
Disability information for parents

By Cindy Cantrell

February 20, 2011

After winning a hard-fought, out-of-district school placement, Sharon Lipsi Riddle of Marlborough was determined to share the special needs resources that she had worked so hard to identify for her oldest son, Michael, who was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome and attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder at around age 5.

In 2007, she founded the free newsletter and website SPED Child and Teen. Just last month, she began offering listings about free and low-cost disability events and services in Massachusetts and beyond.

Examples of events for children with special needs and their families include early-intervention programs, disability art and sports programs, sensory-friendly movie theaters, and camp fairs and expos. She also informs parents about disability workshops around the state that cover special needs laws, assistive technology, understanding children's learning styles, MCAS for students with disabilities, bullying, treating sleep disorders, the transition to adulthood, estate planning, support services, and seminars by well-known authors and experts.

Riddle said her mission is preventing other families from feeling as overwhelmed and alone as she did when Michael, now 16, began experiencing developmental delays as a toddler. To date, more than 900 people have joined her e-mail distribution list.

"People in the disability community need to know there are others out there who have walked this path," said Riddle, emphasizing that while programs may be difficult to find, they do exist. "I present a lot of doors on my website, and behind those doors is a plethora of support and information to help parents find what their children need and deserve."

For more information, visit spedchildmass.com.

WORDS AS WEAPONS AGAINST CHILDHOOD OBESITY: Fifth-grader Daniel Schratz of Franklin was recently selected as one of three first-place winners of the national Recess Rocks contest for two-minute videos sharing ideas for preventing and reversing childhood obesity.

The contest, which accepted submissions from second- through eighth-graders, is part of the Recess Rocks campaign, launched by Community Health Center Inc. in September 2010. The other two first-place winners are from Los Angeles and Dubuque, Iowa. The videos were required to feature a speech, song, dance, or commercial addressing personal feelings about the childhood obesity problem and what can be done about it. Entries were judged on creativity, memorable content and delivery, clarity of message, and overall impact.

Eleven-year-old Daniel recruited his sister, Gina, 8, and brother, Thomas, 6, to perform to a high-energy rap song urging children to "move and play every day" rather than to sit inside watching television, using the computer, or playing video games. In delivering their message, the siblings Hula-Hooped, jumped on a trampoline, biked, used sticks in a "sword" fight, and promoted healthy snacks.

Daniel also had help from his older brothers: Michael, 14, helped him brainstorm ideas for the video, and 16-year-old Regis, 16, assisted with editing. The entire process took about a month.

Daniel said he was thrilled to win the first-place prize, an Apple iPad.

"Hopefully, I don't go on it so much that I forget to move and play," he said.

To view the winning videos, visit recessrocks.com.

POETRY IN MOTION: Deborah Mead of Needham admits she was skeptical when her friends and fellow writers Eileen McCluskey of Watertown and Kara Provost of Barrington, R.I., suggested publishing a book of their poetry last spring. Despite distinct voices and styles, however, their individual work easily meshed into common themes of relationships, sexuality, and loss.

The result, "Topless," was a finalist in Main Street Rag magazine's 2010 chapbook competition. The 30-poem book will be distributed by Main Street Rag Publishing Co. in March.

According to Mead, the title was chosen because breasts figure in many of the women's poems. For example, McCluskey wrote "Washing a Bra," about her friend's mastectomy. Provost's poem "Red" opens with a woman tenderly breastfeeding her baby. Mead's "

Playboy

of the Western World" describes a middle-aged drugstore clerk flashing a customer who she believes to be Hugh Hefner.

Mead, who estimates the women have been meeting to work on their poetry since 2003, described the process of selecting the pieces for the book as "revisiting old friends."

"A single poet can have an incredible range of voice," she said, "so to have three poets represented in one book allows readers to experience a variety of female perspectives."

For more information, go to www.mainstreetrag.com/TOPLESS.html.

VOLUNTEER HONORED: Karen Edelstein of Newton was recently recognized with the Karen Yahara Volunteer Service Award from Birthday Wishes Inc., a Newton-based nonprofit that organizes birthday parties for homeless children.

Edelstein received the award at the organization's annual volunteer appreciation event at the Windsor Club in Newton on Feb. 6.

Last year, several hundred volunteers organized and ran birthday parties for approximately 1,500 homeless children living in more than 150 shelters, motels, and transitional living facilities in Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

The Volunteer Service Award is presented annually in memory of Karen Yahara, who cofounded the organization with Newton resident Lisa Vasiloff in 2002.

"The award recipients are a true reflection of Karen's passion for helping others, giving of themselves to ensure that no child goes without a birthday celebration," said Vasiloff, the organization's executive director.

For more information, call 866-388-WISH (9474) or go to birthdaywishes.org.

People items may be submitted to Cindy Cantrell at cantrell@globe.com.

© Copyright 2011 Globe Newspaper Company.
