’t thank his mentors, Martha and Debra, and his sister, Amy, enough for taking the time out of their busy schedules to help him be successful at this event.

He was also invited to sell ice cream at the Arts & Crafts Festival by the Danville Area Chamber of Commerce. Though Vikram didn’t sell any ice cream that day, due to the cool day, he was happy handing out Dippin Dots ice cream to the trick-or-treaters and having fun with his friend, Brett.



Vikram at the cash register with a customer, his sister, Amy (middle), and mentor Martha Lee (back right)

Raising and Showing Livestock Is Rewarding

Leane Perry

My 17-year-old son, Joshua, has had and continues to have wonderful life experience with his involvement in raising and showing livestock. Josh has been part of Valley Vista 4-H and Future Farmers of America (FFA) all of his life. We started him with rabbits, which he successfully raised and showed throughout the state of California. At age 11, he was ready for something a little more challenging—pigs! With the help of his sisters, he chose a piglet weighing about 60 pounds, with the intention of showing and selling it at the Alameda County Fair. He fed and cared for that pig every day, twice a day, until the pig weighed between 210–270 pounds.

This year Josh showed two pigs at fair and won Reserved Grand Champion Duroc with his pig “Jack.”

Josh also participated in the Horse Project and showed at the fair’s horse show. He worked all year with his therapeutic riding instructor at Reins in Motion to prepare for two events, the single stake race and the pole bending race. He placed 4th and 6th, respectively. When his name is called by the announcer in the ring or at the awards ceremony, it feels like the announcement of a celebrity. The place erupts in cheers and applause. He loves to talk to the public about his pigs and is very proud of any ribbon or award he receives for them.

One wonderful thing about this experience is the kids. The 4-H and FFA members who know Josh personally and those who have just met him all support him. Every year I have to politely decline kids who want to help Josh get his pig ready or move the pig to the show ring.



Josh and his award-winning pig, Jack

This coming year will be Josh’s fifth consecutive year raising and showing pigs for the fair. Josh will be able to continue this project until he reaches 19 years of age. Not only has 4-H been a wonderful experience for Josh, but also for his family and the friends he’s made within the organization. It has given Josh the confidence and the discipline that I don’t think he could get anywhere else.

Avery and Parents Welcome Asher

Laura and Jim Gordon



Meet the new addition, Asher

We have a new addition to our family: Asher Gordon, born October 7, 2014. He was born in the same room that Avery was born in four years before! Avery is so excited about her new brother; she has become an instant helper with him. It is so amazing and wonderful to see him smile and react to his sister—he truly loves his sister, too!

Avery turned four on September 26 and is thriving at her new preschool.

Not satisfied with the options the school district offered us for Avery, we sought out a private school, Happy Hearts in Benicia, where she is fully included in a classroom of 26 kids. They are wonderful with her, and she loves going there. We are working on prewriting skills at home, and her fine motor and gross motor skills are progressing along with her. We have been working on sight words.

She is able to talk in three- and four-word expressions and will initiate conversations and commentary on her own. She is almost completely potty trained, and we are so proud of her for that! She loves to dance and sing. She sings whole songs now; although, she usually prefers her medley versions of her favorites. We have her going to a six-week program offered through the Ace Dance Academy, and she loves it! She is having so much fun that I think we will be getting her into another program after this one is over. Avery is looking forward to Christmas this year and is practicing Christmas carols. She has suddenly learned a number of new songs, with the recent release of Signing Time Christmas. Hopefully she will sit on Santa’s lap this year. Looking forward to seeing everyone again at the Christmas Party!



Avery and Asher

Jackson Thrives at California Academy of Science

Jane Steiner

Jackson Soderquist Steel is thriving in the Guest Services position at the California Academy of Sciences. His main duties consist of greeting attendees, escorting them throughout the Academy, and providing insider tips and knowledge about the Academy.

Jackson got this job in partnership with The Arc San Francisco. The Arc is a non-profit service and advocacy organization for adults with autism, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, intellectual and developmental disabilities, and their families living in San Francisco and San Mateo counties. We are very grateful to organizations like this. To see Jackson at work, as well as two other people’s stories, watch the video produced by Arc at <http://vimeo.com/109860476>.



Jackson checks tickets at the entrance, one of his many duties.

Beautiful Flower Girl

Mimi Hsueh



Katie Mack walking down the aisle as a flower girl for her Auntie’s wedding

Nico’s Day in the Sun

Veronica Barillas

Nico is the only student out of 711 students at Pleasant Hill Elementary with Down syndrome. He has been embraced by many, but how do you reach 711 students, all in one day? Nico’s dream team (his education team), including the principal, Dr. Angela Walker, made it possible for me to get all students up on Down syndrome by making an ability awareness presentation to them.



I’m not sure what I expected, but the results were overwhelming! I have received cards and letters from parents and teachers. Students approach me daily with questions about Nico and just to say hi. Nico is exhausted (but thrilled) by his latest “celebrity” status!



Top photo, Veronica making the Ability Awareness presentation Above, Nico (center) and his schoolmates

It’s All Okay

Gloria Casadont

Tatiana graduated from high school and is enjoying her new transition program at San Ramon Valley High School.

At the transition program, Tatiana has reunited with old friends and has made several new ones. She is working at both Richard’s and Revel Kitchen and Bar restaurant.

It was at the beginning of high school when she started saying, “Bye, bye, Mama” frequently. I interpreted this as leave me alone. Fast forward to October 27, when arriving at her horseback riding lesson she said, once more, “Bye, bye, Mama.” Tatiana rode and trotted on her lesson horse, Simone, all by herself. Her instructor, Heidi, was so proud of her—but not half as proud as I was. It was in that moment that I realized “Bye,



bye, Mama” didn’t mean leave me alone; it means “I did it!” I can do it by myself, and I’m so happy when I do. I want you (and others) to know I can do it. I want to thank you for giving me this chance (and many others). I want you to know I’ll be fine. I’m okay.

Tatiana riding her horse, by herself



It’s a Match!

Did you know that many corporations offer employee giving programs where they . . .

MATCH DONATIONS?

Some companies are even matching volunteer time with monetary donations. Check with your employer today to see if they provide matching gifts!

Aktion Club Has Fun Giving Back to the Community

Marianne Iversen

The Aktion Club meets every month on the 2nd Tuesday at 6:00 p.m. at the DSCBA office in Danville. They are co-sponsored by both the DSCBA and the San Ramon Valley Kiwanis and raise funds to give back to local organizations. If you know of any adults living with a disability who would like to become a community leader and would be interested in joining, please contact Marianne at 925-362-8660.



Lucky Pennies

Cathleen Small



Theo (left) and his brother, Sam, were mom's lucky pennies this Halloween.

Blossoming BatSam

Robyn and Sam Dobruck

Sam Dobruck, or "BatSam," has thoroughly enjoyed his first year in the Bay Area. We moved here from Maui last year to find a place Sam could thrive, both medically and with some peer groups. We have found it! The DSCBA brought us together with other youngsters Sam's age and has helped us find the right therapists and educators.

Sam is getting stronger every day and recently learned how to stand up at furniture by pulling. He started early intervention preschool last month and is really blossoming with the wonderful teachers and classmates!

BatSam flying through air



Patrick Rocks the Football Field

Kathy Harkins

Patrick Harkins received an award for participating in Sacred Heart School's Rock Star football camp. The camp was held in Atherton on October 25. It was a great day filled with football drills, flag football games, lunch, and awards. It was a lot of fun seeing old friends and making new ones. Can't wait until next year!



Patrick proudly shows his award, surrounded by Coach Lavorato and some of the senior players.

Minion Loose on Halloween

Tania Streete

Brayden Streete had fun on Halloween dressed as a Minion, here with his one-on-one aide.



Thank You, NAILBA Charitable Foundation

Thank you to the NAILBA Charitable Foundation for their generous donation of \$10,000 to support the Down Syndrome Education Alliance and the Communication Readiness Program. The NAILBA Charitable Foundation is dedicated to providing funds to well-run charities that may not otherwise have access to additional funding.

We send a special thank you to Jeff Mooers of H.D. Mooers and Company, who came to our Step In class to present us the check.



Jeff Mooers delivers the check to Blair Hogan and the Step In class



Grace and Brady Cannon celebrating the fall season with Farmer Mike, part of our extended family!

For Your Time, Talent, and Treasures We Are Grateful...

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MARTHA HOGAN AND ALL OF HER TIRELESS WORK
Paul and Carol Rioux

IN HONOR OF

MY BELOVED UNBORN DAUGHTER, TVISHA. I LOVE YOU!

Geentanjali Magodia

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AVA PARHAM

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Please know we work very hard to ensure your kindness is acknowledged. If your contribution to our success was received after the newsletter went to press, we will be honored to highlight your generosity in the next edition. Thank you!

VOLUNTEERS

2014 Step Up Walk

Avengers Initiative

Capes4Heroes

Tami Castelluccio

Maureen Cummings
Dancers with a Pointe

Dougherty Valley High School

cheerleaders

Alex Ferguson

Madison Ferguson

Tammy Garcia

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Diablo Valley Chapter

Shamal Perera

Rachel Sherbow

St. Joan of Arc Knights of Columbus

St. Joan of Arc Light Youth Group

Lisa Upton

2014 Holiday Party

K. Leigh Alfrey

Conner Anthony

Mike Cannon

Tami Castelluccio

Mike DeMasi

Madison Ferguson

Jennifer Kearns

Los Cerros Middle School, Danville

National Charity League

Diablo Valley Chapter

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Nicole Patton

Roxy Rymland

Tracy Schretenthaler

Mackenzie Shrieve

Meabh Tangney

Kaitlyn Tran

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Volunteers

Alyssa DiDio

Ally Ferber

Payal Desai

Lauren Fruci

Elizabeth LeMay

Claire Simon

Katherine Wolfert

Danville Children's Guild

Fashion Show

Danville Children's Guild

Jennifer Kearns

Kiwanis Club of San Ramon Valley

Dedicated Classroom Volunteers

Annie Brown

Katie Capone

Bailey DeSchane

Wendy Earl

Jane Fountain

Brian Frucy

Dawn Handley

Camille Hunt

Josephine Lau

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Natalie Louie

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