



# Inclusion Solutions

## A Letter from the Editor

Just this past Saturday, I met Elizabeth out on our street. She lives around the corner from us and attends the same class with my son, Gene, who has autism and Down Syndrome.

She came up to me with two things in her hands. One was the trail-mix I had ordered from her for Girl Scouts. The other was an empty tin with a colorful picture of fish on it.

"I thought maybe Gene would like to have this," she said quietly.

Elizabeth knows how much Gene loves any type of sea life. Each day in school she sees ocean creatures popping up everywhere in his curriculum.

I told her indeed Gene would love it and we

walked back to the house to give it to him. No surprise, Gene loved it. He took it everywhere with him the rest of the day... to the park, to the family room, to bed.

It was very touching that Elizabeth had thought of Gene. Had he not been in her classroom, she would not know anything about him... much less that he loves fish.

I began to think about what the kids in the class had to offer Gene. I know that daily it is plentiful... a friendly hello, a high five, assistance on school work, a push on the swing. But in this season of giving, it also occurs to me how much Gene is giving to children like Elizabeth.

In this time of curriculum standards and high stakes

testing, what besides academics do we hope kids learn from school? Aren't we all, as parents, hoping our children will grow up to be compassionate, helpful, and accepting of differences? The children in Gene's class have been given the gift of Gene's friendship and thus, an everlasting life lesson.

This issue looks a little bit at friendship. No matter how hard we try to create friendships, we cannot befriend someone unless we try to know them. If we never get the chance to really know them, we will not become friends.

Thank you to Elizabeth and all of Gene's wonderful classmates for becoming his friend.

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## Life isn't always fair

Life isn't always fair.

Our planet contains a small number of people who appear to function like eagles. In childhood, their bodies and minds and senses develop with reasonable ease. In school, they warm the hearts of their teachers

by rising quickly to the top of their classes. As adults, they soar and dive and compete and win at whatever they attempt. They seem to be right up there on the list for Survival of the Fittest.

But this world also contains a tiny number of people

who appear to function like birds with short or even broken wings. Their childhood development becomes an obstacle course, and those of the old school try to avoid them as much as possible. They feel the same longings  
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# Information about WIN

## MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of WIN is to further the quality inclusion of students with disabilities into regular education classrooms with appropriate supports.

## PROMOTING INCLUSION

The board of WIN believes education of parents, educators and education students is key to making inclusive education work. Thus we provide the following programs and services.

- Telephone and in-person inclusion advocacy assistance is provided to parents free of charge.
- Four educational meetings per year are held at the Kent Intermediate School building. The focus of these meetings is on topics involving inclusive education. Meetings are open to parents, educators, administrators and anyone interested in inclusive education .
- Information packets on inclusive education can be mailed upon request.
- A yearly inclusive education conference is held each fall, featuring a nationally known keynote speaker and break out sessions.
- “Planning For Inclusion from Inception thru the IEP” is a free educational program for schools, parents groups and other organizations that can be held at any location.
- A lending library is available. Call for a list of current titles.
- WIN representatives are also available to do presentations about inclusive education to support groups, colleges, universities, and schools in West Michigan.
- A quarterly newsletter is sent to anyone on the WIN mailing list.
- In-school inclusion assistance is available for educators and administrators.

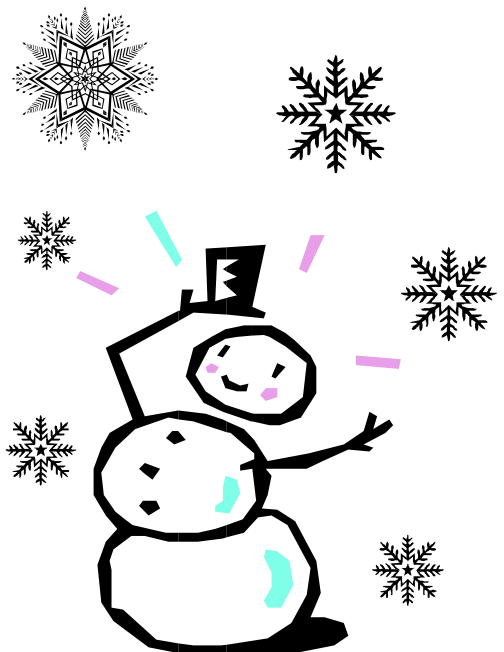
## Board Members

- ◆ Bill Pieri
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- ◆ Tammy Finn
- ◆ Barb Spidell

**Happy Holidays from your friends at WIN!**





## Perske

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as the eagles do, but they are at a terrible disadvantage. They exert many times more energy just to climb or move ahead. And when they or their loved ones hear talk about survival of the fittest, they flinch.

As for the rest of us—the masses of ordinary people who live on this planet—our development appears to hover around average (sometimes above and sometimes below). And yet, powerful forces—parents, teachers, television, billboards, and who knows what else—tilt our thinking toward believing that most things worth striving for can be found up on the mountain top with the eagles.

After all, if and when The Great Cut comes, we think it better to be found in a nest with those above-average people. We dread being seen as below average, even though in every competitive situation we can think of, 50 percent of us fall into the lower group.

Quite often we jump at a chance to befriend those who run fastest, hit the ball farthest, give the

greatest speeches, create the best technologies, come up with the best theories, attract the most members of the opposite sex, or make the most people cry. These are the people whose faces appear frequently on magazine pages and television screens.

That's why most doors in our neighborhoods would open wide to them.

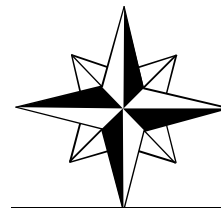
And maybe that's why—until recently—our community portals often were closed to many with severe physical, sensory, or developmental disabilities.

Fortunately, some of us now feel that continually stretching in the direction of eagles can be tiring.

We long for wisdom to make the world more decent and tolerant and caring, a world where all of us figure in one another's survival. We believe that much of the wisdom needed for this task comes from reaching toward those we may have been programmed to avoid.

Used by permission:

**Circle of Friends** by Robert Perske, Abingdon Press, 1988.



"Inclusion is a right, not a privilege for a select few."

-Oberti v. Board of Education, 1992

## Upcoming WIN Events

- ◆ **Elise Dirkse**, OTR from Jenison Public Schools, will be giving a presentation on Sensory Integration. It will be held at the Kent ISD Building on Thursday, January 18 from 7 to 9 p.m. More information will be coming in the near future.
- ◆ February/March Educational meeting to be announced.

**Are you or anyone you know interested in becoming involved with WIN? We are always looking for extra hands and volunteers to plan and assist with our events.**

**If you are interested in becoming a WIN board member; please contact the WIN office for consideration.**

**If you have any ideas for this newsletter; we can post websites, events, meetings, and articles that are inclusive in nature.**

## Celebrating Students and Peers

Some children have a natural ability and desire to be a friend and advocate for students challenged with a disability. WIN's October event, *Celebrating Students and Peers*, came out of a desire to honor some of these peers who stand out as true advocates and friends of students with disabilities.

We wanted to let them know how much we appreciate their role in the life of a student with a disability. Additionally, we wanted parents and teachers to

who are interested in inclusive education to have a chance to learn from these student peers.

The event started with a pizza social. About 60 students, parents and teachers gathered to enjoy pizza and a time to visit with one another.

We made prior arrangements for twelve of the students to be on a panel to share their experience of being in school with a friend who has a disability.

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A panel of friendly faces.

## CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

“Circle of Friends” is a social group, which meets on a regular basis facilitated by the school social worker. The group consists students with and without disabilities. The group can act as a strong support system for the student with a disability as well as giving non-disabled students an opportunity to learn from, support and assist the student with the disability.

Steps to begin “Circle of Friends”

1. Discuss the group with the teacher and explain that the students may occasionally miss class time. Circle can also be conducted during lunchtime or recess.
2. Discuss the opportunity of belonging to Circle of Friends with the class (with or without the student with a disability present, depending on that student’s preference).
3. Identify the ways students who sign up can participate.  
Examples: Read with student when own class work is completed. Call student at home to follow up on school activities, general discussion or simply to practice appropriate phone skills. Agree to meet during school hours as a group to play games, work on project or participate in school improvement project. Invite student to birthday parties etc.
4. Send permission form home to students who wish to sign up for Circle. Explain that their child may miss some school time. Also include a description of the activities being planned.
5. Communication is important. The social worker may want to discuss positive ways of supporting the student with a disability with their peers if inappropriate behaviors occur. This discussion can lead to open communication with students if questions or concerns arise.
6. If several students sign up to participate (which isn’t unusual) the group may be divided into two or three small groups which rotate.
7. Monitor the group to assure the student with disability is seen as an equal member.
8. The emphasis of the group should be social or activity oriented versus calling attention to the person with the disability.



Typically the best time to start Circle of Friends is in the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. As the student gets older the group may take on a different purpose such as being responsible for making school sports posters, joining an after school club together, or peer assistance with a school job.

The West Michigan Inclusion Network can connect those interested with social workers that have facilitated Circle of Friends.

A parent may choose for their child to not have a formal Circle of Friends because their child is surrounded by a class full of students who are already their friends. The perceived benefits of having a formal Circle of Friends is a parent’s decision.



## A nice day for a walk!!!



Those parents and educators involved with WIN have been very busy this fall. On September 30th, our first annual Walk for WIN was held at Cascade Township Park.

The weather even cooperated for us as about sixty people made their way around the one-mile loop at the park.

Many big thank-yous are in order: to all the individuals who came out early on Saturday morning (many after a long work week)... to all those who volunteered time to make the walk a success... and too all those individuals who

financially contributed.

Lastly we would like to thank the following companies and organizations for their contributions:

- Tru-Heat Corporation
- Zondervan Publishing House
- Lacks Industries
- Rapistan
- AB Dick
- Diesel Technology
- Benteler
- Downs Syndrome Association of West Michigan
- Jersey Junction
- Koeze's
- Liberated Arts
- The Catering Co.
- "Van's" Bakery
- Big Apple Bagels
- Mike Finn



(from left) Brian, Mary and Molly VandeWater and Deanna Cowden having a good time at the Walk for WIN.

## Celebrating Students

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ibility. The panelists were from four school districts and ranged from fifth through twelfth grade. Facilitated by Crossroads Middle School teacher, Kathy Vogel, the panelists answered questions from the audience.

Everyone in the room learned a great deal from the perspectives shared by the student panel. Students, parents and teachers all walked away feeling encouraged and enlightened.

Some of the things we learned from the panel of peers include:

- ◆ They were unanimous in feeling that kids with disabilities belong in school with them.
- ◆ They described lessons they learned from their friend with a disability

such as patience, persistence, determination, humor, and taking things at a slower pace.

- ◆ They recommended incorporating favorite activities or hobbies into the work of the student with a disability.
- ◆ They suggested treating students with a disability as you would other people of the same age.

Most of the people attending *Celebrating Students and Peers* wanted to know if we will do this again. We will keep this in mind as we plan WIN sponsored events and activities for 2001. Meanwhile, we want to thank the wonderful peer students who participated on the October panel, and their parents for

making sure they could participate.

### *Celebrating Students and Peers—Panelists*

- Brandon Beckman, Northview Crossroads Middle
- Rob Collins, Northview Crossroads Middle
- Ashley Glover, Northview Crossroads Middle
- Nikki Golemba, Rockford Lakes Elementary
- Steven Kilpatrick, Forest Hills Northern Middle
- Jeff Peterson, Grandville High School
- Dan Reames, Kenowa Hills High School
- Emily Shields, Forest Hills Central Woodlands
- Larry VanZomeren, Northview Crossroads Middle
- Hayley Vogg, Rockford Valley View Elementary
- Katherine Wirth, Forest Hills Central Woodlands

-Barbara Spidell  
WIN Advocacy Consultant



Katherine Wirth and Emily Shields sharing their youthful wisdom on the *Celebrating Students and Peers* panel.

## A Reflection on the Inclusive Education Presentations of Mara Sapon-Shevin

On November 16, 2000 at our First Annual Focus on Inclusive Education Conference, Mara Sapon-Shevin poignantly addressed the need for teaching social justice within our schools. She emphasized the importance of examining the concerns within the social climate of the school. Professor Sapon-Shevin shared through powerful examples a vision of inclusive schools where differences are accepted, appreciated and celebrated. She motivated us to develop courage to support our child's inclusion. She provided especially relevant strategies toward creating an inclusive school and community.

In her session entitled "Building Friendships in Inclusive Classrooms," Mara Sapon-Shevin heightened our awareness of both the differences and similarities that children possess. If nurtured appropriately in the classroom, these qualities can enable friendships between children with and without special needs. She explained that widening a child's circle of friends to include all classroom members would encourage additional friendships. She ignited our interest in building friendships in

inclusive class rooms with her selection of games, songs, picture books, and small/large group activities.

As a mother of a daughter with Down Syndrome and a professor of education, I heartily endorse the opinion, insights and information expressed by Mara Sapon-Shevin. I support my personal beliefs in the success of inclusive education with numerous research findings, especially those that state a child's cognitive, moral and social development increase when a child with diverse abilities is included in the community of a classroom where his/her typically developing peers are learning. Children with and without disabilities in inclusive classrooms have been shown to score higher in tests of social skills development (empathy, adaptability, sharing and other pro-social/altruistic behaviors) than those in non-inclusive classrooms. Our children's future depends on their ability to interact not only with their environment but also with the many people they will encounter in their life.

Cheryl Kaletka, M.Ed.

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### Focus on the Inclusive Education Conference



Held on November 16 at the Applied Technology Center of Grand Rapids Community College/Ferris State University Grand Rapids Campus, WIN held its first inclusive educational conference. We were pleased to have 160 parents, students, educators and school administrators in attendance. Feedback was very positive. There will definitely be a second inclusive education conference next fall. We are already starting to plan for it!!! Thank you again to all of our wonderful and informative presenters:

- ◆ Mara Sapon-Shevin, Syracuse University
- ◆ Dr. Sally Burton-Hoyle, Autism Society of Michigan
- ◆ Dr. Tony Thaxton, Holland Public Schools
- ◆ Randy Park, Big Rapids High School
- ◆ Howard Strom, Big Rapids High School
- ◆ Melanie Lewandowski, Saginaw ISD

And a special thank you to all who were able to attend!



*December 4, 2000*

*Dear Friend:*

*On behalf of the Board of the West Michigan Inclusion Network, I would like to wish you and your family a joyous holiday season.*

*Over the past year, WIN has been working to provide quality educational opportunities for parents and educators revolving around issues concerning inclusion. Our first annual Focus on Inclusive Education conference was a great success with special and regular educators, paraprofessionals, school administrators and parents attending. We have been pleased to see teamwork alive and well in a number of West Michigan school districts. But we still have a long way to go. WIN representatives have been busy advocating for parents in their individual school districts as well as assisting teachers.. This is an ongoing process that often requires much fine-tuning.*

*We would like to continue serving parents and educators throughout West Michigan and we could use your help. I am asking you today to please consider a tax-deductible donation to our organization. With your donation, we will be able to continue providing education programs, information packets and advocacy services.*

*We hope you have a wonderful holiday. Our wish for 2001 is that children with disabilities be given increasing opportunities to purposefully participate in the world in non-segregated settings...accepted for who they are and what they have to offer. We all are gifted in different ways and children with disabilities are no different.*

*Sincerely,*

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lauri Stein". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

*Lauri Stein, President*

## Language of Us/Them

By Mayer Shevin

We like things

They fixate on objects

We try to make friends

They display attention seeking behavior

We stand up for ourselves

They are non-compliant

We have hobbies

They have self-stim

We choose our friends wisely

They display poor peer socialization

We persevere

They persevere

We like people

They have dependencies on people

We go for a walk

They run away

We insist

They tantrum

We change our minds

They are disoriented and have short attention spans

We have talents

They have splinter skills

We are human

They are...?



**West Michigan  
Inclusion Network**

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