

January-March 2006



Families Helping Families
at the Crossroads of Louisiana
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Families Helping Families at the Crossroads celebrated its 14th Christmas anniversary in a big way with over 250 people attending the Christmas party held at Kees Park in Pineville on the 16th of December. Participants from throughout Central Louisiana ate good food, played carnival games (winning play money and prizes), sang Christmas carols, used play money in the auction to win over \$1000 in Christmas prizes, and..... most importantly..... greeted Santa as he passed out gifts for everyone. A big thank you to Charles Blanks (i.e. Santa) and George Hollinshead (our Christmas music entertainment) for their most gracious participation in this occasion. And.... we can't forget Mayor Clarence Fields, the mayor of Pineville, for his allowing us to use Kees Park for the party. Christmas 2005 was the best party yet for all of us at Families Helping Families and Central Louisiana's family's participants. If you or anyone you know has a developmental disability please contact our office at 318-641-7373 or 1-800-259-7200.

James Sprinkle
Executive Director

FHF Staff

James Sprinkle-
Executive Director
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Family, School, Community
Project & PROMPT Facilitator
Pam Carey-
GUMBO Project Coordinator
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Specialist
Cathy Dove-
CSHS Parent Liaison &
Community Outreach
Specialist for Early Steps
Melissa Harrison- B.C.S.S.
CSHS Parent Liaison
Betty Hudson- LaSIG & STAR
Outreach Facilitator
Lori Lorenz-
SDE Transition Facilitator
Teresa Harmon- Intake Coordinator
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Intake Coordinator
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Intake Coordinator

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Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities

The vision of OCDD is to ensure a person-centered approach to services for individuals who have developmental disabilities which equips these individuals to more fully experience quality of life and achieve their maximum potential; to be a leader in providing a quality service delivery system that provides opportunities for individual choices; and to serve LA's primary resource on state-of-the-art services. If you or someone you know is interested in finding out more about OCDD contact Kristen Reed at 641-7373 or 1-800-259-7200.

Rainbows Trainings Start Up!

Are you interested in attending a FREE 6 hours for CEU's training for child care professionals on "Including Children with Dual Diagnosis and Autism in a Day Care Setting"? The new sessions will be starting up on:
May 27, 2006 in Marksville
June 3, 2006 in Jonesville
If you are interested in attending contact Kristen Reed at FHF at 641-7373 or 1-800-259-7200.

Families Helping Families is acting as a distribution center for hurricane evacuees with developmental disabilities.

LA SIG Project

More information about LaSIG (LA School Improvement Project) and how parents can get involved call Families Helping Families. Catahoula Parish Sit Teams (LaSIG) Parents: What activities are you involved in as SIG schools? For more information call Betty Hudson at 641-7373 or 1-800-259-7200.

Children's Special Health Services

Children's Special Health Services Parents look forward to the new resource table at CSHS clinics coming in the next few weeks. It has a whole new look and is full of valuable information. We're also working on having transition and resource information readily available for parents and children. There will be a checklist where you can check off the information that you want and we'll get it to you. Hope to see you all soon. For more information contact Melissa Harrison at FHF at 641-7373 or 1-800-259-7200.

GUMBO UPDATE

The 2005 GUMBO State Invitational was held in Alexandria on November 12, 2005. There were 65 registered athletes. The weather was great and the athletes performed well with many taking home medals. We were happy to have the Invitational after all that has happened in our state. We even had several athletes from the New Orleans area attend. Coaches of the Year awards went to Jerry Waugh from Shreveport and Lena Gaffney from New Orleans. The Bantam Athlete of the Year was Jylan Ross from Bastrop. The Volunteer of the Year award went to Mrs. Loretta Hamilton from Baton Rouge. Results and new state records have been sent to all coaches who attended the 2005 State Invitational Meet.

The Winter Sports Camp is scheduled for December 17 and 18 in Pineville. Fifteen athletes and 3 coaches have been invited to attend. Eight athletes will be selected to the Louisiana Mudbug Team that will hopefully travel to the Windsor Classic Games for the Physically Disabled held in Windsor, Canada in March.

There will be a Boccia coaches training on January 2, 2006 for Bossier Parish Adapted Physical Education teachers.

The 2nd annual Boccia State Tournament will be held in late January or February. It will be held in Shreveport this year. In order to qualify for the state tournament you just need to be a Louisiana student with a physical or visual disability and you need to turn in an entry form. Entry forms will be mailed to previous GUMBO athletes as soon as a date and site for the tournament are confirmed. If you would like to be added to the GUMBO mailing list please contact Pam Carey.

If you know of a young person aged 5 – 21 with a physical or visual disability who might be interested in participating in an organized athletic program, please contact Pam Carey at 1-800-259-7200 or by email at carey33452@aol.com.

STAR Project

The STAR Project is still conducting a service/information survey for families and their members with disabilities. Please complete the insert and mail to Families Helping Families/Attention Betty Hudson at 641-7373 or 1-800-259-7200. Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all S.T.A.R. families. For more information on Transition Core Teams or/and how to get parents involved call Betty at the numbers listed above.

Learning Disabilities and Social Skills: What's the Connection?

Most of us understand that kids who have learning difficulties struggle with academics. What many parents and educators don't realize is that having a learning problem can also impair a child's social skills and prevent him from having successful relationships with family members, peers, and other adults. The extent and impact on social skills varies with the child, depending on his basic **temperament** and the nature of his learning problem. Getting along with others is as important as getting along in school, so it's critical for kids with learning issues to develop good social skills (social competence).

What is Social Competence? **Social competence** refers to a person's interpersonal skills with family, friends, acquaintances, and authority figures, such as teachers and coaches. Here's how two noted learning experts describe social competence:

"Social competence refers to those skills necessary for effective interpersonal functioning. They include both verbal and nonverbal behaviors that are socially valued and are likely to elicit a positive response from others."

— Betty Osman, Ph.D.

"Social skills are all the things that we should say and do when we interact with people. They are specific abilities that allow a person to perform competently at particular social tasks."

— Michele Novatni, Ph.D.

How Do Learning Difficulties Affect Social Competence? If a child has a learning problem, such as a language processing disorder, he may have difficulty understanding what another person says or means. He might also have trouble expressing his ideas in speech. Either of these problems can interfere with interpersonal communication. A child who has Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD) may be inattentive, impulsive, hyperactive – or any combination of these. **If he's inattentive, he may have a hard time paying close attention to other people's speech and behavior; his mind may wander, or his attention will be drawn to something else going on nearby.** If he's impulsive and/or hyperactive, he may interrupt others when they're speaking and may find it difficult to wait his turn. While such a child doesn't behave this way on purpose, others will likely be

frustrated or offended by his behavior.

The Three Elements of Social Interaction Before you assess your own child's social skills, it's helpful to think of social interaction as consisting of three basic elements:

- **Social Intake** — noticing and understanding other people's speech, vocal inflection, body language, eye contact, and even cultural behaviors.
- **Internal Process** — interpreting what others communicates to you as well as recognizing and managing your own emotions and reactions.
- **Social Output** — how a person communicates with and reacts to others, through speech, gestures, and body language.

Social Intake: Reading Social Cues Social interactions require a child to interpret, or "read," what other people communicate. Picking up on spoken and unspoken cues is a complex process. A child with learning problems may misread the meaning or moods of others. Janet Giler, Ph.D., outlines three potential problem areas for such kids:

- Inability to read facial expressions or body language (kinesics)
- Misinterpreting the use and meaning of pitch (vocalics)
- Misunderstanding the use of personal space (proxemics)

If your child struggles with these issues, ask yourself if his particular learning difficulty could be causing the problem. Is he inattentive or easily distracted when dealing with others? Does he have a hard time grasping what other people say to him?

Internal Process: Making Sense of it All Having read another person's social cues, a child must next process the information, extract meaning, and decide how to respond effectively. Thomas Brown, Ph.D., calls this ability "emotional intelligence" which he explains "is a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor feelings and emotions in self and others; discriminate among feelings; and use this information to guide thinking and action."

If your child misses or misinterprets another person's words, meaning, or mood, he'll end up processing incorrect or incomplete information. This can lead him to inaccurate conclusions and inappropriate reactions. And if your child is impulsive, he may react before processing all the social cues and deciding on an appropriate response. It's difficult to observe exactly how your own child processes social cues internally. But if you're concerned about how his internal "gears" process social data, you might gently probe by asking him how and why he decided to respond to someone in a particular manner.

Social Output: Responding to Others After a child interprets and internalizes social cues from other people, he then responds. This behavior, social output, is easy to observe. But it can be painful or frustrating to watch if the child's response isn't appropriate.

Inappropriate responses can take many forms. If the child didn't understand a question or comment, his response may seem silly (such as nervous giggling) or unintelligent (an irrelevant answer). Another child may overreact with **angry words** or actions. Finally, if a child has really tuned out, he might not react at all, even when a response is required or expected from him. Understandably, such responses can cause problems and confusion with family members, friends, classmates, and teachers.

Teaching Social Skills: How Parents Can Help If you realize your child's learning difficulty is **hampering his social interactions**, there are many ways you can guide him toward better social skills. Try practicing the three R's: Provide social skills instruction that is **relevant**, deals with **real-life**, and delivered in **real-time**. That means watching for teachable moments to coach your child in his interactions with others and doing so right away (or soon after). **Focus on specific behaviors. Offer prompts before your child acts, and praise him for positive interactions.** Additional suggestions:

- **Model appropriate behavior** when you interact with your child and other people.
- **Encourage role playing.** Help your child rehearse his behavior in "pretend" situations. With your guidance, he can practice and improve specific social skills. He'll then be better prepared to apply those skills in real-life situations.
- **Promote generalization.** Help your child learn how and when to apply specific social skills to different situations. For example, once he learns to take turns playing a game with his sister, help him relate that to waiting his turn in line at the ice cream store.

Social Competence Builds Confidence Kids with learning problems are at risk for low self-esteem. Helping them become socially competent can go a long way to bolster their self confidence. **Furthermore, a child with good social skills will have an easier time advocating for himself — whether he's asking a teacher for specific help or deflecting teasing from a classmate.** We all face social situations around the clock — at home, school, and in other settings. Helping your child overcome his social challenges is a gift he will benefit from throughout his life.

Stanberry, K. (2005). Learning disabilities and social skills: What is the connection? <http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=5138g=2>

Support & Training to Access Rights (STAR) Family Satisfaction Survey

1. Are you a:
 Parent/guardian of a person with a disability
 Person with a disability
 Professional
 Other, please specify _____

2. What services did you receive through STAR?
 Transition and the Individual Transition Plan
 IEP
 Families Helping Families Transition Workshop
 LA Youth Leadership Forum
 LA Benefits Planning & Outreach
 Other, please specify _____

3. Should the project provide other services? If so, which ones?
 Information and referral for the elderly (wavier, Social Security)
 Budget counseling or referral services in the community
 Long-term care services
 Other, please specify _____

4. Are you satisfied with transition involving the IEP? Yes ___ No ___

5. How would you rate the applicability of the target areas highlighted on the transition?
page of the IEP in your case?
1. Excellent 2. Good 3. Fair 4. Poor

6. Are you willing to attend trainings and workshops under the project for
community awareness? Yes ___ No ___

7. What choices of training topics would you like to see offered through STAR?
 Transition (Individual Transition Plan Page)
 How to access information through LA Rehabilitation Services
 Employment options
 Community resources and supports
 Training through "Job Fairs"
 Social Security planning
 How to access STAR services
 Elderly and Disabled
 Transition CORE team meetings
 Other, please specify _____

8. Did you know that the STAR Project resides in your regional Families
Helping Families Office? Yes ___ No ___

9. Overall, how satisfied are you with the services you received:

Very satisfied _____
Somewhat satisfied _____
Not satisfied _____

10. How were you referred to STAR?

- _____ Newsletters
- _____ Friends
- _____ Agency in the community
- _____ Word of mouth
- _____ Telephone book
- _____ Flyers
- _____ Other, please specify _____

11. Would you refer this service to other families? Yes _____ No _____

12. Did you know STAR is funded by the La. Developmental Disabilities Council?
Yes _____ No _____

13. Are you a member of Louisiana Citizens for Action Now (LACAN)?

Yes _____ No _____

If no, and you would like to join, please your address, phone number, email address, and information on disability services that you and /or your family currently receives.

14. Do you receive the TriAngle newsletter? Yes _____ No _____

If no, and you would like to receive it, please provide you address and phone number.

