

DSAF  
PO Box 57362  
Lincoln, NE 68505

Return Service Requested

**Down Syndrome Association for Families**

**Mission Statement:** The Down Syndrome Association for Families is a Lincoln based non-profit organization that provides support for individuals with Down syndrome, their families, friends, educators and professionals who share in their lives.

Every person with Down syndrome is an individual who has a unique purpose and abilities. DSAF provides networking and a positive vision for the future.

www.dsafnebraska.org  
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**APRIL / MAY 2011**

### President's Message: Deb Safarik

Even though the weather hasn't felt like it, summer is coming. It's nice to enjoy the relaxed schedule but we do start looking for things for our kids to do. It can be a little harder if you're not sure what programs might work best for your son or daughter or if they will be able to take part.

I really hope many of you will take advantage of our Summer Enrichment Activities Support (SEAS) program. There is more information on page 2 & 3. Several things need to happen in short order of each other--you need to pick a program & contact the director to discuss the program & share about your son or daughter's strengths & needs. The director may suggest classes or teachers that will work best. You will need to line up a para-educator who knows your child. This will not work for a family member or nanny, etc. You need to apply for the reimbursement scholarship & be approved. If approved you will receive the reimbursement when the class is over with. If you have any questions or need an application please contact Lori Tackett or myself.

Another nice program to take part in is your libraries' summer reading program. The Lincoln City Library's reading program is called "One World, Many Stories". Information will be coming out mid-April. Each local library site will have reading programs. Paul & I took part in several reading with an adult programs when he was younger. These work particularly well for our kids since it's set up for an adult & child to read a book together. Then the group comes together to discuss the book. There's usually an activity & some refreshments. At least one time we took part in a group where the kids were slightly younger than Paul but the books were more to his interest. Talk to your local library.

Of course we will have our Little Stars, Super Stars, and other group activities coming up this summer also.

Ah, summer. I can hardly wait!!

### Program Director Update: Lori Tackett

Every year JEO Consulting Group hosts a golf tournament that benefits a local charity. This year we are thrilled to announce that they have chosen DSAF. This is a wonderful opportunity to raise funds and raise awareness in the community. We encourage you all to join us on July 8th!



**Date:** July 8, 2011  
**Time:** Shotgun start at 1:30,  
**Facility:** Woodland Hills Golf Course  
**Fees:** Individual Golfer\*: \$90.00  
Foursomes: \$360.00

The event will include a 4-person scramble, T-shirt, awards reception & dinner following golf.

**Registration is now open**  
[www.jeogolf.com](http://www.jeogolf.com)

There are also many Sponsorship opportunities available. If you have an idea for a corporate sponsor please contact Lori Tackett for more information. 402-314-1731 or [lori@dsafnebraska.org](mailto:lori@dsafnebraska.org)

## Calendar of Events Not to Be Missed!

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>April 2<sup>nd</sup> :</b>                      | Lil' Stars go to Lost In Fun - 10:00am                                   |
| <b>April 4<sup>th</sup>:</b>                       | Next Medical Outreach Meeting - Meetings the first Monday of every month |
| <b>April 9<sup>th</sup> :</b>                      | Super Stars Event – Mahoney State Park – 2:00pm                          |
| <b>April 29<sup>th</sup> :</b>                     | Mom's Night Out – Skeeter Barnes – 6:30pm                                |
| <b>June 11<sup>th</sup> :</b>                      | Ice Cream Social – Details TBA   |
| <b>June 25<sup>th</sup> :</b>                      | Medical Outreach – New Parents Training                                  |
| <b>July 8<sup>th</sup>:</b>                        | JEO Golf Tournament to benefit DSAF - Woodlands Golf Course              |
| <b>July 11<sup>th</sup> -22<sup>nd</sup>:</b>      | Bike Camp – helping our children learn to ride!                          |
| <b>July 29<sup>th</sup> &amp; 30<sup>th</sup>:</b> | Wrightslaw Conference  |
| <b>August 7<sup>th</sup>:</b>                      | Annual Picnic and Pool Party   |
| <b>October 1<sup>st</sup>:</b>                     | Step UP for Down Syndrome Walk   |



## Lessons Learned - Things Really Do Work Themselves Out

By: Deb Safarik

I received the "perfect" Mother's Day card from Paul. It was big. It was pink. It had lace, ribbons, & hearts. And, it was a card for Mother's Day, not a birthday, anniversary, or sympathy card. Let me explain.

I remember when Paul was little & we'd go into the Hallmark store & look at cards. Paul loved to pull cards out & say, "This one?" Generally he was going by whatever "look" caught his fancy. We'd be looking for a birthday card & he'd hand me a congratulations card. If we needed a Father's Day card he might hand me a birthday card. I remember thinking what it might be like for Paul as an adult going into a store & not being able to pick out an appropriate card. I thought how I wanted him to be able to read well enough so he could do that & wondered if that could happen.

When Paul gave me the card I asked him if he'd picked it out himself & he said he had. Later I pulled Dan to the side & said, "Did he **really** pick it out himself?" Dan said, "Yes he really did." I said, "Well did he understand what it said?" Dan said, "He stood there reading it out loud."

I think this card was a "perfect" card for Paul too. Some of the wording was bigger than others, "Mom" was written big. Some of the words were in script but most of it was printed. The sayings were in short lines of 2 to 4 words per line like a poem, which would be easier for him to read. Inside the card there were fewer words & since it was a little bigger than average card the words were a little larger. (H-m-m, larger font, short phrases, fewer words per line, fewer lines per page...those are all format ideas I've suggested over the years to help Paul & others like him make reading easier!)

So Paul picked out a perfect card - perfect for me because I would love anything he chose & perfect for him because he found what worked for him to read. The hearts, lace, & ribbon were just extra!

## SEAS (Summer Enrichment Activities Support)



The SEAS program is for students with Down syndrome to help them participate fully and meaningfully in summer programs open to all children. Registration fees to the programs are the responsibility of the family. Many programs provide financial assistance you can apply for if that is needed. Parents will arrange for a para-professional to assist their son or daughter in the program. They can apply for a reimbursement stipend from the DSAF. The stipend will pay at the rate of \$13.33 per contact hour up to \$200 (actually this works out to \$199.95. You get to pay the nickell!) A good example of the type of program would be Bright Lights. There programs are usually half day/5 day week programs. Bright Lights asks we call Barb Hoppe about a classes. They have worked with our families before & are happy to assist with ideas that may work best for your son or daughter. Monies are limited, apply as soon as possible.

- The scholarship reimbursement is for the para support.
- The emphasis is on summer enrichment educational opportunities.
- Families should arrange support with paras who have worked with their student.
- Families who are paid members (membership is \$10/year) will receive first consideration.
- For specific details, contact Deb Safarik or Lori Tackett.

On page 3 you will find a preview of summer activities available. Our next issue will provide more summer activities; if you know of any you'd like to share with the group please send them to Lori Tackett.

## DSAF Committee Updates

### UPCOMING 'LIL STARS EVENTS!

Provides social events especially for our member families with children ages 0-5

#### Saturday April 2nd - 10am: Lost In Fun

Lost in Fun 8431 Cody Dr., Lincoln NE 68512

The Lil' Stars will have a party room reserved until 11:30 to keep our bags and shoes. DSAF will pay for admission. **\*\*PLEASE BRING SOCKS FOR YOUR CHILD TO WEAR\*\***

Contact Liz Echternkamp with questions or to volunteer to help with the 'Lil Stars Events  
[eldrenliz@gmail.com](mailto:eldrenliz@gmail.com)

### UPCOMING SUPER STARS EVENTS!

Provides meaningful social events for school-aged children - focusing on fostering peer relationships.

#### Saturday April 9th - 2:00pm: Mahoney State Park

indoor playground. Free Admission and one free Rock Climbing simulator. Located near Ashland, just off of I 80 at exit 426.

Super Star next event will be the first week of June Kung Fu Panda 2 - More information to come

Contact Caroline Fehlhafer with questions or to volunteer to help with the Super Stars Events.  
[cmfehlhafer2001@gmail.com](mailto:cmfehlhafer2001@gmail.com)

### UPCOMING MOM'S NIGHT OUT!

#### Friday April 29th - 6:30pm: Skeeter Barnes

5800 S 58th St # A Lincoln

RSVP by April 28th to Caroline Fehlhafer  
[cmfehlhafer2001@gmail.com](mailto:cmfehlhafer2001@gmail.com)

### PARENT AND TEEN GROUP

#### LOOKING FOR IDEAS ON UPCOMING EVENTS

Let Amy Svoboda know what activities you'd like to see for this group in the upcoming months.

[amysvo@gmail.com](mailto:amysvo@gmail.com)

## MEDICAL OUTREACH COMMITTEE

The Medical Outreach Committee had their first meeting of 2011 on March 7<sup>th</sup>. We are excited about the opportunity that we have to provide the local medical community with the most up-to-date information on Down syndrome. We are hoping to schedule a presentation with one of the perinatologist's offices in April. In May we will have a working session to update the binders which we provide to expectant and new parents. Finally, we hope to put together a team of "on call" DSAF members who are willing to meet with new parents to provide support and answer questions. We are scheduling a training session for anyone interested in volunteering for the "on call" list in June.

If you would like more information about the goals of the committee, or are interested in becoming a member, please contact Ame Creglow (429-3638), Lori Tackett (314-1731) or Deb Safarik (875-0464). Meetings will be held the first Monday of the month with our next meeting on Monday, April 4th at 7pm.

### CONTACTS

**Deb Safarik, President of DSAF Board**

**Dean Fuelberth, Vice-President of DSAF Board**

**Jane Quiring, Treasurer of DSAF Board**

**Dyann Rupp, Secretary of DSAF Board**

**Ame Creglow, Medical Outreach Committee Chair**

**Liz Echternkamp, Lil' Stars Chair**

**Caroline Fehlhafer, Super Stars Chair**

**Amy Svoboda, Parents and Teens Chair**

**Lori Tackett, DSAF Program Director**

**Angie Willey, Email Blast Coordinator**

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## BOARD APPROVES 2011 BUDGET

At the February 21, 2011 meeting, the Board of Directors approved the 2011 budget of \$ 91,595 revenues and \$ 109,413 expenditures. Reserves of \$ 17,818 are anticipated to fund the difference between budgeted revenues and expenditures. Budgeted expenditures represent an increase over the 2010 expenditure budget of \$ 85,910. Previously, revenues were not budgeted. The 2011 budget will support ongoing programs and activities, fund newly budgeted expenditures in the awareness and programming categories, and provide increased funding for national speakers (Wrightslaw conference July 29-30, 2011) and the Step Up for Down Syndrome walk. Actual revenues and expenditures for 2010 were \$ 57,208 and \$ 59,225 respectively. At December 31, 2010, total assets were \$ 106,774.

Revenue sources include the Step Up for Down Syndrome walk (66%), conference fees, membership fees, program income, grants and investment income.

The expenditure budget is categorized under seven areas: administration, awareness, education/events, national and community partnerships, organizational development, programming, and scholarships. A portion of the program directors salary is allocated to administration, awareness, education/events, and organizational development.

The administration category includes funding for office supplies, post office box rental, CPA services, insurance, printing and copying, telephone, postage, and corporate appreciation.

The awareness category includes funding for the annual report, awareness items, web site development, inclusive teacher recognition program, branding campaign, World Down Syndrome day and the Step Up walk.

The education/events category includes funding for local/national speakers, the all group events (ball night, picnic/swim, Roca Berry Farm, and Christmas brunch), medical outreach, peer presentation kits, sibling workshop, book bundles and the newsletter.

The national and community partnerships category includes funding for memberships and/or donations to National Down Syndrome Society, National Down Syndrome Congress, and Down syndrome Affiliates In Action (AIA), partnerships with community organizations, donations to Lincoln City Libraries and Nebraska schools, teacher reference packs, and donations to the DSAF library.

The organizational development category includes funding for the AIA conference, board education and training, staff education and training, and volunteer development and appreciation.

The programming category includes funding for the Summer Enrichment Activities Support program, Lil' Stars, Super Stars, and Parent and Teens group events, rural community satellite support, membership directory, special needs trust stipend, dad's night, mom's night, grandparents program, and new parent orientation.

The scholarships category includes funding for local conferences and national conventions.

For further information about DSAF's 2011 budget contact Jane Quiring, Treasurer.

## BOARD UPDATES BYLAWS

At the February meeting, the Board of Directors approved new bylaws. The new bylaws replace and expand bylaws that were several years old. The new bylaws provides structure to support growth in DSAF, more clearly define roles and responsibilities of the governing body, volunteers, and employees, and include rules of conduct that apply to all acting on behalf of DSAF. The new bylaws will be posted on the DSAF website.

## Summer Activities



There are so many activities in Lincoln that can provide an inclusive environment for learning and socializing for our children this summer. Below are just a few samples of exciting opportunities this summer that may qualify for the SEAS program. We encourage you to contact these organizations to find an appropriate choice for your child. This list is simply a sample of what is available and not the entire list of activities that qualify for SEAS.

We hope they will give you some ideas for this summer!

**Bright Lights Summer Learning Adventures:** <http://www.brightlights.org> or 420-1115—Registration begins 4/1.

**Lincoln Parks and Recreation Programs:** <http://lincoln.ne.gov/city/parks/Programs/index.htm> or 441-7952

**Summer Lux Art Classes:** [www.luxcenter.org](http://www.luxcenter.org)

**Lincoln Children's Zoo Summer Adventures:** [www.lincolnzoo.education](http://www.lincolnzoo.education) or 475-6741 ext 130

**UNL Summer Band Camps:** [www.unl.edu/band](http://www.unl.edu/band) or [www.unl.edu/music](http://www.unl.edu/music)

**UNL Campus Rec for Kid:** [www.crec.unl.edu/youth](http://www.crec.unl.edu/youth) or 472-3467

**UNL Theatre Camps:** [www.unltheatretickets.com](http://www.unltheatretickets.com) or [jhgemeier1@unl.edu](mailto:jhgemeier1@unl.edu)

**Lincoln Children's Museum Camps:** [www.lincolnchildrensmuseum.org](http://www.lincolnchildrensmuseum.org)

**Dimensions Educational Research Foundation Summer Discover Days :** [dimensionsfoundation.org](http://dimensionsfoundation.org)

**Strategic Air & Space Museum Summer Camps:** [www.SASMuseum.com](http://www.SASMuseum.com)

**Junior Vet Camp at Ox Bow Animal Health:** [www.oxbowanimalhealth.com](http://www.oxbowanimalhealth.com) or 800-249-0366

**Pioneers Park Nature Center Camps:** 402-441-7895

There are also some great activities that do not qualify for SEAS but are especially designed for Children with Special Needs. We encourage you to see if these would be a good fit for you this summer as well!

**The Barn: Play Center for Children with Special Needs:** <http://www.myplaybar.com/SummerCamp.html> or 402-301-6829 or [info@myplaybarn.com](mailto:info@myplaybarn.com)

**Dreams Unlimited:** <http://www.dreamsunlimitedlincoln.org> or 402-420-2009

Summer Rafting Trip Winter Park, Colorado July 15 & 16, 2011

Summer Bike Camp, June 6 -17.

**Easter Seals Summer Camps:** [www.ne.easterseals.com](http://www.ne.easterseals.com) or 402-345-2200



## Is Your Child Ready for Handwriting?

By: Sue Bainter

This is an often-asked question for children who learn things differently from their same aged peers. It's probably something that has crossed your mind at a various points in time as your child participates in preschool and school experiences. The intent of this article is to provide some decision making criteria and also some helpful resources.

Children who have Down syndrome are at risk for delays in motor development because of low muscle tone. Essentially, they often have trouble generating enough tension in their muscles to support participation in many activities that require coordination, such as using a pencil, coloring, riding a bike, doing jumping jacks, etc. Think about a rubber band. The tighter it is, the more likely the band is to securely maintain and hold things. Conversely, the looser the band, the more likely it is for things to slip out. This certainly does not mean that children with Down syndrome cannot participate in regular motor activities; it simply means that it might be more difficult, take more practice, or more encouragement.

Low muscle tone, in and of itself, should not prevent children with Down syndrome from writing. But, just like any other child, there are things to consider in terms of "readiness". Apart from the motor skills required, the child's teacher is probably a good resource about the child's interest in his/her name and other types of environmental print he/she may be exposed to around his/her home, school and community. Children are often more connected to things like the M on the McDonald's sign or the name on the front of a box of their favorite cereal. One of the signs of readiness for a focus on handwriting is the child's interest in the letters and words around them. Once they are, consider the following in terms of motor experiences during the child's younger years:

Exposure to any kind of writing tool he/she might be interested in - markers, colors, paintbrushes, pens, etc. Let him/her have large sheets of paper to scribble on, particularly if he/she is seeing parents or older siblings write.

Expect that his/her hand movements will be large, and don't try to force him/her to hold the writing tool a certain way at this early stage.

See if you can interest him/her in watching and imitating what you do by showing them how to draw simple shapes, lines and forms, or write their name, their family member's names, etc., and also encourage the idea of how to stop or start lines. Again, the focus is on having fun without being rigid about how accurate they are or how they hold the writing tool. Early on, young children think they are making these drawings, even their names, just like they are shown. It's "pretend writing" and a very important early stage.

Provide opportunities for other hands-on activities like playing with water, sand, play dough, dirt, etc. Some children resist these kinds of tactile experiences, so be creative in offering tools they can use within the activity, such as cookie cutters, cups, spoons, sponges, etc.

Once the child has had some of these "pre-writing" experiences or begins school, the expectations for using pencils, introducing lined paper, and using smaller movements are more appropriate. However, the individual activities offered to the child should always fit with his/her developmental abilities and needs.

Some things to take note of when introducing handwriting:

Children learn the vertical stroke before the slanted stroke as they begin to copy things on paper. Consider teaching all capitals at first, to minimize slanted and curved formations.

Group letters together that start in the same place and have similar formations, e.g. E, F, B, D, P, R.

Teach the formations working left to right and top to bottom, starting with the initial vertical stroke as much as possible.

Use more than one type of writing tool and material, i.e. instead of only using a pencil, try chalk on a chalkboard, markers on a white board, etc. This keeps it interesting for the child but also provides opportunities for practice without the redundancy of using pencil and paper for all repetitions.

Check out Handwriting without Tears as a potential curriculum which meets the above criteria, <http://www.hwtears.com/>. On the home page, find the blue tab specifically for parents. As with any program, make sure you and your child's teacher discuss ways to apply the activities that best fit your individual child's learning needs.

## Occupational Therapy and the Child with Down Syndrome (Continued)

Then your child enters the school system and the focus of your energies changes somewhat again! You help your child adjust to new routines, you attend school meetings to plan your child's educational program, you focus on speech and communication, you help your child practice fine motor skills for school (such as learning to print), you expect your child to develop more independence in self help activities, and you search out extracurricular activities that will expose your child to a variety of social, physical and learning experiences. At this stage an OT may become involved to:

facilitate fine motor skill development in the classroom. Many OTs work in the school system and provide programs to help children with Down syndrome learn printing, handwriting, keyboarding, cutting etc. They will also look at physical positioning for optimal performance (eg: desk size etc.) and assist with program adaptations based on the child's physical abilities.

facilitate self help skills at home and at school. As with all children, our kids with Down syndrome vary in personality, temperament, and motivation to be independent. Some children with Down syndrome have a desire to do things themselves, such as dress and feed themselves. These children may learn these skills by watching others and participating from a young age. Other children may be happy to let others do things for them, and may resist attempts to help them learn these skills. In these cases an OT may be able to help a parent work out these challenges, while helping the child develop better motor skills to be successful in self help skills.

address any sensory needs your child may have. Sometimes a parent has a concern about things their child does that may relate to the child's sensory development. For example, a child may excessively put toys in her mouth, she may have poor awareness of her body in space, she may squeeze everything too hard or drop things a lot, or she may not tolerate very well some routines like washing and brushing hair. An OT can offer suggestions to help the child and parents deal with these issues.

As parents we must be concerned with the well-being of our child in all respects. We have so many things to think about and keep track of: medical and dental needs, motor and communication needs, educational needs, advocacy, social and behavioral needs : the list seems to go on and on! We need the help of trained professionals to guide us and to work with our children to help them achieve their potential in life. An occupational therapist is one member of the team that we can rely on to provide professional assistance throughout the growth and development of our children. In Canada, occupational therapy services for children with Down syndrome can be accessed through hospitals, home care programs, infant development programs, specialty nursery schools, public schools, and through private therapy services.

(Editor's note: In the US, OT services can be obtained through Early Childhood Intervention programs, public and private schools, and from private therapists.)

Further information about fine motor development can be found in my book "Fine Motor Skills in Children with Down Syndrome", published by Woodbine House (800-843-7323) in 1998.

*This newsletter reports items of interest relating to Down syndrome. DSAF does not promote or recommend any therapy, treatment, program, etc. Any medical articles included in this newsletter are solely for information. Any medical questions should always be referred to your family physician. DSAF does not support any particular political or religious view. Individuals or organizations are not necessarily endorsed by this publication or its editor. We wish to bring together those interested in Down syndrome and attempt to create a positive, optimistic outlook and attitude. We want to help our kids reach their fullest potential and be included in their schools and communities.*

## Occupational Therapy and the Child with Down Syndrome

Written by Maryanne Bruni, BSc OT<sup>©</sup>

<http://www.ndss.org>

If you are a parent reading this [article], you likely have a child with Down syndrome, as I do. My intent with this article is to provide you with some information about how an occupational therapist (OT) may be able to help you and your child. Occupational therapists who work with children have education and training in child development, neurology, medical conditions, psychosocial development, and therapeutic techniques. Occupational therapists focus on the child's ability to master skills for independence. This can include:

self care skills (feeding, dressing, grooming etc.)

fine and gross motor skills

skills related to school performance (eg: printing, cutting etc.)

play and leisure skills

When your child is an infant, your immediate concerns relate to his health and growth, development of the basic motor milestones, social interaction with you and others, interest in things going on around him, and early speech sounds and responses. At this stage an OT may become involved to:

assist with oral-motor feeding problems (this can also be addressed by Speech Pathologists). Due to hypotonia and weakness of the muscles of the cheeks, tongue and lips, feeding is difficult for some infants with Down syndrome. OTs suggest positioning and feeding techniques, and can be involved in doing feeding studies, if necessary.

help facilitate motor milestones, particularly for fine motor skills. Occupational therapists and Physical therapists work closely together to help the young child develop gross motor milestones (eg: sitting, crawling, standing, walking). OTs work with the child at this stage to promote arm and hand movements that lay the foundation for later developing fine motor skills. The low muscle tone and loose ligaments at the joints associated with Down syndrome are real challenges to early motor development and occupational therapy can help your child meet those challenges.

When your child is a toddler and preschooler, she will likely have some independent mobility and will be busy exploring her environment. To assist her development you will want to provide her with many opportunities for learning, you will want to encourage the beginning steps in learning to feed and dress herself, you will want her to learn how to play appropriately with toys and interact with other children, you will be encouraging speech and language skills, and you will continue to provide opportunities for refinement of gross motor skills. At this stage an OT may become involved to:

facilitate the development of fine motor skills. This is an important stage in the development of fine motor skills for children with Down syndrome. Now they will be developing the movements in their hands that will allow them to do many things as they get older, but many children need some therapy input to ensure that these movements do develop. Children do this through play; they open and close things, pick up and release toys of varying sizes and shapes, stack and build, manipulate knobs and buttons, experiment with crayons etc. Your child may face more challenges learning fine motor skills because of low muscle tone, decreased strength and joint ligament laxity.

help you promote the beginning steps of self help skills. An OT can help parents break down the skills so expectations are appropriate, and can suggest positioning or adaptations that might help the child be more independent. For example, a child may have more success feeding herself with a particular type of spoon and dish.

(Continued on page7)

## An Occupational Therapist's reflections of how children with Down syndrome have changed in the past 26 years!

By: Pamela S. Linke, MA, OTR/L

Hi, I'm Pam Linke and have been working as an occupational therapist for the past 40 years! Where has the time gone? While I don't feel like a "newbie" in the profession and feel comfortable and confident with my skills as an OT, I still think I have another 40 years to go to improve and give service to our students in LPS! Over the years, I have seen a lot of changes but especially so in our youngsters with Down syndrome.

I remember when I went to elementary school in the 1950s that I hardly ever saw students with disabilities, whether they had physical challenges or cognitive delays with different facial characteristics. When I saw a child with Down syndrome, I was fascinated with the short stature, roly-poly appearance, and little hands, round face and "slanted" eyes, and often unclear speech. I remember that back then kids with disabilities were served in "special" schools and we students in regular education never saw them. There was a mystery about these kids and when we did happen to see them in a store, on the street, or at the movies, some of us were nervous or scared because we didn't know anything about these youngsters with special needs nor did we have any mutual experiences with them.

Fortunately, have times changed! Along with the increasing acceptance of children with special needs in our schools, communities, and society, we now know the challenges and delights children with Down syndrome offer us. Some of the facts we have learned today is that youngsters with Down syndrome are kids first, they are learners like everyone else, they enjoy many of the things that other children enjoy, they have fun, they can demonstrate independence in self-care skills, they have a sense of humor, they love attention, and they like being around their peers. Some of the challenges they present include their tendency toward stubbornness, strong likes and dislikes of toys, foods, and people, honest expressions of their thoughts, occasional self-stimming behaviors, and unexpected interpretations of what we say and do!

Especially in the past 20 years have I seen children with Down syndrome become healthier people with better body shapes and fewer tendencies toward obesity, more emphasis on participation in sports and pursuing activities that incorporate life-time physical conditioning (eg. Bike riding, treadmill, lifting weights, etc), healthier and better nutritional eating habits, increased presence and comfort in socializing with classmates and adults in their environments, actual employability with potential for long-term jobs, and full heads of hair! With the current drive of "inclusion" as a key element in the public schools' mission and service for all students, with and without disabilities, it has been eye-opening and a joy to see all children participating in daily school routines and classroom activities. I have many fond memories of my students and several include students with Down syndrome. I remember one youngster who, every time he saw me, pulled up his shirt sleeves on his arms so I could see his muscles. He must think I'm a "physical therapist"! Then I recall a visit I made a couple weeks ago to a classroom in high school and brought an attractive young lady with me, an occupational therapy student. The young man with Down syndrome came up to talk to us, but it was clear that the young lady had his attention and the older lady could just go about her business with the other students!

The changes I have seen for these youngsters have been positive and I hope to see more. These kids have been actors in movies and active participants in the Special Olympics. Many of them embrace the "joy of life" and are truly fun to be with. It has been my pleasure to have had opportunities to meet, know, and work with these students and I look forward to continuing to interact with and provide service for them!