

SOUTH SOUND PARENT TO PARENT
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South Sound



The connection for
 families of children and adults with
 special needs in
 Thurston & Mason Counties

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SPRING 2009 ISSUE

Signing Class at (P2P)

South Sound Parent to Parent's sign language class is a big hit! Thank you to the Olympia Rotary Club for their generous donation which has allowed us to continue offering classes to our families free of charge. The third session begins April 29th, 2009. Susan Bakke, early educational consultant for deaf/hard of hearing, instructs the group on beginning sign language. You will learn letters, numbers, colors, food, animals, clothing, and family members. Activities include practice using signs in songs, games, and playful interactions with one another. Classes are Wednesday evenings from 7:00 - 8:00 pm at Parent to Parent in the Activity Building. There are eight classes per session. If you have a child who is deaf/hard of hearing or a non-verbal communicator and would like the benefits of learning sign, please call (360) 352-1126 or email skernan@ssp2p.org to register for the next 8 week session.

The sign language class at Parent to Parent was beneficial to me. I see a need to know sign language at my school. From working with preschoolers to the students with Autism, I feel more confident if this need arises. This class has been educational and fun at the same time. Susan was an excellent Teacher and a great source of information. Thanks Susan! ~ Para-educator

I'm a mother of a 1 year old baby boy who has moderate to severe hearing loss in both of his ears. Taking Susan's ASL class has benefitted me and my family in many ways. My son is still too young and behind developmentally to communicate with words or signs, but thanks to this class when he is able I will be ready with both forms of communication to help him. I also have a 2 1/2 year old daughter, and like most other 2 1/2 year olds she gets frustrated when I do not understand her words. In teaching her the ASL I am learning not only am I giving her another way to communicate while keeping her calm, I am giving her a brighter start at her future. I love that it is also something for us to do together. ASL is not yet a necessity in our family, but is something we enjoy. I am thankful for this class and I am thankful to Susan for teaching it. Thank you!!! ~ Parent

Two Little Boys and their Dad by Matt Graffagnino

My story is a little different than most, because I am the primary caregiver and stay at home parent for my sons Matthew who is 6 and Ryan who is 4. I have been home with them for almost 5 years. With my boys being the center of my world I figured I would share my story and shed some light on the paths I have walked.

My story begins like any other expectant father. Finding out I was having a son at one of our ultrasound appointments was like being told I won the lottery. All I ever wanted was a son to play sports with, fish, hike, and be my little pal. Matthew had a typical birth, no complications or setbacks so I was on my way to my future pro football star. After about 6-8 months of Matthew not hitting his milestone markers we had him assessed by Parent to Parent and began early intervention. How could it be, I thought? I walked at 6 months old, I knew my ABC's at one, and my wife was accelerated in her development as a child, so how could this be? Matthew needed physical, speech, and cognitive therapy to help him catch up. All the while my other friends with babies were talking about little Joey's first steps, little Sara is talking, and meanwhile my poor little Matty was struggling to roll over. I was devastated. It seemed like all my hopes and dreams for my boy were gone.

Soon I learned that my wife was expecting again and I was to have another son. Well I thought, Matthew will be my special guy and the soon to be born Ryan would be the rough and tumble one. After Ryan was born everyone said now you will see what it is like, how a baby should develop. Unfortunately, it didn't happen that way. Ryan also had delays and soon the boys would both be diagnosed with Fragile X, a genetic disorder that they would have to deal with for the rest of our lives. My world was upside down, life as I knew it was over; two boys both with a disability, I was unable to go on. I fell into a deep depression, not wanting to go to work or get out of bed, but the one constant was the love that I felt for my children. At a Dr's appointment, a few months later, we were going over the level of care that the boys would need and a genetic counselor came over to me, looking like a moping mess and she said, "How can I help you get through this?" I looked at her as if she was crazy and I said, "How can you help me? My life is ruined. All the expectations I had for my boys are gone." Then she said to me the words that changed my life, "Honey, is that what you are upset about? Children haven't been living up to their parent's expectations for a long time." Then it got me to thinking, wow, I know that I surely didn't turn out to be the doctor or lawyer my folks hoped I would be! From that moment on, I began to see things in a new light. Those were the words that started my transformation from a man, to a father. The journey would take me down many unexpected paths, a gamete of emotions, and a world that only a few have to navigate. I don't even know that Genetic counselor's name or where to find her to say thanks, but she saved my life; not from physical harm, but she gave me the will to live for my boys and also for myself.

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Going "Green"

South Sound Parent to Parent is "going green" and we need your help! We love to get in touch and share information with our families, but it comes at a great cost to us and the environment. We want to continue informing you of our upcoming events and other news. Please sign-up by emailing



skernan@ssp2p.org to be a part of our email distribution list. Thank you for your continuing support!!!

Please support Earth Day ~ Wednesday,
April 22nd, 2009

National Spina Bifida Conference

Heather Logan, South Sound Parent to Parent's project assistant, was elected as one of the delegates for Washington to attend the 36th annual Spina Bifida Conference. This year's theme is "Imagine the Possibilities". The conference will be held in Orlando, Florida on June 30th - July 3rd. Some events include an opening night reception, adult day, a celebration luncheon, and kids camp. The conference is a great time to meet others from different states with similar situations and challenges. Last year was the first time she attended the conference. She didn't know what to expect and she made lots of new friends. The educational sessions were a good experience to listen and learn information to bring back and share with others; as Heather is the facilitator for P2P's Spina Bifida support group. She can't wait for this year's conference. She's hoping to catch up with friends she met last year and to make some new ones!

Two Little Boys and their Dad (continued from page 3)

Most people make a big deal when their baby starts to walk, and rightfully so, but after the first day, it's over, because you expect your child to walk. My boy's steps were as if they were walking on the moon and it was the same for their speech. Words that come from my children's mouth are golden! I guess the point that I am trying to make is that life is what you make of it, no guarantees, and no promises to be kept. A friend was reflecting on some decision in his life he was pondering, and he said to me, "This is not the dress rehearsal, this is the dance!" Don't treat your life as the rehearsal. So dads, this is a call out to you. Children are precious, and fathers who feel the need to fix things, should fix the lack of participation in the lives of special needs children. I'm not saying this applies to all dads, just the ones that need a friend, a friend that has walked in their shoes, who has felt their pain, and who has become just a dad.....A Dad.....to two little boys.



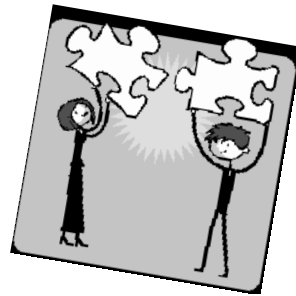
South Sound Parent to Parent is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) agency. We are a United Way Community Impact Partner, eligible to receive Donor Direct funds in the annual United Way campaign. Designate code 176033 for the Combined Fund Drive. Thank you for supporting our mission.



What's New in the Lending Library

South Sound Parent to Parent has received numerous donations in the past months. The following list are some of the items that may benefit your family:

- ◆ Baby Swing
- ◆ High Chair(s)
- ◆ Rocking Chair for Toddler
- ◆ Trike for Toddler
- ◆ Twin Size Bed Rail/Guard
- ◆ Puzzles
- ◆ Children's DVD's
- ◆ Hiking Backpack with Child Carrier



Please check our website (www.ssp2p.org) for new additions!!

Save the Date

The forth annual Mason County Transition Conference is **Thursday, May 21st, 2009** at the Shelton Civic Center. The Transition Conference is a free event designed to assist young adults prepare for life after high school.



At this conference you have the opportunity to:

- ◆ Identify skills/strengths
- ◆ Gather info on employment
- ◆ Learn how to handle emergencies
- ◆ Meet employment & community vendors

Please contact Gar (360)426-4471 (Shelton) and Debra (360)277-2113 (North Mason) for a registration form or if you have any questions.

South Sound Parent to Parent's annual picnic is **Saturday, August 15th, 2009** at Rainier Vista Community Park. Please join us for some fun in the sun. More details will be available soon.



Youth Sibshops

Sibshops is a time to get together with other teens who have siblings with special needs. We have fun activities and great snacks. Most importantly, we have a safe place where young people in middle and high school can talk about their feelings, get advice and feel comfortable in knowing that they are not alone in the challenges and joys involved in having a brother or sister with special needs.



Jim Smith is the facilitator of the group. He has been an educator for 20 years with master's degrees in School Administration and Special Education. He loves working with young people and making a difference in their lives.

We are looking for more participants! We meet on the 2nd Saturday of each month at Capital Vision Christian Church in Olympia from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. If you need information, please email Jim at jsmith@ssp2p.org or call and leave a message for him at Parent to Parent. He will get back to you right away! See you at Sibshops!

North Mason County Families

Parent to Parent is hosting a support group in Belfair for anyone with a family member with a disability. Contact Chris at P2P for more information ~ cmorris@ssp2p.org

Summer Parent/Toddler Group at P2P



We will have our Parent/Toddler Group again this year for parents and their children who are in the Birth to Three Program! This summer it will take place at the South Sound Parent to Parent location (1012 Homann Dr. SE in Lacey). Group will meet every Tuesday from July 7th through August 24th from 10:00 to 11:30 am. We will have activities, outdoor play, circle time and snack. We look forward to seeing our Birth to Three families over the summer! If you have questions, please ask your FRC!



Washington Apple Health Care for Kids Expands Coverage

Washington Apple Health Care for Kids provides medical benefits to children under the age of 19. The insurance is free or low-cost depending on your family's gross monthly income and is available to both citizens and non-citizen children.

Apple Health for Kids is free for children in families below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (\$36,620 for a family of three). Families above that level may be eligible for the same coverage at low cost: \$20 a month per child for families below 250 percent of poverty and \$30 a month per child for families below 300 percent of poverty. (The premiums max out at two per family, so no family would pay more than \$60 a month in premiums.)

For more information and an application, please contact CHOICE Regional Health Network at (800)981-2123 for English speaking families and (888)493-8397 for Spanish speaking families.

Resources

[The Office of the Education Ombudsman](http://www.waparentslearn.org) ~ www.waparentslearn.org

The Office of the Education Ombudsman (OEO) is the first state-level ombudsman office in the nation for k-12 education. They are a new agency within the Governor's office and separate from the Office of Public Instruction. OEO believes that when parents understand the public school system and work in partnership with schools, student learning improves. They offer publications, free consulting, conflict resolution, and workshops for free.

[Answers for Special Kids \(ASK\)/Family Health Hotline](http://www.waparentslearn.org) ~ (800)322-2588 (tty relay 711)

Callers will speak to a live Information and Referral Specialist who helps determine their likely eligibility for several State programs and to connect to a variety of important services such as child development, food resources, health insurance and family support. Hotline staff are bilingual (English/Spanish) and use the AT&T Language Line interpreter services to communicate in all other languages.

Two Little Boys and their Dad (continued from page 2)

After brainstorming with my then wife, we decided that I would stay home and take care of the boys. They both required therapy 5 days a week and a level of care similar to that of an infant. So for me, it was many diaper changes, feedings, therapies as well as running the household. Not an easy job, let me tell you! In my daily travels to therapy or playgroups I started to notice that I was the only guy around. Often people would look at me different, a dad with 2 disabled boys running after them toting a diaper bag and changing diapers with the other moms. In talking with the other moms and therapist, I found out that a lot of fathers are often absent or not involved with their children. "My husband is in total denial." or "He just left when he found out our kid was disabled." I was floored by what I was hearing and to be honest a little upset. My children are my life and especially at this stage of their lives they needed a father the most. Thinking about why a dad would be absent, it brought me back to my dark time when I was in denial and depressed. Men in general look for a way to fix what's wrong. Why does the problem



exist and fix it! How could this happen to my kid? Is it my fault? Just an enormous weight to bear and when friends or co workers ask about your child it brings up all the pain and emotions over and over. Look, I get it, I really do! I have been there, but to shut down and shut out is not the answer. Life has no guarantees. Every day has new challenges and the unknown is a constant. Your "typical" child could, god forbid get in an accident that could render them disabled, or have an allergic reaction to a food at school that could do the same. Would you as a father leave your child at that time of need? In fact, my experience with my children's disability has made me more of a man. Watching my

children grow and develop, helped me grow and develop as well. I became a better man, a better person, and a much better father. As you get older, wiser, and begin to put your life in perspective, you realize that sometimes the path you had chosen to walk down, may not be the path life has chosen for you. I was a landscaper by trade, had a career in sales, a brief stint on Wall Street, but now I am dad...just Dad. I am the breakfast maker, the diaper changer, the caretaker. Despite its initial shock to the system for me, my place is now by my children's side for as long as it takes. Believe me it wasn't always easy, it's still not, but turning the page on negativity, sorrow, and pity is opening the door to fulfillment, wonder and a place where life is different but oh so satisfying. Let's briefly discuss some positives that a dad gets from being with his boys who are a bit different than most.

My life has forever been changed by two little souls, that struggled to roll over and sit up, or use a spoon, but always had a smile on their faces. I watched my children as they learned how to crawl, then take steps, at two and a half, but they did it. I was so proud to be part of that moment, it was like a privilege to see those boys who struggled in physical therapy for years apply what they learned; to walk.