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November - December 1991



In this issue:

We're Back!

The Stuff of Dreams
Come True

Report on the Ohio
Conference

THE MAILBOX:
Letters from Subscribers

Social Stories

An Update on
The Curriculum System Manual

Pictured above: Liesl McDowell, from Indianapolis. See story inside by Susan McDowell, her mother.

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(616) 457-8955 anytime.

About Our Cover: Meet Liesl McDowell from Indianapolis! Our thanks to Liesl and her mother, Susan McDowell, for their terrific article in this issue, "The Stuff of Dreams Come True."

W E ' R E B A C K !

Whew! That was CLOSE! We had reached the end of our funding (we thought) for The Morning News. This issue is proof we're back - coming free to you for another year. We appreciated all the letters you sent us - excerpts from a few of them are in this issue. The feelings are all mutual - we are thrilled to have the opportunity to continue The Morning News!

To those of you new to The Morning News, WELCOME! The Morning News shares experiences educating students with Autism and developmental disabilities with parents, professionals, businesses, and students from the United States, Mexico, Canada, and Germany.

We welcome and encourage contributions from all subscribers - including students - to this newsletter. Please feel free to send articles, pictures, photographs - GET CREATIVE - to The Morning News at any time! Enclose a note indicating we may print your contribution in The Morning News, along with your name, address and phone #, and send it to Sue Jonker at the above address. Photographs, etc. can be returned on request.

This month we called Susan McDowell in Indiana and invited her to write an article for The Morning News about her daughter, Liesl. She agreed. Beginning below and continuing on the next few pages, we proudly present her article.

The Stuff of Dreams Come True

- Susan McDowell

The day Carol Gray contacted me about writing a story featuring my daughter Liesl, little did she know how timely her phone call was. It was on that very day that Liesl, my 8-year-old second grader, was mainstreamed for the first time into an academic area--math. "This is great," I thought. "I can write a success story!"

I firmly believe that all parents of autistic children need to hear success stories. They inspire us. They motivate us. They energize us. And this is how I arrived at a decision that hopefully will enrich my daughter's life...

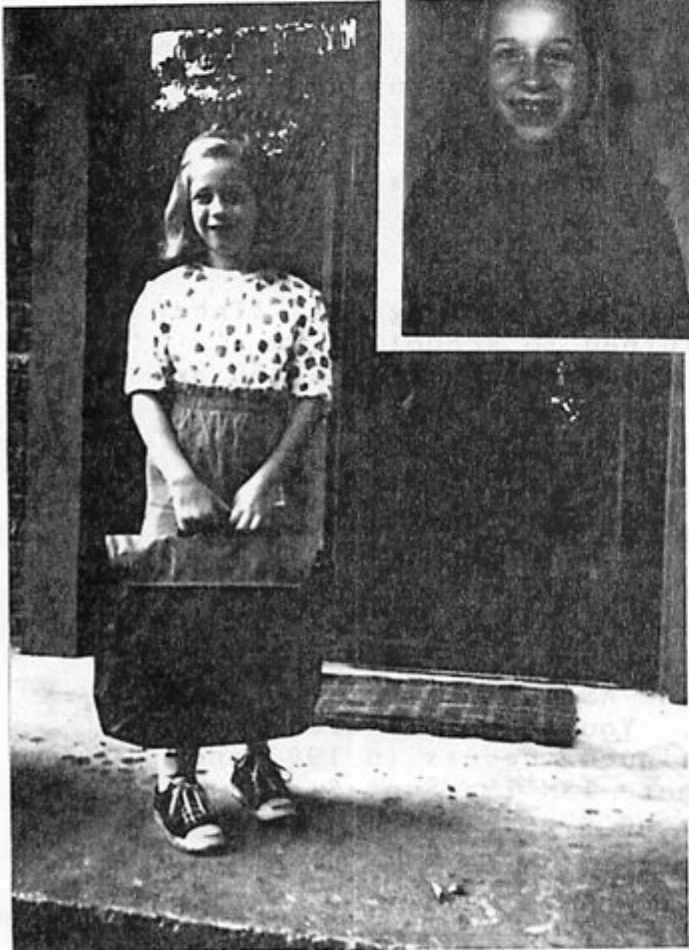


The summer had already brought some exciting moments of achievement for Liesl. First of all, she started taking piano lessons. From the beginning she showed signs of having musical talent. She sang Christmas carols at around 18 months of age, and when she got older she enjoyed "playing" the piano on her own. A few months ago she informed me that she wanted to play "Hill Street Blues" on the piano. I showed her the melody, and she was able to play it in an incredibly short amount of time. The time was ripe...

Music has opened up a whole new world for Liesl--a place where she can shine. She thoroughly enjoyed playing and is showing signs of being capable of reading music. Her piano teacher is also working with her on vocals, as she loves to sing and has a very good pitch. She is able to play elementary versions of classics such as "Für Elise" (one of her favorites), "Surprise Symphony" and "Minuet in G." Vocally, she does such pieces as "Edelweiss" and "My Favorite Things." We are now working on Christmas music, and her music teacher at school has indicated that she will have the opportunity to play for the other students. She already knows "Jingle Bells".

The second big accomplishment of the summer was for Liesl to learn how to swim. One autistic child, unafraid of water and capable of some arm strokes, kicking and blowing bubbles (but not all at the same time!); one no-nonsense swimming instructor with years of experience dealing with special needs children (both in and out of the water) and--presto!--a team was formed that produced a child who can swim independently and loves to jump off the diving board. This was all but overwhelming for me to observe as the summer went by. It was especially a milestone for Liesl, as she wears braces on her legs due to slight

hemiparesis of her left side, and the need to correct toeing in on both feet. I can't tell you how many times tears came to my eyes as I observed her progress.



Then I met Carol Gray at the ASA National Conference in Indianapolis in July of this year. Her presentations convinced me that with the right support system, Liesl, who is high-functioning, could be mainstreamed into academic areas. She had already been mainstreamed in specials (music, art, library, computer lab) with a fair amount of success. (Gym was definitely a problem area, as Liesl is not only autistic, but has attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder as well. This year we decided to hold off on gym for the time being.) So with my usual (and sometimes unbridled) enthusiasm, the ASA National Conference having transformed me into a woman with a mission, I set out to make arrangements to reconvene Liesl's case conference with the goal of getting her mainstreamed into an academic area. I had approached the case conference committee with such a request last year, but

after careful consideration, we felt that Liesl's behavior needed to be modified more in order for her to be mainstreamed successfully.

Now I was faced with a situation that often causes problems between parents and the school. Would the case conference committee be as confident as I was that Liesl could be successfully mainstreamed?

Well, as things turned out, the case conference was a huge success. The cooperation of the administration and faculty was everything I could have hoped for. I can't say enough good things about all those involved to make my dream a reality. We started by mainstreaming Liesl for storytime, and then after observing that she was adapting well, she was mainstreamed into the math class. Meanwhile, she was awarded October's

student-of-the-month in her resource room. I know there will be hurdles to clear, but so far math class has gone quite well.

Just recently, I gave a presentation to Liesl's mainstream class to help the children understand what autism is and how they can better relate to Liesl. Her mainstream teacher has been wonderful and the children have been very accepting of Liesl.

When I went into the mainstream class to give my presentation, I saw Liesl sitting at her desk, working on her math. Once again, the emotions that welled inside of me upon seeing her participate like the other children was indescribable. And with the Christmas season upon us, I can only say: "Yes, parents, there is a Santa Claus."

P.S. Carol Gray's presentations were so inspiring that since the ASA National Conference I have returned to school (I am a former teacher, Spanish my major with a minor in reading) and am working on a minor in special education with the goal of becoming a consultant for autistic, as well as learning disabled, children. I have already received support in my endeavor from the director of special services in our township and from the principal and staff of Liesl's school.

* * *

Thanks, Susan, for a beautifully written article. I am glad you enjoyed my presentations at the ASA conference, but I can't take any credit for inspiration. You and Liesl are the inspiration! Our best wishes for continued success in 1992 and after. (You mean some people think there ISN'T a Santa? Naw...the elves I'VE talked with swear he's real.) - Carol Gray

Reporting on the Ohio Conference

- Dale Ranson

After attending the conference for the Ohio Association I realized two very important things. First, we all seem to be doing the right sort of things according to the "experts." Second, I have my work cut out for me to do all the things I should be doing. Luckily, I have the staff and support to at least begin to attack some of those areas. The following is a brief overview of the conference.

One of the things they stressed when they talked about identification and diagnosis was that Autism is not a disease but a collection of symptoms, or a syndrome. One of the interesting descriptions of Autism was that an individual's intellect and their ability to use it on a day to day basis is what separates Autism from other disabilities. However, the

description I enjoyed more was that Autism is like a bad FM station, sometimes it comes in clear, sometimes it doesn't. Most of the other information in this area has been the same for many years such as all the statistics, etc..

One of the most informative presentations and certainly the most entertaining was Dan Crimmins on behavior management. Anyone who can hear him speak, should. His main premise was that you do not manage behavior, you negotiate it. Too often we forget to consider the wants and needs of the person we are trying to make a change in. He also talked about using anger control techniques with certain individuals. This involved the steps STOP, PAUSE, THINK, DO IT, EVALUATE. You are supposed to find relevant techniques for each step depending on who you are dealing with. The theory he proposed that I really understood as a teacher was that the collective IQ of all your students is probably greater than yours - do not forget it!

In the area of medical research the bottom line is that they do not know what causes Autism and the only known effective treatment is a behaviorally based special education program. They are finding some definite genetic links to Autism but otherwise there are a number of things that show some type of statistical link but are not conclusive.

Overall I thought the conference was fantastic. After overcoming the depression caused by feeling like there was so much I wasn't doing I realized everyone there felt the same. I realize this only barely scratched the topics covered so if anyone wants more information please feel free to contact me. (Contact Dale at the address/phone number on page 1.)

A Unit on Autism

Dale is in the process of developing a unit on Autism for our secondary students with Autism. We would sincerely appreciate any information/experiences/ideas any subscribers may have in this area. If you've some ideas/experiences to help us, please contact Dale (address/phone number on page 1). THANKS!

Three Ways to Cut Fat From Your Diet

- Carol Gray

Occasionally students with Autism display a special wisdom in the things they say, or write. This example comes from a science test question: "List three ways to cut fat from your diet." The student's answer: "1. Cut the fat from your steak. 2. Slide it to the side of your plate. 3. Throw it in the garbage."

THE MAILBOX

- Subscribers from The Morning News network

We received many letters lately! Thank you for sharing with us! What follows are some excerpts:



"Thank you for sending me your newsletter - it just makes me work harder with my son (6 yrs) so someday he too can work at places like some of your students..." - B.J., New Mexico

(To B.J.: Our best wishes to you, and your son. You're very close to the next ASA National Conference in July '92 in Albuquerque!)

"I am a job developer with a high school transition program that placed 57 students in our urban community last school year (enclosed is our brochure.)" - T.R., West Virginia

(To T.R.: Please write us about your program to share in The Morning News! Thanks! We'll call to remind you! 😊)

"I'm a school social worker...I work with two autistic students. I received information concerning your newsletter in The Link, a publication about Autism for parents and professionals in Iowa." - V.V., Iowa

"...I am part of a team of special educators in Indiana addressing vocational education through inservice throughout the state. Your program is an example of one I think can be modified to serve all students with disabilities, not just Autism or mental retardation." - M.M., Indiana

(To M.M.- YES! We've had a lot of success using our curriculum with students with other developmental disabilities).

Success in Ohio with Social Stories

- Carol Gray

Recently we received a letter from Joy D. Garand in Cincinnati, Ohio. Joy attended my presentation at the ASA conference in Indianapolis, in which I discussed "social stories" as one way to assist students with Autism in selecting relevant social cues. An excerpted version of her letter:

Dear Carol,

I teach in a MH primary classroom. Social stories have made inclusion so much easier and quicker. We have also used the social stories at home with the parents and have had overwhelming success. We will also be using these ideas for a pilot program for inclusion in Ohio.

Sincerely,

Joy D. Garand
Cincinnati, Ohio

I called Joy the day I received her letter. Her enthusiasm was infectious. She has written and used social stories with her students with Autism with immediate success. Joy indicated they had tried several interventions, and it was "scary" how well the social stories worked. In response to Joy's letter, we decided to share some information regarding social stories in this issue.

Social Stories

Social stories are written for individual students in response to specific situations. Social stories reinforce other Social Reading activities (described in The Curriculum System manual), and can be used to personalize or emphasize social skills covered in any social skills training program.

Social stories are written in a special, but individualized format. They should not be confused with Language Experience (L.E.A.) Stories - as they differ considerably across several factors. Consider these basic guidelines for social stories:

1. Social stories are written for individual students, by staff or parents.
2. Social stories are usually written in the present tense (to describe activities that are threatening or confusing); or
3. Social Stories may be written in the future tense, to describe an upcoming situation to make it seem less threatening, perhaps tying aspects of it to a more familiar event, setting, or activity.
4. Social stories describe a situation matter of factly, from the perspective of an objective onlooker, without assuming or defining the reactions of the student. From this perspective, social stories assist/reinforce/support students as they learn to focus on relevant cues.

5. The student is often (though not always) NOT pictured or illustrated, as stories are written as though the student is also looking at the situation.

6. Social Stories may be illustrated with photographs, illustrations, or student drawings.

7. Social stories often describe one aspect or one step of a social situation per page, to allow the story to be used as a curriculum story, or an interactive story (two special formats for social stories).

We invite you to share with us your ideas or experiences related to social stories, or copies of social stories you have written. Send to Carol Gray at the address listed at the start of this newsletter. Please make sure to enclose your name, address, and phone number.

An Update on The Curriculum System Manual

- Carol Gray

Thank you for your interest in our manual, The Curriculum System: Success as an Educational Outcome. Thank you, also, for your patience (better than my own!) We have all your requests on file. We are sorry, but we may have to ask people who sent later requests for \$5 shipping and handling. We'll let you know.

In our last newsletter, we indicated the manual would be available by Halloween. It's not that we're incredibly dishonest...just incredibly naive. Work toward a final draft is continuing. We absolutely guarantee as soon as it is available, we will place it in the mail to you.

We may have a few manuals left (they're free). The number of manuals available will be uncertain until we know the exact number of pages in the final manual, and thus the number of manuals we will be able to print. You may place your name and address on our list for a manual by contacting us at the address or phone number at the start of this newsletter.
