



A Chance To Grow

The Newsletter

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A CHANCE TO GROW: *Where It All Started*

The concept that launched A Chance To Grow was born in a small kitchen in the Phillips Neighborhood of Minneapolis, Minnesota nearly 25 years ago. That landmark, that meeting, was driven by the passion and commitment of a group of parents who shared a vision. A vision that was filled with determination to find options capable of providing better treatment and care for their children that had special needs.

Since the time that their first neighborhood meeting took place in 1983, the passion and commitment for creating a new vision for children in need has grown beyond the farthest expectations of the parents who gathered around that very kitchen table.

A Chance To Grow, and the many services that it now provides, has become an organization of national recognition. Each day, countless new threads

are woven into the tapestry of the growing legacy of A Chance To Grow. These "threads" are the success of children who face challenges that were once thought to be insurmountable, but were achieved...threads that represent the heartfelt commitment of parents, staff and benefactors who provided confidence and resources... threads created throughout and beyond the Northeast Minneapolis community that continues to support the work of A Chance To Grow every day.

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Mark Your Calendar!

**A Chance To Grow's "7th Annual Walk & Roll"
to Benefit New Visions School and
the Turnquist Child Enrichment Center**

Friday, September 26, 2008

**Jane Goodall Roots & Shoots Science
Center and Marlene Myers Nature Gardens
Dedication Ceremony**

Thursday, October 2, 2008

Visit www.atcg.org for more information.



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Warren & Earl: Reaching New Levels of Success



Warren and Earl in the "Boost Up" program

When Becky Weir began her graduate studies in counseling and psychology, she was interested in doing art therapy with autistic children and others with developmental disabilities. Years later, she recognized the same text book indicators of developmental delays, attention deficit disorder and hyperactivity with her sons, Warren and Earl who at that time were ages 9 and 7, respectively.

Becky home-schooled all three of her children. Working with them closely each day she became very aware of their cognitive development and grasp



From the Director's Desk

The summer of 2008 has been an exciting period of accomplishments for A Chance To Grow—some new, some old. All of it involves children reaching new levels of opportunity and development. This is only possible through the work of our dedicated staff and our supporters.

As part of our \$750,000 "Roots and Shoots" Science Addition Campaign, our outdoor classroom and the "enchanted" rain garden is near completion. To date we have raised \$680,000 of the total campaign goal through the generous contributions of the Minnesota Department of Education, foundations, corporations, community groups such as the Northeast Lions, and individuals. The outdoor classroom has quaking Aspen, White Birch, Norway Pine, Black Hills

Spruce, Oak, Maple and Apple trees surrounding a rain garden planted with natural prairie grass. The space has three gardens: a perennial flower garden, a vegetable garden, and a berry patch. Classes have two group learning settings, one where limestone blocks replace chairs and a deck overlooking the rain garden. The outdoor classroom and rain garden complements the new science addition to New Visions School.

For our second year of our Boost Up Plus program we had to schedule two additional sessions due to the high level of interest and demand from families. Some families signed up for double sessions. Boost Up Plus is an all-day program where we integrate all of ACTG's interventions (Boost Up, Auditory Stimulation, Vision Therapy, and EEG Neurofeedback) in a three-week program. The children's progress was very exciting for their families to witness and experience.

Earlier this past summer, the staff at ACTG received a college graduation announcement. John completed his BA in food management. We first worked with John twenty years ago. He was "flunking" kindergarten as a seven year old. He was awkward, had poor writing skills and obviously had many challenges since he was a seven year old in kindergarten. At that time, we had no school facility so we offered Boost Up as an after-school project. His parents drove from Inver Grove Heights through rush hour traffic to be at our center at 4:00pm and then drove home at 5:30pm every day of the week for over a year. John made great reading gains, his coordination improved so much he was the star of his T-ball team, and he no longer had a lazy eye. Today he is a college graduate. This would not have been possible for John if it were not for his dedication to hard work, his family's commitment to him reaching his potential, and the support from contributors to our work. We appreciate your support and hope it will continue to allow us to help all children like John in the world today.

upon basic functions. Their education was tailored to their own learning styles. Still, while her daughter excelled at reading, her younger sons found reading a much more difficult task. Becky recalled, "Earl had a hard time with letter recognition. He just did not get how to process information." Despite her best efforts, Earl continued to struggle.

Warren, however, had a hard time reading longer sections. She explained that, "He could read small sections but the process of getting him to concentrate to read paragraphs was nearly impossible." Both of the boys were aware of their difficulties which included not only reading and learning but trouble with following directions, having appropriate reflex responsiveness and visual and audio coordination.

Living on two acres of land, the boys were encouraged to play outside with their dad. Warren was always getting hurt. "It got to the point where their dad became frustrated that he could not throw the ball around anymore with his sons," said Becky. They both understood, at that point, that something had to change. She continued, "Even Warren came to me and asked Mom, what's wrong with me? It started to wear me out. I thought, I can't go through another year like this!"

Months later, she was introduced to a program where a focus on physical activities encouraged a student's social, behavioral and academic capabilities. The program was Boost-Up.

Under the direction of A Chance To Grow's dedicated and knowledgeable staff, Warren and Earl were screened to pinpoint areas to work on and then began eight weeks of therapy that focused on their specific, individual needs. The therapy incorporates a multi-sensory approach with music, obstacle courses, games and many other activities to accelerate kids' learning. By increasing physical activity, especially those activities that children enjoy, they are able to increase their ability to think, remember and learn. Boost-Up targets and develops

the retained infant reflexes that characteristically get in the way of kids who have learning problems.

For Warren, this work focused on his difficulties with his posture; he could not sit in a chair without wiggling and had trouble standing still. When a child like Warren is consistently that uncomfortable, it is impossible for him to concentrate. Worse, many parents and educators will label a child who is constantly moving, lounging, slouching as a child not paying attention and poorly behaved.

"...there is hardly a parent out there who does not have one child who could benefit from these remarkable services."

In fact the opposite is true. Warren was trying to get comfortable so that he could pay attention. In a classroom setting without the understanding how such behavior is based on reflexes, a child will typically be punished and reprimanded for the behaviors. Then a situation is created where the child starts to believe that he or she is bad.

Today, Becky and her husband are amazed by the results. "After two months with A Chance To Grow, my husband was able to teach the boys archery. They are like having different kids now as their progress is amazing," explained Becky. Both Warren and Earl continue to show improvement and are functioning at a higher level than their parents could have imagined. After Boost-Up, the boys are enrolled in additional therapies such as Neuro-feedback and the auditory clinic to maintain their progress.

Becky has become a staunch believer and explained, "I'm glad that we found A Chance To Grow. I tell all my friends about the programs. In my opinion, there is hardly a parent out there who does not have one child who could benefit from these remarkable services." ■

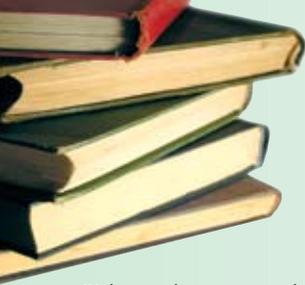
New Visions School

New Visions School is a licensed K-8 public charter school serving nearly 230 students through the regular day, along with after school and summer programs that are designed to accelerate and maximize learning potential. New Visions and its staff promote the importance and power of families working together with their surrounding communities to help their children. Despite the challenges they face, each year NVS students gain, on average, one year and several months on standardized reading tests with no difference based on race or culture!



The program content of New Visions School originated with A Chance To Grow's summer program, Boost-Up, which began in 1988. Through this innovative program, participating children attend a two and one-half hour program, five days a week for eight weeks. The children participate in structured activities that will stimulate the brain's processing capabilities and help the brain learn how to receive information more efficiently. Boost-Up students make an eight-month gain in reading over the seven-week period.





500 Teachers Are Getting SMART

"I have been teaching for over twenty-five years, and the increase in children with short attention spans, behavior issues and who generally just struggle through a school day is beginning to be overwhelming. Something has to change," quipped a teacher at a recent workshop presented by the Minnesota Learning Resource Center. Another educator validated that feeling by saying that the children are also feeling frustrated. "We've been at a loss as to how we can help them, until now."

These teachers are part of some 500 teachers and education professionals who participated in the SMART workshops conducted during the past summer by A Chance To Grow and its teacher-training institute, the Minnesota Learning Resource Center. Typically, 300 educators participate in the workshops annually, however, in 2008, over 500 teachers participated.

"They are realizing that we can offer a solution," explained the Director of the MLRC, Nancy Farnham. "When we look at the child, we look at them developmentally. So, although a child may be seven years old chronologically, he may be as young as three or four

years old developmentally. Our job is to help teachers who attend our workshop to understand where that child is AND ways in which to address it." All of the MLRC workshops conducted during the past summer were either at or above capacity. In Minnesota, they were held in Duluth, Minneapolis, Clara City, Eagan, New Prague, Blue Earth, Jordon and Bemidji.

"For the first time ever, Huron's two Title 1 schools (low income) scored on par with the non-Title 1 schools on the statewide tests."

SMART, which stands for Stimulating Maturity Through Accelerated Readiness Training, focuses on the child in the areas of: language development, reading, math, writing, physiological readiness, attention, and coordination. It incorporates a continuum of physical and motor-skill activities that emphasizes stimulating the brain stem to promote richer connections among the neurons. This is crucial for readiness skill development and a child's ability to be fully attentive to what a teacher is saying.



"I think that the growing interest among teachers in SMART is that the program has proven itself in data and measurable results among the students. With the training, mentoring and encouragement that we provide to the teachers during and after the workshops, it becomes a very easy program to replicate back in their classrooms. "Simply put, it works," said Farnham. "The MLRC also makes a commitment to the SMART teams and schools for three years. We provide them with over a dozen visits by our mentors over the course of three years."

Poverty is an issue for many students and their families. Statistically these children are behind their peers developmentally when they begin school. "The issue is not confined to the inner city, it is very prevalent in rural areas, too," Nancy pointed out. "Low-income families do not have access to many resources that can benefit the children and this manifests itself in a child's behavior, as well as preparation for school. Some teachers have indicated to me that they are now seeing an unsettling increase in pre-school kids being expelled!"

Bruce Willer, Director of Special Education in Huron, South Dakota stated that, "For the first time ever, Huron's two Title 1 schools (low income) scored on par with the non-Title 1 schools on the statewide tests. This is clearly



attributed to SMART." SMART has successfully helped teachers learn how to work with the children as they learn more about the intervention model. The children also build their own self-esteem with a sense of accomplishment that is reinforced by their teachers.

"The demand is growing and that will continue especially with the increase in challenges that many of our children are facing. Unfortunately, funding has been cut at the State level for the

MLRC workshops and school districts are facing very tight budgets, too," Farnham explained. "We've been fortunate to have regional support from the Northland Foundation, the Northwest Minnesota Foundation and General Mills. But it is our hope that we can get some private individual contributors involved. When you look at the results, it is a great investment. It's our children's future." ■



Double, Triple, Even Quadruple Your Gift To A Chance To Grow and New Visions School!

Many companies match employee's gifts to nonprofit organizations. More than 8,000 companies will match employee or affiliate contributions with a ratio of 2, 3 and even 4 times the original gift amount. Check with your employer to see if a program is available or contact the development department of A Chance To Grow by calling 612-706-5515. If your company's eligible, request a "matching gift form" and send it completed and signed with your gift. We will do the rest. It is just that easy!

The Minnesota Learning Resource Center

The Minnesota Learning Resource Center (MLRC), is a national center for innovation in education, was established through an appropriation by the Minnesota Legislature in 1999. The Legislature recognized the potential to dramatically improve the academic achievement of school children in Minnesota through the use of simple, affordable and replicable learning interventions that were identified by A Chance To Grow and then tested in the classrooms at New Visions School.

The primary mission of MLRC is to train teachers and replicate practices developed and validated over the years by ACTG that address students' academic, behavioral, psychological, and physical development. The core program of the MLRC is S.M.A.R.T. (Stimulating Maturity Through Accelerated Readiness Training). It is a multi-sensory approach to learning, based on brain research. This program develops physiological and neurological readiness skills essential to classroom success.

The MLRC works to promote the use of these strategies where they can do the most good – in public schools



across the nation. These strategies can easily be integrated classroom-wide into the school day. Educators, parents, and professionals from around the country come to Minneapolis to attend two to four-day workshops that teach them to implement these strategies at home and in the classroom. Workshops are also held regionally in Minnesota and cities throughout the U.S. The trainers from the MLRC provide follow-up services including on-site mentoring on a monthly basis at participants' schools that are recognized as "Designated Learning Sites".

Funds are still needed to help sponsor some schools in Minnesota to participate in the workshops and follow-up mentoring. School budgets have been cut, but the need continues. Those interested in contributing to MLRC should contact: Nancy Farnham, Director of the MLRC, by calling 612-706-5519 or e-mail her at: nfarnham@actg.org.

Thea's Accomplishments: Nothing Short of A Miracle

Thea entered first grade just after her seventh birthday. She was very excited about learning to read. Her parents had no reason to believe that she would have any trouble learning since she had flourished both academically and socially in kindergarten. Her accomplishments up to this point were astounding.

She was born prematurely and required oxygen and intravenous nutrition during her first three years of life. Early in her infancy, doctors said she was both blind and deaf. Later, she was properly diagnosed with dyspraxia and learned to communicate through sign language. She began speaking by her third year and each passing day she became closer and closer to being "on track" developmentally. When she entered school at the age of six, Thea seemed to be a perfectly normal kindergartner. Then came the first grade.



Thea, June 2008

At the first parent-teacher conference, Thea's teacher informed her parents that there were signs of serious trouble. Thea was exhibiting learning, behavioral and attention problems. The problems were so significant her teacher did not know where one started and the other left off. Her parents were devastated. Even worse, Thea was very upset and became frustrated as she kept falling behind the other students. Her medical team and school began testing.

The test results indicated that Thea also had dyslexia and her frustration was creating the behavior problems. She was eventually placed on an individual education plan while beginning special education and occupational therapy in school in school.

*"The staff that worked with
Thea were incredible!"*

Paula Johnson, who is Thea's mother, happened to attend a lecture by Carol Kranowitz, author of *The Out of Sync Child*. The free lecture was held at A Chance To Grow. She had never heard of the organization and decided to take a tour after the lecture. "I was so impressed," commented Paula. "The very next week I scheduled an appointment for Thea at ACTG's vision department.

Thea received a complete eye exam and then a developmental evaluation in order to identify visual integration problems. The results clearly indicated that Thea had difficulty processing visual material. Thea's parents decided to enroll her in A Chance To Grow's vision therapy program.

She received individual vision therapy throughout the following summer and during the first several weeks of second grade. Paula recalls, "The staff that worked with Thea were incredible! They bonded with her and were able to bring out the best in her in a very nurturing way. She began to happily



Thea in "Boost Up", 2003

look forward to her vision therapy. Her gains were becoming more evident and each accomplishment of hers was celebrated along the way." Despite Thea's gains, her mother witnessed something even more amazing.

Thea who had struggled to print her name legibly, began writing short stories for everyone to enjoy! Here was a young girl who had struggled to read the simplest of primers, who began checking out chapter books from the library. As the new school year progressed, Thea was up to grade level work in all areas. "Her special education teacher told us that it was a special, but rare treat to release a young student from special education during the elementary years", remarked

*"It is incredibly rare to have
such a young child make as
much progress...in such
a short amount of time."*

Paula. "The teacher told us that it is incredibly rare to have such a young child make as much progress as Thea had done in such a short amount of time." It was clear that the vision therapy played a major role in her success.

Her mother concluded by saying, "We are all so proud of Thea and so thankful for the people at A Chance To Grow. They have helped her become the audaciously, securely intelligent child that she is!" ■

Science Expansion Becomes A Reality

After months of planning and securing funding, the highly anticipated science classroom expansion at New Visions School has become a reality. The Jane Goodall Roots and Shoots Science Classroom is a technologically advanced addition to the school that combines a flexible indoor classroom with a greenhouse, adjacent garden and outdoor learning environment. Designed with green building principles in mind, the new science classroom seats up to 25 students in a room complete with full spectrum lighting, natural ventilation, interactive white boards and workstations.

Solar panels will also be added above the school's main entrance, providing a working science project for students. Students will be able to monitor the amount of energy generated by the panels on a daily basis, tracking differences related to the weather.

The new science classroom has direct access to a greenhouse and experimental garden. A walkway will connect the classroom to a 12,000 square foot garden complex that features areas of natural prairie, an outdoor classroom to hold classes outside as weather permits, and a rain garden that will handle storm runoff.

Children will enjoy a "flexible indoor classroom with a greenhouse, adjacent garden and outdoor learning environment."

The project is being funded by a \$500,000 grant from the Minnesota Department of Education's Charter School Facilities Improvement Grant program. Additional funding, which is critical to completing the project, has been provided by the Graco Company Foundation, The Southways Foundation, The Donaldson Foundation/Donaldson Company, Inc, The Carolyn Foundation, Smikis Foundation, Tennant Foundation, Rasmussen Foundation, Barbra Weiner, Judy Dayton, Jerry & Marlene Myers & the Northeast Minneapolis Lions Club.



Bringing the "Green" to Children

City skylines, cement, poverty, and pollution seem to have become the "norm" for many children in society today. Unfortunately, that holds true for the many students attending New Visions School. The majority of the young students live in the city, reside in apartments and have little to no access to nature, gardens and the countryside. Too many children miss the chance to learn and grow and experience nature firsthand.

Adjacent to the school, what used to be a stretch of abandoned railroad tracks littered with broken bottles, cans and garbage has now been transformed into an "enchanted garden" and outdoor classroom. In 2007, a section of 12,000 square feet of land was donated by the Burlington Northern to A Chance To Grow and the school. With that, the dream started to become a reality.

Landscaping has been non-stop during the summer. Today, an arched vine-

covered arbor welcomes the entering child into his or her "enchanted garden." Small trees abound that will grow to sway in the breeze. Aspen, pine, oak, birch and prairie grasses will bring the forest to the students and all the creatures that will make their "home" in area. Eventually apple and pear trees will provide fruit.

Berry patches and a vegetable garden are nearby. A light fragrance is in the air from the flower garden. An old-fashioned water pump is in place to encourage students to care for their plants. A deck overlooks the small rain garden.

There is a central stone outdoor meeting space surrounded by stone benches and a replica of Stonehedge. Here, students will learn about the world around them, as children should, by experiencing it firsthand while beginning to embrace their role as citizens of the world to care for it and themselves in the years to come. ■



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For more information about A Chance To Grow, New Visions School and the Minnesota Learning Resource Center visit us on the web at: www.actg.org

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A Chance To Grow Main Office: 612.789.1236

New Visions School 612.706.5566

Turnquist Child Enrichment Center 612.706.5590

Minnesota Learning Resource Center 612.706.5549

Neurotechnology Clinic 612.706.5551

Kretsch Family Brain Resource Library
(located in New Visions School)

Out-Patient Rehabilitation Clinic
612.706.5537

Auditory Clinic 612.706.5548

Home Based Services
612.706.5515

Vision Clinic
612.706.5540

