



Parent Connection

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From the Executive Director's Desk

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Change is the inevitable product of life, and the only truly reliable constant in our existence. And, change is coming to our organization.

Sometime back, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services announced that it was going to restructure the way it contracted for "out-of-home" services (which includes us). Some of you are familiar with at least part of this change while others may not be. At the risk of being too ethnocentric, the question became, "what effect will this have on our organization and the families we serve?" The answer is, at least in part, we don't know for sure. Right now what we know is that we will continue to contract with Region 4 ICCU until this change is put into place sometime at the end of this year.

Many have asked me if we will continue to exist after these changes take place. Here's my answer: We're doing everything we can to position ourselves to be providing service for years to come. Discussions have been held with key players, and we have a wonderful advocate in Candy Kennedy of the Nebraska

Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health. We have other advocates, also. But none is more important than you. So, I'm asking for your help. **If you believe that maintaining and even expanding the services of Parent to Parent and its sister organizations is a worthwhile goal; if you believe that families' voices will be weakened by elimination of our services; if you believe that having a strong, independent family-driven, family-based organization not only helps families to deal with challenges in their lives, but also helps reduce the amount of taxpayer dollars that need to be expended for purchase of more expensive services; if you believe that peer support has a vital role to play in strengthening Nebraska's families; and if you believe that the youth of this State are better served when families have a strong voice in the development and evaluation of their children's services then I urge you to help us make sure that our future is even brighter than our past. Our mission is to help you...the children and**

families of northeast Nebraska. Please help us continue our mission. One thing you can do is to write a letter addressed To Whom It May Concern urging decision makers to help us sustain our mission by continuing and/or developing independent funding for family organizations. Send us the letters, and we'll see they get to the right folks.

Families are the backbone of Nebraska's culture and in these awful times of crisis and worry, it is well worth the investment for decision-makers to make sure that adequate, independent funding is available for organizations like ours that are devoted to strengthening Nebraska families. By independent I mean: funding which does not put us into "dual" relationships with another organization, thereby potentially compromising either our ability to act ethically, or at least presenting the impression of such. Here's what I mean: Hypothetically, let's say that **Ralph Waldo Emerson Counseling Agency** gets a contract to provide a vast array of "out-of-home" services in our catchment area. Because they trust our his-

tory and effectiveness, they decide to 'subcontract' with us, so that we provide the family support services we've been providing all along. On the surface, that seems like, and in most respects is a good thing. We would have the new funding stream we're seeking, and our clients would continue to receive care. But, here's the hitch: suppose one of our clients has deep, abiding concerns about the services they're receiving from **Ralph Waldo Emerson Counseling Agency**, and they want us to advocate for them with that organization. Will the client trust that we are acting in their behalf, or might it appear we would be more concerned with protecting our contract with **Ralph Waldo Emerson Counseling Agency**? Such doubts lead to fear, and then trust can be all too easily lost... To paraphrase Abraham Lincoln, our integrity and reputation are part of our stock in trade. So, our autonomy and independence is essential to maintain **public trust**. Doesn't it make more sense for us to have funding stream unencumbered by such potential complications?

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From the Executive Director's Desk...cont.

I like to think that we at Parent to Parent don't just talk about strengthening families, but instead we act effectively on those convictions, so that what we do actually matters. And, the responses we get from families in the evaluations we conduct consistently show that those we serve agree. **I hope you agree**, and will take the time to write down your thoughts and send them to us.

There are six "family-based" organizations in Nebraska. Each is slightly different due to the variances from region to region. But, borne out of **our own experiences**, at the heart of all these organizations is a deep and enduring commitment to help families.

Because we've "been there", we know what it means to parent a child with mental illness, or behavioral disorder(s), or chemical dependency, or physical disabilities, or learning disabilities, etc. We have a pretty good idea what it takes to successfully navigate systems, and we view our role as working in cooperative partnership with schools, agencies, governmental units, etc to achieve the goals of the families we serve.

Families often express to us that our ability to empathize based upon our own experiences is a key reason they choose to use our services, and, more importantly, respond to them.

We know what it is like to spend hours in countless school conferences because of the repeated counter-productive behavior of our child. We know the embarrassment of watching as other children graduate while ours drops out of school. We know the sleepless nights wondering if she'll come home in one piece, or if she'll come home at all. We know what it's like to question our own judgment...our skills as a parent...and even our own sanity as we watch yet another legal entanglement ensnare our child. We know the pain of watching as those who would judge our parental skills

shame and humiliate us. We know the cruelty a child can experience because he walks or speaks differently, or scrambling letters and word in such a way as to make reading out loud in class a truly humiliating experience for him. We've watched as our children try repeatedly to complete some task, only to become exasperated and ultimately defeated by the inability to do the task, despite the desire to complete it just like everyone else. We know the pain of watching our children sit on the sideline of school, activities, family events, and life itself because they simply aren't accepted or cannot do the things other children can do. We have yearned for solutions that would make our child's instruction meaningful and successful for him or her. We've carried the guilt of punishing our child for behaviors we later found out were beyond her control. We've spent hours battling our child to do homework that could have been completed in far less time than the battle took! We've watched as well-meaning individuals in our child's life believe they are doing all they can, when the truth is that much more could be done if only a little research were to have been done. We've witnessed the blood coming from our child's face—the result of yet another fight. We've lost our breath when told our child is to be incarcerated. We've seen those whose minds seem closed, so their hearts follow suit, and such authority figures become obstacles to the well-being of our children. We've seen the discrimination, the refusal to believe that our child has a diagnosable problem that, if worked with properly, can be addressed. We've heard the retorts, "he's just a trouble-maker" and our hearts ached as we wished for greater understanding so that our children would not suffer under the tyranny of such closed mindedness. And, as we realized our shortcomings as parents we suffered immeasurable grief until we learned to accept that like all, we possessed

strengths and weaknesses, and if we wanted to help our children, we had to grow beyond guilt to taking action to improve our skills. Some of us had no clue how to be a parent, let alone a parent of a special needs child. So, in effect, we have attempted, at times, to give away that which we did not possess---we tried being parents without really knowing how. And when the inevitable occurred, we became paralyzed or we traversed the path of jumping from one action to the other, desperate to find one that would make the difference in our family's lives. We have seen our children bluster ever more intensely as they brace for what they perceive to be the inevitable pain and inexpressible hurt that thrives when our children themselves are confused and unable to understand their own behavior. We have lived through the rage of a child developed as a result of unmerciful, unrelenting bullying by their "peers". We've watched our children act out in self destructive ways. In some cases, we came to fear our own children.

We have watched in almost slow-motion and near paralysis as our once bright-eyed, eager children filled with joy as they took that unsteady, yet pride producing walk to their first day of school. It seemed they might burst with joy and anticipation (even though they were more than a little frightened), and curiosity as they entered school, only to have that joy systematically drained from their very souls, leaving them emotionally subdued and constantly dreading yet another overwhelming day of school. It is hideous to watch a child's anguish, and we have watched our children's anguish. And, despite countless attempts to intervene on behalf of our child, we have even endured the unspeakable-- a child who committed the ultimate act of despair by taking their own lives.

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From the Executive Director's Desk...cont.

We have suffered.

But, through it all, we've learned to be an unrelenting voice for our own children, and, in so doing, found out that something can be done! As a result of a parent's advocacy, we've watched a physically disabled child run gingerly onto a soccer field that before he could only dream of stepping on, and saw his spirits soar when, after a few futile attempts, he was able to kick the ball to a patient teammate. We've borne witness as our 18 year old daughter graduated with honors and was greeted at the end of the dais by her two year old daughter! The courage of a deaf child playing baseball with utter abandon is an experience that words do not give justice to. We have again and again been touched as we watched a child learn to live a sober, productive life. We've seen the angry, uncontrollable adolescent respond to the love of his parents and the help he received and, in so doing, grow up to be a successful local businessman. We have seen the child of murdered parents accepted without question into some stranger's home, and nurtured successfully into adulthood. Again and

again we've marveled at the miracle of the child who overcomes the jumbled messages his brain sends him and learn to make order of such chaos by learning to read. And on and on it goes! Children and families transformed emotionally, physically, spiritually because someone, somewhere taught them that their lives could be better and that wishing could make a difference--- as long as you got busy and made the changes.

We have seen the miracles of perspiration and inspiration, and I swear that in the process we have been transformed...that somehow in those moments we have been lifted up to a better place...a better time

We've learned that blame almost always consumes the holder, and that retribution is futile. As Gandhi said, "an eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind". There is strength in our common experience, and there is, therefore, hope for families in the future. We have learned that we can't walk the path for another, but we can at least erect some sign posts to enrich the journey. United in a common jour-

ney, we reach out each day to yet another family, yet another child. And we grow richer for it.

Please help us to send our message to those who make important decisions about our future! Write today.

"A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history."

Mohandas Gandhi

It takes a lot of courage to release the familiar and seemingly secure, to embrace the new. But there is no real security in what is no longer meaningful. There is more security in the adventurous and exciting for in movement there is life, and in change there is power.

---Alan Cohen



May is Mental Health Month



- "There are more than 91,000 people with serious mental problems in Nebraska.
- 23,000 of those are children under the age of 17 – 5% of our youth.
- One out of five children in Nebraska are affected by mental health problems—their own or their parents'.
- Two-thirds are not getting the help they need."

In recognition of the families that live with mental health issues in Nebraska, Parent to Parent Network is once again joining Family Organizations from across the state in raising awareness of these challenges. During Children's Mental Health Week (May 3-9), the Family Organizations will be holding awareness activities in various towns throughout Nebraska and facilitating a collection of letters from family and community members that will be delivered to our Governor at the Capital Building at week's end by our "Pony Express" motorcycle riders.

Please watch for more information on our website and through the mail regarding our local events in May to raise awareness about mental and behavioral health challenges, the struggles families face, and the successes they experience.

If you would like to join in our awareness effort, would like to write a letter to the Governor sharing your experiences, or have ideas to share, please call our office. We welcome any suggestions and participation that will ensure our awareness events are a huge success!

http://www.projectrelate.org/mental_illness_stats.html



March Events



4th & 18th, April 1st & 15th—“How to Make Children Mind Without Losing Yours!” will be held at the Dodge County Head Start (1024 W. 23rd St.) in Fremont from 6:30-8pm each night. Please call 402-721-9022 to inquire further and to register for this free training.

5th—A Secondary Trauma workshop, presented by Dr. Christine Dobson with the Child Trauma Academy, will be held at Northeast Community College from 9am-noon. For more information, please call 402-477-7344.

11th—“Speaking of Children”

conference will be held from 9am-3:30pm at the Qwest Center in Omaha. The featured speakers are Antwone Fisher and Dr. Bruce Perry, PhD. Please call Project Harmony for more information at 402-595-1326 or visit www.projectharmony.com.

19th-21st—The PEP (Parents Encouraging Parents) Conference for parents of children with special needs will be held at the Midtown Holiday Inn in Grand Island. There is no registration fee, and lodging and most meals are provided. For more information, please call Ann Figard at 402-471-2471.

24th—Early Childhood Mental Health for Pre-K Children webinar will be held at 7pm at <https://www1.gotomeeting.com/join/571168897/105759852>. Please email webinar@bghome.net with questions.

24th & 25th—“Unspoken Crimes: A Community Response to Sexual Assault in Nebraska” will be held at Wayne State College (1111 Main Street in Wayne) in the Gardner Auditorium. The event will run from 9am-5:05pm on the 24th, and from 8:30am-3:35pm on the 25th and is FREE. Register by March 16th by calling Kimberly Meidell at 402-471-4777



16th & 17th—The Autism Spectrum Disorder State Conference will be held at the Embassy Suites in La Vista. The cost is \$75 for family members and \$175 for professionals. Registration is due by March 27th. Call Annette Wragge for more information at 402-472-4194, or visit www.nde.state.ne.us/autism

17th—“Disability is Natural

April Events

and Other Revolutionary Common Sense,” a presentation by Kathie Snow (author of *Disability is Natural*), will be held at 7pm at ESU #7 in Columbus. A meal is provided prior to the event at 6:30, so please register by calling Angie at 402-564-0815.

21st—Intentional Teaching: Early Years are the Learning

Years webinar will be held at 7pm at <https://www1.gotomeeting.com/join/708647470/105967628>

23rd—Sexual Assault: Searching Beyond the Myths training will be held from 8:15am-4:15pm at the Lifelong Learning Center in Norfolk. There is no cost. For more information, call 402-379-2026.



2nd—Fremont’s Camp Eagle will be hosting a respite open house from 10am-2pm. For more information, visit www.ne.easterseals.com

5th, 12th, 19th—Positive Discipline/Parenting 1,2,3,4 series (parenting class for parents of children ages 1-5) will be held from 6:30-8pm each night at Faith Regional Health Resource

May Events

Center’s Madison Room in Norfolk. The cost is \$15. For more information, please call 402-644-7348.

6th, 7th, 8th—Nebraska Juvenile Justice Association 2009 Annual Conference “Nebraska’s Youth: Respecting Differences...Creating Positive Change” will be held at the Midtown Holiday Inn in Grand Is-

land. Please call Doug Kramer at 308-233-5229 for registration, and further, information, or visit www.NJJA.org

19th—Nurturing Parents as Partners webinar will be held at 7pm at <https://www1.gotomeeting.com/join/464845954/105592611>



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Parent to Parent Network is a non-profit organization for families that reside in 24 counties in Northeast Nebraska. We are a group of individuals that are raising, or have worked with, children with special needs. These special needs include, but are not limited to, developmental disabilities, behavioral/emotional disorders, or physical challenges. We believe that families know the most about their own children's needs and should be the main decision-makers for their children. We recognize the need to have someone that understands the challenges families face with schools, in their homes, and in their communities. We are dedicated to strengthening families through advocacy, education, resources, and support.

Family Support Group

The Norfolk Family Support Group is held on the third Monday of each month at the Parent to Parent Network office, 201 Miller Avenue, in Norfolk. A meal is provided at 6:00pm, followed by the support group meeting. Youth

activities are also provided, so bring the whole family!

Please do RSVP so that we can plan the meal and youth activities accordingly.

The upcoming support groups are on:

March 16th, 2009

April 20th, 2009

May 18th, 2009



Parenting Classes

Active Parenting Now and Active Parenting of Teens parenting classes will begin in March, and will be lead by School Psychologist Mark Claussen, and Myrian Juarez with Parent to Parent Network.

Active Parenting Now is for parents of children ages 5-12, and teaches ways to raise responsible, cooperative children who are able to resist negative peer pressure.

Active Parenting of Teens provides training and support to families experiencing the dynamic changes of teenage development.

Both classes run for 6 weeks, are held from 7-9pm at the Norfolk Public Schools Administration Building, and cost \$20.00 per family (for the Parent's Guide and other materials).

Active Parenting Now will be held each Monday from March 2nd to April 6th.

Active Parenting of Teens will be held each Tuesday from March 17th to April 21st.

Pre-register by calling Mark at 402-644-2507.

For more information, please call our office.