

NATHHAN / CHASK

CHASK - Christian Homes And Special Kids
NATHHAN - National Challenged Homeschoolers

Spring / Summer 2010



Do-it-Yourself Early Childhood Development

Woman Care for those with Disabilities

Accepting Government / Adoption Assistance

CHASK - "She had an abortion." - Sharing the heart of Christ

Articles, letters, and reviews printed in the NATHHAN NEWS are not to be taken as legal or medical advice. Please seek the services of a qualified source.

Also please note: What you read and the resources you find through NATHHAN may not line up with your Christian convictions. Some of the resources we share with you may not be necessarily from a home-schooling perspective. We simply point you, with your shovel, and hope you will dig! Please pick and choose carefully.



Bushnell Family 2008

Goal and Purpose of NATHHAN

To encourage homeschooling families with special needs children in ways that glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. To find Christian homes for children with special needs.

NATHHAN / CHASK

National Challenged Homeschoolers
Christian Homes And Special Kids

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www.chask.org

Front Cover

A huge thanks to Whippersnappers studio and Central Oregon Down Syndrome Network. (www.whipsnaps.com and www.codsn.org)

JoAnne Lang shared this photo of her husband's adult sister, Becky, and children with Down syndrome. The Langs are one of our long-time NATHHAN /CHASK families.

Letter From the Editors:

Our rainy spring makes the occasional bursts of sunshine through the clouds extra special. Isn't that the same with life's challenges? When times are stressful, the tender moments seem more poignant.

Being a family with lots of teens certainly keeps us on our toes. As each of our children continue to develop into who they will be as adults, we are amazed at their unique talents. Their child-like attempts are replaced with capable completion of chores and projects. We find that sometimes it is just better if we as parents just get out of the way.

There goes Jordan, our 23 year old son with the lawn mower. The sun has been shining all morning, but it has rained and rained for days. The grass is thick and mile high. He sees what we all see. A lawn desperate for a hair cut. His solution is to get that mower out while it is shining and start cutting! That's great. But what Jordan doesn't see (and we do) is the big bank of rain clouds coming from the west. A sure sign of more rain very shortly.....

Our lives are like Jordan's lawn mowing in many ways right now. We are a family of action. See a need. Just do it. We are so thankful that God is keeping an eye on us and can direct in the right way to be of best use to Him. Our enthusiasm is what helps us get things done.

Sure enough... the mower starts... his unknowing race with the rain commences. The thick juicy patches of grass choke the mower blades and the machine dies. Again. And again.

Hmmmm.... I can see him thinking. I need some help! So he trudges to Dad's office. He stands there struggling to verbally express his mower sorrows.

Dad contemplates Jordan's ability, with an eyeball on the coming rain, and decides that it's better to wait on the mowing. Frowning, Jordan doesn't understand Dad's reluctance to get the

mower working for him. Jordan doesn't see the rain coming. Just the lawn crying out to be cut.

So dad takes Jordan to the shed, gets the weed eater going for him and points toward the grass along the fence edges instead. Perfectly happy, Jordan walks off with a big ol' smile, engine roaring away, chopping grass and being productive.

So much like us in relating to our walk in this life, with the Lord directing us and helping us to go in the right direction.

Benefits of Homeschooling Your Child with Special Needs

As we have watched homeschooling with special needs "grow up" over the last 20 years, it has become more widely accepted.

Thanks to families like yourselves who are doing a fantastic job teaching your children with disabilities, everyone can see that parents can do a great job.

Many public school districts simply don't have the resources to make our wishes for ideal academic schooling and therapy come true. So, giving up, they are happy to stand back and watch.

After all, for the typical special education teacher, extra challenges or a bigger job does not equal more pay. Making her job easier, by doing ours as a parent, suits her just fine.

Trouble can come with school district administrators who are worried about their bottom dollar in making the whole picture work. Special needs kids can bring in big bucks. (\$15,000 a year or more per student.)

Especially troubling to school districts are the parents who ask for help, but don't want to sign paper work so the district can be reimbursed by the federal government. The balance between making promises to the parents for education goals and not making the burden overwhelming or impossible for the district is hard. Some kids require more work.

It is common at IEP meetings for parent ideas and school teacher abilities (promises) to clash. The districts want to make each parent happy. They want families to be grateful and content with what their program has to offer.

But as parents, if we are not happy with what the school has to offer (or what happens

in reality, in spite of the "goals" made) we have a right to pull out and do it ourselves.

In all states in the USA, parents can homeschool their children with special needs. See www.hslda.org and click on your state to view the latest rules.

So, as we are homeschooling and looking for opportunities for learning in the community, keep a positive attitude. You are saving tax payers a lot of money! Your hard work is paying off in several areas:

- Your son or daughter is getting just the education you want. You know where your child is in skills and school work.

- No negative influence or bad habits brought home from a setting other than home, as we sit there scratching our heads muttering, "Don't know where that came from?!"

- Social contacts are appropriate for your child's needs. Not one size fits all. (This translates to "big bully Henry is not pinching your little Sara every day when teacher is not looking.")

- Speech therapy, OT and PT is given when your child is ready and doing well, not when child is distracted or exhausted.

- Your family's values are integrated into the learning setting. It is all part of the child's big picture, instead of just something we do at home.

Maybe you are a family that needs outside intervention to make private education for special needs work for you. That is the beauty of independently tailor-making a program for your child. You know what works for your child and what works for THE WHOLE FAMILY.



Have a great Summer !

Tom and Sherry Bushnell

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History and Information About NATHHAN/CHASK

NATHHAN began with a telephone call from one mother of a child with Down syndrome to another mother homeschooling her son with Down syndrome in the early spring of 1990. Acting on the Lord's prompting to begin a network of parents helping one another, Diane Macbeth in PA wrote Kathy Salars in TX on March 17th, 1990, thus announcing the birth of NATHHAN.

In the fall of 1992, due to NATHHAN's exponential growth from 2 to over 600 families, it became impossible for these moms to keep up. Tom and Sherry Bushnell offered their assistance and NATHHAN's main office was moved to Olalla, Washington. The NATHHAN/CHASK office now operates in Moyie Springs, Idaho.

A board meets periodically to make decisions. Its officers are Jim and Jerri Unruh in Bonners Ferry, ID; Ralph and Debbie Poole, Cheney, WA; John and Diane Ryckman, Creston, BC; Tom and Sherry Bushnell; and Andy and Linda Dillon, Camano Island, WA. Financial Advisory: Dennis and Linda Lamphere, Moyie Springs, ID.

In the Fall of 2002, as an outgrowth of NATHHAN, CHASK was born. CHASK, Christian Homes And Special Kids, matches special kids with families for free, no agency fees or referral costs.

NATHHAN / CHASK's web page and magazine strive to equip and encourage parents with special needs children, assisting them in finding the will of God for their lives.

In the Fall of 2007, CHASK opened A Blessed Beginning, an on-site pregnancy resource center.

NATHHAN 's Ministry

National Challenged Homeschoolers

NATHHAN NEWS - This magazine, printed twice a year, includes resources, articles from parents and professionals, and lots of letters from families, plus much more.

NATHHAN WEB PAGE www.nathhan.org

Updated quarterly. A full service web page with all the features of the print style NATHHAN NEWS plus a discussion board, and on-line applications for the lending library and family directory. A password is needed to access the NATHHAN membership portion. Hundreds of articles from the last 16 years of NATHHAN are included.

FAMILY DIRECTORY - Although some of us will never meet this side of heaven, we can still encourage and share a bit of our lives with each other. The directory is on-line, password protected, updated once a year and is available to members willing to be in the directory.

LENDING LIBRARY - The library is operated through the mail for NATHHAN members. Members donate postage to and from library when they use it. The NATHHAN Lending Library Catalog can be reviewed on the web site www.nathhan.org. Book donations are gladly accepted.

**All this for only \$25.00 / year.
Unbelievable!**

CHASK's Ministry

Christian Homes And Special Kids

Parents can raise their disabled child with joy and competence. Christ is the answer to making it through any crisis.

Our goal is to *match* every special needs child that God brings to us who needs a home, before-born or already born, with a Christian family. No agency fees.

**www.chask.org
chaskinfo@aol.com**

Gift Memberships

Gift memberships are available for folks facing financial difficulty. A NATHHAN/ CHASK gift membership entitles the family to NATHHAN/ CHASK's internet services. NATHHAN/CHASK's gift program is funded solely by other homes sharing out of their concern and abundance, giving so other Christian brothers and sisters can receive the encouragement they need. We want you to get the support you need. If your home cannot afford the \$25.00, don't hesitate to send us what you can afford and request a gift membership.

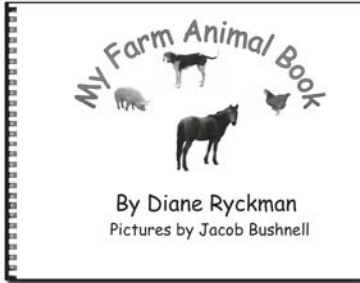
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If phonics isn't clicking, try...

Farm Animal Words Reading Kit

Designed to assist you in teaching sight reading skills, **Farm Animal Words Reading Kit** consists of a book called **My Farm Animal Book**, a double set of flashcards, and an instruction booklet on how to teach sight reading.



My Farm Animal Book Features

- ⇒ 10 well known farm animals.
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- ⇒ One simple animal photograph per page with large, easy to read print.
- ⇒ Total reading vocabulary of 57 words. 4 new words per page.
- ⇒ Repetition and review of words incorporated into text.

Farm Animal Words Reading Kit has been developed by Diane Ryckman, and has been thoroughly tested on her son Andrew, who just happens to have Down syndrome.

For more information visit www.DownHomeLearning.net

E-mail: ryckman@downhomelearning.net

Phone: (250) 428-7798

John and Diane Ryckman
1453 Evans Rd. RR7
Creston, B.C.
V0B-1G7

\$23.00 Includes shipping and handling.



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Special Needs Support Groups

Deaf Ministries List

Earl and Shirley Wilbers
221 W. Gay St.
Harrisonburg, VA 22802
E-mail: EEARL2@aol.com
Website: Deaf Ministries List
www.deafministriesconnection.netfirms.com

Especially Yours - a support group for families homeschooling children with special needs in Colorado. All are welcome.
Call Patricia Rendoff.
(303) 937-3428 or email at prdiggie@juno.com

Shepherd Boy - Strategies for Autism

4241 Faye Drive
Olive Branch, MS 38654
www.shepherdboy.org
Hands-on, practical ideas for working with individuals with autism and related disabilities.

HOPES - Homeschooling Our Precious Exceptional Students. We meet on the first Thursday night of each month.
For more information contact Jim and Mary Rees,
Traveler's Rest, SC Phone: (864) 834-0264

Bethel Baptist Academy

P.O. Box 10035
Fullerton, CA 92838
Norm and Sharon Wallace (714) 527-5807 or Matthew and Julia Hoch (714) 990-0199. We help moms write their IEPs through our workshops. Our resource specialist is Marian Soderholm. She can be found at (562) 425-7886 or e-mail at mercedchristian@yahoo.com

Almaden Valley Christian School & AVCS Books

Consulting services, curriculum resources and support for families of special needs children.
Sharon Hensley, MA— Director
16465 Carlson Dr.
Morgan Hill, CA 95037
408-776-6691
sharon@avcsbooks.com

H.A.N.D.S. ON!

Support group for special needs homeschoolers in PA
Newsletter: www.groups.yahoo.com/group/handson_westernpa
Online forum: www.groups.yahoo.com/group/wpahandson

S.N.A.C.K.S. of Delaware

(Special Needs and Christian Kids)
Helping families and churches to minister to their special needs children. Serving the greater Delaware Valley and Tri-State region
Contact: Tina Wyatt
Email: tewjr@flash.net

Homeschooling With Autism

Donna Glick 920-296-5462
Provides resources and help for families homeschooling with autism. Located in Rio, Wisconsin.

Specially Gifted c/o the Pegrams

7217 South Drive Richmond, VA 23225-1622
(804) 323-1786
Strengthuntostrength@juno.com A support group for families homeschooling special needs children. Part of a Christian family-based ministry operated by Dave and Deb Pegram. They also operate a private Christian "umbrella" school that provides transcripts, IEPs, testing and evaluative services.

PRAISE

Parents Reaching Academically in Special Education
A homeschool support group for parents homeschooling special needs children.
947 Park SW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504
(616) 451-3620
Contact Shannon Bloemendaal Email: sbloemen@aol.com

Parents Instructing Challenged Children LEAH

www.piccnys.com
piccleah@verizon.net
New York state's Loving Education At Home. Special needs support and chapter for families homeschooling struggling learners.

O.U.C.H. Ohio's Uniquely Challenged Homeschoolers

(formerly C.H.O.S.E.N. Christian Homeschool Special Educational Needs)

Renee Silvaroli—Support Group Coordinator & Workshop Speaker. Meets at Silvaroli's home.
Phone: (440) 944-4782
Email: RCHOSEN@visn.net
Please RSVP if you plan to attend a meeting.
"Ohio Special Needs Resource Packet" available (at cost of \$10.00 plus \$2.50 postage/handling); State Newsletter \$5.00 (5 issues); workshops and special needs consultation available (\$1.00 for sample newsletter).

Down Home Learning

Does your child have Down Syndrome? Need someone to talk to? Have some ideas to share? Contact: Diane Ryckman
1453 Evans Rd. RR 7
Creston, B.C. V0B 1G7 CANADA (250)-428-7798
Email: ryckman@downhomelearning.net
www.downhomelearning.net

Arizona - West Valley Autism Support Group

Contact Shelley 623-572-5289. Meets at New Life Comm. Church in Peoria, AZ second Tuesday of every month.

Christian Cottage School

(303) 688-6626 Sedalia, Colorado
Mike and Terry Spray founded CCS for diagnostic testing and prescribing curriculum.
www.christiancottage.com

Earthen Vessels Ministries

A support group in Central Maine, for families who home school special needs children. We encourage both moms and dads to join our group. We share ideas, accomplishments, and experiences. Learn about what works and what didn't. Be sure to check out our files for resources and post your favorite pictures in our gallery of beautiful faces! http://groups.yahoo.com/group/earthen_vessels_ministries

Special Needs Support Groups

Carrying To Term Resources

American Association of Pro Life Obstetricians and Gynecologists. www.aaplog.org
AAPLOG National Office Contact Info:
Phone: (616) 546-2639.
Email: info@aaplog.org

DrugWatch.com

Questions regarding which medications are harmful for pregnancy? Contact CJ Woodland at (800)452-0949
cwoodland@drugwatch.com

Be not Afraid www.benotafraid.net

An online outreach to parents who have received a difficult prenatal diagnosis. The family stories, articles, and links within this site are presented as a resource for those who may have been asked to choose between terminating a pregnancy or continuing on despite the diagnosis.

Waiting with Love site
www.erichad.com/wwl

Prenatal partners for life www.prenatalpartnersforlife.org

Living with Trisomy 13 or 18

www.livingwithtrisomy13.org
www.trisomy18support.org

Now I Lay Me Down To Sleep Infant Bereavement

Photography - Free, volunteer service provides beautiful pictures at birth to celebrate and remember baby.
www.nowilaymedowntosleep.org

Perinatal Hospice

www.perinatalhospice.org

Joanne O'Brien's Story

Brochure and Special Support for families with babies that may not live long after birth. www.graceannenugent.netfirms.com

Post Abortion Resources

Rachel's Vineyard Retreats

1-877-HOPE-4-ME (1-877-467-3463)
www.RachelsVineyard.org

Healing Hearts Ministries (on-line counseling)

www.HealingHearts.org 1-888-792-8282

Ramah International

www.RamahInternational.org

Save One, www.SaveOne.org

1-866-329-3571



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Friendship Ministries is a non-profit organization that exists to help churches and organizations around the world share God's love with people who have cognitive impairments.

**For more info contact Nella Uilvlugt
888-866-8966 (ext. 2 --1)
E-mail friendship@friendship.org
www.friendship.org**

NATHHAN Web page

NATHHAN Lending Library catalog is arranged by subject.

Family Directory- Folks are listed by state and list disability. Form your own support network. Find families homeschooling with the same special needs you are dealing with. Search the *entire web site* for a subject of interest when you participate in the NATHHAN family directory. Additional password needed for security.

Discussion board - Get your questions answered by moms who are competent and experienced. A variety of subjects and responses makes just reading the discussions of others VERY interesting.

Classified Ads • Letters from Families • Deuteronomy Dads • Mommy's Musing • Children waiting for Moms and Dads
Favorite Resources

Just \$25.00 / year for membership!

www.nathhan.org



1st Straight Talk

A Parent's Guide for Correcting

Childhood Mispronunciations

Written by

Marisa J. Lapish, M.A. in Speech Pathology

- Charts explain normal sound development
- The *Consonant Cookbook*, suggestions to help with each consonant's correct sound
- Test forms and score sheets
- Word training lists

An excellent resource for parents wishing to implement a quality speech therapy program without spending lots of money or going to the public school. We've used it successfully for over 10 years.

—Tom Bushnell



\$45.00

Free Shipping!

1st Straight Talk's DVD

Watch Marisa demonstrate the sound "r" using the manual.

30 min. video supplements the manual.

Video is \$20.00 separate from the manual.

Combination Straight Talk 1 + DVD = **\$55.00**

Order online at www.nathan.org or use the order form on page 25!

2nd Straight Talk
A Parent's Guide to:



**Language
Development**

A Christian Perspective

Written by
Marisa J. Lapish, M.A. in Speech Pathology
and Tom and Sherry Bushnell, Directors of NATHHAN

- Exercises in Learning to Listen
- Nuts and Bolts of Language Training
- Increasing Auditory and Visual Comprehension
- Language Development Activities for the Christian Home
- Tests to Determine Exactly Where Your Child Needs Help
- Suggestions for Working with Children Ranging from Non-verbal to More Advanced in Language.



\$45.00

112 page manual, free shipping!

*An excellent resource for parents helping their
children overcome language delays.*

Order online at www.nathan.org or use the order form on page 25!

“She had an abortion.” - Sharing Christ’s Love

CHASK— Christian Homes And Special Kids

By Tom and Sherry Bushnell

Perhaps one of the hardest things to do is step into a person’s shoes to feel what they might be feeling. The idea of doing something as desperate as abortion is not on our radar screen. Yet, God has called us to do just that... to emotionally step into the shoes and love those who have broken their own hearts by things they have done. They are the ones that God is calling us to minister to and forgive. Here is a CHASK story that will inspire you to look beyond the act of pregnancy termination, and look to the heart of the matter through Jesus’ eyes.

“She is walking down the road that way,”...a neighbor pointed. A distant figure walked slowly, stopping now and then. “Is she looking for something?” the neighbor shaded his eyes trying to focus against the bright spring sunshine.

“Well, sort of....” Dana replied sadly. Truth was, Mandy had chosen to abort her baby with Down syndrome 3 months ago. Nagging guilt had settled in Mandy’s heart. She had contacted CHASK for possible post abortion counseling. Dana, a CHASK mom, made a decision to befriend and encourage Mandy. Their first meeting had gone poorly, or so it seemed at first. Their conversation had ended with Mandy jumping up, running out of the house and down the road.

Falling tears embarrassed Mandy and she wasn’t willing to stay for comfort. Dana wasn’t sure if she should sit down and wait for her return or follow her. She thought, “Hmmm... Mandy is looking for something and I know what it is. Forgiveness!”

“Well, I sure hope she finds whatever she is after...” the neighbor picked up his lawn rake. Dana’s hesitation switched to decision. If Mandy was looking for forgiveness, Dana knew she might be Mandy’s only hope of helping her know where

to find it. Dana started jogging toward Mandy, not knowing what to say. The Lord would have to give her the words.

Abortion is an awful decision to make. It is never easy. I think almost every mother wishes she could be that “perfect pregnant mommy”. But the world is good at convincing pregnant moms that being “ready” means being totally healthy, totally financially prepared, and always in the ideal life situation. Not many of us can say we have arrived. When special needs is added to the picture and the worst case scenario painted for baby’s health, 90% of women choose to terminate their pregnancy. Many women become convinced that they cannot parent and choosing life means choosing suffering for their baby.



Dana walked silently beside Mandy a few minutes later, catching her own breath. She begged God to give her something to say to Mandy that would share the heart of Jesus. “I love you Mandy, and Jesus loves you too, so much!” Mandy’s dragging feet stopped and she looked up with a tear-stained, surprised look on her face.

“Why? I have just killed my baby. Why would He love me...and why would you care about me, a total stranger?” Dana took a deep breath. She took Mandy’s hand in hers and put her finger in the middle and pressed in... “Well, Jesus loved me so much, in spite of the awful things I had done, that He let his own hands be nailed to the cross and He died there. Just so I could be forgiven. It was the only way my guilty heart could be made free. Since he has done this incredible thing for me, I want to love Him with all of my heart. And loving Him means loving you, Mandy.

Dana led Mandy over to a large tree along the road. Sitting down in the grass, she pulled a Kleenex from her pocket and gave it to Mandy. Dana’s own tears now spilled down her cheeks and splattered on her jeans leaving wet blotches.

Mandy looked in wonder at Dana’s earnest

face blinking back tears, “How can you believe all of that?”

Dana then went on to share her story of her own abortion at age 25 and the mental torture she experienced for several years. Someone shared with her the love of Jesus and led her to the throne of grace to find forgiveness. “Because my guilt is gone! Mandy, my guilty heart is gone. After Jesus filled me with peace, I became a new person inside. Yes, my baby is with Him, and I did the wrong thing. But I now know that I will see my baby again and that it will all be O.K.”

Mandy’s fresh flood of sobs shook her shoulders... “Can I be forgiven too?” So Dana and Mandy, under that tree by the road, spent 2 hours talking and sharing. Later, together, they made a special little memorial under the tree...a sort of remembrance for a life that was lost, and a new life in Christ begun. Healing had begun.

Walking back to the house later, the neighbor was not in his yard... but Dana wished he would have been. Mandy had indeed found what she was looking for!



CHASK UPDATE: January through July have been pretty busy months here at CHASK. Over 80 birth moms or parents have been ministered to by various CHASK families.

Here is a quick run down on some of them:

Birth mom pregnant with her 3rd child just found out her baby has Down syndrome. Her husband is in Iraq and will not be present for the birth. Her other two children also have serious

disabilities. She is overwhelmed and is looking for help.

Birth mom with nerve disease wishes to place her baby for adoption. 5 CHASK families are sent to her to review.

Birth mom with 20-week-old unborn baby with Down syndrome is referred by a geneticist in CA. We counsel with birth mom and send families. Baby’s life is terminated. CHASK family is praying for birth mom, that God would use this situation in her life to bring her to Him.

Grandma in her 70’s cannot care for her 11-year-old special needs grandson with FAS due to her health problems. A CHASK family adopts him.

Baby girl has a stroke in utero after her mom is injured in a car accident. Birth parents are exploring parenting options. 8 CHASK families are sent to them. With encouragement, they decide to keep their baby.

Low income birth mom, who struggles with mental disability and blindness, became pregnant while staying at a mental institution. After getting out of confinement, she called CHASK, we contacted a local CHASK family who befriended her and shared food and Christ’s love with her. She wishes to place her baby with this pastor and his wife. They are continuing to supply for her physical needs and share their lives with her as well.

Hispanic baby with Trisomy 13 is born and a DNR (Do Not Resuscitate) order is placed at birth. He refuses to die. The hospital releases the family and the baby a few days later. Baby stops breathing, is resuscitated and is placed in hospice. Baby is released 7 days later. Birth parents fall in love with their son. They become his advocates, fighting for his life in a system prepared to let him die. A CHASK family in TX comes along side and provides love, care and resources. He passes on to be with Jesus 24 days after his birth. Family will miss their son, but had 24 wonderful life changing days in which they poured their love on him.

Mother of 19-year-old birth mom with autism, calls CHASK to share that her daughter is expecting in October. She finds a loving CHASK

family for her grandchild, that is accepting of her daughter’s special needs and their family situation.

Birth mom who is Chinese, has given birth to a baby girl with chromosomal anomaly. She wishes to place her baby with an adoptive family. She is totally emotionally distraught. After counseling with several CHASK families, she decides to keep her baby.

The list goes on...

Your financial support gives birth parents a glimpse of Christ’s love. We are answering phone calls, finding ready families, and we appreciate your willingness to give. None of the above would have happened without you.

Birth moms, that have chosen abortion, need to feel our compassion and love through the body of Christ. CHASK specifically has a heart for parents that feel burdened by pregnancy beyond just “bad timing” or “life-inconvenience.” The unborn babies and birth moms we search for are facing true tragedy. Please help us make life-choices possible for the birth moms who contact us.

Together we can keep CHASK and NATHHAN available for birth parents 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Our family and staff is dedicated to counseling and assuring birth parents. Help and/or loving, adoptive families are ready right now, no matter what a baby’s special needs may be.

We are thrilled that Dana chose to love and help Mandy, showing her Christ’s love and forgiveness. Showing the love of God to a birth mom after she has an abortion is a very effective way to share the good news of forgiveness which is in Christ Jesus. It takes a special CHASK family to look beyond the termination of the baby’s life that they had promised to love, and meet that woman in her sorrow. It can mean even more to a birth mom than a promise to love and raise her baby.

Sometimes Jesus allows tragedy in our lives to bring us to a point of decision. Please help us minister to birth parents needing to hear about forgiveness in a

desperate way. Sharing the heart of Christ, means sharing forgiveness.

CHASK supports birth parents in crisis. We find loving adoptive homes for any baby, with any medical concern, *because you make it happen!*

Please consider monthly sharing with CHASK. We need your help.



My NAME _____

My ADDRESS _____

My Phone _____

E-MAIL _____

I can send \$ _____ to help birth parents make life decisions. (NATHHAN / CHASK is a 501 (c) 3, non-profit organization. Your donation is tax deductible.)

Please send me _____ Adverse Prenatal Diagnosis brochures (free) to give to crisis pregnancy centers and doctor’s offices in my area.

Blessed are the Merciful, for they will be shown mercy ... Matthew 5:7



Lee Magryta

Freelance Writer;

13-year Home Educator;
Gentle Teaching Practitioner;
Founder – *Gentle Families*

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy”.

Matthew 5:7

As home educators each of us faces everyday challenges in unchartered ground. Within ourselves and amongst ourselves we dig deep to find the courage, resources, and fortitude to meet our everyday moments of self-doubt. **For many of us, self-doubt is overcome through our faith sustaining us. For others of us, self-doubt is overcome when those of us with faith surround us.** It seems unchartered ground and challenges are no match for Christian homeschoolers...but, is this entirely true for the most extraordinary and gifted families amongst us—those with special needs?

Increasing numbers of home educating families face a host of special needs challenges—Autism, Asthma, Epilepsy, ADD/ADHD, Cerebral Palsy, Anaphylactic Allergies, Language impaired, Dyslexia, Blind, Mental disabilities, Learning Disabled, and Paralytic...the list goes on and on.

Parents of these special children often face indescribable self-doubt yet they dig even deeper to find the *extra* courage, resources, and fortitude needed to educate their children at home. Many of these extraordinary parents are well-educated doctors, lawyers, dentists, teachers, professionals, or loving parents who, perhaps at first, left their ca-

reers and embarked on home education reluctantly because their children were falling short of getting equal education opportunity and resources through their public or private education sector.

Many of these special children when brought home under the loving care of their resourceful parents have not only flourished but give their families, their communities, and their peers many gifts of the Holy Spirit—Wisdom, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Wonder and Awe in God’s Presence, Piety, and Understanding. These are the gifts, as Christians, we often reverently ask be given us. Yet, so many of us surrounded by our own everyday challenges in unchartered ground fear opening our hearts to many of these very gifted families.

Too often as home educators we close our doors, our hearts, our souls to the opportunities God gives us to receive His gifts to us through these special families. We close our support groups for fear of liability, fear of change, fear of the unknown, fear of ourselves.

How many of us have been part of a support group that instead of adopting a mindset of charity through a “can-do” and “win-win” attitude have turned away special needs families citing an inability to meet the family’s needs without compromising the rights of the others.

As Christians, do we believe we have rights and freedoms? Or, do we believe we have rights and freedoms that come with responsibility given us by God? So, what exactly is our responsibility to our fellow special needs families? Do we open ourselves and our support groups up to the gifts from those of who have become the **experts at overcoming home education self-doubt through faithfulness?** And, do we as good Christians **surround them with our faithfulness** in *their* times of self-doubt? Looking to the scriptures, many



Christians have sought the answers and found inspiration to take a strong stance on completely and totally embracing their home educating peers with special needs.

*Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
Matthew 5:7*

The seven practices of charity toward our neighbor:

1. Feed the hungry
2. Give drink to the thirsty
3. Clothe the naked
4. Shelter the homeless
5. Visit the sick
6. Visit those in prison
7. Bury the dead

Mt. 25:34 “Then the King will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of my brethren, you did it to me.’”

True, as home schoolers none of us are beholden to meeting all the needs of each and every one who seeks us out or asks of us and our support groups. On the other hand, as Christian homeschoolers, if we indeed live as we profess, we are beholden to a life in Christ.

So what might a life in Christ look like to the Samaritan in the gospel of Luke 10:25-37 where Jesus asks, “Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?” The man replied, “The one who

showed him mercy.” Then Jesus said, “Yes, now go and do the same”.

As homeschoolers if we are to *go and do the same*, are we not beholden to offer to our neighbor all “the mercy” that is *within our powers to offer*? A fellow mom asks us for advice on a curriculum to use. We share our knowledge and experience

joyfully and in friendship. Another fellow home schooling mom has a car that broke down and we quickly offer the entire family a ride to a home school event. And, how neighborly were our fellow homeschoolers following the birth of one or more of our children? Did we not receive meals, gifts, and tender support? But, are these measures the total fulfillment of the mercy within our powers to extend to our peers blessed with special needs children or, has Jesus commissioned us to a greater degree of mercy that we may not yet realize we too are capable of? In response, prayerfully answer one simple question—*Do I believe*

that Christ will give me the grace to fulfill any act of mercy I am asked to give?

Often fears of an unknown, experiences from a known, hardness of heart, or our own sufferings and challenges will cloud our abilities to answer this question in truth. Jesus understands our shortcomings and failings. He leads us through His grace to the fulfillment of what He asks of us through our neighbors with special needs. We are all called to be the Good Samaritan,

through His grace, He will show us The Way. Pray for an open heart, a heart of compassion, a heart of mercy to our neighbor in need. Finally, ask yourself, **“If Jesus himself came to me with**



this request for mercy to be shown Him, would I say no, or would I ask Him for the grace to do it?" Indeed, uncharted grounds and challenges are no match for Christian Home educators for in putting on a mind of Christ we can do all things in helping special needs families bear their burdens. In return, we are blessed.

Lee Magryta is a Christian home educating mother of four, a Gentle Teaching Practitioner, a founder of Gentle Families, a Conference Speaker, and a mentor to those dealing with special needs or everyday challenges.

Gentle Teaching

Gentle Teaching is based on the writing and work of internationally known John J. McGee. Gentle Teaching is the basis for learning and moral development. It is modeling and coaching in safe, respectful and nurturing environments that encourage feelings of companionship and safety in an ever expanding inclusive community. The goal of Gentle Teaching is to validate each individual's humanity, offering an environment where the person can reach their fullest potential when they feel safe to participate, to learn, to share their talents, to utilize their strengths, to improve upon their weaknesses, and to build interdependence and solidarity with others.

www.gentleteaching.com



Christian Cottage School



Teri Spray

Directors:
Mike and Teri Spray
Christian Cottage School has been empowering home educating parents for more than 20 years. We work with learning disabilities, and challenging students.

Correspondence school for children with learning delays!

Our job at CCS is to search out and develop a learning program with materials and educational strategies custom-tailored to your family. We believe learning should strike a balance between concise, consecutive basic skills and rich, varied learning experiences. Our goal is to help parents of challenged learners experience success, confidence and peace of mind.

Services Include:

- Diagnostic Achievement Testing
- Two hour, one-on-one, professional assessment, mostly oral, nationally normed, percentiles available as needed.
- Processing Skills Assessments
- One-on-one achievement testing services
- Custom Curriculum Education Strategy
- General Consultation Services (per hour fees)

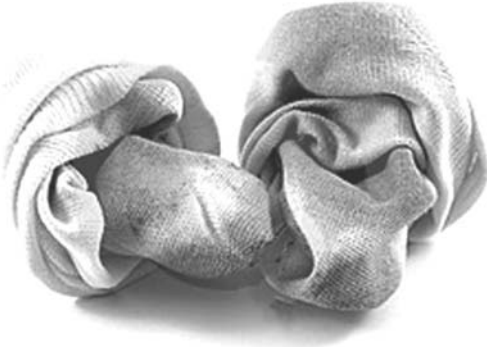
NEW!!! Christian Cottage is continuing to produce curriculum that is not available anywhere else. The newest product is Learning Rivers Reading and Writing program. In only 100 lessons children progress in reading, handwriting and creative writing from making one letter to reading chapter books and writing fun and interesting stories. Parents become the Learning Specialists as they teach rhythmic exercises with a concise consecutive phonics-based program. (Four double-volumes) www.learningrivers.com

Christian Cottage School

(303) 688-6626 888-286-5494
Sedalia, Colorado

www.christiancottage.com

Dirty Socks



By Tammy Bellinger

The phone rings. My then two-year-old daughter sits at the table for breakfast. In a hurry, I have quickly given her some milk and donuts. I am running later than I need to be. I hear the noise of milk splashing to the floor. I walk into the kitchen where my small daughter sits, smiling, seemingly proud of her accomplishment...once again delaying my morning with a mess.

Frustrated, I grab a towel, and bend to mop up the mess. "I am a single mom and have to have to keep this job!" I think to myself. Freshly dressed for work, I stand up, feeling the familiar tug of tiny fingers on my once-clean shirt. I turn around to see the smudgy fingerprints smeared across my shirt.

"Mommy, all done" she pipes up. Getting more agitated at the loss of time, I run up the stairs quickly throwing on another shirt. I take BriAnna to the living room, wash her gooey hands and face, dress her, and put on a brand new pair of socks.

Shoes!... I forgot the shoes. I grab her shoes, am barely headed back down the stairs, when the door opens. Too late. She is out the door, straight into the mud puddle...*in her brand new white socks.*

Arrrrgh! Now I am very frustrated and yell, "Now look what you have done!" Bringing her back inside, I change her socks and push her shoes onto her little feet. I hate things to be dirty. Especially socks...and these were new. In a few minutes we are out the door and headed to the babysitters. I kiss and hug her and I'm off to work. She waves and

says, "I love you mommy".

A few minutes later, pulling up to a quiet, beautiful large home, I know that I am late. They are understanding, but I like to be on time. Walking down the long paved walkway, up to the arched doorway, I enter a spacious home beautifully decorated and freshly clean. Wiping my feet, I walk back to the office to clock in.

This job was a fun one and my first of this kind. This seems like a normal home but is indeed a very special one. It is a group home for special needs children, with the house parents living in the lower level of the home. We much enjoy our job, knowing we are making the children happy. My friend and coworker, Cassie, tells me, "Hello!" and we proceed down the hallway to get the children up.

First is Trevor, he is a frail little boy, around seven years of age. Way too thin, his bones poke through his clothes, with tussled, sandy blonde hair on top of his head. His blue eyes seem to ache. We know when he is uncomfortable by the cry in his voice. His face is pale but his cheeks are pink. His lips are a pretty red color, full and plump. He was placed here at a young age due to his disabilities. He and his twin brother were born, with his brother strong and healthy. Trevor was the less fortunate of the two. He suffered from brain damage and cerebral palsy. His parents did not feel that they could care for him, and placed him in this group home. His grandmother came on a regular basis to visit and take him home for the occasional weekend. He loved her and one of the few words he could say was in response to her. He would babble "Gaa Gaa, gaa gaa," upon seeing her and she knows he loves her dearly.

I dress him and slip on his socks. I lift the small boy into his wheelchair and push him to the kitchen for breakfast. I attach the feeding tube to start the morning drip of Pediasure into his thin stomach. He lets out a giggle. I know I have tickled his tummy. His smile is beautiful and I delight in his morning happiness.

Walking back down the hall, Cassie has

gotten Stewy dressed and up to the bathroom. He sits on the toilet, smiling and laughing with his fist in his mouth. He is a tall boy, with fire-red hair lumped on top of his head. His shiny blue eyes dance with laughter. He is almost thirteen and his blushed face is blotted with the familiar teenage acne. This boy is much stronger and can walk with assistance. He wears an Attends. We try to encourage him to use the toilet. He usually does in the mornings when placed on the toilet, although he does not know when to use it on his own.

I round the corner where another tall red-head yells out in discomfort, pulling his contracted arm up to his face over and over again and yelling out loudly “Eeyy, eeyy!” This is Stewy’s younger brother, he is eleven and much resembles his older brother, with the exception of his mood. He never smiles and seems to always be uncomfortable and agitated.

The two were removed from their parents’ custody at a young age when a neglect report was made and an investigation found the small boys, barely two and three, locked in a closed room, in the back of a dingy trailer where the temperature had far exceeded the normal range. The investigators were too late and the small helpless boys were left with severe brain damage.

I dress Ben. Quite a chore as his body is badly contractured. Pulling clothing on over his stiff, board-like limbs is a difficult task...all the while he is aggressively yelling out. I speak softly to him and try to reassure him. I bend over, sit him up, then lift him into his wheelchair. I comb his red hair and push him to the table for breakfast. Stewy is there waiting for his too.

I pass through the other side of the kitchen and down a hallway on the opposite side of the house. I enter a room decorated brightly with blues and reds. There lies Christopher, laughing and smiling upon hearing my greeting. He is another lovely child. His hair a golden blonde, his eyes a twinkling blue. His broad smile always seems to engulf his face. He is nine and not as thin as the other boys in the home. His body is loose and floppy. I reach down, tickle his tummy

instigating more laughter. I then pull off his jammies and dress him. Cassie walks in to help me get him into his chair. His loose tone makes it more difficult to get him from the bed to the chair. We count “One, two, three”, and lift him to the chair. He laughs in delight at our idle attempt to be funny. I run the brush through his hair. Nothing but smiles from this little boy. Cassie pushes him into the kitchen where she hooks him up to his morning feeding tube, and gives his meds.

I turn back down the hall and into a cutely decorated little girls’ room. Flowers and butterflies hang on the walls. Pinks engulf the room. “Good morning, little Katie!” I say in a loud happy voice. She smiles and looks ready to get up for the day. She is a pretty little girl, her skin a creamy caramel color and her hair black and curly. Her eyes are the darkest brown and her eyelashes bat like fans as she smiles. She is small, but heavier. Her body is severely contractured. Her legs are in a bent position and her little arms tight and bent. She is also hard to dress, but small enough to lift into the chair on my own. I pull off her pink gown and replace it with pink pants and shirt covered in flowers. I cradle her up into my arms, place her in her wheelchair and push her into the kitchen. She is also fed from a feeding tube. I hook up the drip of Pediasure and draw up her meds, giving them through the iv tubing. Katie’s story is indeed a sad one. Her disabilities a direct result of Shaken Baby Syndrome. While only an infant, her father shook her so hard, that her tiny brain came loose from the brain stem. They said she would only live to be three. She is now nine.

As the three kids sit and get their breakfast through tubing, Cassie has prepared breakfast for Ben and Stewart. Everything goes in the blender. This morning: eggs, bacon and toast, blended. Thickened juice and water are fed to them with a spoon. We sit at the table. Cassie feeds Stewy and I feed Ben. Stewy enjoys his breakfast. Ben seems annoyed by it all.

We love to entertain the kids, constantly running and jumping, laughing and making silly noises. They enjoy our feeble attempts at making them laugh and we delight in the joy on their faces as we make complete fools of ourselves. Ben is an excep-

tion to the smiling bunch, but even he seems to get that look in his eyes saying he enjoys us making ourselves look like giddy little children.

Breakfast over, we wheel everyone to the great room where we enjoy some TV time. We watch music videos and dance around the room entertaining the children.

We are also responsible for the chores, cleaning the kitchen and the laundry. Cassie leaves the room to switch the laundry. She is a pretty girl with long blonde hair and deep dark brown eyes. I love her. She has a one-and-a-half year old son named Jason.

She reappears carrying a white basket of laundry and sits down on the couch. I join her and we begin folding the clothes and discussing our morning.

Proceeding to tell her the story of my morning, I complain about the messy little girl that had put a damper on my morning. And then, to top it off, her ruining her new socks!

Cassie's eyes look to the basket, then they wander around the room at the children. She looks at me and says, "Tammy, look around you." Tears well up in her eyes as she speaks. She picks up some socks from the basket. "Look at these socks. Look at the socks on their feet," she points to Katie's... white, all so white." Tears stream down her cheeks as she continues on. "All their socks are white, no dirt, not stains, no holes. They can not walk, they cannot run and their little feet are in seemingly new socks that will never touch the ground."

As she speaks, a lump wells up in my throat and hot tears begin to run down my cheeks. It hasn't occurred to me. I haven't thought of it that way. Why have I been so blind to what was all

around me every day? Why did it take someone else to point this out to me? Why do I take the most special thing in my life for granted?

Cassie continues, "Jason's socks are filthy, stained and often holes appear in them shortly after being bought, but I am thankful. I love his dirty little stained-up socks. I am thankful that he is healthy. He can run, jump and play!"

Eager to leave for the day and pick up my daughter, I rush to the babysitters. When I pull up in the driveway... there she is. My beautiful, amazing little girl. She is outside playing in the dirt, in her new socks, that are not so new any-

more. I run to her as she squeals "Mommy!" with delight. I scoop her up as she says, "Sorry mommy, I got my socks dirty."

Once again tears begin to stream down my face as I pull her close. I kiss her dirt streaked face and I tell her, "Sorry baby, so sorry, mommy was wrong to get upset with you and you can get your

socks dirty any time you want!" I hold her close for a long time, living in the moment and being thankful for every mess that her tiny hands and feet have ever made. Never again, I promise myself, will I take the small things in life for granted.

Have I kept my promise to myself? Not always. Life has a way of catching up, and I forget. But as life goes on and time passes, I am reminded of the socks. My little girl is much bigger and all grown up, she is fourteen and a handful. She now helps herself to *my* socks when she cannot find her own.

How time has flown. I now have five more children. We are foster parents and have a lovely sixteen-year-old foster daughter. I see her as my daughter, and love her as though she were born to me. She is smart, is in Auto tech class and plays rugby. Much to my delight, she washes her own



socks. Next is Destiny. She is vibrant, active and smart, she loves to read. She loves funny socks: bunnies, seasonal, stripes and toe socks. Xabian is my first boy, and all boy he is. He is nearly five and he never stops, he runs jumps and rides his bike, and when he does wear socks, they are always in the dirt and grime. Xaydan is the sweetest little boy, he just turned two and is still all boy. He is silly and loves to snuggle and give hugs. He can point and say "sock!" when you put them on him.

Lastly is our baby girl Xylee. She is beautiful and she is my treasure who gives me the small gems of life that I am so thankful for every day. She is adopted. She has skitzencephaly. Her brain stopped developing at some point during gestation. She has cerebral palsy and was born at 27 weeks, weighing in at a whopping 2 lbs 4.4 ounces. Despite her rough start, she is strong and thriving. She kicks and smiles, making daily improvements. She looks into my eyes and I see and feel her love.

She turned one last week. As I blew out her candle, my wish for her was that someday she might be able to get her socks dirty.

If you have special needs children who don't have dirty little socks, thank-you for your angels on earth. They are the treasures that God sent to teach us all about life. They are my inspiration. They are the reason that God lead my heart to choose to adopt and be blessed by a special needs child.

Do you have a basket of dirty, holey, stained socks? Please be thankful. Be thankful every day. Be thankful for the little things. Look around you and be thankful for all the spilled milk, for all the grimy, sticky little handprints, and most of all, always be

thankful for all those dirty little socks!



Xylee snuggled in her beautiful new Kid Kart Kover made by her mom

Xylee has a wonderful therapist, and she is progressing well. Upon visiting the seating clinic, Xylee's adaptive equipment has been ordered. They have ordered her a stander and her first Kid Cart. Upon viewing the fabric choices for my beautiful little girl I was not pleased. I went ahead and ordered a pink frame and some Kacki and beige fabrics. I do lots of sewing and immediately got some pretty girly fabric and started a new cover for Xylee's kid cart. It has turned out beautiful! It looks so darling and girly. I can make these covers out of any fabric and they would be easily washable. Would any CHASK families be interested in something like this? I am calling them K-4. That stands for, Krea-

tive Kid Kart Kovers. I will also be making any wheelchair covers, walker covers and Snuggies for kid carts and wheelchairs.



Tammy Bellinger
 tammymbell@gmail.com
 (573)694-7036--cell

A Mother's Day Gift with Hannah...

One day I (Gayle) was sick in bed. My little 10 year old daughter, Hannah (who has cerebral palsy and delays), crawled beside me and said, "Mama, let's write a poem." We found a pencil and paper and we began to write. We prayed about who or what this poem should be about.

Words slowly formed in my mind and I began writing them down. Hannah helped with the words, but quickly I realized that the Holy Spirit was involved in this poem.

Jesus was speaking to my daughter. Addressing her little fears, validating her feelings, giving her comfort and encouragement. Showing her the answers to her search for meaning, significance and wholeness. (A journey we all must make).

Gayle and her daughter Hannah live in Southern California. Hannah shares her life with her twin sister, Sarabeth, 10 yrs, Josh, 23, Joe 16, Jon 13 and Wally and his wife Charity (and their 4 children), Brother Jerry and his wife Pam and older sister Noelle and her husband Michael.

Gayle and her husband Don have been married for 32 years. Four of their children are biological and 4 are adopted.

gaylovesbooks@gmail.com
Hannah Miller, age 10
750 Palomino Road
Fallbrook, CA 92028



**Gayle Miller, with Hannah on the right
and Sara on the left**

Hannah's Poem

**My name is Hannah
I have C.P.
Sometimes I'm afraid
But I know God is with me.**

**Sometimes I'm blue
And sometimes I cry
Even when I feel like giving up
I know Jesus wants me to try**

**Try to serve Him and others
And to share about His love,
With those who are discouraged
And need His help from above.**

**C.P. is difficult,
I often stumble and fall,
Sometimes it seems
I can't learn anything at all.**

**But God loves me so
And I'm beginning to see
He can use this great trial
To help mold and shape me.**

**My choice is to serve Him,
With whatever my lot
To love God supremely
Like Jesus taught.**

**My life is a promise
Full of opportunities untold
But one thing for certain
I'll shine forth as Gold.**

**One day in God's timing
We'll meet face to face -
I'll run to His arms
A trophy of His, by His grace.**

**Hannah and Gayle Miller,
Mother's Day, 2010**

NATHHAN / CHASK Resource Room



Christian Homes And Special Kids - Warmly penned, written for parents by parents, with a goal in mind...to raise children with disabilities, who love the Lord. This is a great book to share with new moms, or parents who are facing giving birth to a child with special needs. It is realistic, encouraging and full of a feeling of "Welcome to the world of disability, it's not so bad!"

By Sherry Bushnell and Diane Ryckman.....~~\$17.00~~

Half Price! - \$8.00



God's Special Child - This is the story of a family, working with their son who had Prader Willie syndrome. They candidly share their success and failures. The results are an encouraging book that shows God's faithfulness and the wisdom of following His ways.

By Donna Adee **\$10.00**



Phonics Plain & Simple Part A - includes colors, shapes, left/right and up/down etc.. ABC's, early phonics and the vowels.

No speech or handwriting required, although activities do require pointing or "x's". Comes shrink-wrapped in plastic and drilled for three ring binder. See ad on page 28. Printed on one side only for ease of copying. No tabs or binder included. **147 pages** **\$20.00**



Phonics Plain & Simple Part B - includes review of vowels, consonants, consonant blends, and early words

No speech or handwriting required, although activities do require pointing or "x's". Comes shrink wrapped in plastic and drilled for three ring binder. Printed on one side only for ease of copying. No tabs or binder included. See ad on page 28. **204 pages** **\$30.00**



Individual Education Planning Manual For the Homeschool Handicapped Student - IEPs are now easy! Create your child's professional looking IEP specific to the special needs of your student.

By Deborah Mary Kathleen Mills **\$67.00**

NATHHAN / CHASK Resource Room

Quantity	Item	Price	Total
	CHASK Book	\$8.00	
	God's Special Child	\$10.00	
	Phonics Plain & Simple Part A	\$20.00	
	Phonics Plain & Simple Part B	\$30.00	
	1st Straight Talk (See page 11)	\$45.00	
	1st Straight Talk with DVD	\$55.00	
	2nd Straight Talk (See page 12)	\$45.00	
	I.E.P. Planner By Debbie Mills	\$67.00	
	Please renew my NATHHAN membership with this order	\$25.00	
	Donation to NATHHAN / CHASK	\$ _____	
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Please e-mail your ad to nathanews@aol.com and send a check. Ads must be received by the deadline date below, to be printed in upcoming issues. Please phone first, as we fill up very fast.

We hope you understand... we reserve the right to refuse ads we feel are inappropriate. (Please, no multi-level style products or companies.) \$500/ full page, \$250 / half page, \$125/quarter. Deadline dates: Sept 15th, March 15th. Please call to verify ad space and arrangements.

Phonics Plain & Simple

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Part A - includes colors, shapes, left/right and up/down, etc., abc's, early phonics (the vowels). \$20.00 Postage is included in the price. (No tabs, or binder, it is 147 pages)

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e-mail: s.d.jolly@att.net

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FREE MATH LESSONS

I just wanted to drop a quick note to tell you about a new website that makes learning math fun and easy. There are over 28 hours of video tutorials, and hundreds of printed worksheets. I have included a link for free lessons.

<http://americasmathteacher.com>

Home school parents are very excited about this program, they say it's like having a personal math tutor available 24/7!

All About Spelling

I've been using the All About Spelling program with my two children for about 2 years.

All About Spelling (www.AllAboutSpelling.com) is a step-by-step multisensory program that helps struggling spellers. It has made a huge difference in our homeschool!

.....

Christian Birth Doula

I just wanted to let your group know about my services as a Christian birth doula. I definitely support your ministry, and would help mothers and families who face daunting decisions surrounding pregnancy, birth, and beyond, with special needs children. I also support homeschooling. If you know of anyone who could use help in their birth, or pregnancy with support and caretaker referrals, please let me know.

Bethany Russell, Certified Birth Doula (AVIVA)
Phone: (216) 459-9148
email: doulabethany@yahoo.com

(A birth doula is a person trained and experienced in child-birth who provides continuous physical, emotional and informational support to the mother before, during and just after child-birth.)

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www.comeunity.com

Adoption, Special Needs and Parenting Support - This outstanding parenting site provides hundreds of definitive articles, resource directories, expert interviews and exclusive book reviews on parenting, adoption and children's special needs.

.....



Featuring CHASK children and families

www.youtube.com/user/spiritwingsmusic

H2O Productions and Spirit Wings Music in association with CHASK, Presents: Somebody Loves Me.....a promotional DVD.

Recording artist Rebecca Huseby and Managing Editor: H2O Productions, Lee Haarstick, are proud to dedicate this presentation to the promotion of CHASK: For Rebecca's product list or order information, contact Rebecca at

spiritwingsmusic.com

Special-Heart Ministries

I wanted to let you know about my website at www.special-heart.com
(See her book review on page 48, A Never-Give-Up Heart.)

Please pass it on to any parents who have kids with "harder-than-average" challenges. This does not necessarily mean "special needs," but any challenge that makes life a little (or maybe a lot!) more challenging for the kids and the parents.

If you go to the site, and if you are so inclined, I would really appreciate it if you would sign the "guest book" at the bottom of the welcome page. When I had my blog, I noticed that visitors are reluctant to leave comments UNLESS they see that others have left comments before them. Thank you for taking a look. I'd love to hear from parents at bev@specialheart.com
Love in Christ,

Bev Linder

Precision Songs

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Visit our blog site which explores church inclusion of the disabled - autism in particular.

Arlyn Kantz 817-294-9441

www.precisionsongs.com

ADOPTION CHRONICLES

--- A new and innovative system
Allowing waiting children to speak for themselves, to prospective adoptive parents.

Videos give kids a voice in adoption

Find out more about creating a "family chronicle" at 698-3888 or www.keeninnovations.com

A Raleigh-area woman adopted three teenage boys after viewing their "adoption chronicles," created by Greensboro-based Keen Innovations, said Cindy Knul, director of recruitment outreach for the Children's Home Society of North Carolina.

The woman said that if she had just read their profiles, she wouldn't have adopted them, Knul said.

In another case, a "family chronicle" the company made for Lori Moller's family swayed a North Carolina adoption panel to choose them over three other families, Moller said. "You can read a piece of paper. You can look at a picture," said Moller, 40, of Woodstock, Ga. "But a video...it has more impact."

Keen Innovations started the "adoption chronicles" about two years ago after owner Dustin Keene ran into Knul. He had bought the Web site for adoption-chronicles.com after seeing a photographer donating pictures for adoption profiles. Keene, who had already started chronicling the lives of schoolchildren as they grow up to create family keepsakes, wanted to use the concept to help children waiting for adoption.

"We believe they have the right to speak for themselves," Keene said.

Traditionally, families look through portfolios that include social worker reports, photos and other information on the children. Families looking to adopt compile similar profiles for examination by adoption agencies, foster families and caregivers.

"Sometimes people read what social workers have

written on a piece of paper and it doesn't fairly represent a child's day," Knul said.

She recently saw a child's profile that hadn't been updated in three years. So it didn't show the child had been through therapy to deal with issues in the report, Knul said.

So far, grants have paid for the DVDs, which cost about \$300 each to make and copy. But that has limited how many children can get them. Knul would like to get sponsors so more children can participate.

Keene also encourages families looking at adoption to consider a family chronicle.

The Mollers found out in April that their family chronicle had helped them get picked to adopt siblings, a boy, 7, and a girl, 6. The adoption still needs to be finalized. The Mollers visit the kids every few weekends and talk every day by phone.

Before they even met, though, the children already knew them through the DVD, Moller said.

They knew about the Mollers' older son, who was adopted from Russia two years ago, and about Ruby, the dog. They knew how Lori laughs and that her husband, Peter, speaks with a deep voice. The video did more than pave the way for the adoption; it smoothed the way for that first meeting.

"If you can't be there in person to make your own case," Moller said, "you've got a video to do it."

ADOPTION CHRONICLES

Address: Keen Innovations, LLC
602 S. Elam Ave.
Greensboro, NC 27403

Contact us: Info@AdoptionChronicles.com
336-698-3888

Visit our other sites: Our corporate home site is
www.KeenInnovations.com
www.SchoolKidChronicles.com



Victoria Christina Marie Brown **May 27, 2008 - February 22, 2010**

Dear Friends at NATHHAN / CHASK,

Here is a picture of our special little Victoria. This picture was taken 1 day before she left to be with Jesus.

She was very much loved, not only by her family but by all who cared for her. Staff at Children's Hospital were in shock over Victoria's sudden death. I received a letter from a social worker at the hospital who talked about how much she was loved and how doctors began to change the way they felt in regards to suffering.

Victoria was happiest at home with her family, playing with her sisters and watching me cook. She brought our family very close together - including Raymond's sister. Victoria changed them into different people - more forgiving and understanding. Our family now understands in a deeper way about helping others.

Thank you, CHASK, for allowing Raymond and me to adopt Victoria. I will always repeat that phone call in my heart.

Our little girl died at home, as I asked the Lord not to let her die at the hospital. In death, Victoria was peaceful. No pain, only love on her face.

Raymond and Belinda Brown
9624 N Hoover Rd.
Hesston, KS 67062



Timothy Lichtenburg

WHAT is the TRUE VALUE of LIFE?

By Diane Lichtenburg

I have a special story to share, which brings the value of each person's life alive in an even deeper way. After 2 miscarriages in 2008, God blessed our family with Timothy Richard on August 11, 2009. He has Down Syndrome. He is an incredible blessing and a joy to me and to our whole family!! Look at the picture above. See how his face lights up. He breaks into the most tremendous smiles that I've ever seen!! I am so excited to see how God will show His love through Timothy. I believe he will show God's love to others without inhibitions. I believe he will be more pure in motive than I could ever hope to be, and I believe that I will be humbled and learn an incredible amount from Timothy!!

Timothy has already had some challenges. When he was born, he ended up on oxygen in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, because his lungs weren't fully developed (even though he was full term and over eight pounds). He had pulmonary hypertension due to his lack of lung capacity. In the NICU, I learned an invaluable lesson of which I continue to remind myself.

There was a particular baby across from Timothy who did not receive visits (as far as I had seen) from his parents. I was at the hospital for a good num-

ber of hours each day, and day after day I never saw this child's parents. I felt very sad for this child. But, as I watched the skilled nurses snuggle him, feed him, and hold him against their body as if he was their own, I was amazed!! I looked around at some of the very tiny babies that had been born a month or more premature. I suddenly realized that aside from God deciding to take one of these precious children to be with Him, their survival was dependent upon the nurture, love, and medical care that they received!!

At that moment, I suddenly realized how important my job as a mother was!! I amazingly realized that my efforts of nurturing, loving, and attentive care taking of my children was invaluable!! If they could die from lack of love and affection (since the nurses purposefully spent the extra time to cuddle the babies whose parents weren't around), then how could the love and nurture that they're given ever be awarded a price tag? Life is priceless, and so is our efforts as mothers!!

When I was pregnant with Timothy, we did not know that he had Down Syndrome. We did not have an amniocentesis done, and the ultrasound did not show any abnormalities. As a matter-of-fact, he moved around so much that the ultrasound technician mentioned that she could hardly record his measurements and other various information! Even though I didn't know that Timothy had Down Syndrome, the Lord prepared me with the words to speak to my nurse for when Timothy would be born. I was still initially surprised when I looked into his eyes and realized that he had Down Syndrome, but then I was full of joy and hopeful expectation of how he would change our lives for the better! I was able to tell the nurse how God had prepared me for Timothy's arrival and how He had given me a willing spirit to have a child with a disability! I am still amazed as I type this!!

It was shortly after, that I began to realize that my greatest sense of worth is when I am not trying to be anything other than God's servant! When I focus on loving and serving my husband, my children, and others – without

wanting recognition or appreciation – I am so free and feel incredibly blessed that God allows me to do His work and allows me to be a vessel that His love can flow through to others in need. These are my greatest accomplishments -- when I choose to become nothing so God can be everything to me and to everyone whose life I touch!

In the same way, any child with disabilities is just as priceless, because God created him or her!! God prepared me for Timothy's arrival by helping me to pray for a willing heart to have a child with disabilities. Sherry Bushnell (whom I first "met" through a story she wrote which was published in an Above Rubies magazine) had stated in a document that I had read, that one should be willing to adopt children with disabilities. So, I prayed that the Lord would help us to be willing to adopt a child with disabilities. I realized that it would be easier to do this if we had already experienced one of our own, so I prayed that the Lord would open our hearts to be willing to have a child born with a disability of some sort, if that was His will.

There are times that I feel discouraged about our situation. I counter this attack from the enemy reminding myself that Jesus stayed under His Father's authority and obeyed Him. I look up a verse to take this truth into my heart. Philippians 2:5-8 comes alive in my heart: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!"

Suddenly, my prideful heart is exposed. At the root of my desires for an income, a title, recognition, power, and authority is really my pride!! I confess my sins to the Lord and realize that I've bought into the lie (again) of valuing worldly approval versus God's approval. I am put to shame when I really try to grasp what Jesus gave up to come to this earth and be the Savior of the world!! As He speaks to me through His Word and by His Holy Spirit, I realize that my value is in the fact that Jesus loves me, lives in me, and works through me!! I realize that my value is in the fact that He created me!!! Wow!

God has truly given me an unquenchable

desire and passion to help Timothy feel His love and acceptance! I am still amazed at how excited I am to see what Timothy will do and say and how he'll help others to know the love of Jesus!

God put a song in my heart that I wrote down while I was in the NICU with Timothy while he was sleeping. I would like to record this song and give it to birthing centers across the United States for free, so they can give it to anyone who has a child born with Down Syndrome or any other disability. It helped me when we received a packet of information at the hospital from the Down Syndrome Association for free, but they didn't include anything about how God values each life. My hope and prayer is that this song will touch many lives with an understanding of the tremendously special blessing that they have been given in a child with disabilities.

Here is Timothy's Song

When I looked into your eyes and realized that God had a special plan for your life; it meant more to me than I can say, more to me than I can say...

**Refrain: Because I knew that you would help us to grow, and I knew that you would let your love flow in ways I'd never known.
I can't wait to take you home.**

**I get excited to learn what you will like to do. It's a privilege for us to take care of you. You'll be such a joy to have with us,
such a joy to have with us...**

**Refrain: Because I know that you will help us to grow, and I know that you will let your love flow in ways I've never known.
I can't wait to take you home.**

**When the challenges come to us along the way, I want to see them through God's eyes every-day. We can reach new heights of faith and love,
reach new heights of faith and love...**

(Note: If you are interested in making a donation for the production and free distribution of "Timothy's Song", please send your donation to NATHHAN / CHASK, with a note in the Memo portion of your check stating that it's for "Timothy's Song".)

It is already so fun to see the improvements Timothy is making in strength and ability! I appreciate it so much more than I did with our other nine children, because I'm not taking it for granted! For Timothy, holding his head up at first was a challenge. But, as we incorporated the exercises that an Occupational Therapist from the hospital (who also cross functions as a Physical Therapist) showed me to do, he has improved by leaps and bounds!! Now, he is almost sitting up by himself and can do various other activities! How exciting!!

Shortly after Timothy was born, woman asked me if we were going to have any more children. Before I had a chance to answer, she said, "Probably not, right?" Understanding her confusion, I responded to her with an emphatic, "I hope that God will bless us with more children! I don't believe that Timothy is a mistake. I believe that God chose to make him the way he is." I went on to tell her that I believed that Timothy will bless many people and be able to show love to others in ways that we can't, because he won't have the same inhibitions. I told her how I've always been blessed when I see people with Down Syndrome, because I usually see a huge smile on their face, and they have a special innocence that we don't. She agreed.

Thank you for helping people who need encouragement to understand the blessing of each child regardless of capabilities. For our worth and value is not in what we achieve in life, but in surrendering ourselves to being the person God created us to be and letting His love flow through our lives to touch others, as I'm learning!



Lichtenburg Family

David - Electrical Engineer/Project Manager

Diane - very blessed homeschooling mom!

Eric, 16 -- enjoys researching information to refute evolution, plays guitar and is learning to play the banjo to accommodate his growing interest in Bluegrass music

Ashley, 14 -- plays the flute and is very artistic and uses her ability to draw, paint, decorate cakes, and various other things including scrapbooking)

Benjamin, 10 -- is very helpful and initiates "cleaning parties" at various times! He also enjoys conducting church services and preaching to his younger brothers and sisters from time to time.

Emily, 9 -- like a little mommy, she is incredibly helpful with her three youngest siblings! She is the first one to run to Timothy if she hears an unpleasant squawk from him! She can be found reading during any moment that she finds free.

Matthew, 8 -- loves fish, frogs, and turtles, and is a very gifted nature artist! He has also helped to motivate younger siblings to clean.)

Stephanie, 6 -- is our very affectionate child who loves to give and receive hugs, which is such a special blessing! For a while, she would say, "I love you as much as Timothy," to show the extent of her love for me!

Daniel, 5 -- is very smart and has already picked up on reading long vowel words and subtracting single digit numbers from two digit numbers -- sometimes in his head! He has lots of energy and can be very self-motivated at times.

Hannah, 4 -- is a bouncy, energetic girl who enjoys playing with her younger sister, Amber. She enjoys her preschool work and will be reading in the near future.

Amber, 2 -- is also a bouncy, sweet girl who has shown signs of being an actress-in-the-making! She and Hannah are two peas in a pod, and both love Timothy dearly and shower him with kisses!

Timothy, 9-- months -- is our precious little boy with Down Syndrome who lights up our days with his tremendous smiles!

Letters From Families



Philip and Dawn Wollcot and daughters
 pwolcotts@juno.com

Best Things In Life are Worth Waiting For

On 4-18-2005 our first foster daughter was brought to our house and placed in my arms with the now infamous words, "Here you go, Mom. Got any questions?" These last five years were nothing less than a journey of faith. Sometimes, often times, it was blind faith as we groped in the dark not knowing what would happen next. It could be a burst of sunshine, or it could feel like the bottom just dropped out on our amusement ride. If we had known how difficult the dark days were going to be we might have said "no, thank you" but we would have missed so many times of laughter.

Foster care is by definition short term care for children with another family until they can be returned to their first family. Five years later Lillian Faith, the name we have chosen for her, is still here. We are still awaiting a decision from the state appellate court about her being "fully freed" for adoption. We continue to walk in faith that this beautiful child who turned five last week will be a permanent legal member of our family by the end of the year.

Lillian was diagnosed before she was two with autism and ADHD. The days when she growls, throws things at your face or can only eat if she is fed like a baby are few and far between now but those days still happen. It is a good reminder to us of how far she has come and how much she has

taught us about herself and her needs.

Successes for her can come in small but slow doses. Today she went to Sunday School and church for the first time. For two hours she was with her peers and separated from us. She can now take a shower without screaming and digging herself until she bleeds. If you ask her what her name is she can answer, "Lillian Faith Wolcott". We got some funny looks from some of her previous answers, "Yellow", "My train is number one", "dirty diaper". Ok, those are big successes but we did wait a long time to see them.

Lillian's latest way to get our attention is to yell, "Who loves me?!" It is then a mad race to see who can raise their hand the fastest. This little girl has given us so much in such a short time. She gives BIG, strong, squeeze-your-head-off hugs and her smile forces you to smile back. Throwing her head back and laughing about pure silliness is a gift that she loves to share. I truly believe when she laughs so does God.

Wherever you are in this earthly walk, take a moment to think about where you are. This may not be the place that you wanted or expected to be. I certainly didn't think that I would be permanently parenting children who are younger than my grandchildren. It is a different place than I expected but it is a very good place. I just wanted to remind you that sometimes, often times, the best things in life are unexpected and worth waiting for

.....

I need help concerning homeschooling, OT, PT and ST

I am a new member of NATHHAN. I have a child who will be turning three in September and is supposed to be transitioned into the early childhood program in the public school. She is currently receiving these services through the Birth to Three program here in Wisconsin.

I homeschool 4 other children--also special needs and DO NOT want her going to school. She is in the Birth to Three because she was a foster child and it was not my decision in the past. She is now all mine and I want to reclaim her. She is delayed in all areas of development but has no official diagnosis. She is just starting to take steps and

does not talk at all.

She sees a neurologist that recently told me that she, "may just NEED to go to school." I have watched every single therapy since she was only a few weeks old and I feel totally qualified to do it on my own.

I need help knowing how to proceed with the training and also with the "EXPERTS."
 Carol Stuhlt caremare2003@peoplepc.com



Math Resource for Homeschoolers


I wanted to let you know about a new Math Teacher Resource site that was just launched - called "TeacherZone". "TeacherZone" is a free resource for Teachers and Homeschooling Parents, and has thousands of free math video lessons for Grades 3-10. It's available at <http://teacher.tenmarks.com>

Thousands of homeschoolers and teachers have signed up for the free service over the last few days, and the feedback has been just phenomenal. They love how they can use the videos as part of the study session and share with kids to help them explain the concepts after. Parents who've used TeacherZone like how they can quickly find the right lesson, show it to the kids, share it by email and other ways - to help with homework and much more.

If it makes sense, can you let your homeschooling community know about the site.



As families working with challenging students, I'd love to get your feedback on the site. If you have a few minutes, can you please check it out. <http://teacher.tenmarks.com>
 Thanks, Andrew Joseph, Co-Founder and President TenMarks Education, Inc.

PS: You can follow us on Twitter. http://www.twitter.com/teacher_zone



Mercy Kyree Beach

03/17/08 - 03/1/10

Now I'm Free

When I am gone, release me, let me go...
 I have so many things to see and so.
 You mustn't tie yourself to me with tears.
 Be happy we had these few years.

I gave you my love, you can only guess
 How much you gave to me in happiness.
 I think you for the love you each have shown
 But now it's time I travel on alone.

I'm following the path God laid for me.



I took His hand when I heard Him call.
 I turned my back and left it all.
 I couldn't stay another day
 To smile and be with you all.

If my parting has left a void
 Then fill it with remembered joy;
 A love we shared, a hug, a kiss
 Ah, yes these things I know you'll miss

Be not burdened with times of sorrow.
 I wish you the sunshine of tomorrow.
 My life's been full, I savored much
 Good friends, good times, a loved one's touch.

Perhaps my time seemed all too brief.
 Don't lengthen it with undue grief.
 Lift up your heart and share with me.
 God wanted me now

He set me free.



Support for families who have adopted.

Chosen International is a faith based nonprofit organization reaching out to teen adoptees and their parents with emotional support and educational resources.

Ginger Clausen, Board member,
Chosen International daveclausen6@msn.com

As our adopted children hit their teens we were faced with some very challenging behaviors that, frankly, caused me to burn out for about two years. Learning disabilities are one of the problems we faced, but much more serious than that were identity issues. Our oldest daughter, whose learning disabilities were mild, seemed to hit a wall at about 14 years old. She had arrived at four months old with attachment disorder, but she had a happy childhood until she turned 14. She became angry and depressed. We visited many counselors, but it wasn't until we found one that specialized in adoption that we really found the help she needed. At about the same time we discovered Chosen International, which supports teen adoptees and their parents. She is now almost 20 years old and is happy and progressing in her life. Dave and I are now on the board of Chosen, and so is the Christian therapist we found for her!

Chosen is hosting a camp for teens who have been adopted from June 17th-20th at Eagle Fern Camp in Estacada, Oregon. It's about 45 minutes away from Portland. The camp is \$135 and it's for ages 13-18. Our three youngest attended last summer and all three came away encouraged.

The conference is at our church in Clackamas, Oregon- Spring Mountain Bible Church. Our church family has been a huge support for us and they are rallying around Chosen now, too. Five of the board members are members of our church, but Chosen actually started in southern Oregon in Grants Pass. God is using Chosen to help hurting teens and as people see

the difference in our kids they spread the word.

My friend Mary's daughter melted at the conference two years ago- I could see it happen from several rows behind them- she was defiant and angry (but still a good kid), but she visibly melted (I could see her neck/shoulders soften) when she heard Stephanie Fast's life story, the story of her rescue and adoption and rebellion against her parents and finally, how God worked in her life to heal her.

"Something extraordinary happens when adoptees connect with one another. There is an unspoken bond. A feeling of camaraderie. A reassurance of being understood. A sense of belonging. This may be difficult for the non-adopted person to understand, but there is something almost mystical that happens when two or more adoptees gather together."

- Sherrie Eldridge

*"I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, 'You are my servant'; I have **chosen** you and have not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.." Isaiah 41:9-10; God gave me these verses as a lifeline long before He gave me children.*



Clausen Family

Life With Julia

Article by Jessica Allinger, daughter of Ruth Allinger, NATHHAN / CHASK's adoption worker.

To the Least of These

" 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me' " (Matthew 25:37-40).

To the majority of our culture, she is worthless. She is three years old and still cannot walk or talk. She must be fed through a G-tube. She has poor muscle tone and very limited mobility. Her spine is curving, and her hips are moving out of place. In addition, her brain is showing signs of atrophy. If she does survive past early childhood, she will still be severely disabled. She will never be like her strong brothers and sisters. She will never be able to contribute much to society. This is Julia, and Julia is adopted. Why would a family who already had eight healthy children adopt a disabled child? What is it like to adopt a disabled child? The idea of caring for a child with disabilities can be scary. Maybe by learning more about Julia and her family, I will learn to see beyond my fear, to see why others are willing to adopt a child with disabilities.

Jerri Unruh met me at the door with a warm smile and invited me in. She led me over to where Julia lay in her crib near the kitchen, her little black dog curled up at her side. Julia's eyes were almost closed, and she was making a moaning, crying sound. Jerri explained that she had been making that sound lately, but they weren't sure why. The rest of the house was busy with daily life. Several little kids were playing, a friend of Jerri's was cleaning the kitchen, and her friend's college-age daughter was working on algebra at the counter. The Unruhs homeschool, and piles of schoolbooks covered the dining table. Jerri and I sat down at one end of the large wooden

table, and I spent the next 45 minutes learning more about Julia and her family.

The Unruhs are part of an organization called CHASK--Christian Homes And Special Kids. CHASK is a non-profit organization that helps find adoptive families for children with disabilities. On August 23, 2007, Jerri had called the CHASK office to learn about any new kids that were needing homes. The Unruhs weren't planning to adopt at that point, but Jerri wanted to pray for the children that CHASK was trying to place. One of the children described to her stood out-- Julia. Julia's birth mom was too young to care for her, so Julia was currently in a private foster home in Arizona. She had to be fed through a G-tube--a tube inserted directly into the stomach through the abdomen. After talking with her husband, Jim, and praying together, Jim told Jerri to go ahead and start filling out the paperwork. In addition to paperwork, the Unruhs had to have a home study done, part of which required all those over age eighteen to be fingerprinted. They also needed to find a lawyer to help make sure all the paperwork was in order. The adoption would have gone faster if the home study had already been done before they decided to pursue adopting Julia, but it wasn't. In addition, Jim had been having some health problems, so Jerri had rescheduled the fingerprinting. These problems caused some delay in bringing Julia home, but, as Jerri told me, "God's timing is perfect."

Adopting Julia turned out to be more than paperwork and a home study. Jerri had previously worked with disabled children and even had practice working with a feeding tube, but she was not comfortable adopting a child with seizures, which she noted on the CHASK application. The two families who had previously agreed to adopt Julia had backed out; the Unruh



The Unruh family

family was next in line. Then they got a phone call from Arizona: Julia had been seizing over the weekend. The very disability they did not want. But, as Jerri told me, the fear didn't matter anymore. They had chosen Julia. They had not been looking to adopt when Julia came up, but now here she was.

"She's mine." Jerri said. "God placed her here. . . . I'm so blessed by her every day."

In October of 2007 Jim and Jerri, along with their youngest child, nineteen-month-old daughter Lily, went down to *Arizona*. They arrived back home with Julia on October 14. Then, on the 23rd, Julia's G-tube came out. She was sent to Spokane, where it was discovered that the G-tube had not been placed properly back in Arizona. Jerri took me over to where Julia lay in her crib and showed me the scar from the first G-tube. I felt it gently. It was too high up on her stomach, too close to her ribs. The doctors in Spokane replaced it, lower this time. Although the Unruhs knew that Julia had seizures, she had never been formally diagnosed. While in Spokane, an EEG was performed, and Julia was diagnosed with Ohtahara Syndrome, also called Early Infantile Epileptic Encephalopathy. In other words, Julia has a severe seizure disorder. Many children with Ohtahara Syndrome do not live past their first year. Some do, but they are severely disabled and usually die in childhood. The doctors did not expect Julia to live long.

After three weeks in Spokane, Julia was able to come back home. In January of 2008, the adoption was finalized, and Julia Hope officially joined the Unruh family.

Julia continued to grow, although development was slow. She did not smile until she was eight months old. She also gained weight, though still using a feeding tube. Trouble with choking sometimes required suctioning, something Jerri became proficient at. In one of her "Life With Julia" articles for the NATHHAN/CHASK news-

letter, Jerri writes:

A common occurrence around here is to be responding to Julia's choking emergency with the suction machine, while at the same time being asked, "Mom, where is my math?" or "Hey Mom, can I have a cookie?" To which one of two things happen, #1 I respond with, "You left it on the washing machine." or "No, you can't have a cookie, wait for dinner."

OR #2, I hysterically say, "Please, can't you see this is life or death?!"

The hospital staff in Spokane was surprised that the Unruhs

would adopt Julia, knowing she had serious medical concerns. Even relatives could not understand their decision. Jim Unruh writes in an article for the NATHHAN/CHASK newsletter: "We have heard things like, 'How can you do this to yourselves and your family? Isn't there someone else who can raise it?'" The Unruhs feel very differently. "IT!!" Jim writes, "her name is Julia, not IT!"

The birth mom could not keep Julia, and two families had already backed out. No one would have blamed the Unruhs if they had decided to as well. So why did they adopt Julia? Jim writes: "It's very simple. That's what God did for us! For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. (Rom5:6)" God had called them to adopt Julia, and that settled it.

I asked Jerri how the other kids had responded to adopting Julia. She replied that their reaction had been very positive.. The kids love to cuddle and kiss her. In one of her "Life With Julia" articles, Jerri gives an example of what she's heard at home from the little kids: "...Momma, Juya having seezers; mom, come quick she coughed, how can I help? I'll turn on the suction and get some water to clean it when your done; she's so beautiful, can I kiss her?"

Julia is now three years old. When I asked Jerri how Julia is doing, she laughed and said "Her hair is really long!" When Julia was eight months old, she was floppy, like an infant. Now she can



Baby Julia

hold her head up a bit, and she can move her limbs some. Julia is still fed through the G-tube, although she is able to eat a little. Jerri explained that Julia can't eat enough to be off the feeding tube, but she can eat for recreational purposes, for sensory stimulation. She has speech therapy to help with swallowing, and she continues to receive occupational therapy several times a month.

While Julia has made progress, she still has many difficulties. Her spine is curving, and her hips are moving out of position. Her vision also seems to be worsening. Her latest brain MRI shows spaces in her brain that were not there previously, a sign of brain atrophy. Julia will likely never walk.

She cannot talk, and she is unable to show much personality, an ability that most two-year-olds possess. The long-term prognosis isn't very bright.

The Unruhs know that Julia will never be like their other children. Therefore, they do not have the same expectations for her. Jerri summed it up when she said: "She's Julia, and this is life with Julia." Even three-year-old Lily seems to understand that Julia is different. She doesn't expect Julia to walk like other children she knows. In the evenings, Jerri likes to sit and hold Julia. That means other things may not get done, but, as she told me, in the light of eternity, the other things don't matter. The cleaning will still be there tomorrow, and the day after that, and the year after that. Julia needs someone to love her now.

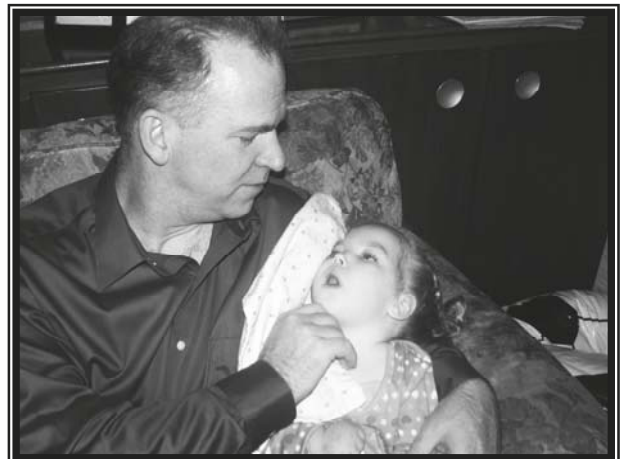
What about other children with disabilities? According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway website, it is estimated that 30-50% of children waiting to be adopted have some type of developmental disability. Unlike a child who can develop normally, a developmentally disabled child will require more care.

Adopting a child like Julia requires a long-term commitment because many of these children will never be able to care for themselves. Many times, families who adopt developmentally disabled children already have a large number of other children. They already have experience with parenting as well as with the medical and school systems. The CWIG website says: "The motivation shifts for these families from wanting to adopt infants to form a family to providing for the quality of life for additional family members." Caring for a disabled child takes time and patience. Quoting from The Special Child Handbook, CWIG notes that an

important characteristic is "You are able to view people for what they can accomplish, not what they cannot, and you value them according to their own potentials." However, for those like the Unruh family who do adopt a special needs child, the rewards far outweigh the costs.

Jerri says in one "Life With Julia" article: "When we were first made aware of Julia I felt that we needed her as much as she needed us." CWIG echoes this: "Those who have adopted children with disabilities feel that they receive more from the experience than they give."

I concluded my interview with Jerri, and stood up to go. As I walked past the crib, Julia was finally sleeping, her porcelain-like face calm. I left the Unruhs' home that day with more than pages of scrawled notes. I left with some lessons I hope to never forget. I learned that love overcomes fear. Love wins out over the fear of adopting a child with special needs. Love keeps you going even when other people don't understand your decision. Love gives you the strength to give up personal comfort for someone else. Oh, the uncertainty will still show up some days, but it will be controlled by love. The Bible says ". . . perfect love casts out fear . . ." Learning about Julia, her triumphs and her struggles, her life, has made me wonder if I, too, may someday be called to love one of the least of these, one of the little ones whom the rest of the world might consider worthless.



Julia and her Daddy

Embryos with potential special needs looking for loving Mommy

CHASK supports a parent's decision to adopt embryos that need a mommy and daddy.

Couples who have gone through fertility treatments such as in vitro fertilization (IVF), often have embryos that were not placed in the mom, cryopreserved or frozen for future family building.

When these couples complete their families and their embryos remain, they are faced with the daunting task of deciding what to do with their embryos.

Did you know that there is an estimated over half a million embryos currently cryopreserved in the United States? Sadly, there are limited options for these embryos.

1. Couples can thaw and discard their embryos.
2. Offer them to scientific research
3. Donate them to another couple.

Many couples believe embryo donation and adoption is the most life honoring solution to this difficult choice. There are a handful of adoption organizations and a limited number of IVF clinics which facilitate embryo donation and adoption.

The National Embryo Donation Center

(NEDC), a non-profit organization located in Knoxville, TN, is one such agency that supports a family's choice to preserve life. They are also the only organization that handles the medical, legal and social requirements of embryo donation and adoption all in one location. And, being true to its mission, the NEDC accepts ALL embryos from donors across the country, including those deemed "special consideration."

Embryos regarded as special consideration include those whose genetic family reveals potential for a known genetic defect. Carol Sommerfelt, an Embryologist at the NEDC shares, "If a donor couple has a child that has a genetic defect, then the embryos become special needs embryos."

Other embryos classified as special consideration include embryos that may have undergone Preimplantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD) which revealed a genetic defect, and those whose genetic parents tested positive for sexually transmitted dis-



eases (STD), including hepatitis or HIV.

To date, however, no STD has been contracted through donated embryos. Whether an embryo has a genetic defect or a potential for a defect, the NEDC believes *all embryos deserve a chance for life* and hopes to find adoptive families for all their donated embryos, including those with special needs.

"Of the approximately 1,200 embryos stored at the NEDC, 14 "sets" of embryos, from 14 donor couples, are designated as special consideration / special needs, and are needing to be adopted," said Clydene Elkins, NEDC Patient Coordinator.

Since the NEDC's inception in 2003, only one "set" of special needs embryos have ever been adopted. That couple is pregnant and due in June with twins. "We work very hard to assure all embryos are placed in good homes," Elkins added, pointing out the following requirements.

The adopting mother must be healthy and able to carry a child to term. The adopting family must be a married couple that has successfully completed a comprehensive evaluation and education process, and meet the following criteria:

- Couples must be married for a minimum of 3 years.
- Wife must be 45 years old or younger.
- The combined age of applicant couple must not exceed 100 years.

- The wife must not smoke during the application process, embryo transfer preparation and procedure process, or during pregnancy.
- Preference will be given to couples with no biological children.
- At least one partner of the adopting couple must be a legal citizen of the United States. Couples must undergo and pass a home study.

The Center offers a variety of placement options for donor couples – from anonymous to open, with every varying level in between. Donors are not compensated for their embryos.

Couples who choose to adopt embryos do so for a variety of reasons. Often times there are infertility issues with one or both partners or a history of multiple pregnancy losses not associated with uterine or implantation issues.

“Think of the thousands of couples who experience the anguish of not being able to have children,” said Jeffrey Keenan, Medical Director of the NEDC. “Many of these couples are hoping and praying to bear children, but they are not candidates for in-vitro fertilization. For them, the solution is embryo adoption,” he said.

The process generally takes between eight months to a year to complete, with the cost ranging from \$6 – 8,000 for the first cycle. In any type of donation – anonymous or open – the legal relationship between donor and recipient is decided *before* the donation occurs.

Based on current law, “adoption” only refers to the placement of a child after birth. Therefore, instead of using adoption laws, legal agreements are used to govern the process of embryo adoption and are as binding as an adoption.

Once the embryos have been transferred, the genetic parents have no legal claim to any resultant children. Birth parents will be the parents cited on the birth certificate. The contract agreement and relinquishment forms are legally binding between the two families.

The NEDC recommends donors and recipients learn as much as possible about embryo donation and adoption through the websites www.embryodonation.org and www.embryoconnection.org

Accepting to adopt a special needs embryo does not ensure a child will be born with a genetic defect or without a defect. For some adop-



tive parents, however, this is a chance they are willing to make for the sake of giving all embryos a chance at life. Listed below are a few of our special consideration embryos waiting to be adopted.

Please contact Clydene Elkins at 865-777-2013 for more information.

Profiles of the NEDC Special Consideration Embryos

Donor 1262

Male twins born from same group of embryos with spina bifida. Three years later a female was born without any genetic defects from the same group of embryos. Third cousin also with spina bifida. Race: Caucasian

Donor 1280

Sickle Cell Anemia Trait for Female Donor, Grandmother, and Brother. Race: Bi-racial – African American and English

Donor 1333

Male Donor: Family history of Muscular Dystrophy for mother, brother & sister. Son from same group of embryos born, with autism and Eosinophilic Esophagitis.



God's Special Child

What is it like to sit on the sand,
Spilling the crystals through your hand
While others shout and splash and play
In the water day after day?

What is it like to not be able to speak,
To have no way week after week
Of letting us know how you feel or why,
To depend on us guessing after many a try?

What is it like when all are rushing around
Ignoring your incoherent attempts at sound,
Pushing forward to each new, exciting height:
While you cannot advance, try as you might?

What is it like to know no fear,
To not really care if Mom or Dad is near,
To live in a world that is all your own,
Your thoughts and desires a mystery unknown?

Oh small, sweet child, we love you so!
Sometimes our hearts break, and yet we know
That God the Creator and Ruler of lands
Has always held you safely in His loving, powerful hands.

Rebecca Bennett

in loving memory

Moriah Rebekah Bennett

03/23/94 - 11/03/09

Facing the Future and Letting Go...

By Becky Bennett (Moriah's mom)
andybeckybennett@sbcglobal.net

Have you heard comments like, "You must be special parents for God to have chosen you to have this special needs child."

I never found this terribly comforting. The reality of day-to-day with a child who could not walk or talk was anything but heroic. Since Moriah did not have a diagnosis of anything except that her head was small and the brain underdeveloped, we had no map to follow. We did not have success stories to tell over 15 years of many therapies and countless hours of work with her at home. Many, many, times I was tired and discouraged and did not take care of Moriah with a wonderful attitude. My husband was better at this than I.

But what we did learn was that God IS faithful to His people.

He never left us.

We were never alone.

We learned to pray in a more humble manner.

We learned to trust that the little bits of knowledge He gave us to help her was enough.

We were strengthened in our beliefs that all life is valuable to God, though we will never be able to see or understand all of what God did or is still doing through Moriah's life.

We were strengthened in our stand that Moriah was given to our family and was ours to care for. She did not have to go outside the boundaries of our home.

And in the week of her sickness, death, burial and memorial, we learned that God gives strength and walks with us very tangibly in extreme difficulty. Nothing could have prepared us,

but we did not have to be prepared. God had it all planned and He carried us through.

Yet, are Christian parents of special needs children special?

Yes, because the Lord is drawing them to a spiritual depth not needed to raise "normal" children.

Yes, because they will know the goodness of the Lord in a deeper capacity than others can imagine.

My personal message as a mother who has recently lost a child, to those who walk a difficult, tiring walk with their children, is to keep on praying and keep on doing the next thing in front of you. If God chooses to bless your efforts, give Him the praise. If God upholds you through months or years of a walk in the dark, praise Him.

Do not fear the unknown, even the unthinkable, like God might bring your child home to Himself. God will prepare the way for you.

We have found we can even praise Him for the circumstances surrounding Moriah's death. We certainly can rejoice that she is now freed in spirit, finally able to communicate with her Lord. And we do praise the Lord for carrying us through every step, all 15 years of her life.



The Bennett family, with Moriah



Meet Joey, our son with Trisomy 13

By Jim and Lori Reite

We are the new and proud parents of Joey Lane Huddleston Reite. Joey came to us "via" the internet. It's amazing what you can find online these days!

He was born March 6, 2007 at St. Johns Mercy Medical Center, in St Louis, Missouri. His original adoption was all in place at the time of his birth. When Joey was born with Trisomy 13, the adoptive family backed out. His birth family, feeling even stronger about not being able to care for him, put him back up for adoption.

The attorney who was handling the adoption contacted the "Living with Trisomy 13" organization and sent a letter over their website. Because of our son Tucker, (full Trisomy 13, April 5, 2001-May 3, 2003) we are still involved with the Trisomy 13 support groups and read this letter from the attorney stating she was looking for a family to adopt this baby whom she and the nurses called "Joey."

After Tucker died, Jim and I talked about adopting a baby. But I didn't want just any baby, I wanted another Trisomy 13 baby. We have four other healthy, normal (which is all a matter of perspective) children, but I missed the uniqueness that only comes from these special children. But what were the chances of finding a baby like this when the syndrome is so rare to begin with!? Most are miscarried or aborted. The percentage of those that actually make it to term and then survive long

enough to be put up for adoption (and that's providing the birth family did not want them) was so small that I always said, "If God wants me to have another Trisomy 13 baby, He'll have to drop one in my lap!"

Jim and I read the letter and felt God laying it on our hearts to call this attorney and inquire about Joey. I asked questions that only a mother of a Trisomy 13 child would ask, and gave her Tucker's website (www.cowboytucker.com).

We had no clue where to really start in the adoption process, so we talked to a friend from church who ran a Christian foster care organization in our local area called Koinonia Foster Homes. He put us in touch with Rob, who was starting to do foster-adopts for Koinonia. Rob got in touch with Cindy S., The "whirlwind" of an attorney back in St. Louis who was waiting to hear back from us on our progress.

Although she actually represented the birth family, she offered to do all our paper work on that end "pro-bono" (free). And she was helping walk Rob through the interstate compact red tape which could take a year or two to complete.

All of us who have Trisomy children know that time is of the essence and we may not have months or years. Well, God knows that too. He is obviously bigger than the state of California or Missouri because within two weeks our home study was completed, (paid for by the state of Missouri) the home inspection waved, and by the end of April all the paper work in Missouri completed, and they were ready for us to come pick up Joey.

We had not been planning a trip to St Louis on such a short notice so we had no money set aside to make the trip or cover our income while we were gone which added up to roughly \$4,000. With the help of our immediate families, church families and friends and donations that came in from our small community, God provided all we needed.

By now Joey had been in foster care for two weeks through a foster care organization called Family Christian Services. On May 5th we left our little mountain town in northern California, and drove to St.

Louis to meet with Cindy, her friend Kelly, who was the attorney to represent us, who also agreed to work for free, and Sue, on May 9th. The plan was to file for adoption placement, and then return to California with Joey to finish up the adoption through the interstate compact, how ever long that took. But there was confusion over which state was going to be responsible for him medically in the interim. So when we met with these attorneys, they asked if we could stay a few more days in St. Louis and see if a judge (even though we were not on the judges docket) could push this adoption through to completion in a few days. This would solve the whole interstate compact red tape.

We set up camp at Jellystone Park in St. Louis and prepared to stay the week. Joey was in a wonderful Christian home and very loved and cared for. After a few visits, we were comfortable enough with the feeding pump to take him to his new home away from home..."the camper". Joey became very popular at Jellystone Park and soon almost everyone knew him. He would have visitors daily!

On Monday we got the phone call to be in court at 8:00 Tuesday

morning. We rushed into the parking lot, stressing because we were late due to traffic and fearing that if we missed our appointment it could be weeks before we could get in again. But all of our stress melted away when we were met by Kelly carrying a large bag.

In it was a lot of goodies and snacks for the road, some stuffed animals and toys for Joey and a card with a prepaid credit card for \$250.00 for on the way home from Matt and Cindy K!

Kelly, Cindy S., Sue, Jim and I entered into the court house where we were greeted by a "grumpy" bailiff who informed us that the judge was doing physical custody hearings all day and we had a long wait if we got in at all today.

Just then a court trustee walked by and heard the conversation. Cindy S. and the trustee did



a few hand signals and the trustee went into the judges' chambers. A few minutes later the furred-brow Bailiff came out and said the judge would see us now.

After about 15 minutes in the courtroom, the judge pronounced us as the new parents of Joey as if we had given birth to him. He told us we were the sunshine in his day, but actually he put the sunshine in our day.

Joey is now almost 5 months old. So far he is doing well. He is g-tube fed due to some obstructions in his airway. He was born with extra pinkies on both hands but they got removed today as they were dangling. He has an umbilical hernia and an Artrial Septal Defect, but he is not on any oxygen at this time.

He so far has had no apnea (something that gave us A LOT of grey hairs with Tucker) and he has some myoclonic jerks. He has some vision impairment but I think he can see pretty good as he focuses well on objects and reaches to nudge them with his hand. He knows how to push the button and turn on his fish aquarium, and will wake up at night to play with it on and off through out the night.

We think he holds his head up pretty good too. My biggest concerns are keeping him healthy and wondering whether to treat the myoclonic jerks, or wait until they become seizures. With Tucker we chose to wait and we never could get his seizures under control.

Do we start early with Joey? Any advice would be welcomed, email: reitejl@hotmail.com or phone 1-530-333-4472.



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Welcome, Amira Jenae! (ah-Meer-ah Je-nay)



We got a phone call from CHASK on Friday evening (January 8th). There was a 2-week-old little girl who was Irish/French/Filipino with Down syndrome that needed a family. The baby was in Tacoma, Washington (3 hours away), and would be ready to be discharged from the hospital on Monday.

Saturday evening, we were told that the birth mother was “distracted by her decision” and that there was going to be a meeting on Sunday afternoon with the social worker and adoption agent. We thought for certain that the birth family would change their minds and keep her, so we didn’t make any plans for taking care of our house, dogs or kids. The meeting was at 1:30 on Sunday afternoon. It wasn’t until 6PM on Sunday evening, that we were called and told the adoption was going through and we needed to come to Tacoma the next day. (Monday, Jan. 11th) to pick her up.

Sunday night we packed clothes and food for our whole family along with pillows, sleeping bags, etc. and called a friend to house sit and take care of the dogs. We had no real idea how long we would be gone, but we expected it to be at least a week.

We picked up our adoption home study from Portland on the way out of town Monday morning (this had been finished less than 2 months earlier). When we left, we had no idea where we would be staying that night; however, that didn’t last long. While we were on the road we got a call from the hospital social worker who told us that she had made housing arrangements for us near the hospital.

Our first stop in Tacoma was at the lawyer’s office where we signed adoption papers. The first time that we saw Amira (Monday afternoon), we were already her legal guardians (we hadn’t even seen a picture of her!) We were astonished by how beautiful she is.

She has big gray/brown eyes, a beautiful cherub face and dark hair that comes to an adorable curl on the top of her head. We stopped by a consignment store to get newborn baby clothes so we would have something to put her in to take her home. On Tuesday, around 5:00 PM, Amira was discharged into our custody...though we didn’t yet have permission to leave the state of Washington.

With our heads spinning with all that had happened so quickly, we went back to our hotel room and sat down with the baby. Kirk went out to buy diapers, and while he was gone our lawyer called. He told us that we had already gotten legal permission to leave the state and bring Amira home. The approval was expected to take about 4 days. It actually took only 25 minutes. We packed up and headed home with Amira and her 5 brothers in the car that night (Tuesday), still in a bit of shock with how quickly we had added a daughter to our family.

Amira is a sweet, mellow, alert baby and she fits our family perfectly. She is only fussy when she needs to go poo or eat. Sandi is breast feeding her. Amira has gained well since she has come home.

God has truly given us an amazing blessing and has paved the way for everything. It is just wonderful to watch the hand of God working.

Sincerely,

Kirk, Sandi, Cameron, Eric, Cole, Thaxton, Emerson and Amira Brannock

monkey_toes@comcast.net





What is it like to parent children with Hemoglobinopathies? (Blood disorders)

rainbowfamilyfarm@earthlink.net
Ann McKinney, Decatur, Illinois

When we adopted our Tobin in the US, we had no idea we would be facing the blood disease, Sickle Cell Anemia. We knew he was premature. We knew his birth mother had used many street drugs. But we had no idea his birthmother had Sickle Cell trait, meaning she was a carrier for this disease.

When Tobin was 3-months-old, the hospital notified our attorney that they had important medical documents that needed to be forwarded to his adoptive family, namely us. Those documents were his neo-natal screening results, and they indicated that Tobin had a form of Sickle Cell Disease, called Hemoglobin SC.



Tobin

Before I go further, I need to tell you just how awesome our God is. When I was in 7th grade, we were studying hereditary diseases in our health class at

school. I chose to study and report on Sickle Cell. I distinctly remember my teacher trying to talk me out of my choice. She told me that Sickle Cell was an African American disease, and it would never affect me, so I should choose another topic. I stood my ground, and I learned as much as I could about this disease. At that time, I could not understand why I felt it was so important for me to research this disease!

Over 25 years later, when we received this medical report from our attorney, I knew exactly what we were dealing with, and I understood why God gave me the desire to learn about it in Jr. High!

Sickle Cell is a difficult disease. It is painful, and crippling at times, but can be controlled in most circumstances. To understand the disease, you must realize that a red blood cell is normally soft and round, and very smooth. A person with SC disease has a gene mutation in their red blood cells. When the affected person becomes stressed, such as being exhausted, ill, being too hot or too cold, or under stress emotionally, this causes the red blood cells to "sickle". They become banana shaped, and they get very hard and sticky. When these cells travel through the body, they form clumps, which are VERY painful when passing through small veins and arteries. They can become dangerous if the clots form in the vital organs, such as the heart and brain.

These episodes of pain are called a Sickle Cell crisis. SC patients can also develop "Hot Spots", which are areas of intense pain, where the blood cells have clumped together. The joints are a common place for this to happen. Sickling also causes the red cells to have a much reduced life expectancy. This can cause the patient to be chronically anemic. In the case of a severe crisis, a blood transfusion may be necessary to restore the hemoglobin level to a safe level.

When Toby was younger, his disease was difficult to control. He wanted to run hard and play as rough as his brothers, which

caused him to sickle. He would then spend the next few days in pain. As he has gotten older, he has learned that mom and dad set limits for him, to prevent these painful episodes. He takes Folic Acid daily, to increase his red blood cell production, and he drinks water as often as possible, to increase the hydration in his blood.

For the most part, he is a normal kid. He is usually hospitalized once or twice a year for pain episodes which require IV medications, and occasionally for a transfusion. His physical activity is limited, but not eliminated. His immune system is compromised, so he does require additional vaccinations to keep him healthy.

The hardest part of parenting a child with Sickle Cell disease is helping them understand why they have restrictions, even when they don't have pain. The pain comes later!

Another difficult aspect to this disease is people thinking we are over-protective parents, because they have little understanding of what Tobin's medical condition really is. Tobin tells everyone that he is going to be that Research Hematologist that discovers the cure for his disease! I think he just may! He is a joy, and a blessing to us.

Last year, we decided to adopt again, child #7! We decided to adopt an International Waiting Child, and began to pray about the special needs we were comfortable with. We came across a beautiful Asian princess, MengYan, who was suffering the affects of another hemaglobinopathy, called Beta Thalassemia major, also called Cooley's Anemia.

Beta Thal is similar to Sickle Cell dis-

ease, in that is caused by a mutation of the genes that produce red blood cells. In Beta Thal, however, the cells do not sickle, and they do not cause pain. Instead they just do not carry oxygen, and have an extremely short life span. The blood cells that a Beta Thal major patients produce are not life sustaining. By the time an infant with Beta Thal major is 6-12 months, they are in serious trouble. This is when life-sustaining blood transfusions must begin. Most Beta Thal patients receive transfusions every 2-3 weeks.

Having Tobin, and already being familiar with hemoglobin checks, transfusions, and hematology in general, we felt comfortable with MengYan's special need, and pursued her adoption.

When we met our daughter in China, we were not prepared for how ill she would be. She was yellow, her belly was huge and distended, and her spleen and liver were so enlarged that you could see the outline of these organs through her shirt.

She had nosebleeds several times a day, and sweated constantly. We were very concerned over her health, and thought that perhaps we had jumped in a little too deep!

We began laying hands on MengYan, and praying for her, asking the Lord to allow us to get her home safely. Thank you, Lord, He did. It was a scary 14 hour flight home, but we made it! I totally believe the Lord held onto little Meng, and kept her as comfortable as possible.

The day after we arrived in the US with MengYan, she was admitted to the children's hospital about 90 miles away from our home. She was in congestive heart failure. She has

severe liver, spleen, kidney and heart damage.

She spent 3 days hospitalized, and received 6 units of blood in that time. We quickly learned that she had been receiving transfusions of whole blood in China, which was putting her tiny little body into fluid overload. Her body only required the packed red blood cells, not the white cells and plasma that



MengYan

are included in a whole blood transfusion.

We immediately began transfusing her correctly, and also began her on an oral iron chelator, which is a medication designed to remove the excess iron that too many transfusions can cause.

The first few weeks were tedious and frightening. Her transfusions were not even lasting her a week, and she did not even have the energy to move from one room to the next, or to go up a few stairs. But our God is good! MengYan has been home for three months now. The difference in this little beautiful child is truly a miracle. Her kidney function is now normal. Her spleen is shrinking more and more every day. Her heart remains enlarged, but is now functioning normally.

She is now a beautiful tan instead of yellow, and the nose bleeds have stopped completely. We are transfusing her on a 3 week schedule, and have surgically placed a med-a-port into her chest wall, so we no longer have to hunt for good veins. We use this port for both blood draws and for transfusions. Our only continuing issue is her liver, which is still carrying far too much iron. But our God is faithful, and we trust Him completely for her continued health.

Now that Meng is stable, and receiving proper medical treatment, her condition is very easy to manage. She has no limits, and no restrictions. She can play or do anything a "normal" child would do.

She has a transfusion appointment every 3 weeks, and takes medication daily. She, like Tobin, does require additional vaccinations, due to her compromised immune system.

Overall, both of these diseases are very manageable. New research into better treatments and cures are being conducted daily. MengYan has recently been included in a research program at the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, TN. I am very hopeful that better treat-

ments will increase the life expectancy of children with hemoglobinopathies, as I pray they will outlive ME, not the other way around!

I have learned so much about the human body and the blood that sustains it through my children. It only convinces me more and more that our very bodies are a miracle that only the Lord's hand could have created. I am blessed to be the mother of these special children, and would not hesitate for a second to add another to my quiver, if that was the Lords' calling!

I would welcome corresponding with anyone interested in dealing with hemoglobinopathies or any-

one else that you think would benefit from this article.

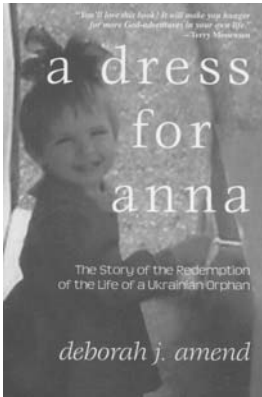


McKinney Family

A Dress For Anna
By Deborah J. Amend

The story of the redemption of the life of a Ukrainian Orphan.

A Dress for Anna tells the fascinating story of how God led Deborah and Rob Amend to adopt Anne, a handicapped preschooler from an orphanage in the Ukraine and intricately knit her into their family. It offers inspiration by illustrating just how much an average, ordinary family can do when listening to God and following His call.

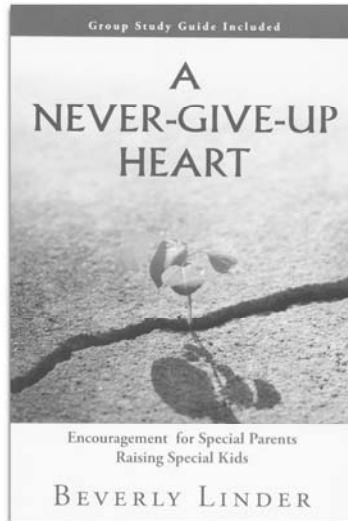


www.amazon.com

NATHHAN Resource Review

A Never-Give-Up Heart

By Beverly Linder



The responsibilities of raising a child can take a parent's full energy, but trying to meet the needs of a son or daughter with extra difficult challenges may seem overwhelming. Drawing from her own experience as a mom of three children, two of whom have disabilities,

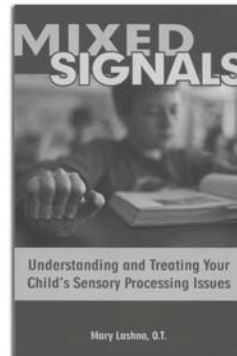
Many "special" parents, perhaps especially moms, feel a sense

of isolation due to the unique demands of raising a child who has harder-than-average challenges. Each chapter in *A Never-Give-Up Heart* ends with study guide questions that would be ideal for parents who are looking for realistic yet uplifting content to guide a discussion for a support group. Also included in one of the appendixes is "How To Facilitate a Small Group" for those who desire to begin a group but need some help in doing so.

Bev has a podcast with Need Project and became families with NATHHAN / CHASK through them. She has homeschooled her children through high school. Two of her three children have had disabilities. One, Kristie, is safe in heaven at this time. This book is the song of her heart - the things God has taught her, "through it all".

It is her hope that this book would meet some of the needs in the hearts of other parents.

www.special-heart.com



Mixed Signals

is an excellent resource for parents who want to learn more about sensory processing disorder and wonder if it's cause of their child's unusual reactions to light, sound, taste, or touch.

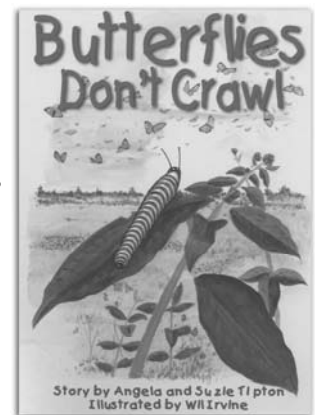
The book examines sensory processing disorder both as a stand-alone issue and as a common characteristic of another condition, such as autism. Written by an experienced OT therapist, the book explores the most current assessment tools and therapy options, helping parents to formulate an individualized "sensory diet" - a series of sensory activities to be followed throughout the day that will calm or stimulate a child's sensory reactions.

www.woodbinehouse.com

Butterflies Don't Crawl

By Angela and Suzie Tipton

After 14 years of living with severe spastic quadriplegic cerebral palsy, Suzi has truly undergone a metamorphosis. From her birth, doctors gave a grim prognosis, telling us that she would not live past the first year, and if she did, she would be severely limited in all areas of development. From the beginning, Suzie has had the faith, persistence, strength and beauty that she portrays in this story.



Angela is a loving wife and mother of seven, six with disabilities, in NC. She loves reading and crocheting and is a support person for parents of children with disabilities.

Woman Care for Those with Special Needs

Article written By:

Sherry Bushnell, LM, CPM and
Dr. Anne Camber, OBGYN in Libby, MT

One of the challenges, as mothers of disabled daughters, is managing woman-care needs.

Granted, for some it's no big deal. Things come naturally and no problems exist. Frequently, adult women with disabilities do not have their woman-care or reproductive health issues adequately addressed. Many are not receiving up-to-date preventive or medical care. Our family has experienced this sort of confusion with our daughter, Sheela, who is now 22 years old. *(Sheela has given us permission to share her story in part. She hopes that it will give others courage to seek medical care and not give up finding what mom and daughter need for a healthy life. Because Sheela is blind and writes in Braille and we guessed you probably can't read Braille, Mom wrote the story. Sheela edited for content.*

Sheela's story: We adopted Sheela when she was 22 months old from Madras, India. She was born without eye-balls and we thought that she was exceptionally beautiful. She has Anopthalma and mild mental disability. After we brought her home, a friend who was a physician asked offhandedly, "What else is she missing?" We sort of laughed it off...

Since babyhood, Sheela has had to strain to urinate, taking a very long time to empty her bladder. I guess with all the other RAD behavior things we were dealing with at the time, we just chalked it up to more strange stuff. She was always basically healthy and did not complain of pain. Into her teens, Sheela was still wetting her bed. We tried just about everything. I guess the best thing we ended up doing was just waiting. We allowed her to change her own sheets and to take full charge of her bedding. At age 9, it was rarely an issue during the day. Our family lived in a very rural community and we had no insurance at

the time. Sheela's embarrassment and disappointment in herself was heartbreaking. Finally, we went to a local doctor. He examined her but seemed uncomfortable, mentioning only that she had a very big hymen. The rest of her exam looked normal to him. That was all.

When she was sixteen years old, she went to stay in Virginia, at a wonderful place called Faith Mission Home. Her caregiver was Barb Hershberger and Sheela bonded closely with her. We look at this experience as her "college". We wanted her to work through some RAD behaviors and have the opportunity to take challenging academic and music

classes. This separation was very much needed, as we were facing some difficult family situations involving RAD attachment behaviors and ongoing habits. I was also starting midwife school and would be away from home a bit.

We expected Sheela to start her monthly period while she was in Virginia. After returning home at age 18, Sheela still had not had her first menses. I was becoming concerned about the lack of a menstrual period, her straining to urinate and rapid weight gain. We brought her home to Idaho and immediately made

her an appointment with an OB/GYN.

Long story made short, Sheela has no internal female parts. Her urine is expelled from a very narrow urethra near where her vagina and uterus should be. Her kidneys are small, but functional. You might ask, "Why wasn't she examined before?!" Perhaps if you have a teen with RAD, you might understand what a challenge this might be! Plus, all had appeared normal when she was younger during her initial doctor's exam. As she was in no pain, and her nightly wetting was getting better. Honestly, we were not concerned until her period did not start.

Sheela's medical workup included ultrasounds, an MRI, genetic testing, and eventually surgery. They removed 2 "masses" in the area that should have had ovaries, a uterus and a vagina.



Sheela and Sherry 1995



Sheela and Sherry today

As her mother, I felt horrible that this had not been found earlier. I am now fully aware that my “hoping-everything was fine” attitude was not productive. It is Sheela and my hope that we can share with you a reason to help our special needs daughters become more aware of their own bodies and confident to care for their womanly anatomy, without it being a big deal.

For some young adult women, this might mean education about managing their periods. For some severely disabled women / teens, it might mean learning patience with caregivers and accepting assistance with monthly cycle needs.

Gynecologic care for many disabled women is easily overlooked. Fears are dismissed, educational opportunities are missed or denied as unnecessary. Sometimes understanding how to access quality gynecological care or ask for help is the challenge. Many people are embarrassed discussing female issues and put off the evaluation. In the right setting, most disabled women can have their exam in the office with a minimum of discomfort and fear.

Admittedly, disabled women’s reproductive health is a hard subject to broach. In Sheela’s case, her symptoms and problems had gone unnoticed for so long they were accepted as part of the disability. Or maybe there are constant symptoms that have become part of routine care and are not questioned. Medical studies show that gynecologic symptoms have a serious impact on quality of life. We invite all special women to join with their caregivers and family to accept, seek and demand access to gynecological care. Get on a schedule for women care. Get to know a doctor you can trust.

Several articles in greater detail about girl, teen and woman care, written by Dr. Camber and Sherry, can be found on the NATHHAN web site www.nathhan.org.

Go to www.nathhan.org. Click on Articles by Subject on the right side of the home page and then scroll way down to Woman / Girl Care.

When choosing a competent physician for care, remember understanding and patience will go further than an office’s “perfect set up for disability.”

Both I as a midwife and Dr. Anne Camber, a wonderful OB/GYN in Libby, Montana, (who also has a heart for helping disabled women and their caregivers access care) are willing to answer questions and offer suggestions in a general sense.

Some of the issues you might need addressed may be beyond our ability without an examination. However, suggestions for managing a period or ideas that help breakdown the barriers to care may be addressed to “Dr. Camber or Sherry” (private e-mail)

questions@blessingcatcher.com



**Dr. Anne Camber, OBGYN,
Sherry Bushnell, LM, CPM**

Accepting Government Assistance for our Children with Special Needs

We have a son with Down syndrome who will be 18 in July. Do you think it is right to accept federal government aid for basic needs? How would you handle this situation?

Assessing your child's need for assistance.

Assessing your child's need for help with food, clothing, shelter and medical help, requires taking a look at your family finances. Some families feel that accepting help from our government is not for them. They may not want the government to know how much they make, or where their money goes. They are willing to sacrifice a little more in other areas, to make sure they are able to provide for their child's basic needs for food, clothing, shelter and medical care.

There are families all over the USA who are not willing (or do not qualify) for government help. They may be dependent on the community or fiercely independent, not wanting the help or accountability from anyone. Or, they might be very willing to be accountable, but do not qualify because they own their own home or a second car.

But some families feel that they are not able to financially to provide for basic care of their child (ren). (Food, clothing, shelter or medical care).

Receiving Medicaid or SSI is a very important decision that each family in the United State makes for themselves. There are no two families alike and financial ability to meet the needs of those God has entrusted us, means different things to different folks.

Putting ourselves in someone else's shoes for a moment, perhaps we can catch a glimpse into the "why's and reasoning another family might have in this area.

Making Good Decisions

Assessing whether basic needs are met is subject to our personal standards of care. Families who are used to living with less, or who live very simply, are very happy that way. Less can mean eat-

ing simple foods at home, instead of eating out. It can mean shopping at the local second hand store, instead of J.C Pennys. It can mean accessing medical care only when needed, instead of annual checkups whether needed or not. It can mean doing therapies at home, instead of hiring a therapist. It might mean personally building home adaptations or devices, instead of hiring it to be done.

Either way a family chooses, it is a good idea to be educated about the different options. Education about the how-to's of meeting our children's needs is our responsibility.

Understanding how the various funding streams work will help us make good decisions.

The big question is

- How do we pay for what we want?
- What does using private insurance mean, and what is the cost to my family?
- How do you begin to understand the complicated area of federal benefits?
- What are the risks and benefits of "going it alone" ---without Medicaid?
- If we do choose Medicaid, do we have to take the whole package - medical help, food stamps to supported living assistance, or can we pick and choose?
- Will I have to be accountable to a social worker in my home?
- What do I have to report?

Private Insurance

Your state's laws determine who qualifies as a dependent for coverage under a family's private health insurance plan. Some states allow an unmarried adult child up to the age of 30 to remain on a parent's policy. Other states cut off coverage for children at age 19 unless they are full-time students. See www.ncsl.org/programs/health/dependentstatus.htm for info on your state's current insurance law.

Most private health insurance programs allow for coverage of children who are permanently disabled even after they are no longer full-time students. However, you must inform them and apply for this exception according to the company's rules. You will have to provide documentation of the disability and you must notify the insurance company before your child turns a certain age. Failure to comply with the rules of the insurance company's plan may result in the loss of private health insurance for your child.

What is the difference between Medicaid and Medicare? Medicare is our national health program for the elderly and it is a social security program - not a need based program. Since anyone over 65 is eligible, it is generally accepted by health care providers.

Medicaid provides health benefits to eligible people. As a health insurance program, it covers physician and practitioner visits, medications, hospitalizations, hospice care, medical equipment, physical and other therapies, transportation. Specific services may vary by state. Those who qualify for Medicaid usually have low incomes. In most states, an individual also qualifies for Medicaid if she qualifies for Social Security Income (SSI)

Once a child turns 18, he or she will probably not qualify for Medicaid unless your family's annual income is below the cut-off established by the federal government. This is because once your child reaches adulthood, the federal government looks only at your child's income and assets, not your family's. Depending on their level of disability, he or she must reapply under their own entity, providing for themselves, so-to-speak, and live at least semi-independently to get full assistance. It can take a few weeks or months to be approved for benefits. If your child is employed, the amount they receive in a monthly SSI cash benefit will go down gradually, as her earnings go up. First \$85 is not counted.

To apply for SSI and to determine eligibility, this is the information they will want to know:

- Social Security card

- Birth Certificate
- Information about where they live, including mortgage or lease, if applicable
- Documents related to her income, such as payroll slips, check books, insurance and such.
- Names, addresses and phone numbers of all the doctors, hospitals and clinics that have treated your daughter.
- Proof of citizenship or eligible non-citizenship status.

Most people find the SSI office very confusing and frustrating. That is because they are! However, if you dedicate the day to getting the chore done, take a number and sit down with a good book and just relax, it is less stressful.

Basically a person applying for Medicaid may not have more than \$2,000 in assets.

Your assets as a family, your mortgage and other household expenses are taken into consideration. SSI assumes that she is being subsidized by you, her family. The amount she receives will be lowered, as long as she is in your home, and your income does not meet the cut-off.

Food Stamps:

The federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance program (formerly known as the Food Stamp Program) provides low income families with financial assistance in purchasing food. Using EBT, qualified families and individuals can get certain food in authorized stores. The card is funded monthly with a pre-determined amount and users draw down each time they use the debit-like card. As of 2009, average monthly food stamp benefit is around \$100 a month. If your child qualifies, she must report any change in income when it occurs, so that the food stamp amount can be recalculated. Determinations are made semiannually.

Suggestions:

- Develop a good relationship with your local Social Security office.
- Be informed about the different programs.
- Do not rely on what the SSI reps tell you verbally. Some are not familiar with disability and mostly deal with retirees. (For example most representatives are not aware that adults with Down syndrome can use section 8 vouchers toward housing that their family owns.

Example: “My daughter wanted to live in her own apartment. We just weren’t ready for her to really live away from us. We had an area of our house that we were able to convert into an apartment for her. When her name came up on the Section 8 list, she was able to use her voucher to rent the apartment we created for her.”

- Keep good records, including pay stubs, and benefits received.
- **BE AWARE:** The social security administration sometimes sends checks that should not have been issued. The recipient will then get an “overpayment notice” and will be told to pay it back. This might be for various reasons, including that they made a mistake. Set aside unexpected funds, in a separate account, until you are sure they are clear. If you feel they are not right in asking for it back, you have 60 days to appeal.
- Make copies of everything you send to the SSA. Send important letters by certified mail, return receipt requested. Keep a separate 3-ring binder with all correspondence.
- Keep a log of all phone calls to SSA: what was said, agreed upon, the name of the person you spoke to, the date and the time. Always follow up any substantive phone calls with a letter in writing.
- Respond quickly to all letters from SSA.
- If your child must be away from home in another state or in the hospital for at least a month, SSA should be notified immediately, to preserve benefits.
- Obtain fax numbers. They are not listed readily in the phone book or any web site.

Other Potential Resources for Solving Needs

If your child is blind, hearing impaired or has autism, specialized groups have been successful in lobbying for special programs for extra help. Generally these programs were established for individuals who did not otherwise qualify for state services for people with developmental disabilities.

Portfolio

Consider checking with family members, close friends, and civic and church organizations to see if they know of local funding or resources. Some may be able to help with one-time expenses such as a purchase of furniture, equipment, scholarships, or home adaptations.

If you are not able to write a letter or portfolio, get some help. You provide the details and a nice picture, and they write it for you. This can be updated and added to as your child acquires new skills or living arrangements.

A Heart of Thankfulness

In spite of all the rumblings we hear about how politically downhill our country is going, still we are very thankful for the privileges of living in the USA and being citizens. In the USA, we have a choice. We can accept government help or we can say, “No thank you.”

Our country is very generous. Even with our taxes being higher and higher, it is some consolation that together, as tax payers, we are able to care for our needy and disabled in some way. Many countries provide nothing for their elderly, sick or disabled citizens. They just hope they die. We believe that America, at its core, values all life, and the opportunity for quality of life is granted to each citizen.

Families who have adopted children from overseas are literally saving those children’s lives. That is admirable. We believe the act of caring for orphans and the homeless is blessed by God.

The Down Syndrome Transition Handbook - Charting Your Child’s course to Adulthood By Jo Ann Simons, M.S.W.

Published by Woodbine House

What Are Adoption Assistance Payments?



By Linda Dillon

The Federal “Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980” (P.L. 96-272) requires states to make adoption assistance payments to parents who adopt a child with

special needs. The “Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997” (P.L. 105-89) updated and amended the first law in a positive way that further helped children with special needs.

While mostly having to do with the adoption of children in foster care, it also helps families adopting special needs children who are not foster children. Adoptive parents can be reimbursed for the expenses of the legal adoption finalization, plus they can receive Medicaid for their child and monthly adoption assistance payments until the child is grown.

There are three ways for a special needs child to be eligible for adoption assistance payments:

- The Child comes from a home on AFDC (Welfare)
- The Child is in state Foster Care.
- The Child is disabled according to SSI criteria.

Number 3 worked well for us, and it is probably the one you will use to receive payments for children adopted through CHASK. The child does NOT have to be placed in your home by an adoption agency.

The child must have a serious disability such as mental retardation, cerebral palsy, blindness, mental illness, etc. Here is the Key: You need an SSI “Award Letter” **BEFORE** adoption finaliza-

tion when you apply for SSI for your child. If your child is approved, you will get an SSI Award Letter.

Adoptive parents can contact the adoption section in the state human services agency in the state of the child’s birth. You request to negotiate an Adoption Assistance Contract before your adoption is finalized.

Why Are Adoption Assistance Payments better than SSI?

SSI is “means-tested assistance” which depends on the child’s income before adoption finalization, and the income of the parents after adoption finalization.

You can receive full SSI payments during the months before adoption finalization when the parent’s income does not count.

During this period your child legally has no parents, and no income. However, after the adoption finalization court hearing, the amount of the child’s SSI payments each month is determined by the income of the adoptive parents.

Your child may get less money, or no money, because of your income. The SSI office requires that you bring in paystubs, and fill out pages of information on all your bank accounts, assets, cars, etc. You must also go through a lengthy yearly recertification process that reviews all your assets in order for your child to continue receiving SSI payments.

The really good news is that Adoption Assistance Payments are not “means-tested.” In other words, your income does not matter for Adoption Assistance Payments! You do not need to send your paystubs to anyone, or list the value of your home, cars, etc.

Your child can receive Medicaid coverage because of your Adoption Assistance Contract, even if your income is too

high for your other children to be on Medicaid. In some states Adoption Assistance Payments can be continued past the child's 18th birthday. You can negotiate payments that continue until age 21 if the child has a mental or physical handicap and is in a school or training program.

Yearly recertification for Adoption Assistance Payments is wonderfully simple. Every year the state of our adopted child's birth sends us a letter that asks if we still have the child in our home and if everything is still the same. We check a little box that says "Yes" and sign at the bottom. We mail the form back, and that is it. According to federal law, the parent's income cannot be considered.

The amount of the monthly Adoption Assistance Payments is supposed to be "similar" to the amount of monthly foster care payments for that state. The amount is negotiated according to how severe the child's special needs are. The amount may go up as the child becomes older. So learn about the foster care payment rates in the state of your child's birth before you begin to negotiate the Adoption Assistance Contract.

What if Your Adoption is already Finalized in Court without an Adoption Assistance Contract?

Adoptive parents actually can apply for a hearing to request adoption assistance after adoption finalization. Adoptive parents can contact the adoption section in the state human services agency, explain that they have already adopted a special needs child, and they are interested in filing an appeal for Adoption Assistance.

The child's eligibility must be established through an administrative fair hearing. Parents should ask how to request an administrative fair hearing and ask for any written regulations and procedures on the subject. Some states have awarded parents retroactive Adoption Assistance Payments. For more Information on this subject please read:

Adoption and Financial Assistance: Tools for Navigating the Bureaucracy, By Rita Laws and Tim O'Hanlon

**Adopting and Advocating for the Special Needs Child: A Guide for Parents and Professionals, By L. Anne Babb and Rita Laws
Rita Laws (Author)**



Do-it-Yourself Early Child Development



By Diane Ryckman and Families from
the Down Home Learning
ryckman@downhomelearning.net
www.downhomelearning.net

Baby years: A Look at “Infant Stimulation” and “Early Childhood Intervention”

Infant stimulation refers to providing a stimulating environment for your baby in order to encourage his or her development. This involves exposing your baby to appropriate activities which will help him progress from one stage to the next. Though the term may sound imposing, infant stimulation is actually something that happens naturally in every home where parents are lovingly involved in caring for their newborn baby. When we carry our child with us as we work around our home, when we talk to our little one and try to coax that first smile from her, when we encourage our baby to move towards a toy placed just beyond his grasp, when we play pat-a-cake with Baby's hands or help Baby wave "bye-bye" to Daddy, when we show our delight at Baby's first attempts to say Dada or Mama - all these are examples of infant stimulation. In each of these examples we are encouraging our child to grow beyond what he has already attained developmentally.

Early childhood intervention refers to identifying potential delays in a specific area of a child's development, and aggressively working with your child to attain that next stage of development. This involves discerning your child's emerging skills and working with him to fully develop them.

Infant stimulation is obviously very important

for every child. When a child is born with special needs, infant stimulation is even more important. Because a child with special needs may show little response to the stimulation around him, this could result in leaving a "content" baby on his own in his crib or playpen when what he really needs is to be in the middle of family life where all the action is!

Here is how one family provided infant stimulation for their newborn:

“When Hannah was just a newborn, our basic rule was to expose her to as much as possible. She had a constantly changing environment of sounds, smells, and sights to see. We put high contrast black and white pictures in her crib, along with a large unbreakable mirror, which we rotated around the crib to different positions and pictures. We put different toys in each room so she always had something interesting at which to look. We sing, we talk, talk, talk.

“As Hannah became more mobile, we put things just out of her reach to encourage her to find a way to get to them. A rolled up towel under her torso when she was on her tummy allowed her hands to be free to handle things, and pillows surrounding her when she could sit up helped to give her a different angle from which to view her world. When sitting on the floor with her we put her on her tummy across our legs to give her something over which to crawl and stretch. We carry her facing out, with her back to us, to strengthen and force her muscles to grow. After each diaper change, we pull her to a sitting position or have her stand each time.”

When providing "home school-style" infant stimulation and early childhood intervention for your baby with special needs, there are two simple keys to keep in mind:

- 1). Know what comes next in skill development, and
- 2). Work towards it.

Knowing what comes next

Here is Carol's advice: "It seems to me the simplest thing is to obtain a list of normal developmental skill progressions and work on

what you see as your child's needs at the moment. IMPORTANT---The age ranges that go with these lists should only help you to keep the skills in order, because it seems as though no matter how hard you work, your child falls farther "behind." God has already determined what level He wants your child to be at when, and don't let anyone lay a guilt trip on you."

Amy, mother of Reagan, shares her experience with her daughter's development: "My goal when Reagan, our daughter with DS, was an infant/toddler was to facilitate development. In order to accomplish this I purchased a developmental scale and an accompanying activity guide. I had so many activities to choose from that I was soon developing a program for her...an informal homeschooling program. Most of the activities were playful and fun, providing appropriate toys and activities in the appropriate environment. With my other children I took so much for granted. Now, I have a deep appreciation for growth and development!" The developmental tools Amy used are called the HELP ([Hawaii Early Learning Profile](#)) Checklist (0-3) and HELP Activity Guide.

Working towards that next milestone

One thing I realized as we worked with Andrew in his development was that children with special needs are not slow, as some people perceive them. No, they are fighters. They have to work HARD to achieve what so many of us take for granted. As parents helping our little ones to grow and develop, we need to be aware that, though the time frames differ, still our child with special needs will continue to make progress. There are a few things to keep in mind while working towards that next milestone.

1). Persevere...sometimes there may be little evidence that your child is responding to the stimulation you are providing. For some children, input needs to be so much greater before they will begin to respond to the stimulus. Galatians 6:9 reminds us, "...let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart."

2). Break things down...little steps are easier to accomplish than big ones. Think through what is involved in reaching the next goal, and see if there are sub-skills to aim for in order to accomplish the big picture. This is where a developmental scale can come in handy. Someone else has already done the work of breaking skills down for you.

3). Be creative...how can you incorporate

stimulation into your daily activities? The more and varied the input, the better.

4). Enjoy!...don't feel pressured to "do everything." The LORD gave you each of your children. Ask Him for the wisdom to know how to help your child grow and develop, and trust Him with your child's developmental time frame, with your other responsibilities, and with the grace to do what needs to be done.

Preschool Years:

Though the skills your child will develop in the preschool years become more complex, learning to recognize your child's emerging skills and determining ways to help your child develop those skills will continue to guide you in planning your child's education as your child moves from infant to preschooler age. Here are some ideas and resources to help you with your child's preschool education.

Communication and Speech Development

The desire to communicate is the greatest motivator behind learning to speak, and for our children with special needs, this desire is no less – it is just that for some, learning to speak is so much more difficult, and for others it will not even be possible. This does not mean that our child cannot learn to communicate at all, rather it means we need to be on the lookout for ways he does communicate and build on these to help him "say" what he wants to get across.

There are a number of resources available to help with speech development. One which comes highly recommended by many parents is [Communicating Partners](#). (www.jamesdmacdonald.org)

Books by Dr. MacDonald include:

[Before Speech](#),
[Play to Talk](#) and
[First Words](#).

Some more books containing ideas that can be used at home are:

[Language and Thinking for Young Children](#)
(Ruth Beechick)

[The Language of Toys, Teaching Communication Skills to Children with Special Needs](#)

(Sue Schwartz)

Early Communication Skills for Children with Down Syndrome (Libby Kumin)

Ready, Set, Go: Talk to Me (DeAnna Horstmeier)

1st Straight Talk: A Parents Guide for Correcting Childhood Mispronunciations (Marisa Lapish)

2nd Straight Talk: A Parent's Guide to Language Development (Marisa Lapish and Tom and Sherry Bushnell)

More ideas for encouraging speech development

Children with speech delays often need to hear a word many, many times before they will attempt to say the word themselves. By consciously determining what words are most important for your child to learn, you can make a point of using these words as you talk with your child.

With Andrew, we made up **picture books of important words** using photographs of family members, pictures of actions, or favorite foods and toys, etc. We would look at them over and over together, saying each target word. Picture books or flash cards of important words can also be made out of magazine pictures cut out and pasted on card stock. The important thing is to review the words together often.

A few simple keys to remember in order to encourage your child's speech development are model, repeat, and expand: model – let your child hear how a word should be pronounced; repeat – let your child know you understand what he is trying to say by repeating his word; expand – add one more word to expand what your child is saying (example: child says "ball", mom says, "big ball"). If a child gets "lazy" and just sits and cries, or makes noise instead of words, remind him that he can talk and to use his words. Try to wait until he says what he wants to communicate instead of figuring it out and responding to his noise.

Pre-reading skills

There are a number of things we can do with our children to help prepare them for learning to read. The most important thing is to read to your child. Get into a habit of reading at nap time or bedtime. Not only is the value of reading passed on as we read to

our children, but their listening skills are improved the more they are read to. As you read to your child, **underline the words with your finger as you read them**. This teaches a number of things: that words are read from left to right, that sentences are made up of words joined together, and that pages are read from top to bottom.

Whether you plan to teach a phonics or sight word method of reading, it will be helpful to **teach your child the sounds that each of the letters make**. Initially teach one sound for each letter to keep things simple. One way of doing this is to purchase or make an alphabet book with one simple uncluttered picture per letter per page, or simpler yet, with both lower and upper case of one letter on one page, and the picture, labeled, on the next. When possible, read this book to your child at least once every day, not expecting any response from your child, but just providing lots of input. Read it the same way each time. With the letter page say, "A says ah, ah, ah" (short vowel sound). With the picture page say, slowly and clearly, "a - ple, apple", the first time breaking the word into syllables, the second time speaking normally. Do this for as long as necessary until your child begins recognizing the letter sounds and "reading" them himself. For those of you who are working on developing your child's speech, this would be a good tool, too.

The video series Love and Learning is a simple, helpful tool for encouraging speech development and sight reading skills.

www.loveandlearning.com

See and Learn is another speech/reading resource, and is available for free download or for purchase at <http://www.seeandlearn.org/en/gb/language-reading/>.

Pre-writing skills

Scribbling is the way most children begin the progression of learning to print. Initially you may need to secure paper to the table or floor with tape to provide stability for your child. For variety, use long rolls of paper on the floor, or place paper on an easel. In order to work towards a proper pencil grip, use short

stubs of crayon or chalk instead of long ones so your child will have to use his thumb and fingers. Using a variety of mediums keeps the interest up and leads to experiment. Try using pens, pencils, felt pens and crayons; foam brushes, q-tips and paint brushes with water colors; chalk on chalkboard or cement sidewalk. Beginning scribbling time should be a together-done activity, for later our children need to pay attention to our paper to move forward.

Encouraging an interest in **coloring pictures** can also help your child develop the fine motor skills they need for learning to print. Color pictures with your child, taking turns coloring. When your child begins staying in the lines, you will know your child is getting closer to being able to control a pencil well enough to begin learning to print letters.

In time you can begin to teach your child to **follow simple movement patterns** using hand over hand, with your child's dominant hand holding a pencil or marker. One way to do this is using 1" masking tape stuck on a large sheet of paper or a cookie sheet. Make tracks to follow with a pencil or match box car. These lines should be easy to follow at first, gradually becoming more complicated in squiggle patterns and zigzags.

Encouraging your child to **copy what you do on paper** will help to develop the observation skills necessary for learning to form letters. Begin with simple things – dots on the page, then short lines, just a couple to a page. Progress to one line starting at the top and going down the page, then one line going horizontally across the page. Next, "V" shapes, zigzags, circles, wave patterns, connected loops, etc.

For our little ones, the first **meaningful letters** to learn are those in their name. Tracing patterns can be used to begin teaching letters. These can be made of card stock with each letter printed darkly in felt pens, then laminated or covered with plastic wrap. Erasable markers or pens should be used to trace the letters over and over until reasonable accuracy is accomplished. Another idea is to print letters with a highlighter and have your child trace these. Here is an idea from Annette: "Once Jessica started learning her letters, I discovered having her follow a tracing of letters out of sand paper was an excellent idea because then she could feel it at the same time and be very interested in it."

Beginner Math Concepts

Counting can be learned even if the concept of how many is not understood. Once a child is able to count by memorizing the number names in order they have a framework for future learning of number concepts. Andrew learned to count going up and down the stairs. First we would count with him over and over to 3. After a few weeks of this, Andrew began counting along with us, then we began counting up to five, then 8, 10, etc.

In order to help Andrew learn **number recognition**, we purchased a large-button calculator for a couple of dollars. As Andrew played with the calculator, we would name the numbers as he pushed them, and he quickly learned the number symbols to go with the names he already knew.

The concept of **quantity** – that the number 4, for example, represents 4 things – is a more difficult concept to grasp and a bit more challenging to teach. Though Andrew could count to 12 or so, if I held out 3 fingers and asked him how many there were, he would be stumped. In order to help him understand that the numerals he could read represented a specific number of things, we would play matching games with home-made number cards and dot pattern cards. We would match numerals with dot patterns, place bingo chips on the dot patterns counting them as we did, match numerals with bingo chips, clip the appropriate number of clothes pegs on the edge of the number card or the dot pattern card, pick a card and build a block tower with that number of blocks, etc.

The concepts of **addition and subtraction** can be introduced using an interesting collection of odds and ends. Ask your child to find you three round things from your collection. Have him take one away. How many are left? Ask your child to pick out two blue things and two yellow things. How many all together? If your child is unsure, give him the answer before he shows any frustration. Keep learning fun, and ensure success by not giving him an opportunity to guess incorrectly.

Learning Beyond the 3 R's

In order to develop your child's understanding of the world around him, use books. Interact with books, broaden his understanding, put thoughts there, stimulate his mind, next time ask to see if he remembers (if not, tell him again).

When a child is not able to form questions because of developmental delays, but is able to understand what he hears, anticipate the questions he would ask if he could, and talk with him about the world around him. Typical pre-school questions to keep in mind are, "What's that?" and "Why?" Asking questions and supplying answers for your child can encourage attentiveness and problem solving skills. As a child becomes more able to communicate, read favorite books with him over and over again, asking him questions about the pictures or what was read and giving him the answers to those questions, or first giving him the answers, then asking the questions. Each time the book is read, ask the same questions, until he begins supplying the answers. Then begin asking the question in a different way, giving him the answer again, if he needs it.

For children who find it challenging to control a pencil it is still possible to use typical preschool materials. Instead of working through a workbook with pencil or crayons, sit together and go through the activities using your fingers (modeling how as necessary) to trace practice lines, match similar objects, identify which one is different – whatever the activity on the page might be. Because the pages are not being written on, you can do this many times, providing lots of input with each concept.

Naptime or bedtime can be a good time to review bits of learning together, whether Bible verses, or counting to 20, or reciting the alphabet. Working review into your daily routine is a simple painless way of learning together. To begin with, you will likely be the only one doing the counting. Despite limited speech, your child is listening and remembering as he hears the same review over and over. As we start early with input even if understanding is not there, we are laying a foundation so that by the time he does understand, he'll have the knowledge to build on.

Passing on our faith to our children with extra challenges

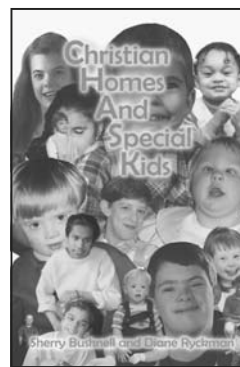
Begin early to pass on your faith to your child. Memorize Bible verses. In our family, in order to help us remember passages of scripture, we make up actions to go with the words. Even a child who is limited in his speech can take part by doing the actions with the rest of the family. He can demonstrate that he knows the verses without speaking a word!

Teach your child about the Bible – that it is about God, that it is written by God, that it is written for each one of us, that it is true. Pass on to your child a knowledge of creation and a love for the Creator. Point out the beauty around us and that God made it all, that creation teaches us about Him – His goodness, His greatness, His bigness – that we serve the wonderful, loving God who gives us all things richly to enjoy.

Most important of all, teach your child about sin, and our need for the Savior – that we all do bad things, that our badness keeps us from God, but that Jesus died to take the punishment for our badness and to make us clean and ready to go to live with Him in Heaven forever.

This article was taken in part from the book, Christian Homes and Special Kids

By Sherry Bushnell and Diane Ryckman



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A Blessed Beginning - NATHHAN and CHASK Reaching Out Locally to Teens and Women

By Sherry Bushnell

During Prolife week this last January, Blessed Beginning was one of several crisis pregnancy centers interviewed on our Christian radio station. They did an on-site airing. Tom Bushnell's Focus On the Family ads were running at the same time all week. It was a great boost for local community awareness, letting folks know we are around.

It was a cold, snowy/rainy evening. We were blessed with supporters stopping by anyway. We had gourmet coffee, lots of goodies and smiling faces cheering us on. Several of our supporters were asked to share for a few minutes on the air. One woman gave a moving testimony of Christ's forgiveness about her abortion many years ago.

Visiting churches in the area

We have been visiting different churches (about 1 a month). This gives us 5 minutes to introduce ourselves and share about A Blessed Beginning. This

helps keep local families updated, in addition to the newsletter that gets sent out.

Baby Bottle Boomerang

This Mother's Day, we decided to do the popular Baby Bottle Boomerang fundraising for crisis pregnancy centers. We handed out cute baby bottles to be filled with spare change and checks.

The original idea was that they were supposed to be handed back in to A Blessed Beginning on Father's Day, but already some people have sent them in filled up! This will be an ongoing fund raiser each spring, as the bottles are totally reusable for next year.

Baby and Maternity Clothes Thank You!

What a blessing these items have been. Thank you to the NATHHAN / CHASK families who have sent maternity clothing, baby clothes and other items. The women in our community are really amazed that you would care enough to send them "NICE stuff like that!"

Recently, our local Department of Social and Health Services closed its office. We are hoping to encourage our community by finding needs and sharing them with families that can give food and physical help for our pregnant low-income moms.

Earn Items for Baby While You Learn

Our new program, Earn While You Learn, that helps new moms learn mothering skills, is really taking off. Young moms are very excited about coming in and earning the items on display. There are many ways they can earn Baby Bucks. This is actually a point system that moms can hand in toward an item they are eyeing. Even church attendance earns a buck or two! We have DVDs, worksheets,

even just coming to the birth center gets them points.

We have also purchased gift certificates from several popular places in town, that the women are interested in getting items from. These, along with the donations and items we already have, are making a nice incentive for young girls who are pregnant to continue coming in and earning while they are learning valuable skills.

We appreciate your ongoing support for birth moms in Bonners Ferry, Idaho.

Preemie size and maternity clothes, still needed.

Please send items to:
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Grandpa and Grandma's Page

What is so Amazing About Grace?

By Dennis Lamphere

What is grace?

Some people claim that they don't have any.

Do we know what it is?

Many of us take it for granted. I know I sure do!

For example, without concern, I get up in the morning, have breakfast, look at the sun coming up, jump in my truck and off I go. I pick up my load, listen to the radio, watch hundreds of cars and trucks swishing by me at 35 - 70 mph - within inches.... Finally, after 8 hours of hard driving, I make deliveries, make small talk with the customer, complain about the weather, share about my family... It's all good....

So what is this grace I am talking about?

Grace is amazing. Astonishing. Bewildering. Perplexing, causing overwhelming wonder.

Why has God shown favor towards me? What can I do today, to make sure I get it tomorrow?

You would think that especially in this prosperous country we would understand what grace is and how to get it.

Grace is undeserved favor, given by God, because of His love for mankind. He gives it to whom He wishes, when and how. The world operates on an equity system so to speak. Tit for tat.



Dennis and Linda Lamphere

When we do something for someone, we might be looking for a positive return... maybe payment, or maybe at least a thank-you, or a smile.

But what about those people who deliberately hurt us or insult us in some way? What about those who harm someone we love?

What about the unthankful, those who purposely make life hard for us?

We wouldn't be very good at handing out grace would we?

God's grace towards us, is giving mankind what we don't deserve and giving a blessing instead!

We are all, going our selfish way. God alone is able to give undeserved favor, making grace available to everyone on earth, no matter what we think of Him.

When we seek after grace, God always gives it. In reality, He pours it out, even on the most unlikely, unworthy person. It is completely unearned.

God's grace is powerful. He will change our lives by giving us just what we need, when we need it.

It can break habits like drug ad-

dictions, alcohol, cigarettes, pornography, bitterness, anger, whatever a person may be struggling with. Grace sets men free. Even the most profane, hateful, lost person can be set free. God's grace, God's gift, given by Him, is the most powerful force in the world.

Charlotte Elliott lived in London with her church-going family. One day a minister came by and challenged her as to whether or not she was a Christian. She said she was not and asked, "How can a wretched person as I come to God?" His answer was "Just as you are".

She went to her room with tears in her eyes and wrote these words:

Just as I am, without one plea. But that they blood was shed for me, Oh Lamb of God, I come, I come.

*Just as I am though tossed about, with many a fear and many a doubt
Oh Lamb of God I come, I come.*

Even if we forget to ask for it, He remembers and gives it to us anyway.

But isn't nice to say "Thank-you, God, for extra grace today!"

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By Deborah Mary Kathleen Mills



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