"Northern Virginia PYE Associate Member loves being 'A Helper'!"

by Heather Arbeen

When my son, Jake, began 6th grade this year, we learned that our district requires 6th graders to participate in community service. When I looked at the forms and requirements, I admit I felt overwhelmed … and then concerned … I wasn’t sure how to explain community service and all the associated requirements (written documentation, oral presentation, and so forth) to him.

Well, it turns out I just needed to give Jake a chance to show what he can do and not worry about any limitations. One of his 1st quarter projects involved volunteering at a Dreams For Kids DC (DFKDC) Soccer clinic featuring DC United starter Sean Franklin. Jake interacted with participants, parents, and volunteers in the process of making name tags for them. This may not seem like much, but for an individual on the Autism spectrum, with social and pragmatic communication difficulties, it’s a great accomplishment!

Following the Soccer clinic, DFKDC’s Executive Director contacted me with an amazing announcement … that Jake, along with his sister, Sofia, had been selected to be recognized as “Outstanding Participants of the Year”!

Glenda had this to say about Jake and Sofia being among the first group of participants to be selected for this award:

“I have seen Jake and Sofia grow up in front of my eyes ever since I took over as Executive Director for Dreams For Kids DC in 2011. Jake has really come out of his shell in the past few years, his confidence in himself is apparent to all those around him. Recently, Jake has desired to step out of his participant role at our clinics to become a volunteer. Just this past weekend, Jake stood with me at our check-in area, assisting me with making name tags for all of our participants. Energetically, asking other participants for their names as they arrived! The whole mission of Dreams For Kids DC is not only to provide adaptive clinic for children with disabilities; moreover, empower them to reach for their dreams and give back to the community. Jake is exemplary of this, which is why we will be honoring him as a participant of the year at our upcoming holiday celebration!”

Jake was happy to hear about receiving an award from DFKDC, but he was, in all honesty, more interested in the “party” aspect of the event. The DFKDC 2015 holiday event will center around providing special needs children and their families to partake in a 3 hour event, where they will have lunch, entertainment, wrap presents, and create gifts for the homeless in the city, to showcase that DFKDC participants are able to give back, and incite a cycle of change, despite their disabilities. Jake seemed very interested in helping DFKDC make sure that other kids would have a happy holiday.

This newly sparked interest in helping others has led to Jake wanting to help DFKDC help the homeless by providing a useful gift to the adults in addition to the kids! Jake will be collecting unused purses, backpacks, or other bags AND toiletries through December 18th. On December 19th he will take what he’s collected to the DFKDC Holiday Celebration where he and other volunteers, including youth with disabilities, will wrap and prepare gifts for a local shelter.

I could not be prouder of my children for being recognized by DFKDC. I am especially proud of Jake and his heartfelt interest in helping others; this is what high expectations and supporting the passions and interests of kids like him who have special needs is all about - helping them to achieve in their endeavors and not letting their disabilities be an obstacle to their success.

An enormous thank you to the Dreams For Kids organization … to Tom Tuohy for his vision, to Andrew Horn for founding Dreams For Kids DC (DFKDC), and to Glenda Fu, DFKDC Executive Director extraordinaire!!

For more information about the Holiday Celebration and how to get involved, go to https://www.eventbrite.com/e/dfkdc-holiday-celebration-2015-tickets-19152133547.
Latino Corner by Arianna Sweeney

De Auto Defensora a Abogar por los Demás

Mi nombre es Silvia Aparicio. Soy una ex alumna de Fairfax County Public School. Durante toda mi educación escolar tuve un Programa de Educación Individualizado (con sus siglas en inglés IEP) porque tengo una discapacidad de aprendizaje. Parte de mi educación escolar tuve terapia del habla y lenguaje.

Además que cuando era pequeña y estaba en la escuela primaria, yo no sabía lo que era eso o que yo tenía un IEP. Una vez que llegué a la escuela secundaria empecé a darme cuenta que yo tenía aquel programa porque me pusieron en clases más pequeñas o clases que tenían dos profesores. Uno para mí y el resto de los estudiantes con IEP y otro para el resto de los estudiantes regulares.

La principal razón por la que sabía que yo tenía un IEP fue porque a la hora de hacer los exámenes de SOL: me dieron una calculadora, diccionario, tabla de multiplicar y otros materiales académicos. Cuando me di la vuelta a ver a mis otros compañeros de clase, ellos no tienen los mismos materiales. Nunca se lo pregunte a nadie el porqué de ello. También me di cuenta y aprendí que soy una persona visual y para poder aprender algo yo tendría que tener el trabajo demostrado para entenderlo.

No fue nada fácil entrar a middle school o secundaria, porque yo era el objeto de burla por no poder pronunciar la c, s, z ya que tengo anquiloglosia, más comúnmente conocido como frenillo lingual. Los otros estudiantes se habían dado cuenta que tenía un IEP porque sabían que tenía clases individuales más pequeñas y por el material extra que me daban para los exámenes de SOL. Ya estando en la escuela secundaria, comprender más y estaba más consciente del porqué de mi IEP y finalmente entendí cuando salía de mi clase para hacer un examen de lectura y otros exámenes en general. Asistí a mi primer IEP a la edad de 18 años en mi último año de secundaria, ahí aprendí acerca mis metas y cómo podría alcanzarlas.

Me hubiera haber estado más involucrada en el proceso de mi IEP, me di cuenta de todo un poco tarde y ya no me quedaba mucho tiempo para cambiar las cosas. Pero el poco tiempo que tuve y pude asistir a mis citas de IEP me aseguraba de poder entender lo que pasaba para explicárselo a mi mamá. Vivir con una discapacidad de aprendizaje en la edad adulta es difícil pero no dejo que eso me impida ir a la escuela o de seguir aprendiendo cosas nuevas. Es difícil pero he podido sobrellevarlo y vivir con ello.

PEATC me ha enseñado acerca los derechos como padre, tía, tío, abuelo, abuela o guardián de un niño con discapacidades. Me alegra mucho que pueda ayudar a otras familias en situación similares a la mía. He aprendido mucho acerca como abogar por mí misma y enseñar a otros estudiantes o ex alumnos como abogar por sí mismos. Una discapacidad no es una excusa para no poder alcanzar nuestros sueños y metas en la vida!!!

From Self Advocate to Advocating for Others

My name is Silvia Aparicio: I am a former student of Fairfax County Public Schools. All my school education, I’ve had an IEP (IEP stands for Individualized Education Program) because I have a learning disability and half of my school education I had speech and language as well.

In elementary school, I never knew what that was or that I did have IEP. Once I got into middle school, I started to realize that I had that program because I would be placed in smaller classes or classes that had two teachers, one for me and the rest of the IEP student and one for the regular students that did not have an IEP.

The main reason why I knew it was an IEP was because of the SOL testing, I would have a calculator, dictionary, times table and I would see my other classmates not have it. I never questioned it.

Also I realized I was more of a visual person than a verbal person, I had to have it demonstrated in order for me to understand the work.

It was not easy for me in middle school or high school because I would get bullied, I would get made fun of because I could not pronounce the s, c, and z since I have lisps and the students realized that I had a small class and because of the materials given to me for SOL testing.

High school I comprehended more, I was more aware of why I had an IEP, I would get pulled out of class to get some testing done and I still would have two teachers in my classes. I attended my first IEP at the age of 18 and I was a senior, I learned what my goals were and how I could achieve them. Living with a learning disability as an adult, it’s tough but I do not let that stop me from still going to school, from still learning new stuff, its hard but I manage.

PEATC has taught me what the rights are as a parent, aunt, uncle, grandparent, or guardian. I am glad I can help other families with their situation. I as well still learn how I can still advocate for myself and teach other students or former students to advocate for themselves. A disability is not an excuse or a label, remember, and never let it stop you from achieving your dreams or goals in life!!!
Rural Perspectives by Summer Sage - "Partners in Policymaking"

The Virginia Board for People with Disabilities Partners in Policymaking class of 2016 gave their mock general assembly testimonies this November and I had the privilege of attending. As a 2013 Partners in Policymaking graduate I was excited to see a room full of involved, motivated parents and self-advocates from all across the state of Virginia. One story in particular caught my attention; a mom was sharing with the legislative panel how she had to go back to work and had been struggling to find reliable care for her child on the EDCF waiver. She asked why she could not be that caregiver. The panel responded with try for work with telework options. Another parent, a father, stood up and respectfully asked if he might respond to the telework suggestion. He explained that his job offered this great benefit however he could not get Internet in his neighborhood. It did not end there; he explained that his family would be traveling out of state in order to meet with a specialist to provide services for his daughter that could be served through telehealth if Internet services were available.

These stories and struggles are not new to the families in rural Virginia. The shortage of reliable primary care givers willing to work for the hourly waiver rates which are lower in rural areas than in their urban counterparts is great, and the need, is only growing. The story shared by the Partners in Policymaking father needs to be shared with your neighbors, teachers, support providers, local legislators, and anyone who will listen. There is no reason that father should not be able to access his job’s telework options when there are programs with funding already in place to bring Internet to rural areas. There is no reason a family should have to incur the cost of out of state travel to see a specialist when technology makes it possible to do this from your own community or home.

An under utilized program in rural areas is the rural broadband initiative, a program that aids rural communities access to lower cost Internet services through various federal grant programs. These services help schools get online through E-rate programs as well as programs that enable telehealth services to be available in the community.

Listening to the soon to be class of 2016 Partners in Policymaking parents share their stories it was hard to hear how similar their asks were to the class of 2013’s. I did notice that what had changed in the past three years was that families were more informed at an earlier place in their journey, that their stories were being listened to and heard, and that most of all they were empowered by their knowledge and taking action.

If you would like more information on the rural broadband initiative please feel free to contact me; Summer Sage 434-234-7822, sage@peatc.org or www.broadband.gov/rural_areas.html
Fatherhood Corner by Derek Flake - "Involved With School"

When fathers are involved in the lives of their kids, especially with their education, children learn more, perform better in school, and exhibit healthier behavior. Even when fathers do not share a home with their kids, their active involvement can have a lasting and positive impact.

Did you know –

* Preschoolers with involved fathers have stronger verbal skills than those with less involved fathers.
* Girls who have a close, warm relationship with their father have a stronger competence in mathematics.
* Boys with highly involved fathers in their life receive superior grades and perform a year above their expected age level on achievement tests.
* Adolescents and young adults develop better verbal skills, intellectual functioning, and academic achievement when fathering style is active and nurturing.

What to do?

- Make contact with your child's school.
- Meet regularly with teachers (check out tips on how to do so effectively).
- Consider joining the school’s parent-teacher group.
- Volunteer for activities or fundraisers the school puts on. You can talk with other parents and be a part of the fun your child is having at school.
- Work on time management together - designate a time for nightly homework and help your child stick to this schedule.
- Get involved with what your child is learning. Do some research on the topics they’re covering so that you’re able to talk about it with them and fully answer their questions.
- Keep track of your child’s grades so that any issues can be addressed immediately, instead of waiting until report cards come out.
- Encourage your child and be supportive of every effort they make in school.
- Get involved with The Million Father March, a day when fathers and other men make a year-long commitment to their children, their families, their communities and their country to volunteer 10 hours during the coming school year at their child's school.

The August 2012 NRFC Webinar Fatherhood Buzz - Back to School Initiative: Effective Strategies for Increasing Father Involvement in Schools provided ideas and resources to help increase father involvement in schools and their children’s education. Including resources and tips for fathers to help them increase their involvement in schools and their children’s education.

There are a lot of ways you can get involved with your kids and their education.

SOURCE: https://www.fatherhood.gov/content/school
Mental Health Desk by Caroline Gendelman - "Letters, Kisses & Souls"

~Sir, even more than kisses letters mingle souls. Thus friends long absent speak.~
John Donne (1572-1631)

This month of holidays and festivities awakens our souls to recall and connect with people who have touched us. It brings us comfort. It gives comfort to those we reach. As parents we are forever being watched by our children. If your family sends holiday cards you are demonstrating the interest in reaching others. It also sends a message of pride in the family.

There is a sense of inner warmth when we receive cards. “Someone cared to share thoughts from his family to ours.” We want to raise good people, feeling people, caring people. When children see us express care and good feeling for those who have played parts in our lives they learn that people and connection matter.

Humans are social by creation. One of the greatest punishments levied is solitary confinement. Without contact we can literally lose our minds. Human infants can fail to grow without proper contact and nurturing. Our minds require the stimulation but what about our souls? Relationships feed our souls. Children have a need to feel support to explore their world and develop their identity.

A particularly fitting article from The Harvard Graduate School of Education reinforces what we instinctively know children need from parents to be ethical, caring adults:

“*We should work to cultivate children’s concern for others because it’s fundamentally the right thing to do, and also because when children can empathize with and take responsibility for others, they’re likely to be happier and more successful. They’ll have better relationships their entire lives, and strong relationships are a key ingredient of happiness. In today’s workplace, success often depends on collaborating effectively with others, and children who are empathic and socially aware are also better collaborators.*”

http://sites.gse.harvard.edu/making-caring-common/raising-caring-children

Personally, I am one who still sends holiday cards. I have fond memories sitting at the kitchen table with my mother licking the envelopes and picking the stamps. As a child I loved seeing the cards we received. I felt a sense of belonging when she put my name on the card. My own children have snickered at me when I would make them gather for the photo which would be our card but they were anxious to see what ones we received. They often go back and look at the ones we sent and the ones that came to us. The cards nourished their life. Yes, truly, letters mingle souls.
Family Engagement Corner by Tina Norris - "Advocacy & Giving Back"

Parents want nothing more than to build strong traits of generosity and a sense of charity in their children. Every parent would love for their child to think of others and their needs before thinking of their own. How can this be accomplished? Children can learn to advocate for resources that are important to them and their peers. Children can do simple acts of kindness in an effort to make someone’s life better. There are so many ways to give back to the community. Volunteering can expose children to opportunities to advocate and give back. Family engagement is vital because many activities can involve the entire family, creating unity and laughter within the family setting. And we know children learn best by following examples. As children grow so will their desire to serve. Children tend to engage and provide support in areas they are interested in. So find out what your child’s interest are and look for volunteer opportunities around that interest.

We found a great resource to support parents in this area:


This website gives practical suggestions on how parents can support their children in learning to give back.

PEATC On Demand & In the Spotlight by Kristin Kane - "Collaborative Advocacy Efforts: Working Together Towards Change"

Advocating for students with learning and attention issues is definitely not a one-person job. It takes a village, including parents, educators, researchers, thought leaders and policymakers at the local, state and federal level to move the needle forward for kids with learning and attention issues. And, the more we work together, the more we can get accomplished.

In this presentation Lyn Pollard, Parent Advocacy Manager with the National Center for Learning Disabilities, will give a first-hand look behind the scenes of ongoing advocacy efforts at the federal, state and local level, helping highlight why community development and collaboration are keys to success. Lyn will present about grassroots advocacy efforts, give an update on ESEA and IDEA federal legislation action and give parents helpful tips and tricks about how to quickly get involved and make the biggest impact for not only their own child, but for other children as well.

This webinar can be viewed at: https://youtu.be/WzQS0TpPpi4.
Early Childhood Corner by Lakeshia Yancey -
"Teaching Your Little One to be an Advocate"

In our lives there are going to be situations in which we need to advocate for something or someone. Imaging not being able to stand up for yourself or get others to understand what makes you tick as an adult. This could lead you to experience difficulties on your job and with your personal relationships. Imagine how difficult that sort of life would be. Now imagine being a child who is learning everything new about the world and then figuring out where and how they fit in it.

The best way to begin to learn these important skills is to learn to advocate for ourselves first. The early childhood years are a great time to start this process. As we know, children learn and retain more information in the first five years of their lives, so why not use that time to teach them confidence, self-help skills, and empathy. When a child learns these abilities they gain independence and they also learn to care for others.

Like all children those with special needs need to learn these skills as well. They need to be taught a developmentally appropriate method that helps them communicate their wants, needs, likes, dislikes, and more importantly who they are. When children can do these things they have better social and academic lives. Helping them with these skills is also beneficial to parents. They can have a better sense of ease when they are not with their child.

Some ways you can teach self-advocacy:

• Introducing himself or herself
• Have kids make eye contact when talking to adults they know outside the family.
• Show your confidence in them
• Teach them to stand up for others and to show empathy
• Have kids order for themselves at restaurants
• Allow them to make their own choices when appropriate
• Role play social situations with your child

PEATC Workshops and Initiatives - check out our latest topical resources

New PEATC Workshops
* Understanding Section 504 Civil Rights Law
* How to Conduct Friendly and Productive IEP Meetings
* Virginia Tiered Systems of Support (VTSS) Workshops
* Understanding Conflict
* The Power of Engaging Families
* Bridges Out of Poverty
* Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin’-By World
* DADS Organized & Engaged (DÖE)
* Understanding Diversity
* Reversing the School to Prison Pipeline
* It Takes A Village: Your Role in Early Childhood

New PEATC Initiatives
* The Solid Foundation Program - looks at the connections between the school and the families it serves and makes recommendations for strengthening family-school connections.
* Families Engaging Families Networking Call - These interactive calls will provide parents with new techniques and strategies to strengthen their collaborative relationships with their child’s school.
* Juvenile Justice Initiative - To promote collaboration and education involving stakeholders in communities throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia that reverses the school to prison pipeline.
* Fatherhood Initiative - Will increase parent engagement of dads in diverse communities and educational settings.

You can access the complete workshop descriptions and scheduling information on our "PTI Trainings and Workshops" page!