

An Okie Christmas Carol

by John F. Gajda, TARC Executive Director

Ebenezer J. Scrooge was feeling very content and proud of himself as he sat in the family living room after a festive Christmas Eve meal. His parents had named him Ebenezer after his father's old bachelor uncle who had come to Oklahoma territory during the land run (actually a bit before the official land run), staked out a claim and began building the family business that his grandfather and eventually his father had become part of. He had never liked the name and preferred to be known simply as "EJ."

EJ had done quite well for himself. He was the first member of his family to graduate from college having attended a state university. It was a real struggle but thanks to the in-state tuition, much lower than at private and out-of-state schools he had explored, and the financial assistance package he received, he was able to complete his degree and became part of the family business. The family business had not done well for many years but his accounting and management skills were helping pull it together-this year and the year before, for the first time in several years, the business had made a small profit. His father's old uncle Ebenezer would have been proud to see the business begin to prosper again.

This also had been quite a year for EJ personally! In June he decided he would file for the open legislative seat in his community and after a busy few months of campaigning he was now a newly elected member of the Oklahoma Legislature. In the middle of the campaign his wife had given birth to their second child, a son, who they named EJ Junior. He had to admit that Junior didn't quite respond to him like his first born daughter had as an infant but he assumed that was just the difference between boys and girls.

He had run for office on a simple message to voters and was anxious to go to Oklahoma City and work to implement it – lower taxes, cutting waste in government, getting the government out of our lives, and a return to real family values.

The traditional Christmas Eve family gathering, that this year was being held at his home, was breaking up and everyone began gathering coats, remnants of leftovers and empty containers that had transported offerings for the feast they had just shared. His parents were leaving with his grandparents, who were not in good health. Neither could drive anymore, so his parents

would leave them off at the old family homestead on their way to their own modest home several miles away. His grandparents continued to be fiercely independent, however, and insisted on staying in their rambling old house despite their failing health. EJ wasn't sure of the details but some sort of workers came to help them several times a week. He and his father chipped in to help maintain the house and his sister did the grocery shopping weekly. No state-funded nursing home for anyone in his family, EJ thought to himself. EJ's older sister and her husband and their son and daughter were also gathering their jackets and preparing to head back to their home in the next town. His nephew, his sister's son, was a concern for the entire family. He had been born with Down Syndrome and his sister complained constantly about the problems he was having now that he was in high school and her concern about what would happen in two years when he graduated. EJ just wished she would focus on being a better mother and spending less time complaining.

As the confusion of the pending departure of his family reached a flurry there was a knock on the door and EJ went to see who was there. Opening the door, he immediately recognized Bob, an employee in the accounting department of the family business, and his son Tim. Tim walked with an awkward gait and wore leg braces. EJ rolled his eyes and uttered a perfunctory greeting to them both. They probably wanted something, EJ thought to himself. Bob always seem to want something, usually some sort of special treatment somehow related to his son Tim. He always needed to leave early or come in late for some type of meeting or appointment and even though he always made up the time it was just getting to be a bit much. He even had the nerve to make a pitch to EJ while he was campaigning for office for expanding services to children like Tim. The nerve! That wasn't why EJ was going to the legislature in Oklahoma City and not why the people had elected him.

Tim reached out his hand and presented a red and green colored tin to EJ. "Merry Christmas" he said. "They're cookies and I helped my Mom make them." Bob chimed in "Thank you, EJ, for all of your understanding this past year. Merry Christmas." EJ thanked him and closed the door quickly so as not to let the chilly air blow in, making a mental note to himself to

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write a written warning to Bob regarding excessive absences.

With Bob gone, EJ's family members soon followed. Not long after, with his wife and children tucked snugly into their beds, EJ sank into his favorite easy chair and put his feet up on the footstool. After an active evening of visiting with relatives and having more than his share of the festive meal they had shared, he was tired and quickly dozed off.

Suddenly, he was awakened from his sound sleep by a cold breeze and an eerie dim red light that permeated the room. Surely he had closed and locked the front door! EJ got up and in amazement walked through the open door of his home to his front yard, where in the dim red glow, he barley made out a small covered wagon, with rickety wooden sides, warped red wheels that appeared to be about to fall off, and a dirty canvas top with red letters he could barley make out. It was pulled by two very dirty, white, sickly looking ponies, Welch, he thought. He could not make out the letters in the first line on the canvas top but the letters in the second line appeared to spell out the word "Schooner." He must be dreaming he thought to himself. He never should have had that third beer.

As EJ turned to go back into his house and join his wife in bed to resume his needed sleep in a more appropriate setting a voice called out from the wagon's seat, "Aren't you coming EJ?"

"Coming where?" he challenged in response. "You're only a dream brought on by overindulgence."

"You may think I am a dream," the voice responded back.

For the first time, EJ could see that there was an elderly looking white haired man with a full beard in the wagon. He wore patched white pants and a red sweater that had obviously seen better days.

The old man answered back, "I am the ghost of Oklahoma's future and I have some things I want you to see. Come with me."

EJ turned and started back into the house. No old bum was going to tell him what to do. But, somehow, before he knew it, he was seated in the wagon next to the old man and they were in an overgrown yard in front of an old boarded up house. He recognized the house as his grandparents' home. He and his father had just repainted the house that summer and faithfully kept up the yard work. He wondered what happened.

Before he could ask, the old man answered, "EJ, remember the people that used to come in and help your grandparents in their home? They were part of a program called the ADvantage Program and you voted for cuts in funding for this program each year you were in the legislature."

"What are you talking about?" EJ challenged him. "It's December 2008 and I am just starting my first term in the legislature in February."

"No..." the old man said, "it's now 2012 and you are at the end of your 2nd term in the legislature. You were re-elected on 2010 because you delivered just what promised, lower taxes and less government. Unfortunately, toward the end of 2009, the ADvantage Program was unable to hire staff because the budget cuts you approved made it impossible to pay homecare workers a living wage and without in-home support services your grandparents were forced to move to a nursing home. Other old folks like your grandparents were forced directly into nursing homes and never benefited from the in-home support provided by the ADvantage Program. Your grandparents died there less than a year later, but not before your grandmother fell and broke her hip trying to get out of bed when no one answered her call button. Staffing at the nursing home was less than required, but the deficiency was never caught because the surveyor positions at the State Department of Health who should have been checking for such deficiencies were vacant. Not enough funding again."

"How preposterous!" EJ shouted out, but before he could challenge this obviously ill-informed partisan liberal political hack, the scene before his eyes changed. He immediately recognized that the wagon was now in the parking lot of the family business he had worked so hard to keep alive these past few years. But now the building was dark and there was a For Sale sign in front.

Before he could ask what had happened, the old man asked EJ, "Remember the cuts in funding for Career Tech Centers you approved in 2010? The tax cuts you were able to pass when the funding was reduced got you re-elected in the fall of 2010, but without adequate funding, the trained workers your business needed as you diversified were not being trained by the Career Tech system and this year you had to close the business because you couldn't hire enough skilled workers. Your belief that the funding could be made up by cutting back the waste in administration wasn't correct."

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Again before EJ could raise his voice to angrily respond, there was a flash of light and he immediately recognized his sister's house. He and the old man were standing in the living room and it was obviously still Christmas, because there was a tree in the corner but the people sitting the living room didn't appear to be enjoying the holiday and they all looked older. One of the cards lined up on the mantel said Merry Christmas 2012! on the front.

"Don't worry," the old man said. "They can't see or hear us."

"See that young man in the corner watching television?" said the old man. "That's your nephew with Down Syndrome. That's about all he does all day since graduating from high school two years ago. He sits at home watching television. You see he is number 8,786 on the waiting list for home and community based services at the Department of Human Services Developmental Disabilities Services Division. He should get some services in another seven to nine years.

"I'm sure you recognize your wife, daughter and four year old son on the couch across the room. It is your sister's turn to host the Christmas Eve dinner this year," said the old man.

"What's wrong with my son?" EJ asked. "He doesn't look right and he's rocking back and forth in his seat."

"Your son was diagnosed with Autism. He never got the early intervention services he needed because you refused to support adequate funding for Sooner Start."

EJ challenged the old man, "I provide for my family and they don't need a government handout. We have health insurance to cover such issues."

"Not so fast," chimed back the old man. "Your insurance does not cover treatment for Autism and you voted against the bill to mandate such coverage in your first year in the legislature. Last year, your wife had to quit her teaching job to stay home and care for your son because no daycare center would accept him."

"Why couldn't my mother continue to baby sit for him like she had been?" EJ asked.

The old man answered, "Notice she isn't in the room."

EJ looked around and sure enough she was not there. Before he could ask why, the old man said "She died in a tragic accident last year. A piece of an underpass she was driving under fell off and went through her windshield, killing her instantly. It was only the ninth or tenth such accident that year. You see the high-

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way department doesn't have the money to maintain all the bridges that needed to be repaired."

"Well, I can fix all of this when I go back to Oklahoma City when the new legislative session starts in February 2013," he cried out.

"No you can't," the old man said. "This fall you were not re-elected. Your political mantra of less government has been successful and left the old Sooner Schooner in such bad shape that the voters in your district had enough. You lost your bid for re-election. In fact, you know the opponent who beat you-Bob, who used to work in the accounting department of your family business"

EJ looked up suddenly and he was not in his sister's living room or in the battered old wagon. He was in his own living room in his easy chair. It was sunrise and the golden light filled the living room as his wife put her hand on his shoulder and shook him as she carried his young son into the room.

"Honey, wake up" she said. "You fell asleep in your chair last night. It's Christmas morning!"

Disoriented for a moment, he shook his body as if coming awake from a long winter's sleep. "I had the weirdest dream," he told his wife as he gathered her and his infant son into his arms. "What year is it?" he asked.

"It's 2008, silly!" she replied. "You really shouldn't have had that third beer last night."

"Merry Christmas, 2008!" he said with a great deal of relief.

He went to the front window and looked out into the front yard and was surprised to see it had snowed. "Look!" he shouted, "The weatherman was wrong as usual. It snowed last night! What a great Christmas day!"

As his wife stood by his side and looked out, she noticed some narrow tracks in the snow. "Those look like wagon tracks. Was there a wagon in the front yard?" she asked.

EJ Scrooge thought for a moment that morning and many other times over the next year. He wasn't sure what had happened that Christmas Eve and early morning. His way of thinking had been changed by that dream and when he began his term in the Oklahoma Legislature in February, he worked to make sure that the dream was just that – a bad dream that he could blame on overindulgence, and not a premonition of the a dark future for Oklahoma and his family.

Study Finds ADHD Medications Do Not Cause Genetic Damage in Children

In contrast to recent findings, two of the most common medications used to treat attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) do not appear to cause genetic damage in children who take them as prescribed, according to a new study by researchers at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and Duke University Medical Center.

The study published online this month in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (JAACAP)* provides new evidence that therapeutic doses of stimulant medications, such as methylphenidate and amphetamine, do not cause cytogenetic (chromosomal) damage in humans. The researchers looked at three measures of cytogenetic damage in white blood cells of each child participating in the study and found no evidence of any changes after three months of continuous treatment.

“This is good news for parents,” said Kristine L. Witt, M.Sc., a genetic toxicologist at the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) and co-author on the study, which was funded through the Best Pharmaceuticals for Children Act by NIEHS and the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), both parts of NIH. “Our results indicate that methylphenidate- and amphetamine-based products do not induce cytogenetic damage in children.”

The researchers involved emphasize that the findings should not be interpreted as final proof of the long-term safety of stimulant drugs for the treatment of ADHD. “More research and close monitoring of children taking these medications for extended periods of time is needed to fully evaluate the physical and behavioral effects of prolonged treatment with stimulants,” noted Scott H. Kollins, Ph.D., director of the Duke ADHD Program, where the study was conducted and a co-author of the paper.

The researchers found no significant differences between the two groups of children with regard to age, gender, race, body weight, height, or ADHD subtype. The groups also showed very similar ADHD symptom levels at initial screening and children in both groups responded equally well to the medication.

Source: NIH

Cleveland Elected Board President of The Arc of the United States



The Arc of the United States announced the election of its new Board President Lynne Cleveland. Ms. Cleveland previously held the position of Vice President and is a life long advocate for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Ms. Cleveland was elected at The Arc's business meeting which was held during The Arc's 57th National Convention at the Albuquerque Convention Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico in November.

Ms. Cleveland previously served as President and as a member of the Board of Directors of The Arc of Texas, along with many other capacities within The Arc of Texas. She has served in other distinguished positions including Member of the Board of Directors of the Texas Council, the Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation on the Citizens Planning and Advisory Council and with The Arc of Greater Houston.

She is a Research Coordinator with the University of Texas-Houston, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Center for Human Development Research.

Peter V. Berns, Executive Director of The Arc of the United States said, “We will be served well by the leadership and dedication of Lynne Cleveland as we move forward in advancing the civil rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities”

The following people were also elected to The Arc's Board of Directors: Michael Mack, Vice President, Maryland; Mohan Mehra, Secretary, New York; Kim Brown, Treasurer, Michigan; Susan Bassett, Indiana; Ron Brown, Texas; Sam Givhan, Mississippi; Joyce Lipman, Maryland; Elise McMillan, Tennessee; and Randall Patrick, Colorado.

Other business conducted included the adoption and/or renewal of ten Position Statements: Aging; Criminal Justice; Early Childhood Services; Family Support; Health, Mental Health, Vision, and Dental Care; Medicaid; Parents with Intellectual Disabilities; Self-Advocacy; Sexuality; and Waiting Lists. These Position Statements will expire in 2014.

Source: Monday Morning Memo

Illinois Olmstead Decision Makes Headlines



A ground breaking agreement was reached in Illinois last week regarding community based services. *Ligas v. Maram* was filed in 2005 by nine people with developmental disabilities (plaintiffs) who reside in private State-funded institutions or who are at risk of being placed in such institutions.

Plaintiffs wanted to receive community services, but their requests were denied by the State of Illinois, a violation of the 1999 Olmstead decision.

Under the terms of the proposed Consent Decree, approximately 6,000 people with developmental disabilities living in large private institutions will be given the opportunity to live in community-based settings. The proposed Consent Decree also requires the State to provide services to people with developmental disabilities who are at risk of institutionalization and currently living in the family home.

Independent monitoring of the Consent Decree will be required, and no money damages were sought. For more information see www.equipforequality.org (Reference: U.S. District Court, Northern District of Illinois, and Chicago, Case No. 1:05-cv-433, *Ligas et al v. Maram et al*).

Source: www.equipforequality.org

Family Voices Releases Family-Centered Care Tools

Family Voices has released newly-published Family-Centered Care Self-Assessment Tools, designed as an opportunity for health care practices and families to assess current areas of strength and identify areas for growth, plan future efforts, and track progress toward family-centered care.

These tools include a Family Tool, a Provider Tool, and a User Guide. They can be accessed at http://www.familyvoices.org/pub/projects/fcca_FamilyTool.pdf, http://www.familyvoices.org/pub/projects/fcca_ProviderTool.pdf, and http://www.familyvoices.org/pub/projects/fcca_UsersGuide.pdf.

An online feedback survey will soon be available for you to give input to help Family Voices continue to improve these tools.

Source: Monday Morning in Washington

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) Training Available on DVD for Parents and Educators



Garrett and Christy Butch are the parents of a child with autism. After three years of involvement with the autism community, the Butches started Maximum Potential, a company that gives parents, teachers and caregivers everything they need to make a difference in the lives of their children and students, at a fraction of the cost of traditional therapy options.

Their Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) course has 17 modules on 8 DVDs taught by PhDs and Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) to help anyone learn how to administer ABA therapy at home, in school or in any other environment. There are examples from actual therapy sessions with children with autism to illustrate the points of the course and guided notes to help along the way. And since the course is on DVD, it can be viewed as many times as needed.

In addition to the course, Maximum Potential is also offering a data collection package that allows for tracking a child's progress. The package has all the forms and graphs that are essential to an effective ABA program, and instruction for the use of these forms is in the DVD course. Maximum Potential has also created hard-to-find picture cards for Discrete Trial Teaching from the Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills. Coaching sessions from PhDs and BCBAs are available via both the telephone and Internet for cost-effective, yet personalized instruction. For teachers, there are comprehensive packages that include the course, private consulting and the data collection forms.

For more information, visit <http://www.maximumpotentialkids.com/>.

Source: Autism Society of America

Visit us on the web at
www.ddadvocacy.net



The Arc Medicaid Resolution Adopted

Medicaid is a critical source of funding for services and supports for people with disabilities and their families. In support of this commitment the following resolution was adopted by the Congress of Delegates at the recent Arc of the United States annual convention in Albuquerque, NM:

Whereas, hundreds of thousands of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families are desperate for services that meet their needs in the community;

Whereas, there continues to be a need to shift state and federal Medicaid resources away from institutional services and toward expansion of community based services;

Whereas, there are major inequities among states on the size of waiting lists, the usage of Medicaid waivers and options, and pay levels for direct care workers;

Whereas, most states are now facing major fiscal crises forcing services and supports to be reduced or eliminated;

Whereas, additional solutions, such as the Community Living Assistance Services and Supports Act (Class Act), are needed to ensure that people who need long term services and supports are not required to impoverish themselves as in the current Medicaid program;

Whereas, recent Congresses have attempted to address these issues through development of important legislation such as the Community Living Assistance Services and Supports Act (Class Act), the Community Choice Act, Empowered at Home Act, and the Direct Support Professional Fairness and Security Act;

Whereas, there is a need for significantly more affordable and accessible housing options for people with disabilities through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development housing programs, state and local governments, and the private sector;

Whereas, the state and local chapters of The Arc, as well as members of The Arc, working co-operatively, are vital to the resolution of these issues;

Therefore, be it resolved that The Arc of the United States urge the Congress and President Bush to increase the Medicaid federal match (FMAP) as part of an economic stimulus package in the waning days of the 110th Congress;

Therefore, be it resolved that The Arc of the United States urge the 111th Congress and the new Administration to commit to resolve quickly the continued inadequacy of current housing and long term services and supports to meet the needs of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families; and

Be it further resolved, that Congress and the Administration should raise Medicaid reform to the highest level of priority to meet the needs of people with disabilities and their families.

Source: The Arc of the U.S.

Study Finds Workers with Disabilities Perform Well



A 2008 study at DePaul University has found employees with disabilities from the healthcare, retail and hospitality sectors were just as dependable and productive as employees without disabilities. In fact: Participants with disabilities from the retail and hospitality sectors stayed on the job longer than participants without disabilities.

Across all sectors, participants with disabilities had fewer scheduled absences. Retail participants with disabilities had fewer days of unscheduled absences. Regardless of sector, participants with and without disabilities had nearly identical job performance ratings. Costs associated with workers with disabilities were minimal and worth the expense.

Benefits associated with workers with disabilities included having dedicated and reliable employees and a more diverse workforce. For more information, visit <http://www.disabilityworks.org/default.asp?contentID=87>.

Source: Monday Morning in Washington

Social Security Representative Payee Reports Can Now Be Completed Online



The Social Security Administration (SSA) launched a new online accounting report option. When representative payees receive the paper form in the mail telling them that it's time for their annual accounting report, they can go to www.socialsecurity.gov/payee and follow the instructions.

Some of the advantages of using the new online form are special features available to help payees complete the report; a user-friendly, one-time registration process that assigns a personal user ID and password payees can use to file future reports; and report download features that allow payees to keep and print a copy of the report for their records.

Source: SSA

National Senior and Disability Advocates Agree on Principles for Financing Long-Term Services and Supports



In a historic step toward a healthier, more equitable and affordable system for financing long-term services and supports, the Leadership Council of Aging Organizations (LCAO) and the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) have agreed on a set of joint principles for reform.

Together, the two coalitions represent over 150 organizations representing seniors, people with disabilities, and providers of health, housing and supportive services. Their consensus on a new direction for financing these services puts millions of Americans behind the push for reform.

An estimated 10 million Americans currently have needs for long-term services. The number of individuals needing long-term services is projected to increase to 26 million by 2050. However, the nation lacks a coordinated, national public-private system for delivering long-term services and supports. Nearly half of all funding for these services is now provided through Medicaid, which is a growing burden on states and requires individuals to become and remain poor to receive the help they need. There is also an institutional bias in Medicaid whereby approximately two-thirds of all spending is directed towards nursing homes and other institutions instead of preferred community-based services and supports.

The principles adopted by the two coalitions call for a national solution. The plan should give consumers access to a broad array of support options, including a continuum of home and community-based supportive services. The new public financing system should be as universal as possible with a limited choice to opt out. This new system will relieve pressure on Medicaid. The new system should promote independence and dignity across the lifespan by ensuring beneficiaries the right to control and choose what services they receive, how and where they are delivered, and who provides them. The principles are:

1. **National Problem, National Solution** - Recognize that although states, communities, families, and individuals have important roles to play, financing for long-term services and supports is a national problem that requires a national solution.
2. **Universality with Limited Opt-Out** - Create a public program that allows all people, including individuals with disabilities and those near retirement, the opportu-

nity to contribute to and prepare for the costs of long-term services and supports. Make participation as convenient as possible but give people the limited choice to opt out.

3. **Public/Private Partnership** - Provide a strong foundation of protection while providing opportunities for personal planning that include a role for private sector options.

4. **Affordability and Risk Pooling** - Provide for broad pooling of risk and appropriate low-income subsidies to make premiums affordable enough so that all people, regardless of income and health status, can participate. Ensure that a new program does not force people to impoverish themselves to qualify.

5. **Fiscal Responsibility** - Provide actuarially sound funding, such as through voluntary premiums that build reserves over time sufficient to pay for future needs in a way that is affordable to individuals and to society as a whole.

6. **Relieve Pressure on Medicaid** - Provide additional long-term services and supports funding mechanisms that will help take the pressure off of future Medicaid expenditures, while preserving the guaranteed safety net.

7. **Consumer Choice and Control** - Promote independence and dignity across the broad continuum of services and supports by ensuring beneficiaries the right to control and choose what services they receive, how and where they are delivered and who provides them.

8. **Support Family Caregivers** - Recognize and support the central role families and other informal caregivers play in planning for and providing long-term services and supports, including developing strategies to support working caregivers to maintain their financial security.

9. **Invest in Quality Care and Quality of Life** - Target additional funding to ensure sufficient training and compensation for the workforce and to strengthen oversight, enforcement, and advocacy programs that improve quality of life and quality of care in all settings.

Long-term services and supports are essential to the health and economic well-being of millions of Americans. The CCD and LCAO principles provide the next Administration and Congress with a blueprint for inclusion of long-term care within the broader health care reform discussion.

Source: CCD and LCAO

12 Tips for Truly Wonderful Holidays for You and Your Family

1. First and foremost, take care of yourself.

Did I say first? YES! When we need to cut corners, the first thing to go is our own self-care. But taking care of yourself needs to be at the top of your list. Get enough sleep. Eat well, and on time. Sip water throughout the day. Stay active. Take a moment every so often to breathe.

2. Sort out what matters most – and what doesn't – in your holiday season.

Chances are there are some things you do every year that you don't need to or even really want to be doing. Throw those out the window! These can be little things or big things. Your choice! You can only do so much, so save your time and energy for the things that are really important to you.

3. Choose your “keepers” for the holiday season.

Look inward and decide what kind of holiday is just right for your family. Talk it over with your spouse or partner. What are the most important things to you and your family this holiday season? There are no right or wrong answers here! Choose the things that are the most meaningful to you and your family, and focus on those.

4. Be imperfect! And love it!

We all know we're not perfect. But we often spend valuable mental and emotional energy wishing we could do things better. This is especially true around the holidays, when we're bombarded with images of the model family, the ideal kids, the perfect dinner, the museum-quality home decor. We hold ourselves to impossibly high standards. Take the pressure off yourself. What if you were to actually celebrate what you formerly saw as your shortcomings? The imperfect parts of your holiday may become some of your best memories.

5. Give a gift to yourself.

This doesn't have to cost a thing. How about giving yourself a gift certificate? Something like: this certificate entitles the bearer to a nice warm bath. Or a cup of coffee with a friend. An uninterrupted half-hour to devote to your hobby. A night off from household chores. A walk in a nearby park. A book from the library to read – for fun. Whatever gift(s) you give yourself, no guilt allowed! Enjoy your gift to yourself fully, knowing that you work hard, and you deserve it.

6. Spend special time with your child.

At first I had this listed as a “gift to yourself” in #4. And special time with your child is a gift to yourself. But it deserves its own category. It's one of the most precious parts of any holiday. Yet parents have told me that sometimes a holiday goes by so fast, they don't feel like they have time to really connect with their kids. Or that they never seem to get a chance to share the true meaning of the holiday with their kids. Or that they're so busy trying to keep their kids busy and behaving, that they've got little energy left for much else. Try this: choose in advance a particular time during the day when you and your child will spend some special time together. Then stick to it, like an important appointment. Doing what? Anything you and your child like to do together! You can leave it up to your child (giving some choices might help). It doesn't even have to be holiday-related. By consciously setting aside a piece of the day that you can purely enjoy with your kids, you'll be making space for meaningful holiday moments and cherished memories that will last a lifetime.

7. Choose one tradition per holiday that brings your family together for a moment of joy, reflection, fun, relaxation, or just plain silliness.

Traditions are important – whether passed down through the genera-

tions, or started by your own family. A holiday can be so jam-packed with activity that the whole day can whiz by with no time to slow down. Make room in your day for ONE tradition that lets you simply enjoy each other's company for a time – in a way that's uninterrupted and just right for your family. Only one tradition? you ask. Trying to keep too many traditions can make you frazzled and exhausted by the end of the holiday season. So focus on ONE to start with, that you'll do no matter what, that you can enjoy deeply and fully. You can always add more traditions, either this year or in coming years, when time permits.

8. Get help.

Delegate as much as you can this holiday season. Ask yourself two questions: - WHAT tasks can you delegate? - WHO can you delegate the tasks to? Once you get going on this, you'll amaze yourself with how creative you can get at getting help! You'll also be pleasantly surprised at how delegating even the smallest errand, task, or responsibility can give you a big boost in your time and energy. Tip: don't hesitate to ask for help from people. A worry I often hear is, “but they all have their own things to do, I don't want to impose.” Try asking anyway. 99% of the time, people are glad you asked! And you'll be glad too!

9. Never mind what other people think.

The holidays are full of moments when we wonder what other people must be thinking, whether we're out in public or with friends or even with family. Parents of children with special needs report that this is one of the hardest things they have to deal with. I encourage you to let go of what other people think. As a parent, your choices are yours and you make them for a reason. You and your family are who you are. No explanations necessary.

10. Take little time-outs when you can.

If you can get a morning to yourself, an afternoon on your own, or a night out, go for it! But it's hard for many parents of children with special needs to get big chunks of free time. So take little mini-breaks when you can, even when you have enough on your to-do list to keep busy every second of every day. How you spend these moments is totally up to you. You may have worked hard all day and want to spend a little time playing with your kids. Or you may have spent the entire day with the kids and need a few moments of solitude. Taking little breaks isn't just a luxury – it's a necessity.

11. Try something new.

Studies show that when people are in the habit of trying something new every so often, they feel better mentally, physically, and emotionally. Why not try something new this holiday season? Keep it simple. A new flavor of tea? A different outdoor game after the big dinner? I could go on, but I'll let you come up with your own ways to put a little of the zing of something new into your holiday this year.

12. Be present.

The more special the day, the more it tends to go by in a flash. Slow it down a little, savor it, cherish it. Now and then, take a moment to stop and really look at and listen to whomever and whatever is around you. Take the day off mentally and emotionally. Give yourself the permission and the freedom to truly enjoy the special moments of the day.

Article by Joan Celebi, Ed.M., CLC, the founder of SpecialNeedsParentCoach.com, and the proud mother of two children, one of whom has special needs. She is the author of *Overwhelmed No More! The Complete System for Balanced Living for Parents of Children with Special Needs*. Joan's free monthly *Overwhelmed No More!* newsletter helps parents of children with special needs nationwide create manageable, balanced, and joyful lives.

To subscribe, visit www.SpecialNeedsParentCoach.com and click on “Free Stuff.”



TULSA ADVOCATES FOR THE RIGHTS OF CITIZENS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

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The TARC newsletter is published monthly by the Tulsa Advocates for the Rights of Citizens With Developmental Disabilities, Inc., to inform readers about issues and legislative action that affect adults and children with developmental disabilities, their families, and professionals working in the field of developmental disabilities. The contents do not necessarily represent the official position of TARC.

HELP TARC HELP FAMILIES-BECOME A MEMBER TODAY!

Families in Transition

Families in Transition is a support group for parents of adult children with developmental disabilities.

NEXT MEETING:
Wednesday, February 11th
6:30-7:45 p.m.
Goldie's Patio Grill
4401 E. 31st St. in Tulsa

RSVP to Amie Farinella, 918-582-8272

Connections Asperger's Group

Next Meeting:
Wednesday, December 10- 4:30 p.m.
Hardesty Library, 8316 E. 93rd St.
The "Connections" Asperger's Group is a social skills group for adolescents and young adults with Asperger's Syndrome. The group meets monthly. Contact Sherilyn or Amie at 918-582-8272 for more information.

Hispanic Parents Support Group
El Grupo Hispano de Apoyo a Padres de Familia

Next Meeting: Monday, December 15
7:00 to 8:30 p.m.
St. Thomas Moore Catholic Church,
2720 S. 129th E. Ave., Tulsa

Contact Zaida at 918-582-8272 for more information.



links to support, to information, to friends.
Support Group for Adults with Asperger's Syndrome

Next Meeting:
Wednesday, December 17
6:30-8:00 p.m.
Brookside Library, 1207 E. 45th Pl.

Links is a support group for adults with Asperger's Syndrome. Contact Amie Farinella, 918-582-8272 for more information.

Day Makers Activities group for adults with developmental disabilities
Contact: Amie, 918-582-8272

Tuesdays • 10:00-11:30 a.m.
Gatesway Foundation-Mabee Gym
1217 E. College in Broken Arrow

Thursdays • 1:00-2:30 p.m.
McClure Recreation Center
7440 E. 7th Street in Tulsa

MOMS & DADS SUPPORT GROUP

Next Meeting:
Thursday, December 4
7:00-9:00 p.m.

Kirk of the Hills Presbyterian Church
4102 E. 61st St., Room B-8

The mission of the Moms & Dads Support Group is to nurture and support families whose children have a developmental disability, to encourage positive strategies in dealing with challenges, and to share in the joys of raising our children.

For more information, contact Sherilyn, 918-582-8272

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Tulsa People First
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Next Meeting:
Tuesday, December 9
McClure Park Recreation Center,
7440 E. 7th St.
Dinner-5:30 p.m.
Meeting-6:30 p.m.

For more information, contact Amie at 918-582-8272

NO MEETING IN DECEMBER!

CREOKS Behavioral Health, 23 E. Ross in Sapulpa
Childcare is not provided, but please take advantage of Sapulpa's great Respite Care Program

For more information, contact Mindy Littlefield, 378-5632

