

## MEETING OUR MISSION...

Written by Holly Peterson

Recently while working on updating our brochure...I looked at our mission statement...I mean really “looked” and asked myself, do we as a staff live by our mission? Each day when I walk into my office and sit down at my desk, retrieve my voicemails and consider how I will respond to each person, situation and request...am I asking myself...am I doing my best to meet our mission? The initial line... *Advancing Independence*—made me think that perhaps when people call, we often take the information and “fix” things or “give things” without letting the caller in on our *process*. When perhaps teaching the *process* should have been the answer -instead of creating a dependency. **That** would *advance independence, create productivity with the goal of full inclusion*. And now, the consumer has the tools.

Yes, it does sometimes take more work on both our parts. There are many ways for each of us to get involved, to take a lead and make things happen for ourselves and others in the process. Some things we are comfortable doing alone while with others...we feel more comfortable doing as a group. I have posted a few articles in the newsletter about such groups... RICC (Regional Interagency Consumer Committee). Adults (and even teens) can get involved in making their community more accessible, tackling issues such as transportation, housing, employment and whatever you feel is important to assist YOU in advancing YOUR *independence, productivity and full inclusion*.

*Mission:*

**To advance the independence, productivity and full inclusion of children and adults with disabilities into our communities of Jackson, Lenawee and Hillsdale Counties.**

The Jackson Autism Support Network (made up of parents) gives families the tools for supports and socialization. They have several projects in the works to make life better in our own town for individuals with autism.

Last week I talked with a group of parents in the Early Childhood program for children age birth to 3 with developmental delays. We offered a way for those parents to get involved in Early On, by being a part of the LICC (Local Interagency Coordinating Council). Here, parents are a part of the team that helps us decide what is important to families of children with delays or certain medical conditions. It is an opportunity to learn “how to make a difference” from the very beginning!

I felt sad this past summer while working on the Special Education Millage —we had so few families and teachers at the table. We all knew the importance of passing the millage yet few came to “work” on it.. to make the personal investment. I have always felt that *I would not have the right to complain if I had not tried to make a difference myself!*

I can say from personal experience.. there are several people here at DC who are ready, willing and able to help you help yourself. My mother always told me... *“if it is to be...it is up to me”*. We all hold our *own* key to our *own* independence, productivity and inclusion. ■

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## Recap and Reinvigorate in 2012!

*Written By: Lesia Pikaart*

Happy New Year from the Staff at disAbility Connections! We wish you, your family and friends a wonderful 2012. It's been a busy year at disAbility Connections and we look forward to the new year.

Recapping 2011.. we were able to expand our Loan Closet for durable medical equipment to allow space for more donated items to meet community needs. I was pleased to join the staff –becoming a part of a team that genuinely cares about helping others to be more independent, productive and involved.

We recognize the importance of taking the time to assess how we are doing, where need is the greatest and how we can provide the most while being true to our mission. With this in mind and the commitment of our Board of Directors and our staff, there are two main areas of change and growth coming in the new year.

We have had increasing requests to help with equipment repair and our lack of space to do repairs was a roadblock. "Fix-dis" will allow us to meet this need. We have acquired the old Braille's Dry Cleaners across the street from our offices. The parking lot has been replaced and windows have been installed. Volunteers are now working to finish the interior of



the building and we hope to be using the additional space for equipment repair. In addition, we are partnering with Michigan Rehabilitation

Services to have one or two slots at this location to do assessment/training for people interested in this hands-on type work. Contact us if you or someone you know, has mechanical/fix-it skills and would be interested in helping us with repairs and mentoring other volunteers to learn these skills.

We are making concrete plans to expand some services to Hillsdale and Lenawee Counties - where we currently provide limited services. People in those areas are in need. Focus groups were held in both counties and discussions with potential partner organizations are underway. Since resources are limited, I'm scheduling presentations to several service clubs in those areas to gather additional input and local support. Stay tuned for updates on progress.

If you have any questions or would like to become a volunteer, please call my direct line (517-998-3082) or email me at [lesia@disabilityconnect.org](mailto:lesia@disabilityconnect.org).

Thank you for continuing to support disAbility Connections. We look forward to reaching more people and meeting the needs of our communities in 2012!



## **Jackson Autism Support Network (JASN) News...**

*Written By: Shelly Lewis*

Do you have a child or know of family or friends who have a child/children with autism?

Have you heard what the Jackson Autism Support Network (JASN) is doing lately? Let me introduce myself – I'm Shelly Lewis, president of JASN. I'm a mom of 2 children with autism, Brad is 21 and Garrett is 10 years old.

If you have not been to a monthly get together in a while or are just finding out about us, we would love for you to attend. **We meet on the second Tuesday of each-month from 6:00-8:00pm at the Lyle Torrant Center.** Our next meeting will be a February 14th Valentine Party. We meet in the cafeteria with childcare and a light meal provided. Our meetings give you an opportunity for sharing with others who understand what it is like to live with a child or adult with autism. You can find comfort in knowing that we have walked in your shoes!

This year's focus has been on getting our kids out in the community socializing with each other. Along with the amazing support from other board members, we are out fundraising so that we can provide these outings free for our kids. In the fall we went to Flavor Fruit Farms, where

our kids got a private tour of the farm. The kids got to swim at the YMCA. We just had our Christmas Party for the kids at Optimist Ice Arena, where we had the whole rink to ourselves. It is fun for the kids and the parents! We planned a night for the parents to get together before the holidays at Bone Island Grill.

Check out our new website [www.jasn-mi.org](http://www.jasn-mi.org) and our Facebook page. JASN is also working with Allegiance Health Systems and Comprehensive Speech and Language on some exciting new ventures.

On January 21<sup>st</sup> we will be having a fundraiser at Optimist Ice Arena called *Around the Rink for Autism*. It will include skating, a meal and raffles. All proceeds from the event will help JASN provide support groups and outings for the kids. For a \$15 registration fee you will get skating, dinner and a t-shirt. Please register to skate with us and help JASN help families in Jackson. Check the website for a registration form.

If you have been affected by autism and need support, check out our website to see what JASN is doing. Please feel free to join or contact me at (517) 812-4303 or email me at [jasn\\_mi@hotmail.com](mailto:jasn_mi@hotmail.com). I would love to hear from you. ■



Welcome Cathy Yori as our new Accountant at disAbility Connections.

Welcome Dana Vance to the dC Nursing Home Transition Staff!



### *Holiday Thanks to....*

First Church of the Nazarene for hosting the GOGOs Christmas Party!

Barb Stoy - Region 2 Area Agency on Aging -for the Christmas Tree for the disAbility Connections Conference room and Nursing Home Transition party.

Yukon Jack's for catering the Nursing Home Transition party!

# 2011 disAbility Awareness Dinner a hit!

Written by: Holly Peterson

From the moment I saw the video on *youtube* about the high school band director from Florida...I made it a goal to talk the committee into Doug Burris as our disAbility Awareness Dinner Speaker. I knew that he would move an audience - because he is able to move high school students.

It was obvious in the video that there was a keen respect for Doug, who happens to have Multiple Sclerosis - I say "happens" because Doug himself never mentions this, he didn't mention it in conversations with Lesia as they worked out the particulars to Doug's first formal presentation as a "Speaker for disABILITY Awareness". I say "happens" because he doesn't even SEE himself as an individual who is paralyzed below the neck and makes it his mission each day to get to school and make a difference for others by giving students a mission of music and self discipline. We had to ask Doug to talk about his disability... something foreign to a man whose daily mission is others... not himself.

Doug came through—as I'm certain his students would say is no surprise! He proposed to Lesia that he come and bring



Doug Burris and the Classical Guitar Ensemble



some of his students with him. He wasn't concerned with the payment to him as his personal fee...

but he looked at the total and made the total dollar amount work to get himself, his personal attendant and the four student "Classical Guitar Ensemble" to Jackson.

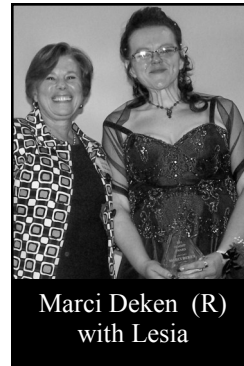
We were the winners! I would have to say that Doug Burris and the Classical Guitar Ensemble were possibly my favorite speakers over the last fourteen of the fifteen years that I have attended. Why? I think it is because I saw Doug Burris as a totally unselfish individual. He is the ultimate "teacher" teaching by example. This is easy to see from his students who have TOTAL respect for him.

The theme of the dinner... "I've Got the Music in Me!" hit home - by the time the ensemble wowed us with classics, we all had the music and their youthful spirit in our bones! Along with awareness, the

dinner is our major fundraising event of the year. We had more than 300 attendees, a silent auction with wonderful themed baskets, a 50/50 drawing and the "bushel of booze" all of which netted disAbility Connections Foundation nearly \$14,000.

Award recipients for 2011 were Jerry Jenkins for Distinguished Service,

Chuck Dillon for Volunteer for the Year, Marci Deken for the Summit Award and Bob and Alice DeVries for Empowering Life Award. ■



Marci Deken (R) with Lesia



Top:  
Bob & Alice De Vries  
Center:  
Jerry Jenkins  
Bottom:  
Chuck Dillon

## **Pets; Equals Companionship & Responsibility**

*Written By: Parrish L. Stahl*

Most Americans would agree that our pets become part of the family. They give us numerous gifts. Chief among these is companionship. Some people would argue that they like their animals more than people. At the end of a hard day few moments in life are as comforting than a favorite pet's greeting. Our animal friends provide us with warmth when we are cold, a listening ear and sometimes even a reason for being.

Even creatures that reside in aquariums and cages can provide us with the privilege of observing them and benefits to our overall well-being. Why we fall so head over heels in love with animals is probably that unlike humans they tend to conduct their lives in a way that is wholly non-judgmental.

If you have been thinking of a pet for yourself, a friend or family member that is dealing with the effects of isolation or disability; it may be a terrific idea or it could spell disaster. Being responsible for any living thing is a sacred trust. Our community is full of unwanted domesticated animals that lack proper care and supervision. The crucial thing to do is to not add to the problem.

There are some important

considerations that can help minimize the pitfalls. Never give animals as a surprise gift. They are a major life commitment. What you visualize as a comfort might in actuality be a burden. All living things require maintenance. Do you or the prospective owner have the financial, physical and emotional capacity to provide proper care?

A person can be a lover of living things and not be at a place in life where ownership makes sense. Are you considering a dog for example; is it a small or large breed, a long or short coat, allergies in the household, are they already spayed? Can the family afford the upfront and annual expense? It is not just dogs and cats that are expensive. A pet rabbit is one of the most expensive animals to care for. Litter cost alone can be a yearly expense of \$400. According to About.com, if your choice is a dog; a person should be ready to spend between \$90-\$290 per month, depending on the breed, health care, grooming, toys, pet boarding and other needed supplies.

Have a plan in place for your pets care if you can no longer care for them, some can live as long as humans! Owning and caring for a pet can be one of the greatest joys in life. You and your prospective pet will have a long and fulfilling relationship if you first think with your head...then enjoy from the heart! ■

## **Ramping-up for a new season!**

It's that time of year again and we are getting ready to roll out

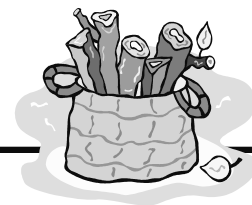


a new season of ramp building. Beginning March 1, 2012 we start to accept applications for residential ramps on a first come/first served basis. If you have questions about the program or need an application please call Lora Bigcraft at (517) 782-6054 ext. 236 ■

### **GOOD SAMARITAN WANTED:**

A couple needs help that have multiple disabilities and a recent surgery. She is recovering from a broken neck. They heat with a wood burner. They have seasoned downed oak logs in the front yard. They need one of two things, split burnable wood for free or at a very low cost...or someone to cut and split their existing logs.

They are heating with electric heaters and its costing a huge percentage of their income. He goes out and cuts enough wood for a day or two and spends three days in bed recovering. They live in the Parma area. Contact Perry at disAbility Connections 782-6054 if you can help!



## Tips: A Closer look at Social Security Disability and Supplemental Security Income

Written by: Parrish Stahl

This publication has published several informative articles regarding Social Security Disability and Supplemental Security Income. The subject is huge with many layers. We will try to provide some simple, to the point advice for people that are speaking to their health care professionals about providing documentation for a possible disability claim.

When you know the proper terminology in discussions with your doctor—that can help get the correct terminology into the all important and needed documentation. As an example, if you have a cognitive or mental disability a case can be built around these 5 issues:

### 5 Mental Capacities Social Security Looks at Closely

- Ability to understand and remember instructions
- Carryout instructions
- Deal with co worker contact
- Ability to function without special supervision
- Ability to deal with day to day stressors

Discussing any of these specific issues as they pertain to you; can help your doctor write strong documentation and ultimately strengthen your case. ■



# Focus On... Nursing Home Transition Program

Written by: Holly Peterson

Mary Fitz had lived in a nursing home after a bad fall three years ago. She had given up her home and all of her worldly possessions. Never in her wildest dreams did she think she would be back in her own apartment with her own things, getting up in the morning when she chose, making the meals she desired to eat... on her schedule.

There are many other individuals who desire to live more independently but just don't know how to go about getting set up again. That's where the Nursing Home Transition program comes in. It is funded through the State of Michigan and not only saves the state a great deal of money...but in turn gives individuals the opportunity to have some help to get a place prepared with the assistance needed to go home. Mary for example needed a ramp and some assistive items for the bathroom. Her family helped with some furnishings, but she still needed dishes, pans, linens and groceries to get her started.

Carmon Yeloushan, Dan Ramey and Dana Vance are on staff at Disability Connections working with this program. They are making people's dreams come true. They work with the individual and their family to make arrangements to

set up an environment that will assist them to return home with the best possible successes.

Some funds exist through the program to get durable medical equipment, basic furnishings and allow for some accessibility issues to be dealt with. Plus Carmon, Dan and Dana have the experience to help make it happen.

If you or someone you know needs their help, please feel free to call them at (517) 782-6054. They work in Jackson, Hillsdale and Lenawee counties.

Carmon, Dan and Dana pictured



It is such a rewarding experience. Stories of success were shared at a Christmas Party given in their honor in December. A husband and wife reunited, a son returning home, a man getting his own place after 6 years in a Nursing Home. Staff and those transitioned by Region 2 Area Agency on Aging were also present to share in the event, catered gratuitously by Yukon Jack's. ■

## **Giving Back is for Everyone**

*By: Parrish L. Stahl*

At some point in our lives we all need to lean on someone or something for support. Society, individuals and governments ultimately make choices about who needs help. The tricky part is how much is too much. The strain caused by taking more resources out of an entity than individuals are giving back can break individuals and government.

Politics and even family disagreements often have at their core a fundamental opinion that a person / group of people are taking or getting more than they deserve. Long ago our society made the decision to set up safety nets to help vulnerable groups of people. The elderly and people with disabilities come immediately to mind, but there are other nets for our children, the working and non-working poor, the hungry, unemployed, sick and disadvantaged. The list is varied. As stressors continue to build society, individuals and families are having an increasingly difficult time coping with needs.

If we look back on how this country has dealt with crisis in the past we can learn valuable tips for dealing with our current problems. Everyone has talents and abilities. People need encouragement, a pat on the back and most importantly for someone to believe in them. Do you think that Rosie the riveter (the term used for women that worked in the manufacturing

plants producing munitions and war supplies during World War II) thought that she could become an expert welder, riveter, engine assembler...jobs traditionally done by men? These women learned entirely new jobs replacing the male workers who were in the military. What historians do not talk enough about is how many believed that women could not do the jobs they ultimately expertly performed.

Our society has vast untapped human resources. Our economy and our well-being as a country will turn around when we encourage all people to give something back. *Pay it forward.* If you are not working because of the economy, unemployment, disability or any number of other reasons; you likely have something many individuals do not, time on your hands. Learned helplessness and self imposed isolation are two huge problems that plague our community. Maybe your way to give back is by giving of yourself and encouraging people to get involved.

We are so much richer when we help each other. Think small if it is too overwhelming. The snow is coming, can you clear your neighbor's sidewalk after the first snow, and if you hear a job lead can you pass it on to someone who is looking, can you give someone who is cold your extra blankets? "Giving" may be just the feeling you have been missing! YOU can help your family, church, organization or country get and stay healthy... make a commitment to not take more than you give back. ■

# ADA

## Americans With Disabilities Act

### **Did you Know?**

The Department of Justice resolves numerous cases without litigation or a formal settlement agreement. In some instances, the public accommodation or State or local government promptly agrees to take the necessary actions to achieve compliance. In others, extensive negotiations are required. This is an example of what has been accomplished through informal settlements.

*An individual who uses a wheelchair complained that it was difficult to maneuver through the entrance doors at several branches of a Michigan bank. The bank implemented a policy directing staff to open the doors for customers with disabilities when needed, posted a notice about the policy and trained it's employees on how to assist customers with disabilities.*

Sometimes businesses don't know there is an issue unless we let them know. Calm, rational discussions go a long way in solving problems and coming up with solutions that all parties can live with ■



## Who wouldn't want to be a GOGO?

Written by: Holly Peterson

If you were a GOGO...you could have... been to 2 swim parties, gone to Summer Camp and gone on boat rides, made arts and crafts, sang Karaoke, learned to square dance, played BINGO!, made several new friends, taken a spooky Halloween wagon ride at Camp McGregor, gone bowling, danced to a personal concert performed by Steve Tucker, petted exotic animals, worn a live snake around your neck, had a bon fire at the lake, danced at a Mardi Gras party, shared your talents, played games and celebrated accomplishments with your friends! With all of this said...I repeat—who wouldn't want to be a GOGO?



Vika & Daisy cool off at the lake



2011 Summer GOGO Camp at Camp McGregor

GOGO's are fun loving individuals (with disabilities) who have graduated from High School or Kit Young Center and are living at home with their families. They like to go places, have fun, and make new friends

Call Holly at 782-6054 ext. 223 at disAbility Connections if you are interested in joining the GOGOs or becoming a volunteer, both roles are equally fun! ■



## Games, Crafts & Wellness Day At disAbility Connections



Held on the First Friday of the Month 1 pm-4 pm  
(sports equipment or Wii every time)

### 2012 Schedule

(subject to change at program coordinators discretion)

April 6, 2012 *Featured Craft: Fabric Jewelry*

□ Mini Class: **Managing Diabetic Diets**

May 4, 2012 *Featured Craft: Puzzle Piece Jewelry*

□ Mini Class: **Relaxation Techniques**

June 1, 2012 *Featured Craft: Air Freshener*

□ Mini Class: **Low Fat Cooking**

July 6, 2012 *Featured Craft: Mosaic Project*

□ Mini Class: **Adaptive Bikes**

August 3, 2012 *Featured Craft: Zipper Pulls/Phone Charms*

Mini Class: **Adaptive Bikes**

September 7, 2012 *Featured Craft:*

**Fabric Christmas Cards**

□ Mini Class: **Yoga**

October 5, 2012 *Featured Craft:*

**Fabric Flower Wreath**

□ Mini Class: **Smart Food Shopping**

November 2, 2012 *Featured Craft:*

**Fabric Corsage** □ Mini Class: **Low Calorie Cooking**

Thanks to our sponsors:



### Inclimate Weather Policy

If Jackson Public Schools are closed Games, Crafts and Wellness Day activities are canceled for that day.

**Questions? Contact Brenda 782-6054**



## **DC VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATED AND NEEDED**

*Written by: Holly Peterson*

You can't imagine what a day is like at disAbility Connections when we are short of volunteers! The first thing it drives home is how much we as a staff and community rely upon the skills that they bring to disAbility Connections.

Some volunteers work an actual schedule, for example Monday and Thursday mornings from 8:30-1 PM. Others come in on special occasions to assist with mailings, arts and crafts or GO-GO events. All bring with them unique skills, some repair or maintain equipment or build ramps, others work at the front desk answering phones, doing data input and filing and we also appreciate those who volunteer by serving on our board of directors.

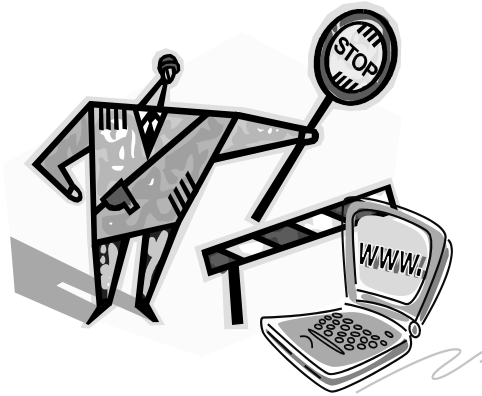
We are fortunate to have Dodie Botsford, our Volunteer Coordinator to help individuals choose an area that best suits them and provides the needed training to make them comfortable in their role.

If you have some spare time and talents, we will likely have a spot to slip you into...our volunteers always tell us that they get more reward out of being here than they had ever expected. Contact Dodie at 782-6054 Ext. 243. ■

*Last year alone...  
Volunteers donated  
nearly 5000 hours  
to disAbility Connections!*

## **WEBSITE UNDER CONSTRUCTION**

disAbility Connections is working hard to make our website the best possible site for providing the information that you need. To make this happen we would like you to contribute suggestions about what YOU would like to see on our site. Suggestions can be submitted by visiting our website at [www.disabilityconnect.org](http://www.disabilityconnect.org) and selecting the "Contact Us" tab. This will take you to an email where you can submit your ideas. ■



## **disAbility Connections HOURS OF OPERATION:**

**Monday—Friday  
8:30 AM to 4:30 PM  
Our office is closed  
when Jackson Public  
schools are closed  
due to inclement  
weather.**

## *disAbility Connections*

### **Staff & Extensions**

**Lesia Pikaart- 222**  
*Executive Director*

**JoAnn Lucas - 225**  
*Associate Director*

**Brenda Bobon - 242**  
*Independent Living Counselor*

**Dodie Botsford – 243**  
*Administrative Assistant  
& Volunteer Coordinator*

**Carole Briggs - 242**  
*Respite Coordinator*

**Jo Corder - 228**  
*Tech Coordinator*

**Cathy Yori - 227**  
*Accountant*

**Cyd Collins - 226**  
*Data Entry*

**Jim Cyphers - 224**  
*Independent Living  
Specialist*

**Lora Bigcraft - 236**  
*Resource Coordinator*

**Cathy Heins - 238**  
*Michigan Alliance for  
Families - Parent Mentor*

**Don Keith - 232**  
*Maintenance*

**Alan Lewis**  
*Equipment Assistant*

**Holly Peterson - 223**  
*PERC Coordinator,  
Newsletter, Go-Go's*

**Dan Ramey - 240**  
*Nursing Home Transition*

**Parrish Stahl - 239**  
*P/R, Community Outreach*

**Dana Vance - 247**  
*Nursing Home Outreach*

**Carmon Yeloushan - 231**  
*Nursing Home  
Transition Coordinator*

### **Thanks to our Weekly Volunteers**

Herb Botsford • John Conley  
Alice DeVries • Chuck Dillon  
Gary Eckert • Desmond Herbert  
Marilyn Johnson • Elissa Konkol  
• Pat Shipley • Al Walker

## Rotary / Children's Christmas Party Celebrates 79 Years!



Student's actively participate in the magic show with Colour's

Elementary were wowed with lunch, a magic show with Colour's the Clown and a visit from Santa who had brought personally chosen gifts for each of the kids. One young man could hardly wait to give Santa his hand written letter with pasted pictures of his Christmas gift dreams. If you have EVER questioned what is "all-good"...this event fits that description!

The Jackson Noon Rotary began a very rich tradition in 1932. I can't they would have dreamed this great event would thrive all of these 79 years! It does so because of a great commitment to local children with disabilities. Three local classrooms from Northeast Elementary, Hunt Elementary and Bennett



*Current Resident or*

*Place label here*