

developments

Spring '09

The Official Newsletter

for Southwest Human Development

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Talking the Talk...and Walking the Walk!

Two year old John's mother Samantha is delighted that she is able to describe her son as a "loving, energetic boy who enjoys being the center of attention." Born two months premature, John's start in life left this single mother with grave doubts about his future. Now his development is progressing and he is an ideal Ambassador for our upcoming Walk With Me event.

Diagnosed with Periventricular Leukomalacia brain damage, John has been delayed physically since birth and spent the first five months of his life in the hospital. It was there that Samantha learned about Southwest Human Development's Healthy Families program. Healthy Families seeks to ensure all new parents, particularly those facing the greatest challenges, get their babies off to a good start in life. Nearly twenty years of evaluations have demonstrated that this program is highly effective in promoting child health and development, enhancing parent/child interactions, preventing child abuse and neglect, and helping parents attain self-sufficiency.

Samantha remembers how helpful the Healthy Families home visitor has been since the time of John's birth. She says that even for the entire five months John spent in the hospital, Healthy Families was there with support and guidance, for which Samantha, who doesn't have any family in Arizona, was very appreciative.

Healthy Families home visitors receive training in child development, disabilities and mental health, as well as helping families reach self-sufficiency. This training is put to use depending on the specific needs of each child and family. For Samantha and John, the support from Healthy Families, along with Southwest's Easter Seals disabilities programs, made all the difference. John is learning to walk with the help of leg braces and a walker, something Samantha was told would probably never happen. Now she's hopeful that after one year of therapy, John will be walking like a pro. Samantha attributes the progress John has made to the physical therapist he's been seeing once a week for the last year.

Easter Seals Southwest Human Development's early intervention program was contacted on John's behalf by his Healthy Families home visitor. The early intervention program helps infants and young children with disabilities reach their full potential through a variety of services, including physical therapy. Other programs include assistive technology training and comprehensive programs for infants and young children with feeding problems and those on the autism spectrum.

Although Samantha is well aware that John is facing an uphill battle with his physical challenges, she knows she can rely on Southwest Human Development for the help, support and referrals she and John may need.

When asked to participate in our first Walk With Me event to raise awareness and funds for our disabilities programs, Samantha didn't hesitate. John may not be walking independently, at least not *this* year, but he will be joining hundreds of others at Steele Indian School Park on the morning of May 2nd when we get together for this mile and a quarter family-friendly stroll through the park. Afterward, there will be a chance to meet John and Samantha



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Letter from the CEO

by *Ginger Ward, MAEd*

This New Year brings us many hopes, challenges and changes; nationally, locally and here at Southwest Human Development. One change you'll notice is the look of our newsletter. In order to keep you well informed, we have broadened our focus to provide better coverage of the entire agency, while still ensuring continued updates on the Arizona Institute for Early Childhood Development.

The state of the economy has affected many in our community, not the least of which are the children and families we serve. In this issue we discuss the impact of stress on young children. Whether related to job loss or other family crises, even infants and toddlers sense the strain and Southwest is there to help parents understand and support their children. Also highlighted is our Family Assistance Fund. This fund is made possible through donations and provides short-term assistance for items such as rent, utility payments, medications and other family emergencies. Read about how you can help, as this year the need for this fund outweighs donations.

In 2009 we are introducing two new events benefitting children served by Southwest Human Development. On May 2, the first Easter Seals Southwest Human Development Walk With Me event will raise awareness and funds for our disabilities programs. Then, on October 15, we will launch our first Portraits of Opportunity exhibition. This unique evening event will showcase agency programs and families through professional photography. Mark your calendars and look for more information to come.

Especially in times like these, we want to take the opportunity to thank our donors. Our accomplishments are possible because of the support of individuals, foundations and corporations who are equally committed to creating a positive future for young children. I hope you enjoy our newsletter and take the time to catch up on the latest agency events and news by visiting our web site at www.swhd.org. ★

Walking the Walk *cont. from pg. 1*

personally, as well as other Walk ambassadors, as we enjoy family games, food and fun for all ages.

Samantha says she's excited to be an example to other parents who may be going through a similar experience with

a child's hospitalization or the issues associated with having a child with a disability. She said, "You can make the best out of any situation with the help and support of agencies like Southwest Human Development." ★

Walk With Me

The Easter Seals Southwest Human Development Walk With Me event is Saturday, May 2nd. We will walk 1.25 miles at Steele Indian School Park in Phoenix and raise money to help provide services to children with disabilities. Join us for this morning of family fun and fitness!

- 7am - Registration & check-in
- 8am - Program from the stage
- 8:20am - 1.25 mile Fun Walk, followed by food and family entertainment

To form a team, walk with us, or make a pledge to Easter Seals Southwest Human Development's Walk With Me event, go to www.walkwithme.org or call Julie Turko at 602-266-5976.

Children Feel the Stress, Too

Like so many adults, the state of the economy can affect young children. They don't understand the news or the changes at home, but they do pick-up on the stress their parents are feeling, which is why it's important to talk to them about what is causing it. Deciding when and how to tell your children about a job loss, household cut-backs or a possible move is not easy.

"Young children do not understand and do not benefit from conversations that are overly detailed or that speculate about what might or could happen, such as possible job loss or a potential move. They do profit from simple, clear words and concrete information to explain what is happening in their lives," said Dr. Alison Steier, an infant mental health psychologist at Southwest Human Development.

Research shows that steady, responsive, sensitive parent-child relationships can buffer children from the effects of excessive stress and can promote children's own sense of competence and effectiveness. According to Dr. Steier, "Young children organize their experience around their

relationships with parents and other trusted adults and are quite attuned to the feelings of these individuals. They look to these adults in order to draw conclusions about whether they are safe or need to be worried or fearful. They operate according to the principle, 'I'm OK if you're OK.'" ★



Signs that children are struggling with excessive stress:

- Changes in eating and/or sleeping patterns.
- Increased clinginess, whining or attention-seeking behaviors.
- Regression or a return to behavior characteristic of a younger child like calling for a parent in the night, toilet accidents, thumb sucking or asking for a bottle.
- Increased fear of separation.
- Increased aggression, irritability, fussiness and frustration.
- Decreased cooperativeness.
- Withdrawal or subdued mood.

What can parents do to help? These suggestions may be helpful:

- Take care of yourself. This is not a luxury; parents must take care of themselves in order to help their children. Exercise, getting enough sleep, and reaching out to your own support circle are all good examples.
- Use words to label children's feelings. It helps them feel more organized and your empathy can help them settle down.
- Maintain everyday routines as much as possible. Some sense of predictability, even in the midst of great change, helps everyone retain a feeling of security. Bathing, meals, playtime and even homework are the life activities that communicate to children that some things don't change.
- Let people like child care providers and teachers know that your family is going through difficult times and they may see changes in your child's behavior. Sharing strategies you use at home to help your child may be appropriate.

Parents, or professionals, with questions about whether their child is experiencing stress, or any other child development question, can call our free Birth to Five Helpline (1-877-705 KIDS) and speak with a child development specialist. ★

Short Term Help/Long Term Benefits

We know that Southwest Human Development strives to create a positive future for young children. And, we know Southwest is a leader in the field of early childhood development. But did you know that for the families we are currently serving, Southwest can also be a place to turn when emergencies strike?

For nearly five years Southwest Human Development has maintained the Family Assistance Fund; an invaluable financial resource acting as a lifeline for children and families who are confronted with emergency situations and have exhausted all other resources.

Like so many working families today, the families we serve are often challenged just to meet their everyday needs. When emergency situations arise, they have little or no savings to see them through and other means of assistance are often not available. The Family Assistance Fund is there to help meet such situations, or to offer short-term assistance with basic necessities like rent, utilities, transportation, medicine and child care.

As a good example, when a parent starts a new job after a period of unemployment, they may not be able to afford that first month of child care. The family assistance fund can cover this until the first paycheck is received and the family can afford child care on their own.

In a recent real-life example, a home fire destroyed all the furniture and clothing belonging to a family enrolled in our Head Start program. The Family Assistance Fund provided the financial support needed to purchase clothes and some basic furniture.

The Family Assistance Fund has had a tremendous impact on the lives of many children and families – at times making the difference between success and devastation. Predictably, the need for this fund has only increased as our economy worsens and families face job losses and find their already fragile resources weakened or depleted. For so many of these families, just a little help can go a long way, keeping them from financial ruin and helping them continue on their road to self-sufficiency. If you would like to contribute to this fund, or if you would like more information, please contact Laura Chasko at 602-266-5976 extension 2140 or lchasko@swhd.org. ★

Other News and Upcoming Events

Portraits of Opportunity

Mark your calendar now for this inaugural event:
October 15th / 6:00 – 9:00 PM / Memorial Hall at Steele Indian School Park
This unique fundraising event will be an elegant evening showcasing agency programs and families through professional photography. ★

Arizona Foothills Magazine's Designer Showhouse 2009 Tours

Sign up now for the April 18 and 19 tours of this luxury home overlooking Paradise Valley Country Club while you help support Southwest Human Development. Visit our web site at www.swhd.org and follow the link to Showhouse Tours. 100% of the \$25 ticket price to tour this mansion goes directly to our programs and services. ★

Southwest Voted One of the "Best Places To Work"

Southwest Human Development was proud to be voted the top ranked "Best Places To Work" in the Valley for large organizations by the Phoenix Business Journal and BestCompaniesAZ. The "Best Places to Work" list, which was started in 2003, recognizes Valley companies that, through a third party administered employee survey, rank their respective companies as being the best places to work. The areas surveyed are varied parts of employee life, including workplace environment, leadership direction, culture, and management practices. Making the list is an honor that provides Southwest employees with a sense of pride. ★

Arizona Foothills Magazine's
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**Southwest Human Development is a non-profit organization. To make a tax deductible contribution please call 602-266-5976 or go to www.swhd.org.
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