

Oklahoma Parents Connection

www.oklahomaparentscenter.org July 2008

Where did Summer go?

Summertime is almost over and it is time to start thinking about going back to school. While you are rushing around buying new clothes and school supplies, take time to start now preparing your student for the new year. While some children view the new school year as an exciting adventure, some students, as well as parents, look to the new year with dread. There are always challenges with every new beginning, but spending some time now can make the transition much easier. If you have been lax about a schedule this summer, it is not too early to reinforce bedtime routines. Make sure your child is reading at least fifteen minutes every day. Practice eye contact and social skills for those who have difficulty making friends. It helps to make sure that the child knows how to play common playground games, and enlist a neighborhood friend to be a buddy those first days of school. Understand

that your child's fears are real to them, and be patient. Start now reviewing your child's IEP and thinking about what you want to accomplish this year. Request testing if needed. Check out our tips for helping your child prepare for a new school year in this newsletter, and call OPC if we can help.



Calendar of Events

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| "Recurring Grief Process" OK Mama's Hispanic Support Group | 07/01/08 |
| 504 Workshop 6:00pm-8:00pm First United Methodist Church Piedmont, OK | 07/24/08 |
| Tecumseh Health Fair Booth | 07/29/08 |
| Shawnee Health Fair Booth | 07/31/08 |
| Christian Ministers Alliance | 08/02/08 |
| "Basic Rights" Training | 08/07/08 |
| Basic Rights Workshop | 08/21/08 |
| Basic Rights Workshop 4:00-5:30 | 09/29/08 |
| Transition Training 6:30-8:00 | 09/29/08 |
| "On the Road Family Perspective" Conference with Oasis Northwest Technology Center in | 09/30/08 |

Welcome Our New Associates

Velvet Brown-Watts
Information and Training Specialist
Tulsa, OK

Latisha Coats
Business Manager
Holdenville, OK

Cassandra Elledge
Information and Training Specialist
& Web Tech Specialist
Miami, OK

Sandie Foote
Information and Training Specialist
& Part C Coordinator
Edmond, OK

The "Count Me In" Puppets are here!

Let's Celebrate!

They have arrived!

Their names are Mitch, Jay, Sally, Carmen, and Corey and they are some unusual newcomers to Oklahoma who are available to come to your school or community group and present disability awareness and bullying prevention program called "Count Me In". They sound like they are ordinary, everyday children. However, they are different from the rest of the school population. They won't move or talk unless brought to life by a puppeteer.

The puppets, explained Nancy Garner, Director of Special Projects who coordinates the "Count Me In" program, are available to help students understand and be more comfortable with their classmates who are different. They may learn differently, portray cultural or ethnic differences, or have a visible or hidden disability. We expect that children may be surprised to learn of all the things that the puppets CAN do instead of just thinking of what they can't do because of their disabilities." Just like their human counterparts, the puppets have lively personalities and are not about to let their disabilities stand in the way of doing things that children without disabilities like to do. They play baseball, swim, and argue with their brothers and sisters just like all the other children.

The "Count Me In" puppets have been brought to Oklahoma by the Oklahoma Parents Center from the Pacer Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota. "Count Me In" programs have been presented to more than 350,000 people annually in the greater metropolitan area. The OPC puppet project has been funded through a grant from the Oklahoma State Department of Education and the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.



The puppets are 3 foot tall hand and rod puppets representing a diverse group of children. They also represent various disabilities: Gina is blind, Jay is deaf, Sally has a physical disability and uses a wheelchair, Corey has Down syndrome, Mitch has a learning disability, and Carmen may talk about her epilepsy. The puppets are the same age as the students in the group they visit. The program is made up of three or four skits, depending on the age of the audience. Time is allowed for audience questions and reactions. The entire program for young children (preschool-pre-K) lasts about 45 minutes and up to one hour for older students. Puppeteers are volunteers who have been specially trained. The puppets will be ready to perform beginning August 18, 2008. Volunteers are needed. Interested schools, organizations, or individuals wanting more information are encouraged to call us,

OPC, toll free 1-877-553-4332 or locally 405-379-6015



From Our Executive Director

The Oklahoma Parents Center is very fortunate to have an exceptional relationship with the Oklahoma State Department of Education. Misty Kimbrough, Assistant State Superintendent has always been especially supportive and helpful to our project. Her devotion to children has been an inspiration to me as director and to our staff and board of directors as well.



We are delighted to announce that April 1, 2008, OPC received a grant from the Oklahoma State Department of Education which will allow us to staff underserved areas, provide our **"Count ME IN"** puppet presentations, add a Part C Coordinator to work with early intervention and early childhood issues and provide training in these area. We are additionally expanding our Community IEP Partner Program, and will be hosting an additional state conference in Tulsa for the spring of 2009 among other things.

OPC staff and board of directors would like to express a heartfelt thank you to the Oklahoma State Department of Education for their support and assistance in serving the children and families of Oklahoma.

In gratitude,

Sharon House
Executive Director
Oklahoma Parents Center

Just for Kids who Stutter

I believe that I am a penguin beneath my human skin. Penguins have wings but not the ability to fly. I have a mouth but I do not have the luxury to talk without a care. My wings were shortened throughout my youth. The de-evolution of my confidence forced me to stay grounded and not fly with my brothers, my sisters, my cousins. The tuxedo-wearing birds replace the flying with swimming, as I have replaced my stuttering with a new approach to talking. With this new mode of sustaining, I can now dive into language and speech and survive among the icy waters that I frequently belong to. This can sometimes be a cold place and only if I explore the depths of the ocean that surround it can I find my place in the world, and only when I accept this place can I be admired for my swimming and not my flying. Perhaps those who have the sky and look down can admire me gliding through the waters.

Ben
Edmond, Okla.

Taken from The Stuttering Foundation website <http://www.stutteringhelp.org>



Bullying Prevention Web Site for Teens

Help PACER Create Its New Bullying Prevention Web Site for Teens

PACER is creating an exciting new bullying prevention Web site for teens—and you can help. Designed to reach, teach, and empower teens, the site will feature compelling stories from students, parents, educators, and community partners across the nation when it launches this summer.

Submit a video, story, poem, artwork, or audio clip

Just express your ideas on bullying prevention. It can be about what happened to you or someone else, how you feel about bullying, how you think it affects students and schools, what you have done to prevent bullying, or what can be done to prevent bullying. We want to hear from everyone—teens, parents, teachers, and others with great ideas who want to improve the world. For information on how to submit your story just visit the PACER website at <http://www.pacer.org/bullying/mhs/index.asp> or email to bullying411@pacer.org

Anna, a 6th grade student from New York, uses artwork to tell her story.



BULLYING PREVENTION WEEK – October 5-11, 2008

Oklahoma Parents Center is partnering with Pacer Center in Minnesota to present the first annual Oklahoma Bullying Prevention Awareness Week October 5-11, 2008. The week will include special presentations, activities, contests, online toolkits and bullying prevention training. Watch for more information to come. Also, please note the following important information from the Pacer Center such as resources for parents and professionals. Visit the PACER Bullying Prevention Website: <http://www.pacer.org/bullying>

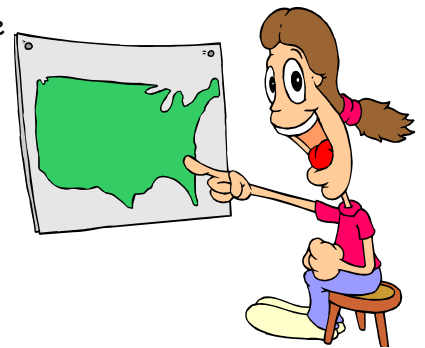
Kids Against Bullying Web site

PACER has created an animated website www.PACERKidsAgainstBullying.org for elementary school students. It is a creative and informative resource to educate students about bullying prevention and provide methods to respond to bullying situations. The site features an animated cast of characters, information, celebrity videos, Webisodes, games, animation, contest and other activities. Parents and professionals will find helpful tips, intervention strategies, and resources for use at home or school.



How to help your child prepare for a successful school year

1. Make an appointment to meet your child's teacher.
(Provide a copy of the IEP and other necessary information about child).
2. Learn school policies and follow them.
3. Model respect for teachers and encourage your child to do the same.
4. Create an environment that is conducive to learning at home
5. Celebrate effort, rather than grades, learning and test scores.
6. Encourage your child to pursue his or her interests. Try not to pressure your child into pursuing your interests or interests that you wish you had pursued.
7. Reinforce learning out of the classroom through extracurricular activities, family activities and one-on-one time.
8. Listen to what your child is saying and learn to be a good observer. Watch for signs that your child is developing new interests and then nurture them.
9. Model lifelong learning. Nurture your own interests and engage in learning activities that expand your interests and build skills.
10. Engage your child in conversation, but don't grill him or her. Children often are more likely to tell a parent about their day when they are engaged in another activity, such as setting the table or taking a walk after supper.
11. Try not to make homework an issue. Allow a child to take the responsibility for what he or she does - or doesn't - do.
12. Invoke Grandma's rule: Eat your veggies before dessert and finish your homework before moving on to the fun stuff.
13. Get involved in your child's school by volunteering in his/her classroom or other areas. Getting to know the school faculty and other parents provides valuable resources for helping your child.



Children may not always be excited about a new school year but with support and guidance this could be the best year ever.

Oklahoma Parents Connection

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Dear Advocate,

My child isn't doing well in school and I suspect a learning disability may be the cause. I have talked to his teacher and the counselor about the issue but nothing seems to be happening. It's not getting better. What is the next step to get some help for my child?

Clueless in Oklahoma

Dear Clueless,

This is a question we get very often. The first step in the process is that you, the parent, should request **IN WRITING** that the school do a comprehensive evaluation of your child. Some parents find it useful to use a form letter when communicating with the school. Please visit our website for further information.



Dear Advocate,

As a parent of a child on an IEP, do I have the right to have copies of assessments done by the school district prior to an IEP meeting?

Mary Lynn of Paris

Dear Mary Lynn,

Yes, the (LEA) Local Education Agency is required to provide copies of assessments prior to an IEP, (suggestion: a minimum of 5 days)! It helps for you to have time to think and talk things through.

Ellen Kimbrell is our *Ask the Advocate!* She has been an advocate with the Oklahoma Parents Center for eight years. Ellen also is a parent of a child with a disability. Thank you, Ellen!