

H.A.L.O. Reports

A Publication from the Help A Little One Foundation



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Founder's message

Acceptance is an achievement

Dear Friends,

There is a poem called "The Serenity Prayer" by Reinhold Neibuhr that is much quoted in greeting cards and self-help manuals. It begins:

"God grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the Courage to change the things I can, and the Wisdom to know the difference."

Acceptance is a quality difficult to attain. It is recommended by doctors to families when their child is born with a neurological impairment, or suffers an irreversible accident, or illness. It is tendered by counselors as a panacea when families lament their child's lost potential, or the different courses of action they might have taken.

Acceptance of things you cannot change is necessary, but not scheduled. After seven years, our family has accepted that our daughter Sarah has suffered irreversible damage, and will never achieve our dreams for her. However, each of us came to that realization at a different time.

As a physician, I recognized Sarah's prognosis almost immediately when seizures and cardiac arrest occurred. It was painful, but something I knew I had to accept. Her brother and sister seemed to move on, after counseling, with the innocence and acceptance of the young. Her mother clung to hope a little longer. There are times even now when our acceptance lapses.

Recently, the staff at Sarah's nursing home called us to report that she broke her leg when she was being moved. We were upset; but we could accept it. We know her bones have thinned from inactivity. We accept osteoporosis as a liability of her illness. We continue to do what we can to make Sarah, and children like her, as comfortable as possible.

As supporters of the Help A Little One Foundation, you have achieved something most people deny — acceptance that there are conditions in life we cannot change. We thank you for your courage, and for your help, and wish you all the wisdom necessary to continue to know when to accept and how to act.

Sincerely yours,

Alan Pinshaw

A Foundation for Neurologically Impaired Children

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Sydney progresses as a day student at Children's Extended Care

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Her name is Sydney . . . She is a happy and sociable five-year-old who attends the Children's Extended Care Center Day School program in Groton, MA. Sydney lives at with her parents Garda and Ed, sisters Alyssa and Jessica, and brother Patrick. She loves the swimming pool, the color purple and two adorable kittens, Molly and Pumpkin.

Sydney is diagnosed with Cytomegalovirus, has seizures and wears hearing aids. She moves from one place to another in her sparkling purple wheelchair and attracts a crowd wherever she goes. Sydney is able to communicate by smiling, cooing and, often, giggling when she is happy and comfortable. Sydney frowns, cries and tenses her body when she is uncomfortable or wants your attention. Sydney is able to use a switch mounted on her wheelchair tray to operate numerous devices, including radios, fans and electrical toys. She loves to be held and responds immediately to people or objects in her environment.

Sydney joined Children's Extended Care Center in August 1998, and greeted the first day of school with a scrapbook of all the important things in her life. She was able to react with smiles and facial expressions that expressed joy and happiness with every turn of the page. Sydney's family asked to stop by that first day to see how she was adjusting to her new program. Her sisters Alyssa and Jessica made a drawing to be hung in class so Sydney wouldn't forget about them. Both sisters gave their approval and told their mom and dad she would be fine.

Within the first two months, Sydney had surpassed many of the communication and therapy goals established by the education and therapy departments. Staff members



Sydney, one of only two day students at Children's Extended Care Center in Groton, Massachusetts, smiles from her purple wheelchair.



Jill Bradley, Audra Lowe and Diann Sespico surround Sydney in her classroom at Children's Extended Care Center.

aimed higher to move Sydney closer her full potential.

Sydney's mom told the staff that she gets excited when the wheelchair van drives up each morning. She says that CECC's day school has been a wonderful experience not only for Sydney but for the entire family.

At home, Sydney helps bake cookies by using her switch to operate the blender or mixer. When left alone, Sydney is able to use her voice meaningfully to get a family member's attention. Sydney has also learned to lift herself up enough to help her mom and dad during dressing and changing times. She is able to roll over on her own and is more active than ever.

Recently, Sydney spent time smelling the flowers, as she was wheeled through CECC's sensory gardens. Her smile and pig tails engaged all within view. Each day brings a new experience. Each journal entry home to the family reinforces their belief that they have a very special little girl. *Her name is Sydney . . .*

Service dogs entertain, motivate Cedarcrest preschoolers

Walt Disney would have said it's the formula for success:
Kids + Dogs = Smiles.

The antics at Cedarcrest, a residence for medically fragile children in Keene, New Hampshire, may not be as zany as *The Shaggy Dog*, but puppy visits certainly balance the equation for the children.

Mothers and toddlers from the community visit the preschool class at Cedarcrest almost every weekday morning, providing peer interaction for the six youngest residents in the 25-bed home. Mondays are very special because two-year-old Olivia Mazzola and her mother Denise usually bring Liberty and Mozart, their dogs.

"Playing with the dogs adds variety to the children's day and helps them reach their goals," said Director of Development Elaine Giacomo. "Some-times that's socialization, or touching a new texture (without fear), taking turns or learning to work together."

For the most part, children at Cedarcrest are unable to speak or walk independently, or have delayed development or disabilities from premature birth or injuries. Residents are not critically ill, but cannot function without trained support.

"We are a home with nurses, not a nursing home," said Giacomo. "From the moment a child arrives, we are working toward his or her transition back to the family. It's an ongoing process."

Denise, the dog trainer, also, has goals. She is preparing Liberty, an 18-month-old yellow Labrador retriever, and Mozart, a three-month-old black Lab, for eventual work as service dogs.

"The dogs are selected for their



Preschool teacher Tracy Hanson and Gregg, a resident at Cedarcrest, a residence for children in Keene, New Hampshire, play with service puppy Mozart and trainer Denise Mazzola.

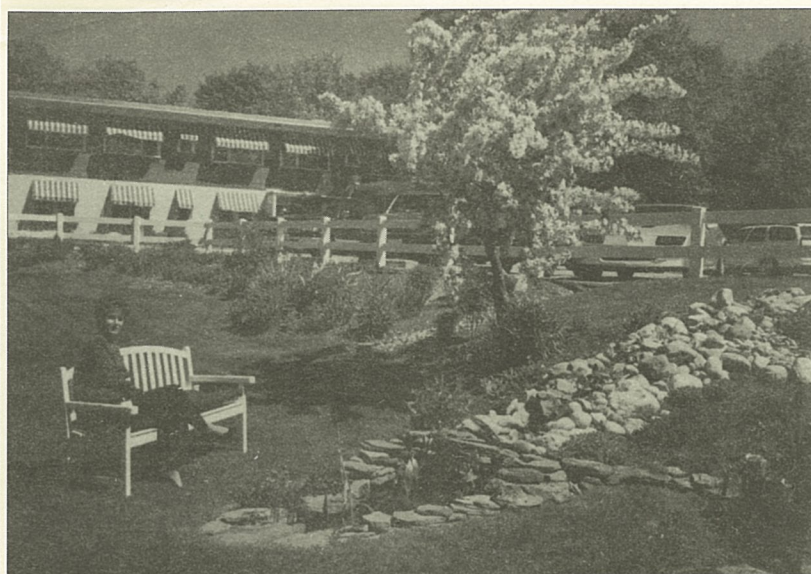
calm behavior, strength, easy care and intelligence," said Denise. After 18 months of socialization and trained response to a standard vocabulary ("give" or "wait" or "stay") the dogs will move to the next phase: acquiring

skills to pull wheelchairs, turn on light switches and press buttons for their disabled masters.

Seeing the dogs in action underscores their ability to serve and be-



Eddie, a Cedarcrest resident, earns a kiss from Liberty, one of two service dogs-in training.



Children's Extended Care plants gardens

Children's Extended Care Center in Groton, Massachusetts, cultivates three gardens for the enjoyment of residents and visitors. In the top photograph, Director Hope Welch suns in the water garden, where scented plants and a pond stocked with koi (left) stimulate the senses.

In the top right photo, mint, Egyptian onions, thyme, and other herbs line



CECC's walkways to offer residents new sensory experiences.

Not shown is a fragrant butterfly garden, donated by the family of Kristen M. Bumstead, a resident who passed away.

Hope wrote a letter about CECC to Birds & Blooms magazine. Readers responded with 100 letters and seed donations, used to start the gardens.

Dogs make kids smile

(Continued from previous page)

friend their companions. Liberty stands at eager attention, waiting for young Eddie to volley a toy into the air. One, two, — oops, Eddie isn't ready to throw yet. Liberty holds still. Eddie passes the toy to teacher Tracy Hanson. She bumps it back. Still, Liberty waits. With some encouragement, Eddie pitches the toy a few feet to Liberty. The dog catches it mid-air, evoking a shriek from Eddie and applause from adults in the room. Liberty rewards Eddie with a sloppy kiss.

Before nursing assistant Michael Carignan can blink, tiny Abby has

ventured to tug on Mozart's ear.

Mozart barely takes notice; in fact

he offers his tummy for a rub. The joyous commotion of pre-school is just a fact of life.

If there is any doubt remaining about the value of puppy pals, visitors just need to see Tim struggle to sit up straight to catch the classroom action. His improved posture and focus testify to the posi-



Denise and Olivia Mazzola

tive effect the dogs have.

When HALO visited Cedarcrest,

both Eddie and puppy Mozart needed to practice climbing stairs. Olivia, Eddie, Liberty, Mozart, Denise and volunteer Jean Henderson paraded up the atrium stairs and down the front stairs. Giacomo said the puppies provide motivation for daily exercise routines; visiting children model other behavior.

Soon Liberty will leave to complete her training. Denise acquired Mozart ahead of schedule to make the transition easier, and is slowly reducing Liberty's visits to wean the children from her company. The children will miss Liberty, but Mozart's visits