

MENTORING LEADS TO READING SUCCESS

(taken from the May-June 2006 *FORUM*, Volume XXIV, Issue3, published by the Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities – OCECD)

An effective and affordable reading mentoring program is being implemented in Ohio. According to an independent evaluation conducted by the Center for Evaluation Services at Bowling Green State University during the 2002-2005 school years, the reading mentoring program is significantly increasing the reading levels of students with disabilities on both informal and standardized reading assessments. Based on the independent evaluation, Project MORE has demonstrated that it is effective, affordable, replicable and sustainable. *Project MORE: Mentoring in Ohio for Reading Excellence* applies scientifically based reading research strategies and follows the No Child Left Behind "high expectation for all" standard. Initially, Project MORE was designed to raise the expectations and performance for children with disabilities in the area of reading, but has also proven effective for students at risk for reading failure.

According to Dr. Rich Wilson, Center for Evaluation Services, Bowling Green State University, "over the past four years, evaluation results have shown that Project MORE students with specific learning disabilities (SLD) have made one-month reading gains for each month of structured intervention."

Project MORE is a collaborative effort among three Ohio Educational Service Centers (ESC's) -- Northwest, Putnam and Wood and the Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities. The project has two goals:

- * Demonstrate that students with disabilities can increase their reading skills using a structured reading mentoring program, in addition to their IEP services; and
- * Ensure that greater numbers of students with disabilities pass Ohio's grade level reading achievement tests.

"I have never seen one program that positively impacts students with disabilities as much as this reading mentoring program," said Jan Osborn, Superintendent of Schools, Putnam County ESC.

During the 2004-2005 school year, Project MORE served more than 1,386 students with disabilities, at-risk or Title I students; 586 of these students had IEP's. More than 1,500 mentors served over 36,626-structured reading mentoring volunteer hours in 44 schools. On average, Project MORE costs approximately \$1-2/mentor-hour for established/mature programs, and \$4-5/mentor-hour for start up programs.

"As Ohio's schools begin to implement a tiered support for students within an integrated model it becomes critical for schools to offer research based reading intervention strategies. Project MORE can provide intensive (Tier 3) intervention for

students at risk for reading failure in order to promote increased achievement and outcomes,” said Mike Armstrong, Director, Office for Exceptional Children, Ohio Department of Education, and currently NASDSE President.

Disability categories of students who are mentored include:

- Learning disabilities
- Cognitive disabilities
- Emotional disturbance
- Multiple disabilities
- Speech/language impairments

“The program is a lot of work, but it is the best investment I have ever made for my students. The gains they have made with one-on-one tutoring have been amazing!” said Lori Fischer, Intervention Specialist, Kalida Elementary.

Origins of Project MORE

Project MORE began in 1999 as an offshoot of Ohio Reads, when legislators realized that students with disabilities typically might not have access to reading mentoring services through Ohio Reads. Legislators sponsored a budget amendment written by statewide parent advocate Margaret Burley, Executive Director of the OCECD, to determine the effectiveness of research-based structured reading mentoring programs for students with disabilities.

“Our support for this project is an example of our belief that without fundamental reading skills, it is nearly impossible for students with disabilities to improve in subjects across the curriculum. By definition, 80% of students receiving special education services have reading problems,” stated Burley.

Once a student has been referred for reading mentoring services, the teacher/coordinator determines the student’s reading ability using DIBELS in addition to other reading assessments. On a weekly basis, the coordinator formulates lesson plans to support the work required in the classroom. The Project MORE coordinator monitors the student’s progress throughout the year.

Trained mentors typically work with students on repeated reading, vocabulary, and specific skill areas that are reinforced using games and activities. For the best results, students are mentored four days a week for 30 minutes, which provides two additional hours of one-on-one literacy help weekly. Mentors report student performance on a daily basis to the teacher/coordinator. Based on these comments, lesson plans may be altered.

Currently, mentors are recruited from local high schools, businesses and within the community. Partnerships have been formed with numerous universities that require service learning contact hours for their students. An example of an excellent

partnership with Bluffton University (student enrollment less than 1200) supplied over 200 thirty-minute mentor slots per week for Project MORE students during the winter term.

Four Models

Over the past seven years, Project MORE schools have implemented four different types of service delivery models:

- * Title I coordinator implements Project MORE for students with disabilities and students identified as eligible for Title I services;
- * Intervention specialist implements Project MORE in addition to her regular teaching duties;
- * Aides coordinate Project MORE in conjunction with the intervention specialist; and,
- * Some schools use a collaborative approach utilizing speech pathologists, school psychologists and special education teachers to coordinate the reading mentoring program.

CHECK OUT OCECD.org

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The Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities (OCECD) has a new website and we're adding resources and information to it everyday. One of the best things about our new website is that it is searchable. Are you interested in seeing articles or items related only to early childhood or transition? Put in your search term and you'll find all resources currently contained on the website related to that term, whether it's a **FORUM** article, a website, or an OCECD publication.

Check it out at ocecd.org.

Here's what you'll find:

1. The *Home Page* contains a list of the latest resources, in addition to the calendar. The calendar gives you access to all OCECD trainings scheduled across the state. Clicking on the date will generate a list of trainings scheduled that day with the location and a contact name and number. The calendar includes conferences and other events happening around the state that are of interest to parents.
2. *Who We Are* makes it easy for you to contact the OCECD regional parent advocate closest to you. You can find a list of all OCECD regional staff including their phone number, a brief biography and the counties they cover. This section includes a listing of OCECD central office staff and our regional trainers. Each entry includes a picture and a brief biography.

In addition, the *Who We Are* section includes an overview of OCECD's history. Soon it will contain a list and description of all OCECD projects, activities OCECD carries out over and above the training, parent advocacy, and conferences it conducts.
3. *OCECD Activities* lists all trainings conducted by the Ohio Coalition with a description for each.
4. *OCECD Resources* includes a list of all OCECD publications and it includes an order form so you can request a copy of any of the training products developed by OCECD. There is no charge for parents and a minimal charge for professionals for single copies of our training products. You can even find OCECD's annual report in this section. Look to see how many phone calls and parent contacts OCECD had during the past year.

This section includes a list of websites, important information resources for parents and professionals over a variety of topics. If a website is mentioned anywhere on site,

you'll also find it listed here. You'll also find a listing of all articles contained in OCECD's bi-monthly newsletter, **FORUM**.

5. Coming soon will be a list of Ohio-specific resources of interest to parents -- links to service agencies and the types of supports and information they can offer. *Resources by Topic* includes a list of all IDEA disability category definitions with a list of websites and other resources related to that disability category that you might want to check out. This also includes Topic listings such as: assistive technology, Federal Regulations, Parent Right's and Updates.

6. *Calendar of Events* is another way for you to search for OCECD training dates and locations around the state.

7. *Ohio Parent Mentors* is a direct link to the Parent Mentor Project website for Ohio. It contains a listing of each Parent Mentor and their contact information.

8. *T.A. Alliance for Parent Projects* contains information about the OCECD's work with the nationwide technical assistance network for parent projects. This links OCECD with parent projects and their information in states all across the nation.

OCECD is adding information to the website every day. We're interested in your suggestions and comments. Let us know what kinds of information you would like to see. Suggest events and activities that you'd like to see listed on our site. We want the OCECD website to be another way we can give parents the information they need and strengthen Ohio's network of parents, professionals and community members so we can continue to build supportive communities.

TEEN ORGANIZES BENEFIT CONCERT TO CELEBRATE MUSIC, HUMANITY

(taken from the May-June 2006 FORUM, Volume XXIV, Issue 3, published by the Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities – OCECD)

(Editor's Note: The following letter, reproduced with permission, was written by 17-year-old Clayton Kennedy of Loveland, Ohio. It is a story about how a school project evolved in to a life-changing experience for many people.)

March 28, 2006

Freestore/Foodbank
1250 Tennessee Ave.
Cincinnati OH 45229

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Clayton Kennedy; I am a 17 year old junior enrolled in the Schilling School for Gifted Students. I am sending, along with this letter, a check for \$700. It represents a labor of love, and the kind of miracle which only occurs when a group of human beings come together in the hopes of benefiting their world, their community, and their fellow man.

I am a musician, and I have long been interested in the nature of the music business, and in being part of a real community of musicians. It's a passion that drives me to do things I'd never thought possible, and I try to channel it as often as possible. Oftentimes, I find that finding some way to incorporate music into a process or task that is usually mundane or tedious makes it fun and rewarding; naturally, this extends to things like schoolwork. So, when I get important assignments, I generally look for an excuse to link it to music history, theory, etc. A few months ago, I found myself confronted with something oozing with potential: I was to take part in a community service project for credit. Immediately, my mind jumped to something we often hear about on the news (especially lately) namely, benefit concerts. So I proposed to my health instructor that I organize a benefit concert for a worthy cause; and although she warned me that it would be quite an ordeal, I insisted, and she relented.

For the first time in my academic life, I found myself totally immersed in a project; there were so many questions to be answered. I had to find bands and artists willing to give their time and effort free of charge. I had to find a venue, and I had to find help. But the most important question was, what would I raise money FOR? I asked my family and friends for suggestions. I had to keep in mind that, whatever I chose, it had to be something I fully supported and could commit myself to. As a person with cerebral palsy, I considered donating what money I made to United Cerebral Palsy. I also

considered the Books for Prisoners program, based downtown. But for some reason, these groups didn't resonate with me strongly enough. It occurred to me that one undisputed universal problem is that of poverty, homelessness, and, especially in a wealthy nation like America, hunger. My father had always supported the Freestore/Foodbank in the Cincinnati area, and I was familiar with its purpose and aims; it seemed like an organization that many would sympathize with (my project DID have to be successful, after all), as well as a place that would surely invest whatever money I raised well, using it to aid the indisputably needy. So my first question was answered. I would organize and host a benefit concert for the Freestore/Foodbank.

Next, I went off to find bands that were interested. After all, if there was no music, I thought, what would be the point of a flyer, a date, and a venue? I immediately went to websites such as Cincymusic.com, posting classified ads asking for musicians willing to play for free at a Foodbank benefit; the response surprised me. It felt as though I was flooded by emails and calls at home from willing groups; many of them had websites where I could listen to their music. I decided that I could afford to invite people whose music I liked, since I felt that if I had to be somewhere for hours listening to music, I ought to enjoy it. I knew I couldn't get any really big names, so I guessed that to make any appreciable amount of money, I would need quite a number of acts. This wasn't a problem, considering that so many people seemed interested in lending help. Eventually, I was regularly in touch with 10 or so groups, all of whom were local. We exchanged regular emails and conversed by phone, and their advice was indispensable. Of course, once this was all said and done, I found myself in a dilemma: I had bands, but no date. I was lucky enough to be acquainted with someone who regularly played and booked shows at a space in Northside called the "Cincinnati Artist's Warehouse." He was able to give me the number of the owner/manager, and also offered to supervise the event. Throughout the process, he advised me on what I needed to pull off something of this magnitude successfully, and later gave me essential newspaper and magazine contacts, so I was able to get the event mentioned in publications like CityBeat and CinWeekly once it was finalized. After a lot of uncertainty and waiting, we decided upon March 25, 2006 as the date of the event. Once that was finalized, I was able to tell all the musicians, who in turn told friends and family, made postings on their own websites, and generally promoted the show to their respective audiences. Also at this time, my schoolmate and friend Jared Towler had begun designing a flyer, putting his creativity to work to add the essential ingredient to our attempt at promotion. I made copies, giving them to friends for distribution and sending them to the musicians via email.

The last weeks were filled with frantic activity. I was expecting this endeavor to collapse on me at any minute. Everywhere I turned, there seemed to be something new to consider. I kept in constant touch with the bands, and through their input and the support of my family and friends, the holes were patched up.

Before we knew it, the day was upon us. I arrived with friends and family at the Warehouse, and we loaded in equipment and the like; the members of my band, the Black Betties, were there to help test the P.A. (which was donated by a friend of our

lead singer, Kurt.) The owner was, of course, there to show us around and help out, despite the fact that he was simultaneously overseeing the constructing of a set for a play he was putting on the next week, and other schoolmates showed up early, eager to be assigned jobs. Many of them would stay the entire evening. At 5:00 p.m. the first act, singer-songwriter Andy McClain, arrived with a photojournalist friend who had agreed to take pictures during the event; we hooked Andy up, sound checked him, and at 6:00 told him we were ready to begin. Before that, a few people had arrived, mainly my teachers and friends, but just around 6:00, others started coming in. People I didn't recognize. They walked up the stairs to the table where my friend Richard was taking the money, pulled out five dollar bills and handed them over. (100% of the door proceeds was donated to the Freestore/Foodbank.) I was astonished. I had prepared myself for a night full of familiar faces. At 6:30, the second artist, whose name was Kevin Milner, went on. People kept coming in.

Then the first full fledged band, Guardrail Angel, arrived; they were on schedule, and ready to go on at 7:00 p.m. sharp; they played an energetic set to an enthusiastic crowd, which was growing still. The next group, a Celtic band named the Blue Rock Boys, followed them. However, when they started, I realized something was amiss. "Is the lead singer's mic even on?" I asked my sister. "No," she said, "the equipment isn't working for some reason." I had had no idea. They didn't utter one complaint to me; instead, they had trudged up in front of a whole gaggle of strangers, with dead microphones, and they still played a wonderful set of songs that had everyone cheering and whistling, laughing and applauding thunderously. I heard several people ask about buying their album when it came out.

I had slipped my band (I'm the drummer) in the 8:00 spot, and so we played a few songs; it was our first performance, and we were nervous. Our delivery was far from professional, and yet we received a number of compliments and heartwarming support from the other musicians. Punk rock veterans Bludstone were on next; they played a mind blowing set that left more than a few people thoroughly impressed (and exhilarated). During all of this, the bands had frequently called for people to applaud my effort, which was touching and encouraging; I felt as though I was part of a community, a big musical family, and that we were all celebrating together. What it was, though, I had yet to pinpoint. By the time that New Zion Haste, a younger, noisier alternative rock band began playing, it was past 10:00 p.m. To my amazement, people continued to trickle in. Around 10:30 (by this time, the rigid schedule I had hoped to enforce was totally lost), the politically charged punk band Gryreleoth took the stage. Although much of the audience was tired by this time, they had brought along a few new people, and played through a number of interesting, nuanced numbers with thoughtful, socially conscious lyrics; I found them to be quite appropriate for a benefit that attempted to address a social problem like poverty. Finally, Realicide Youth closed out the evening with an experimental electronic piece lasting ten minutes; many of the audience members were jumping and stomping and throwing themselves about in excitement.

All in all, the event lasted almost five and a half hours. There were many people, including my family and band mates, as well as some of the other musicians, who

showed their support for all the groups and stayed the entire time. Other people, like Richard, remained at a post for the whole event, without a single complaint. The bands themselves proved to be wonderfully friendly and helpful, and through their individual promotional efforts had drawn so many people that by the end of the night, we had procured the \$700 you now hold.

As I walked out of the building with my family and friends, exhausted but thoroughly satisfied, I knew that I had been blessed with the opportunity to participate in something wonderful, something transcendent and yet utterly human. I thought back to the smiles, the applause, and the cheers that rushed over me when I announced our total earnings, and I realized what it was that we had been celebrating. We weren't just reveling in the experience of music, or enjoying the company of other people. Surely, we were doing both those things, but we were also celebrating humanity and the human ability to feel selfless compassion for other people.

With that in mind, I submit that this benefit was not the work of one person; without bands, even the best promoter or organizer is left helpless. Rather, it was the combined effort of a whole group of people, all of whom were very different. They played different music, they lived in different places, they had different shapes and sizes, and yet they had one thing in common: they were willing, as humans, to sweat for other humans. And knowing that, I hope you accept this donation from us, the musicians of Cincinnati, and that you are strengthened, as I was, by this incredible example of the good that people are capable of.

Sincerely,
Clayton Kennedy

STUDY EXAMINES ACCESSIBILITY

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A study released by the federal Office of Special Education examines the progress of states, school districts, and individual classrooms in implementing federal legislation requiring that general education curricula be made accessible to special education students. Among its findings, which were based on field visits to six school districts in five states, the study notes a lack of consistency in the practices and instructional materials that are used to create accessibility. In addition, the study cites lack of appropriate instructional materials and large class size as the two most common obstacles to success. To download a PDF of this report, go to:
http://www.abt.sliidea.org/Reports/Focus%20Study%20IV_DEC.pdf
(requires Adobe® Reader®)

REGISTER NOW FOR OCECD CONFERENCE

(taken from the May-June 2006 FORUM, Volume XXIV, Issue 3, published by the Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities – OCECD)

4th Annual Partnering for Progress: Improving Results for ALL Children Conference

Sponsored by The Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities,
in collaboration with the Ohio Department of Education

Marriott North Hotel, 6500 Doubletree Avenue, Columbus, Ohio
October 12, 2006 9:00 a.m. to 4:15 p.m.

Free Conference, Lunch provided at no charge, No parking fees
No registration fee (registration is required for space & lunch planning purposes)
Certificates of Attendance will be available (No CEUs)

Deadline for registration: September 25, 2006

Register on line at www.ocecd.org

- * Keynote speaker Dr. Samuel Betances
- * Q & A for parents with Office for Exceptional Children
- * ODE's new web-based IEP Inter Rater Tool
- * Juvenile Justice Panel
- * Ohio's Integrated Systems Model (OISM) Building Teams
- * Poverty and its relationship to Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)
- * School Readiness Task Force
- * Post School Longitudinal Study

Contact Connie Hudson, Conference Coordinator, at ocecdcsh@earthlink.net