

Special Insights

Parents helping parents and professionals enable individuals with disabilities to reach their own potential

A Message from Max

Over the years, we have shared much about transition, setting goals and looking for results in this newsletter. Right now, I am in a position to announce a transition for Parent Network. Effective January 1, 2008, I will be turning over the role of executive director to Susan Barlow.

Most of what we sought to accomplish back in September 2001 is well on its way. Parent Network has become a very effective resource for parents/families and is a thriving agency with a very good reputation and committed and talented staff. It is solid financially with the potential to grow and go to the next level.

Despite challenges, Parent Network has served thousands of parents, family members and professionals and I couldn't be more proud. I feel good about going back to a job in child welfare at Baker Victory Services where I can serve families differently. I plan to stay involved with this organization that I love by providing all the support that I can to Susan in her new role and seeing what opportunities arise at the state level to make things better for parents and individuals with special needs. Additionally, I have accepted a new voluntary role with NYS PTA as special education chairperson. I hope to help us further some of the work we have started with NYS Education Department for increasing parent involvement and helping system change for youth that are falling between systems and being hurt in the process.

I have appreciated being able to serve you in my role as executive director of Parent Network and am proud of all that our agency has achieved over these six and a half years. While challenging at times, we have always found ways to serve parents by our ability to collaborate with agencies and school districts. I have learned a lot about leadership, how to get things done and have done a lot of listening. We talk about Parent Network being like the "little engine that could", letting nothing stand in the way of accomplishing our mission to serve the children and families of WNY. Together we have set the stage for our organization to become even better.

As my role changes, I look back fondly on our accomplishments, the barriers we overcame, the friends we have made, and the respect we have gained because of our determination. My deepest thanks go to Susan Barlow, the Staff and Board of Parent Network. We have made a difference.



Speaking with Sue

Max describes Parent Network as "the little engine that could", which is true. This little engine would not have made it though without the staff and board who astound me daily with their commitment, wisdom and endurance. Nor would this agency have made it without the support of the community in WNY. The partnerships and relationships we have built are what keep this engine on the right track headed to make a difference.

Organizations, much like trains, need good teams and teamwork to make differences happen. At Parent Network I am lucky to witness differences happen whenever...

- **Mary Jo Butler** picks up the phone and answers the burning question of a parent/caregiver or provider at the other end
- **Jennifer Zolnowski** creates a flyer, updates the website or publishes this newsletter
- **Theresa Drum** or **Stacie Ricioppo** teach people about the ins and outs of special education in a workshop
- **Peg Kovach** registers people on the phone for services and makes them feel like they are the center of her world
- **Kim Walek** reaches out to the parents/caregivers who have no idea what Parent Network is all about
- **Gary Pochatko** runs a financial report to help insure that we keep our funding in place and can continue to operate
- **Tracie** and **Sandra**, our interns, voluntarily support all of us on a daily basis

Differences happen...daily at Parent Network. I just feel lucky to be a part of these differences.

I would like to thank you Max for being the engineer of our "little engine". We are grateful for your leadership, sense of humor and commitment. We wish you the best of luck and much success in your transition.

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I could not be more proud of the outcomes our organization has accomplished over the last six plus years. With the continued support of the community and dedication of staff and board members, I am certain that Parent Network will continue to make a difference for parents/caregivers, professionals and individuals with disabilities.

Transition Talk: What is Credit?

What is Credit? Credit is permission to buy something without paying right away for it.

What is a Credit Card? A credit card is a thin plastic card that can be used to buy things on **credit**, instead of using cash or a check. There are MANY different kinds of credit cards that you can get. Some of the most well-known credit cards are VISA, Master Card and American Express. When you get a credit card it will have your name on the front, as well as a group of numbers that allows the computer to know that the card belongs to you.

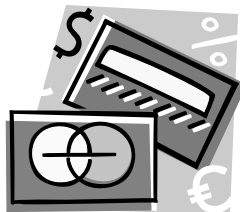
When you first get your credit card there will be a blank strip on the back of the card where you should sign your name. It is very important to sign your name. When you use your credit card at a store or a restaurant, you will usually have to sign your name to a sheet of paper saying what you bought- that paper is called a **credit slip**. The person you are paying will look at the signature on the credit slip, making sure that it matches the signature on the back of your credit card. This helps stop people from using your credit card who do not have permission to do so.

Each credit card has a **credit limit** or the most money the bank will let you borrow before paying them back. Different credit cards have different limits. The longer you have had a credit card and the more you pay your bills on time, the higher your credit limit becomes.

If you go over your credit limit it means that you have used more money with your credit card than the bank gave you to spend. When this happens, the bank will charge you money, called a fee, for going over the limit. Keep track of what you charge on your credit card to make sure you do not go over your credit limit.

Each month you will get a **credit card bill**. The bill will have a list of every time you used your credit card, where

you used it, and how much money you charged to your credit card at that time. It will also have all of your charges for the month added up. This added up number is the amount of money that you owe to the bank. This is called a **credit card balance**.



The bank requires you to pay a **minimum** amount of money towards this balance. For example, if your total charges for the month are \$45, and the minimum payment is \$10, you would have to pay at least \$10 if you wanted to keep using your credit card.

If you only pay the minimum each month and do not pay off your **credit card balance** right away the bank will charge you money for it called **interest**. The higher your balance is, the more interest you have to pay. It is best if you can pay off your balance right away, that way the bank cannot charge you extra money (interest) for not paying.

- Hilary Escobales

The Parent Network of WNY

Outgoing Executive Director:
Max Donatelli

Newly Appointed Executive Director:
Susan Barlow

Parent Resource Manager:
Kim Walek

Administrative Assistant:
Peg Kovach

Program Coordinator:
Theresa Drum

Information & Referral:
Mary Jo Butler

Marketing Coordinator:
Jennifer Zolnowski

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We Have a Winner!

Parent Network of WNY would like to congratulate **Debra Meyers** of East Amherst. She is the most recent winner of a \$25 Wegmans gift card. Debra completed and returned the survey that was mailed out to her after she attended one of Parent Network's workshops. Her name was drawn from all of the surveys returned over a three month period.

The feedback we receive from these surveys is very critical. It is used to help us provide better quality services to parents and professionals. So, if you would like the chance to win the next gift card, make sure you send back your survey.

Success Story: "Ain't No Mountain High Enough"

Belonging to a family of six can definitely have its ups and downs. Being one of four children can cause many different sparks to fly. Having one brother who has special needs was the best thing that ever happened to our family!

Tom was born and I can remember it like it was yesterday. My sister, brother and I were so excited that there was a new little baby in the house. We didn't think that we would not get to meet him until he was two months old. We definitely didn't think that he would have special needs and require a lot of our parents' time. We watched Tom grow up and got used to the countless trips to the hospital for shunt revisions, the middle of the night ambulance trips to the hospital because of seizures, the numerous stressful nights and eventually we became a working machine. When the ambulances arrived we all had our jobs and pitched in together to keep the house running and each other's lives as normal as possible. We were sure Tom would succeed, sure he was going to be fine, he was our brother.

As we grew older we all began to see Tom struggle academically, socially and even spiritually. His infectious laugh turned into screams of frustration as to why he was different and why couldn't he "be normal?". His smile turned into tears when he couldn't play the sports that we had played. His participation in family time turned into more of a chore

to get him to participate than family fun.

Time continued to pass and Tom refused to do anything with our family. He wanted nothing to do with Michael's athletic career, Kate's musical career and my career away at college. He would do anything he could to avoid a family outing. But, we never gave up on him, he was our brother.

We knew that it was a struggle for Tom to feel like he was one of us four kids. We knew that he loved us and we knew that one day he would understand that we loved him the way he was.



Tom Drum and his siblings

A few years later I met the love of my life and decided it was time to get married. Tom loved Jason and soon Jason and I were moving back to Buffalo to be close to Tom, Kate and Mike if they ever needed us. We started planning a wedding and asked Tom to be a groomsman. He said yes but refused to be in any pictures, set foot in the church, stay at the reception... basically all he wanted to do was eat a good dinner. I wasn't sure that he was going to participate but all I wanted was for ALL of my siblings to be at my wedding. I told Tom that he could do whatever he wanted to that day as long

as he was there. He still refused to participate.

The day of the wedding came and we left Tom to do what he needed to do. He got dressed with Jason, went to church and even ushered people to their seats! My favorite part of my wedding was when it came time for Jason and me to go and give the sign of peace to our wedding party. I looked at Tom and told him that I loved him and I was glad that he was there. Tom looked at me and said "What the hell, give me a hug, I'm proud of ya. Love ya Steph!" I nearly fell over! My brother who hated the "monkey suit" hated pictures and didn't want to be there, told me he loved me! I had gotten the best wedding present that I could have ever asked for! We were a four pack that no one could split up.

Tom went on to take the pictures, ride in the limo, eat a great dinner and he even danced a bit at the reception. My brother was finally able to feel the love that we had for him. He was finally able to realize that we loved Tom for who Tom was and he would always be our brother!

Today as we dance around our family room singing our favorite song, looking at my favorite picture of all of us, listening to Tom's infectious laugh and loving his smile Kate, Mike, Tom and I know that we will always be there for each other no matter what our needs are because there "Ain't No Mountain High Enough to keep me from getting to you!"

Stephanie Wheeler, Kate Drum, Mike Drum and Tom Drum

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info@parentnetworkwny.org

What Do You Think?

Do you have an idea for a story? Is there a topic or issue you would like to see in *Special Insights*? Please share your ideas and success stories with us. Contact us by phone at (716) 332-4178 or e-mail:

jrz@parentnetworkwny.org

The Parent Network of WNY

Phone: (716) 332-4170

Toll free: (866) 277-4762

Fax: (716) 332-4171

Information and Referral: (716) 332-4175

Website: www.parentnetworkwny.org

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Your support of the Parent Network is an invaluable gift to all parents. You can lend your support to Parent Network of WNY in several ways: by making a donation, through a bequest in your will or becoming a member.

All donations are tax-deductible. Checks can be made payable to:

The Parent Network of WNY

For more information on donations, bequests or membership, call our main phone number.

The Parent Network of WNY
1000 Main Street
Buffalo, N.Y. 14202

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