

BUILDING A SOCIAL NETWORK

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A NEWSLETTER BY COMMUNICATION WORKS



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Building Communication A Parent's Story

We started a social language group at CW this past April, just before our son started kindergarten, and it was exactly the right therapy for him at exactly the right time. Nate had spent the previous two years of preschool shying away from the other kids. He would occasionally have a one sentence exchange with another child if we prompted him, but he never initiated conversation, and he rarely answered if other kids spoke to him.

After one group, Nate came home and showed us how he had learned to listen with his "whole body".¹ After a few weeks, we saw a marked improvement in his ability to stick with a game with his brother-- not for a long time, but for noticeably longer than a few weeks earlier. After a full school year, we suddenly saw him initiating pretend play, for the first time in his life! This meant so much to us, because after years of trying to interest him in something other than numbers and reading and random fact-based information exchanges, I can't even describe the overwhelming, heart-stopping joy of seeing my son make a little toy fireman climb up the stairs of the firehouse and settle into a little toy bunk bed.

We're now into Nate's third session of social skills

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training for this school year and his third week of kindergarten. School is going better than we could have hoped. He comes home every day bursting with excitement about the other friends in his class. He loves to tell us what each friend likes and doesn't like, who sits next to him for which activities, and who was the class reporter or his line partner that day. This seems to be coming directly from the "friend file"² idea he learned at CW. While the concepts of social thinking -- *of how to understand, think about, and relate to other kids* -- just didn't come naturally to our sweet little Nate, his social therapy has taught him how to be a friend, and why he wants to be a friend. It's made a huge difference in his ability to fit into a classroom and in his happiness at being at school.

One of the most helpful parts of CW has been the parent education component. Every week, after the kids' session, our therapist reviewed the concepts the group was working on and gave us the vocabulary and tools to continue the work at home. Most of what we've learned there has been a matter

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CW “Sponsors” a Family

Many of our kids are challenged to “think of others” and understand the needs and wants of their friends and family members. Being able to see and take someone else’s perspective are key to having friends, a conversation, empathy – it is the basis for social development.

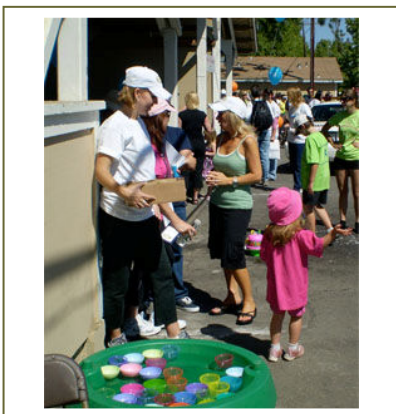
CW is proud to announce that we participated in the San Mateo County Adopt-A-Family program and sponsored a low-income family this past year. Our students in social language groups put their perspective taking skills to work and learned to step into someone else’s shoes. A family in our community now has much-needed clothes, shoes, books and household items. It was a win-win!

Autism Walk 2008

SATURDAY, JUNE 7, 2008

ALAMEDA COUNTY FAIRGROUNDS IN PLEASANTON

Walk Now for Autism, sponsored by Autism Speaks, the nation's largest grassroots autism walk program, is their signature fundraising and awareness event. Walks take place in communities across the United States, as well as in Canada and the United Kingdom.



Thank you to all the families who donated to the family; it was much appreciated. CW plans to sponsor a family each school year.

CW Community Talks

Thursday October 9th, 2008 6:00pm–8:00pm
 Autism Family Support Project
 2191 Kirker Pass Concord
 (925) 671-0777 ext. 25
Communication strategies for facilitating language

Thursday October 16th, 2008 1:00pm–2:00pm
 Berkeley-Albany YMCA Support Group
 2001 Allston Way Berkeley
 (510) 665-3280
Functional language strategies for the home

Tuesday October 21st, 2008 7:00pm–9:00pm
 Family Resource Network
 5232 Claremont Ave Oakland
 (510) 547-7322
Information on social thinking and practical tips

Tuesday March 3rd, 2009 7:00pm–9:00pm
 PRAISE
 318 Blair Ave Piedmont
 (510) 653-1997
Pragmatic language & therapy for K-high school

Powered by volunteers and families with loved ones on the autism spectrum, this successful grassroots fundraising effort not only generates vital funds for autism research but also raises awareness about the increasing prevalence of autism and the need for increased research

“Communication Works raised almost \$11,000 for the Autism Walk 2008”

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Building Self-Esteem

This is a quick and easy game to help your child learn to recognize positive qualities in others and gives him or her an opportunity to hear positive things about himself or herself from others.

Catch the Compliment is an easy-to-learn game that can be played with all ages.

Here's how:

1. Gather a selection of soft, lightweight balls (beach balls, foam balls).
2. In a large open area (with breakables removed) gather the players into a circle.
3. Players take turns tossing one ball to different players in the circle. As each toss is made, the tossing player gives the receiving player a compliment.

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The MIND Institute

By Erica Bland, M.S., CF

At Communication Works, we make a fervent attempt to stay abreast of the most current research and evidence-based practice in speech-language pathology, regarding assessment, intervention, and family resources and training. As a clinician, my professional goal is to acquire extensive knowledge on current research and therapeutic application in my focus area of autism.

Therefore, I made sure to be present at the UC Davis MIND Institute's Conference on Neurodevelopmental Disorders that took place in August 2008. The MIND Institute has been

renowned for its vast array of information highlighting current research in autism.

The range and scope of presentations this year were comprised of psychological research and literature, parent training, school-related issues, and a range of therapeutic interventions. Among the highlights were captivating presentations by Ms. Conni Kasari regarding her research on the effectiveness of social-pragmatic groups in schools, Deborah Hayden, creator of the PROMPT method utilized with non-verbal children with

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of a few simple words and common sense concepts -- ideas we never would have come up with on our own, but which have been so helpful and so easy to implement. For example, when we're trying to talk to him, and he's giving us answers that are unrelated to the conversation, we break out the phrase, "What am I thinking about right now?" It snaps his attention right back to the conversation and reminds him to stay with it. It works like magic for our son, and over time and practice, it seems to be sinking in.

*"To all those that feel they don't belong
Always remember that...
Being different is cool!"* *-Luke Jackson*

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autism, as well as Michelle Garcia Winner's lecture of effective assessment techniques to utilize when evaluating perspective taking with children with social -cognitive deficits.

Being that I utilize a range of techniques from different social-pragmatic curriculums with my social language groups in the clinic, I am constantly looking toward these professionals for enlightening and informative techniques to make my groups run more effectively. This year's MIND Institute provided me with a plethora of new techniques and research that I can apply toward my own therapy, while invigorating my passion and love for this field. I highly recommend attendance at next year's conference to professionals and parents alike.

We still have our work cut out for us; we're now trying to help Nate through his first awkward attempts at actually carrying on a true back-and-forth conversation with other kids his age.

Compared to where we were six months ago, however, when we simply could not get him to even approach another kid, we are so much closer to where we hope he'll be. He's probably never going to love big crowds or cocktail party banter, but we can see how one day, he will be comfortable enough to hang out with his friends and have a conversation, participate in what the gang is doing, and enjoy his own social realm.

We believe that social language groups have been an absolutely essential intervention for our guy; it has helped him tremendously, and he's had fun at every group. We feel so lucky to have found this wonderful group of people who have done so much for our son.

¹source Nita Everly 2005

²source Michelle G. Winner
www.socialthinking.com

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4. The receiving player then tosses the ball to someone else, again, giving a compliment as the ball is tossed.
5. At the end of the game, take time to ask players what was the most difficult for them, what was the easiest, and what was the funniest thing that happened during the game. Ask players to explain what they had to do to be successful at the game - listening, looking, thinking, and other skills may be mentioned.

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funding to combat this complex disorder.

On June 7th, 3,000 people gathered at Alameda County Fairgrounds in Pleasanton for the 6th annual Bay Area *Walk Now for Autism*. The walkers, comprised of 350 teams, raised \$370,000. After the *Walk*, kids visited the railroad exhibit at the fairgrounds and many families held picnics and team parties, enjoying the beautiful weather.

Communication Works raised almost \$11,000 and was recognized for being a top 5 fundraiser.

A resource fair showcased 30 organizations and companies and offered a variety of activities for kids and information for parents. Walkers enjoyed a ping-pong toss set up by Communication Works, and many bubble displays and balloon punch balls.

Communication Works plans to make this walk an annual event and we have challenged ourselves to double the amount we raised this year for the next walk.

We invite our CW clients and their families to make their own commitment to create a team or join ours for the next walk in April 2009.



CW Summer Family Picnic

Robert's Park in Oakland was the setting of our first annual CW family picnic. Thanks to all the families and friends who attended.

Together our students and families enjoyed:

- Three-legged race
- Egg relay
- Parachute game
- Popsicles

The picnic was an opportunity for our kids to think social and practice some of the skills they learned at CW throughout the school year. Kids from preschool to high school played games together and ate lunch. Parents and therapists



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were on hand to encourage and prompt where needed. Except for the cold weather, it was a successful first picnic.

Thank you to all our families and staff for making it a wonderful year and a great picnic.

We plan to do this annually.

Social Skills Tip

Join a Group

Check out your local paper for groups that are appropriate for your child's age. Just this once, bypass the classes that try to enhance your kid's intellect and opt for the ones that require human interaction. Computer classes or art classes are great, but try to even them out with a group sport or other collective experience. Martial Arts, bowling, and golf are all good social steps that don't require as much interaction as soccer and they are skills that can grow with your child.

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