

PACESETTER

A news magazine of PACER Center, Inc. | Champions for Children | (952) 838-9000 | PACER.org

Children's mental health symposium is Aug. 12

The 14th Annual National PACER Symposium About Children and Young Adults with Mental Health and Learning Disabilities will be held on Monday, Aug. 12 at the Minneapolis Convention Center.

The keynote speakers are top-notch presenters who relate well to audiences. They include Richard G. Petty, M.D., a world-renowned authority on the brain and an accredited specialist in psychiatry, neurology, internal medicine, and nutrition. Also presenting is Rosemarie Allen, Ed.D., who is president and CEO for the Institute for Racial Equity and Excellence, the lead agency for ensuring equity in educational practices throughout the nation. She is an assistant professor in the School of Education at Metropolitan State University in Denver.

The Symposium is designed to help parents and professionals better identify and address mental health and learning disabilities in children and youth. Attendees will receive high-quality training and resources regarding children's mental health and learning disabilities, effective treatment, and positive teaching and intervention strategies.

Professionals who attend will be eligible for 6 CEU Clock Hours. The cost for this day-long event is \$35, and lunch will be provided. This event fills up quickly, so those interested should reserve soon. To register, go to PACER.org/symposium or call PACER at (952) 838-9000. ■



Richard G. Petty, M.D.



Rosemarie Allen, Ed.D.

'Good Vibrations' from The Beach Boys at PACER's Benefit



The Beach Boys perform at PACER's 37th Annual Benefit

The highlight of PACER's 37th Annual Benefit, presented by Starkey Hearing Technologies, was the incredible performance by The Beach Boys, led by original member Mike Love. It was an evening of great music for a great cause on Saturday, May 11 at the Minneapolis Convention Center, when the celebrated supergroup performed their greatest hits in front of iconic footage from the 1960s. All proceeds from the evening support PACER's work, which is free to families of children with disabilities and children who are bullied.

"More than one guest told me that this was an evening they'll never forget," said Paula Goldberg, PACER Executive Director. "It was so much fun to watch people dancing to The Beach Boys! The audience sang along enthusiastically and really had the time of their lives. It is easy to see why The Beach Boys are one of the most influential and enduring acts in popular music."

Andrew Zimmern, the renowned chef, restaurateur, and host of the Travel Channel's *Bizarre Foods with Andrew Zimmern*, was entertaining as he emceed the evening's performance. Andrew also presented the Otto Bremer Leadership Award to Talia Malka,

'Benefit' continued on page 8

Go, Walter, Go!

PACER gives kids keys to mobility and independence

Walter Blendermann may be only three years old, but he's already on his second car through the Go Baby Go project from PACER's Simon Technology Center. Walter currently drives a jeep that was modified for his use by PACER staff Elizabeth Barry, Paul Sanft, and Scott Silver through the Go Baby Go project, which adapts motorized cars for preschool children with disabilities. Walter, who has a rare neurological syndrome and developmental delays, outgrew his first Lightning McQueen car, which was modified for him when he was 18 months old.

Today, the jeep he tools around in has room for a passenger: most often his little sister, Gianna. "The cars give Walter a degree of independent mobility he wouldn't have otherwise," said Pam Blendermann, Walter's mother. "They've also made a real difference in other ways. Driving the cars has helped his physical, mental, and emotional development." She noted that the cars have been good for Walter's social life, too. "His peers see him in this cool car, instead of a wheelchair."

Pam is full of praise for PACER staff. "We are so grateful for the passion and creativity of the PACER team," she said. "It is so heartwarming to us, as Walter's parents. So many parts of Walter's life feel difficult, and present limitations. PACER's staff helps us turn difficulties into opportunities. If the car could go too fast, they'd ask, how can we make it safer for Walter? Seating can sometimes



Walter Blendermann

be difficult, so they were creative and designed a piece to adapt the seating using a 3D printer!

"They're very excited to make things work for our kiddo. That lifts us up as Walter's parents." ■

Celebrating 40 years of PACER Center and Parents Helping Parents

PACER's original staff members met with current PACER staff in April to talk about their memories of when PACER first opened its doors with the Parents Helping Parents project in 1978.

Standing: Rianne Leaf, Joan Schoepke, Evelyn Anderson, PACER co-founder Marge Goldberg, Polly Edmonds, and Virginia Richardson. Front row: Marci Bergdahl, LeAnne Nelson, and PACER's Executive Director and co-founder Paula Goldberg.



Mara MacMillan: 'PACER is part of my family'

Mara MacMillan's happiness is infectious. Vivacious and engaging, with a smile that lights up every room, she is one of those people who makes friends wherever she goes. "I am outgoing and spunky," Mara said, and everyone who knows her would agree. Mara has Williams syndrome, a genetic developmental disorder. She also has an incredibly full life.

Mara, who is 33 years old, is the oldest of five siblings. "We are a big, tight-knit family," she said. Several of her siblings are married, and she is excitedly looking forward to becoming an aunt for the first time in the fall. "The baby is due on October 31! I'm going to be the aunt who spoils the baby."

Mara says that PACER is also her family. She volunteers as a member of PACER's Benefit committee and every year she is onstage at the Benefit to draw the winner of the raffle. "I love PACER so much! PACER has been with me my whole life. I don't know what I'd do without PACER. It's so much fun for me to be on PACER's Benefit committee. PACER is part of my family," Mara said. "Paula [Goldberg] is an amazing woman and friend!"

Mara is especially proud that her brother, Win, started PACER's Fun Times program, which connects teens and young adults with and without disabilities for social activities, friendship, and fun. Mara was Win's inspiration for Fun Times, and they participated together for years.

Mara's dogs are also part of her family. She cares for



Mara and her mom, Muffy MacMillan, at Disney World

and trains her three young Labrador Retrievers. "I have three babies at home," she said. "They are well-trained and very obedient, which is great. Their names are Hugo, Leo, and Sir Walter Elias Disney." The name of her last dog is a clue to one of Mara's major passions: all things Disney. She's visited Disney parks multiple times and is always planning her next trip. As the winner of the custom Disney Parks package at PACER's 2019 Benefit, Mara is excited to go to Disney this summer. "I'm going soon, very soon!" she said.

Mara loves to travel and has enjoyed visiting many international destinations. This summer she will be traveling to several European countries as part of a group of young travelers with disabilities. She

has been part of the group for many years. Mara recently visited Japan and loved it, though she said that she regrets not being able to visit Tokyo Disneyland. "Disney is where my heart is," she said.

Mara likes to be busy and enjoys helping others. She volunteers at a local home for seniors. It's a perfect job for someone as friendly and outgoing as Mara. "It's really fun to help them. I help with Bingo, putting out cards and making sure the residents are happy," she said.

"Williams syndrome is amazing," Mara said. "I'm glad I have it. I'm glad to be a human being with a disability, and I'm glad there are people like my friends at PACER who are willing to help me be who I am." ■

“

I'm glad to be a human being with a disability, and I'm glad there are people like my friends at PACER who are willing to help me be who I am.

– Mara MacMillan

”

PACER's Unity Awards: Recognizing leaders in kindness

PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center and its Faces of Change Youth Advisory Boards (Minnesota and Los Angeles) presented the fifth annual Unity Awards on May 22 at PACER Center. The Youth Advisory Board members of PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center chose the award recipients from nominations received across the United States.

Sven Sundgaard, the Sunrise meteorologist at Twin Cities NBC affiliate KARE-11, was the evening's emcee. Sven said, "Tonight is a special evening of recognizing individuals and groups both locally and nationally who are doing something special in the community to prevent bullying and are truly changing lives. The Unity Awards is an opportunity to honor and celebrate students, educators, and community members who have gone above and beyond to address bullying."

The four national awards were:

- **Together Against Bullying.** Charles Kolin of Green Farms Academy in Connecticut almost single-handedly brought Unity Day to his school in 2018 and is already planning for 2019.
- **United for Inclusion.** Sachiri Henderson and the BEAST (Bullying Ends Against Students Together) Crew: After experiencing bullying in fourth grade, Sachiri created BEAST Crew in her Louisiana middle school, which has united the community and focused on Unity Day. Sachiri traveled to Minneapolis from Louisiana to receive her Unity Award.

- **United for Acceptance.** Jamie Pernick and John Eftthemis spearhead their Lancaster, New York high school's "Bands Against Bullying" event every year, volunteering hundreds of hours for this event, which touches on themes of bullying, racism, gender identification, and academic issues.
- **United for Kindness.** Riverhead Peacemakers is a group of New York state fourth graders who are role models, leading a district-wide Great Kindness Challenge where students complete as many kind deeds as possible.

Additionally, The Faces of Change Awards were presented to students, educators, and school groups making a difference in Minnesota, where PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center (NBPC) is located, and in California, where NBPC has an office.

From Minnesota:

- Rogue Robotics, Farmington High School Robotics Team
- Kaia Kallestad
- South View Middle School Peer Insights Group
- Prairie View Student Council

From California:

- Pete Martinez
- Abi Smith, Pepperdine Waves Debate Team, and Woodlake Elementary Debaters
- Deborah Huffman with Dancesport ■



PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center staff Bailey Huston (far left) and Julie Hertzog (far right) with Emcee Sven Sundgaard



Members of PACER's Faces of Change Youth Advisory Board

Barbara Gage: A PACER Advisory Board member on a mission to help students with disabilities

Barbara Gage first became involved with PACER Center because of her interest in learning disabilities. She joined PACER's Advisory Board at Paula Goldberg's invitation. "PACER does such a great job of helping both parents and students," she said. "When Paula asked me to join, I was pleased to become part of PACER. Of course, who can say no to Paula?"

Barbara became interested in learning disabilities for personal reasons. "One of my children has learning differences," she said. "When he was growing up, there really wasn't much support for learning differences. The school he attended didn't know how to deal with his difficulties."

Watching their child struggle made Barbara and her husband, Skip, determined to not only help their son but other youth, too. Their son went to a college that has a strong program for students with learning disabilities, and Barbara became chair of the board of Augsburg College and was instrumental in helping Augsburg develop a learning center for students with learning differences. "It was a pioneering program, and it is growing and active today," she said with pride.

Barbara is an active member of PACER's Advisory Board, and is deeply knowledgeable about PACER's projects. She is impressed with PACER's programs, staff, and volunteers. "The new Innovation Lab is so important because technology is a tremendous tool in learning for students with disabilities. I think the mental health programming is also very important. PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center is great and growing. The advocacy work is really key to helping children succeed in school." Barbara made special mention of the PACERTalks About Bullying video series. "I also think the youth boards are wonderful," she said.

Paula Goldberg says PACER is fortunate to have Barbara. "I'm so glad that Barbara is part of PACER's Advisory Board," she said. "She is a dedicated leader who understands our community. Her knowledge and passion are so valuable to PACER and the families we serve."

A family culture of giving back

Barbara grew up in a family that believed in giving to the



Barbara Gage. Photo courtesy of Carlson Foundation.

community. Her late father, Curt Carlson, founded the Carlson Companies; he and Barbara's mother, Arleen, "were really good role models for my sister and I in terms of our responsibility to the community."

Barbara said that she and her sister, Marilyn, learned at an early age that, "If you have a lot, you contribute to the community and you give back. We were taught that it was important. My parents were always active in philanthropy. We try to be good role models in the same way for our kids and family."

Barbara is active in her family's foundation, and though she is in demand, "I don't serve on many boards. PACER is different than many organizations. It's outstanding in the way it relates to the community and responds to community needs. Helping children and youth with disabilities is something I have a lot of interest in."

Barbara is excited for PACER's future. "PACER is great at new programming that is important and needed, and I think that will help PACER continue to grow and contribute to our community.

"PACER helps children live better and fuller lives. What could be more important?" ■

“ **PACER helps children live better and fuller lives. What could be more important?** ”
— Barbara Gage

‘We want every parent to have hope!’

PACER's Children's Mental Health Project

When parents call PACER for help with their child's mental health, emotional or behavioral disorders, they have access to PACER parent advocates who listen, help, and provide hope. The Children's Mental Health Project provides individual assistance, guidance, and information to parents regarding special education and the overlap with mental health care systems.

The Children's Mental Health Project is headed by Renelle Nelson, who has a master's degree in psychotherapy and counseling, and is also the parent of a son with cognitive and emotional disabilities and a daughter with attention deficit disorder and anxiety. “We work to support parents and others living and working with children and youth with mental health, emotional, or behavioral needs by providing them with information and resources so students can be successful at school, at home, and in their community,” says Renelle. She noted that her team's goal is to support every parent. “We want every parent who calls us to feel validated, supported, and have hope that they CAN make a difference in the life of their child.

“We also help professionals understand that informed parents are important in improving the educational and community outcomes for children with mental health, emotional, or behavioral needs,” Renelle said.

The Children's Mental Health Project provides excellent resources for parents and professionals, including workshops, in-services, and written resources. They also facilitate a Youth Advisory Board on Mental Health. The high-school age members, all of whom have a mental health diagnosis, work to reduce the stigma associated with mental health by giving presentations at national and statewide conferences as well as at school staff trainings.

Working with Renelle are parent advocates Maleenia Mohabir and Laura Jean. Maleenia serves on Minnesota's Special Education Advisory Panel and is a member of her local school district's Special Education Advisory



PACER advocates Maleenia Mohabir, Renelle Nelson, and Laura Jean

Council. Laura has 20 years' experience working with children and families.

Laura said that parents often believe that children with mental health-related needs “won't qualify for an Individualized Education Program (IEP) because they do well academically, or their test scores are too high.” She pointed out that academics are just one measure in an

Individual Education Program (IEP) evaluation to determine a child's eligibility for special education.

Maleenia added, “If parents believe their child's educational progress is being impacted by their mental health-related needs, they can request an evaluation to see if their child is eligible for an educational plan.”

“If parents need assistance making this request, or have any questions about educational issues

or community supports, PACER advocates are here for assistance. We want to help parents be great advocates for their children!”

For more information about PACER's Children's Mental Health Project, visit PACER.org/cmh or call (952) 838-9000. ■

“
We want every parent who calls us to have hope that they CAN make a difference in the life of their child.
– Renelle Nelson
”

PACER puppet shows: Engaging children since 1979

PACER's puppet program uses engaging, life-size puppets to bring messages of disability awareness and bullying prevention to Twin Cities-area classrooms. There are two separate puppet shows: Count Me In, which focuses on disability awareness and inclusion, and Kids Against Bullying.

Count Me In is the original program. "I love the Count Me In presentation!" said one teacher. "You do so well explaining disabilities to our students. They learn a lot during the presentation and sometimes refer to the characters afterwards. My students always talk about it and will remember they can play with other students who have a disability."

Each Count Me In show is age-appropriately tailored to young audiences from preschool (age four and up) through fourth grade.

After the puppet show in her classroom, a second grader came up to Lynn Dennis, who, with Katie Kaufmann, coordinates PACER's puppet program. "I have something to tell Carmen," the second grader said to Lynn Dennis, coordinator of PACER's puppet program. "Sometimes I'm lonely, too."

The girl's reaction to Carmen, one of the puppets, is a common one, Lynn said. "The shows are interactive, and they inspire, educate, and entertain children from preschool through fourth grade."

Teachers and students are equally enthusiastic about Kids Against Bullying shows. One teacher commented, "Fabulous job at bringing bullying awareness to children. I loved how it was interactive." Another teacher said, "The puppeteers included the students in the presentation by asking for their thoughts. The scenarios are very engaging and they are situations that could happen to any student."

Lynn and Katie work with schools and volunteers to bring the puppet program into approximately 180 classrooms each year. "The puppets make a lasting impression on children. It's a wonderful way to engage them in learning about disability inclusion and bullying prevention."

More information about PACER's puppet program is available at PACER.org/puppets. ■



Puppeteers perform a Kids Against Bullying puppet show.

How you can support PACER's puppet shows

Become a volunteer

More than 30 volunteers bring the puppets to life, and the program is currently accepting new volunteers. "It's such a fun and creative way to support PACER," said Lynn. "No experience is necessary. We train in puppetry and presentation skills and offer hands-on rehearsals. Puppeteers present at schools in the Twin Cities metro area two or three times a month."

Sponsor a puppet show

Though the cost to bring a puppet show to a school is just \$100, and has not increased over the past 35 years, some schools just don't have the budget to afford it, said Lynn. "Our need for funding is greatest in the West Metro area. Parents can sponsor a show at their child's school or make a contribution to PACER's puppet program." Donations are tax deductible.

An unforgettable evening benef



Left: Jim Oricchio (center) with his grandchildren and Mike Love (far left) and Bruce Johnston (far right)



Right: (L to R) Stephanie Shaprio, Paula Goldberg, and David Shapiro



Standing: Jodie Resnick, Chris Moore, Michal Mishan, Mai Mishan. Seated: Roy Nock



Andrew Zimmern and Frank Vascellaro



Don McNeil and Sharman Davis Barrett

'Benefit' continued from page 1

the former chair of PACER's Youth Advisory Board on Mental Health. WCCO-TV's amazing Frank Vascellaro did a fabulous job leading the live auction. Chris Moore, producer of *Good Will Hunting* and *Manchester By the Sea*, was a lively auctioneer for the customized Disney Parks package.

Paula credits the dedication of hundreds of people in making the evening a success. "It's hard to put into words how much PACER appreciates the incredible support of our loyal friends," she said. "We're just so thankful for the hard work of our Benefit committee, staff, and 500 volunteers, and the generous backing of our corporate sponsors and individual donors who made this magical evening possible. The funds the Benefit raises

for children are what this special evening is all about. Benefit supporters are truly champions for children with disabilities and those who are bullied!"

The videos viewed by the Benefit's audience are available at PACER.org. These two outstanding new videos are "Talia Malka: A Journey of Hope," the inspiring story of how PACER helped a youth with mental health disabilities reach her full potential as a young adult, and, "We Have Hope," the behind-the-scenes story of the creation of PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center.

Benefits children with all abilities



Virginia Hopper, Richard Hopper, Gwendolyn Hopper



(L to R) Standing: Becca Amstutz, Janet Hills, Mickey Mikeworth.
Seated: Beth Simermeyer, Paula Goldberg, and Drew Glidden



(L to R): Betty Kay Crothers, Dan Crothers, Katie Crothers, Mike Love, Ann Crothers, Katie Fladeboe, Laura Morris, Mike Morris, Bruce Johnston, and Josh Fladeboe



Hannah Radant, Paul Nigon, Kelly Page, Terry Nigon, Pat Nigon, Karisa Nigon, Nick Lenzmeier, Xiaojing Zou, Betsy Nigon



Mike Love, Jodie Resnick, Kevin Martinez, Bruce Johnston



Benefit co-chairs: David Kaysen, Nancy Kaysen, Betty Kay Crothers, Jessica Broyles

Familiar faces behind the scenes at PACER's Benefit

Don Schwartz has attended PACER's Benefit every year but one for the past 30 years. The year he missed, the Benefit was held on his daughter's wedding day. It is a testament to Don's dedication to PACER that the avid fisherman has skipped multiple fishing openers to be at the Benefit.

The retired police officer organizes other police officers to volunteer their time, providing security at the Benefit. Finding officers to volunteer was Don's idea. He explained, "I was on PACER's Board, and I saw the breakdown of Benefit expenses and that PACER paid quite a bit to have police officers there for security. I said, 'Let me check this out; maybe I can get officers to volunteer their time.'"

That was 29 years ago, and Don has arranged for police volunteers every year since. "For a long time, we had the same group every year," he said. "Then other cops would hear about it and say, 'Hey, I'll volunteer.'" Don, who is retired from the Minneapolis Police Department and the Metro Transit Police Department, now has the assistance of Rick Jensen, who is an active officer with Metro Transit.

Don became involved with PACER a few years after his son, Zachary, was born with Down syndrome 36 years ago. "Things weren't as good for kids with disabilities. At the hospital, they tried to give us a list of facilities we could put our son in. I told them to go away. We took our son home."

When Zach was a preschooler, Don called PACER at the suggestion of the Down Syndrome Association of



Zach and Don Schwartz

Minnesota. "We wanted to make sure Zach's educational needs were met. A PACER advocate came with us to the Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting. The school staff recognized her. We sat down and did the IEP and everything went fine." Don and his wife, Barbara Kirby, who is a past PACER Board member, also attended several PACER workshops. "They were very helpful," he said.

Today, Zach is an adult who attends a day program at Partnership Resources, works when he can, and is an avid artist who also enjoys acting in plays. He is by Don's side at the Benefit each year. "People have gotten to know Zach," Don said. "If Frank Vascellaro doesn't see Zach, he'll come up to me and ask

where Zach is."

In addition to their son Zach, Don and Barbara have a daughter, Eva. Though she is three years younger than Zach, "she was really like a little caretaker to him when they were children," Don said. Today, Eva is a pediatrician who specializes in treating children with Down syndrome and autism. "She really got her start with Zach," Don said.

Don says that Zach helps allay other parents' fears about the future of their children who have Down syndrome. "When a child is born with Down syndrome, parents can have lots of unanswered questions and fears. Then you meet Zach and it's so different — Zach is just great. My dad's biggest fear was that he was not going to be able to play ball with his grandson. I said, 'Zach will be able to play ball with you' — and he did." ■

PACSETER

©2019 by PACER Center, Inc. | Published three times yearly

Circulation: 137,138

8161 Normandale Blvd. | Minneapolis, MN 55437-1044

Voice: (952) 838-9000 | Toll-free: (800) 537-2237

FAX: (952) 838-0199 | Email: PACER@PACER.org

PACER Executive Director: Paula F. Goldberg

Editor: Michele St. Martin Contributing Writer: Allison Rodriguez

Designer: Jenna Hanson

PACER website: PACER.org

BULLYING: PACER.org/Bullying

(Alternate format is available upon request)

PACER Center enhances the quality of life and expands opportunities for children, youth, and young adults with all disabilities and their families so each person can reach his or her highest potential. PACER operates on the principles of parents helping parents, supporting families, promoting a safe environment for all children, and working in collaboration with others. PACER is also the National Bullying Prevention Center, offering innovative resources for students, parents, educators, and others.

An Equal Opportunity Employer, PACER is funded by grants from the U.S. Departments of Education, Labor, Health and Human Services, and other sources, and from foundations, corporations, and individuals. Views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Departments or other donors. Contributions to PACER are tax-deductible. For information, call PACER at (952) 838-9000 Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.



Save the date! Unity Day is Wednesday, Oct. 23



October is National Bullying Prevention Month, initiated by PACER in 2006. This is a great time for schools, organizations, and individuals to raise awareness about bullying and the role we all play in making a difference. Unity Day, PACER's signature event during National Bullying Prevention Month, falls on Wednesday, October 23 this year. The call to action is simple: wear and share the color orange.

"More than one of every five school-aged children report being bullied," said Julie Hertzog, director of PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center, which sponsors Unity Day and founded National Bullying Prevention Month in 2006. "By joining together and wearing and sharing orange on Unity Day, we send the unified message that we care about student's physical and emotional health and that bullying will no longer be accepted in this society."

PACER provides free resources for schools, communities, and individuals to get involved during National Bullying Prevention Month and on Unity Day. For more information about how you can participate in helping create a world without bullying, go to PACER.org/bullying. ■

Talia Malka honored with Otto Bremer Youth Leadership Award

Talia Malka received the fourth annual Otto Bremer Youth Leadership Award at PACER's 37th Annual Benefit on May 11. Master of Ceremonies Andrew Zimmern presented Talia with the award.

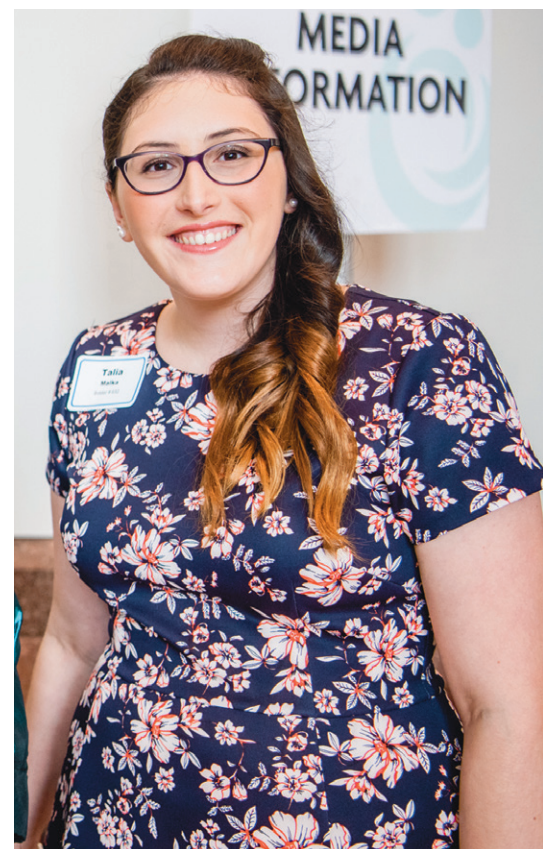
Talia is 19 years old and has just completed her freshman year at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. From early childhood, Talia struggled with behavioral issues related to her mental health, experiencing difficulty in school as her family struggled to find an accurate diagnosis and effective treatment.

Karen Malka, Talia's mom, called PACER when her daughter was nine years old, reaching Renelle Nelson, coordinator of PACER's Mental Health Project, who became their advocate. "PACER was by my side, helping make sure Talia received the education she was entitled to," Karen said.

Talia commented, "It was an unsteady journey, and it took me multiple years to get to where I am today," Talia said. "I was in and out of schools, and a lot of people gave up on me real quickly. I was hospitalized multiple times for mental health issues."

With PACER's help, Karen found schools that offered the right supports to help Talia succeed. Talia became a member of the National Honor Society, and took many classes at the University of Minnesota during her last two years of high school. Her work with PACER's Youth Board on Mental Health helped build her confidence and leadership skills. She spoke to large groups at PACER's National Symposium, and shared her story with legislators at the Minnesota State Capitol.

"I've overcome a lot, and have learned not to be ashamed of my past and mental health," Talia said. "I've been able to use my story to really impact people. Without PACER, I wouldn't be the person I am today." ■



Talia Malka

When parents and schools disagree

Options in the special education process

There are times when parents and schools have differing perspectives about a student's education. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Minnesota's special education laws, parents have a number of options if they cannot come to an agreement with their child's school. These options include:

Conciliation Conference

If a parent objects to a school proposal or the school rejects a family's request, the parent can meet with school district staff for at least one conciliation conference. The conference must be held within ten days of the request, and at a time and place that is convenient for both sides. The district must present a written memo that outlines any agreement or proposal.

Mediation

Either parents or the school may request an impartial mediator through the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE). Both parties must agree to mediation, which is available at no cost to either party. If an agreement is reached, a legal document is created and must be followed.

Facilitated Team Meeting

Either parents or the school may request a meeting to address all or part of an Individualized Education Program. The meeting is conducted by a neutral facilitator assigned by MDE at no cost to either party. The facilitator promotes effective communication and assists the team in developing the IEP.

State Complaint

If a parent feels that the school is not complying with the IEP, they can file a complaint with MDE. An investigator is then assigned, and a decision is rendered within 60 days.

Impartial Due Process Hearing

A parent or district may request this hearing, with a trained hearing officer who acts as a judge, who listens to the case and issues a determination. The burden of proof is on the party who requests the hearing. Because this is a complex process, parents tend to use an attorney for this hearing. ■

Michal Mishan is volunteer of the year in L.A.

Dedicated PACER supporter Michal Mishan has been awarded the "Volunteer of the Year" award by Community Conscience, a Los Angeles-based Human Services Center. Michal has volunteered with the Los Angeles office of PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center for five years. "PACER's principles align with mine," says the parent of two children. "It's so important to provide children and youth with ideas about how to address bullying, and to educate and inspire them to take action and promote kindness.

"Meeting PACER's staff members and volunteers and connecting with Executive Director Paula Goldberg made everything very clear: the most amazing people came together to make a difference. I have been working closely with Judy French from the L.A. office and it's been an absolute pleasure; she supported us and guided many school and local events."

Michal added, "Working in finance, it was important for me to know that 85% of PACER's funds go directly to programs. While there are many worthy causes and organizations, PACER's work really touched my heart and I am very happy and honored to support it."

Michal received this award based on contributions to the Los Angeles gala, the Bullying Prevention L.A. Youth Advisory Board, and other PACER projects in California and Minnesota. She also received commendations from the City of Thousand Oaks and the City of Agoura for her service.



Michal Mishan

College success is possible for students with intellectual disabilities

PACER is a partner with the Think College National Coordinating Center, a national organization dedicated to developing, expanding, and improving inclusive higher education options for people with intellectual disabilities. As part of the project, PACER helps post-secondary education programs better understand how to engage families, as well as promoting high expectations in K-12 education for students with intellectual disabilities. PACER also assists families by providing them with materials about college opportunities and readiness for youth with intellectual disabilities. “This is one of the most exciting opportunities in the last 30 years for youth with intellectual disabilities,” said Barb Zeimke, co-director of PACER’s National Parent Center on Transition and Employment.



Historically, Barb said, most students’ education ended when they completed a high school program at age 21. “There were very few options to continue learning and skill-building in inclusive settings with their peers. Today, there are more than 250 programs in universities and community colleges in 49 states for students with intellectual disabilities. They can take college classes, engage in career development and independent living activities, and participate in the social life of the campus.” Programs vary from college to college, and are both vocational and also teach important “soft skills” that are crucial in both employment and independent or semi-independent adult living.

PACER plays a dual role in the program. “PACER promotes high expectations for post-secondary success by providing assistance to families, helping them learn about appropriate college programs and how they can support their students in preparing to enter a program

and for success within the program,” Barb said. PACER also assists college programs, helping them understand how to engage families.

The results are impressive. One year after completing the program, 65 percent of students responding to a follow-up survey were employed; the national employment rate for adults with an intellectual disability is just 17 percent. There are other positive outcomes as well: 23 percent of respondents were pursuing further education, and 91 percent reported being satisfied with their social lives.

“Parents of students with disabilities such as Down syndrome never imagined these opportunities for their youth,” Barb said. “The availability of the Inclusive Post-Secondary Education program has changed the whole trajectory of expectations and opportunities for students. It’s life-changing.” ■

And the survey says... Support PACER with SurveyMonkey

Helping PACER is now as easy as taking simple online surveys. PACER supporters can sign up on SurveyMonkey. Contribute to receive short surveys from SurveyMonkey customers who need opinions on a variety of topics. For every survey completed, SurveyMonkey makes a donation to PACER, and participants have the opportunity to win \$100 in an instant win game. Participants’ identities and information remain confidential. Sign up at contribute.surveymonkey.com/charity/PACER.

Workshops

PACER Center workshops are FREE to Minnesota parents. For information and to register, call (952) 838-9000 or toll free at (800) 537-2237, or visit PACER.org/workshops.

HEALTH

Meeting the Financial Challenge: Helping Ensure Quality of Life for Loved Ones with Special Needs

Guest speaker Emmy Mastel from Prudential Special Needs Solutions, the parent of a youth with disabilities, will provide helpful information on what families should consider when planning for future financial and care needs of their son or daughter.

- **July 20, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Streaming option also available

HOUSING

Incorporating Home-Living Skills into Daily Life for Your Middle School Youth

Participants will enjoy exploring tools and technology to help their son or daughter learn and practice home-living skills. Topics include: meal planning and cooking, healthy living and smart choices, safety and emergency services, shopping and managing money, communication and self-advocacy, recreation and leisure, and transportation.

- **Aug. 19, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**

PARENT TRAINING

The ABCs of the IEP: Making the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Work for Your Child

Parents will learn to use the IEP to benefit their child, including how each required part of the IEP can be developed to meet their child's needs.

- **July 30, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**
- **Sept. 23, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Brainerd)**
- **Sept. 24, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (International Falls)**

How Parents Can Effectively Communicate with the IEP Team

Parents will learn to advocate for their child in the special education process and receive tips and tools to become more effective communicators on their child's IEP team.

- **Aug. 12, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Crookston)**

Hot Tips on the IEP: Is Your Child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) Individualized and Appropriate?

Parents will learn how to use their child's special education evaluation report to determine how the IEP addresses their child's unique needs. Parents must bring a copy of their child's most recent school special education evaluation report and current IEP.

- **Aug. 13, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**

Ten Topics to Help Your Child Succeed in School

Parents will learn about 10 important areas in special education, and acquire skills, knowledge, and useful tools to help their child with disabilities succeed.

- **Aug. 13, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Little Falls)**

Tips and Tools for Talking with the School

This workshop will provide parents of special education students with practical tips and interactive problem-solving experiences to build the skills necessary to communicate effectively with school staff and resolve differences.

- **Sept. 12, 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. (Crystal)**

TECH FOR GIRLS CLUB

Participants will roll up your sleeves and get messy while having fun with science, technology, engineering, and math! Middle school girls with disabilities and all skill levels are welcome.

Robots in Action

Robots collide in this Tech for Girls workshop! Girls will create their own sumo wrestler using Sphero robots. They'll learn how to code the robots to move.

- **July 20, 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. (PACER)**

TECH FOR TEENS CLUB

Teens are invited to join an exciting club to learn about technology! This club is open to teens ages 11 to 19 with disabilities. All skill levels are welcome.

Building a Robot

Learn about the entire process of building a robot, from assembly to executing code. This workshop is designed for all levels of coding experience.

- **July 13, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (PACER)**

3D Printing Basics

Teens are invited to watch a 3D printer in action and to experiment with 3D design software to create their own computer-generated models.

- **Aug. 17, 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. (PACER)**

TRANSITION

Using Technology to Support Independence on the Job

This transition workshop will address assistive technology to support independence at work. Topics discussed include managing time, staying organized, completing tasks, and maintaining focus. Demonstrations include scheduling tools, smart pens, task managers, as well as tools that support focus and well-being on the job.

- **June 19, 2:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Streaming option also available

Supplemental Security Income (SSI): First Steps

Parents will learn how their youth can apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) to help meet their postsecondary education, training, employment, and independent living goals.

- **July 16, 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (St. Paul)**
- **July 30, 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Duluth)**
- **Aug. 13, 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Arden Hills)**

Assistive Technology to Support Employment: Tools that Bring Accessibility to the Workplace

This workshop will explore how assistive technology can make the workplace accessible for people with disabilities. A variety of tools will be demonstrated, including alternative keyboards, adaptive mice, and devices and apps that support organization and time management.

- **July 17, 2:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Streaming option also available

Resources

To see the full list of PACER publications and to order, go to PACER.org/Publications. You may also order by calling (952) 838-9000.

Special Education Record Keeping Folders

Special education records contain important information for making educational decisions. This set of six folders helps parents organize school paperwork to help them make good decisions about their children's education. Also available in Spanish, Hmong, and Somali.

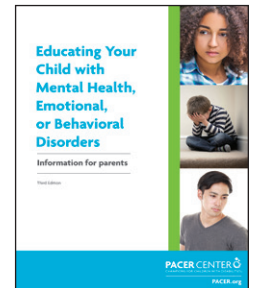
\$10 | 11+ copies, \$8 each | PHP-a5



Educating Your Child with Mental Health, Emotional, or Behavioral Disorders: Information for Parents

This guide helps parents of children with mental health, emotional, or behavioral disorders participate effectively in special education planning, including school discipline policies, placement options, and behavioral and emotional support needs. Updated 2018.

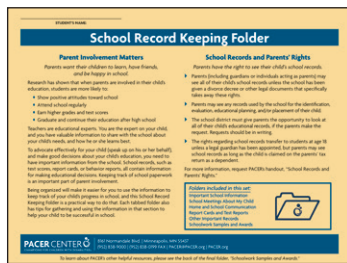
\$5 | 10+ copies, \$4 each | PHP-a21



School Record Keeping Folders (General Education)

This School Record Keeping Folder is a practical way for all parents to stay organized to keep track of their student's progress in school. Each of the six tabbed folders have tips for gathering and using the information to help your child be successful in school. Also available in Spanish, Hmong, and Somali.

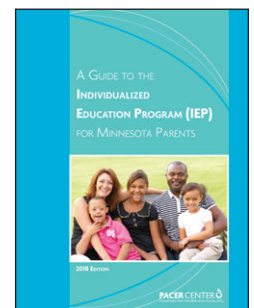
\$10 | 11+ copies, \$8 each | MPC-6



A Guide to the Individualized Education Program (IEP) for Minnesota Parents

This booklet helps parents work with schools to address each child's special needs through understanding the required components of the IEP. Includes examples from an example IEP form. Updated 2018.

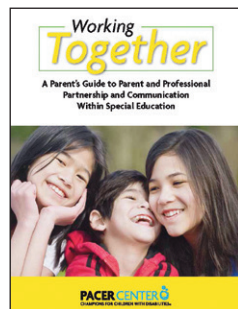
\$3 | 10+ copies, \$2 each | PHP-a12



Working Together: A Parent's Guide to Parent and Professional Partnership and Communication Within Special Education

This book helps parents effectively communicate with special education professionals as they develop their child's educational program.

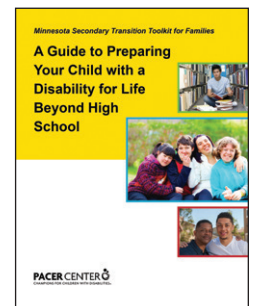
\$6 | 10+ copies, \$5 each | PHP-a19



Minnesota Secondary Transition Toolkit for Families: A Guide to Preparing Your Child with a Disability for Life Beyond High School

Helps make transition planning easier. Topics include health care, benefits planning, postsecondary education, housing, and more. Updated 2017.

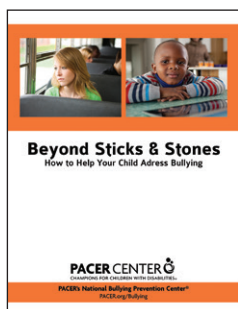
\$9 | ST-41



Beyond Sticks & Stones: How to Help Your Child Address Bullying

This book offers bullying prevention strategies for children at home, in school, and online. It is filled with information and practical tools that can help parents and others take action against bullying. A special section of the book provides specific tips for parents of children with disabilities.

\$5 | BP-7



PACER's complete list of publications can be found at PACER.org/Publications

INSIDE

The Beach Boys at PACER's Benefit	1
Go Baby Go	2
Mara MacMillan	3
Unity Awards	4
Barbara Gage	5
Children's Mental Health	6
PACER Puppets	7
Special Education process	12
College Success	13
PACER Workshops	14

Change Service Requested

Melanie Barry: 'I want PACER to always be there'

Melanie Barry is passionate about PACER, and has been involved as a PACER volunteer for more than 25 years in many ways: from working on PACER's Benefit in a variety of roles to chairing the Advisory Board. When asked how she came to PACER, she said jokingly, "I made the mistake of saying hello to Paula Goldberg in an elevator 25 years ago!"

Melanie did not know back then that she would have grandchildren with learning differences. In addition to giving her time, Melanie is a PACER donor. She believes strongly in the importance of growing a healthy endowment to support PACER's programs in the future. "I give to PACER's endowment because I want PACER's services to be there for all kids, going forward," she said. "I hope others will join me in giving."

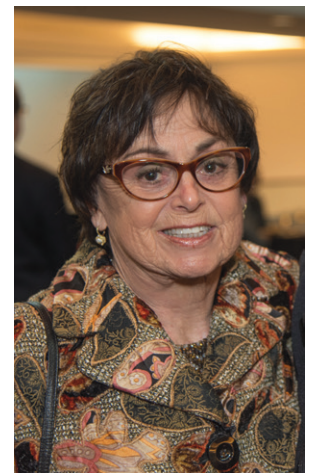
How the endowment works

Your gift to PACER's endowment is permanently invested; only the annual investment income is spent. An endowment reduces the impact of economic downturns and fluctuating funding. Endowment income enables

PACER to create innovative new programs, without taking away resources from the PACER programs families depend on every day. With government funding increasingly uncertain, your gift to PACER's endowment fund couldn't be more timely.

You may want to consult your attorney or financial advisor to discuss how to make your contribution to PACER. There are many ways to give. Donors who are older than 70-½ can donate up to \$100,000 per year directly to PACER as part of their mandatory IRA distribution.

For more information about PACER's endowment, contact Paula Goldberg, PACER's Executive Director, or Renee Gallaher, Finance Director, at (952) 838-9000 or pgoldberg@PACER.org or rgallaher@PACER.org. ■



Melanie Barry