Santa Claus Came to Town

*Kathy Harkins*

The Connection celebrated its 14th Annual Holiday Party Sunday, December 8—wow, 14 years. Each year the party grows with new families, and each year it is a time of visiting and reconnecting with our old friends.

DSCBA is grateful to Hannah Bornstein for helping organize this great event. We spent time picking out crafts, and Hannah helped organize volunteers from Los Cerros Middle School Leadership and her great bunch of friends. They, along with National Charity League Diablo Valley (NCL) volunteers, manned the craft tables. Our NCL volunteers worked the treat table; they also baked 24 dozen holiday treats to share with everyone and 18 dozen plain cookies for our cookie decorating craft. They are an amazing group of moms and young ladies! Thank you to Nicole Patton for leading our Bell Choir. It is so much fun watching all the faces concentrating and waiting patiently for their color to pop-up so they can ring their bells. It is much harder than it looks! Our friend, K. Leigh Alfrey, delighted us with a clarinet performance—my favorite time of the party. Her performances are a must-see.

We raffled off beautiful gingerbread houses made by our grandparents group; there were six lucky winners. And we also had two beautiful Country Bears, made by one of our grandparents, to raffle off. The afternoon was busy with fun craft activities, like kaleidoscopes, snowflakes, candy cane thumbprints, and more. Of course, a Holiday Party isn’t a party without Santa coming to visit! He took time from his busy schedule to visit with us, listening carefully to our wish lists. Thank you, Lisa Upton, for photographing this magical day. The Connection is lucky to have you as a friend. And thank you to Tami Castelluccio for allowing us to setup Friday night and to be able to walk in Sunday morning to get the party started!

We wish you the most magical holiday season (and mark your calendars for next year’s party, December 7, 2014)!

*More holiday photos, page 5*
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2014 Board Meetings
Board meetings are held at 101 J Town & Country Dr., Danville, 6–8 p.m., on the 3rd Tuesday of the month:

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Down Syndrome Connection of the Bay Area
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Happy New Year! We have so much to look forward to in 2014 and much to be grateful for after a very full, rewarding year in 2013. The goals and mission of the DSCBA were accomplished in many ways last year due to the wonderful efforts and generosity from our community: our members, funders, volunteers, staff, and board members. Thank you for believing in our mission and for allowing us to expand our services, which are making a significant difference. Together, we have been busy teaching educators and the community that people of all ages who happen to have Down syndrome should never be underestimated in what they can achieve.

DSCBA submitted 51 grant applications for funding and received over $250,000 from community and family foundations. Because of everyone’s hard work, support, and commitment, we have been able to achieve great things in 2013:

1) Trained 471 educators, thanks to our successful DS Educational Alliance program, with these classes: DS101, Behavior is Communication, Inclusion, Ability Awareness, Numicon, See and Learn, Total Communication in the Classroom, and Augmentative and Alternate Communications (AAC) & Literacy.

2) Conducted more than 16 Ability Awareness presentations throughout the greater Bay Area, educating classrooms with a total of 522 students about Down syndrome and why their classmates are more alike than different.

3) Completed a pilot summer Communication Readiness Program to understand the impact of a summer immersion program in Communication, AAC, Oral Motor and Literacy for preschool- and kindergarten-aged children.

4) Welcomed 25 new babies with their families into our community, with open arms.

5) Facilitated 35 support groups for parents and extended family members.

6) Provided developmental Step classes in four locations throughout the Bay Area, four days a week for ages 0–61.

7) Organized a successful all-day Empowerment Conference, the Gala for Giving, the Step Up for DS walk, and many workshops for parents.

8) Provided 10 Music Therapy sessions and offered Oral Motor Therapy and on-site reading services for all ages.

9) Maintained a lending library, including an extensive technology library, full of AAC devices and materials.

10) Gave the gift of expression to children, teens, and adults with our AAC program.

11) Started a medical outreach program.

And much, much, more!

Please know that without you, we could not make the significant impact we are making. We are truly thankful.

In 2014, with the generosity of the community, we will continue to expand our reach and maintain our core services. We will educate all who come through our doors and, with your help, continue to build strong relationships with school districts and medical professionals. The DSCBA remains strong in our belief that everyone deserves a voice, good education, and access to inclusive programs—our energy in those areas will remain strong. As a community we must advocate for people of all ages with Down syndrome, with a focus on independence and ability.

Thank you for all you do for the DSCBA throughout the year!
DOUBLE YOUR DONATION FOR DOWN SYNDROME

For a limited time, the Quest Foundation will match your gift to the DSCBA dollar for dollar up to $50,000!

Avery, DSCBA Member

DSCBA needs your help to continue our support of families like these:

“When our son was born, the Connection quickly became a key part of our lives. It was, and still is, a sweet and sorely needed combination of a living library of information, genuine compassion, complete support and a warm Grandma’s hug - all rolled into one.”

“Someone I love very much has benefited greatly from the services provided by the Connection.”

“I’ve been involved for the past year with the Down Syndrome Connection — and they’ve been awesome! I’ve met lots of great friends and have learned a ton from them. They work so hard, every day, to help make sure that I, and other kids and adults with Down syndrome, have all of the same opportunities as everyone else to become the best that we can be.”

“Our son will be able to thrive and grow in ways he probably would not have had the chance to without the DSCBA.”

“We are so fortunate to have such a valuable resource in the Bay Area. We love this organization and appreciate what they give to us, to other families we have met, and what they give back to the community.”

“Their education advocacy has been especially helpful as we have navigated the school system in preparation for our son’s kindergarten year — which is off to a great start!”

“I’ve been attending my Step class for the past 7-1/2 years at the Down Syndrome Connection. It has been so much fun and really helpful in helping me with social skills and meeting some great people.”

“We’ve seen firsthand the impact that the Down Syndrome Connection has made in the life of our cousin and his family. It is an amazing organization run by dedicated people who help those born with Down syndrome live lives of grace and dignity.”

Use the envelope included in this newsletter to make a special gift to the DSCBA, which will be matched dollar for dollar by the Quest Foundation.

Or go to our website: www.dsconnection.org and click on the Donate Now button on the home page.

Down Syndrome Connection of the Bay Area

Thank you for your support!
Holiday Party photos continued from page 5, more photos on page 7
Thank You All for Stepping Up for Down Syndrome

Nancy LaBelle

Thank you for attending the 2013 Step Up for Down Syndrome Walk and Family Picnic on October 6. We hope you had a fun day! Over 800 people attended—most in creative T-shirts—for activities, a mile walk, barbecue, and more, at Little Hills Ranch in San Ramon.

A big thank you goes to our sponsor, Macy’s, and to the more than 100 volunteers in attendance that day, as well as Finn the Fish from Pepperidge Farm. For all their work that goes into an event this size, special thanks to our DSCBA staff, both for the advance preparations and the event day work. Sending a shout-out to California Parks Company for their generosity. And we thank Connie, of Connioke Karaoke & DJ Productions, for donating her time and equipment all day.

We are truly grateful for the 90 families who sent out a webpage and collected approximately $132,000 online. Without these funds we do not make our budget for the year to cover our programs. Please consider sending out a webpage next year. If you don’t know how, we will teach you!

Congratulations to the Zolnier and VandenBerghe families who for the third year in a row raised the most money, in honor of Mason, at $20,300. In second place, the Garcia’s, walking for Brandon, rocked it with $11,790. The Drucker’s, walking for Will, came in third with $8,420 and had the largest team! We send special appreciation to our highest single donor, Katherine VandenBerghe, who donated $10,000 to Mason’s page.

Thanks to everyone for their support in so many ways. It was a fabulous day!
Step Up for DS Day photos from page 8, more photos on page 10
Step Up for DS Day photos from page 9, more photos on page 11
Making the Connection

Step Up for DS Day photos continued from page 10, more photos on page 12
Step Up for DS Day photos continued from page 11, more photos on page 13
On a warm Saturday morning, the Down Syndrome Connection of the Bay Area held a Safety Day. What a great day it was! A generous donation to the Connection provided us with a private visit from a fire engine from the San Ramon Valley Fire Protection District (SRVFPD). We were lucky enough to also have an ambulance visit from the SRVFPD. We thank Joyce Castro from this organization for helping to organize the truck and ambulance and donating helmets and badges for the kids.

The Danville Police Department brought their Youth Police Vehicle, a Ford Mustang. It is equipped with emergency lights like normal police cars, but it also has a computer and monitor in the trunk that are used in presentations to young people. We thank Carol Burroughs, from the Town of Danville, for providing this, as well as badges and fingerprint kits, for the kids. This day gave the children (and adults) a chance to see the vehicles up close. We were able to climb in and out of the cab of the fire engine; we were able to see the inside of the ambulance; and we were able to sit in the Youth Police Vehicle. Hopefully, this took some of the fear out of these cars and trucks—so if we happen to need one, we won’t be as scared.

We enjoyed a great lunch of ribs, the famous ball tip sandwiches, beans, and salad from Kinder’s BBQ Danville and had a wonderful time visiting with old friends and making new ones. We ended the day with a raffle—congratulations to all the winners! I would like to thank the following people who helped with making this day so fun: Alec DeLillo, Peter Downey, Madison Ferguson, Taylor Fink, Ryan Harkins, Martha Hogan, Marianne Iversen, Marie and Morgan Jimenez, Heather Peterson, and Mark Vukelich. Thank you also to Sammie Fox, who gave her time to take pictures of this fun-filled day!
Hi, everyone! It has been another incredible year for all of the children using the Talk Tools Oral Placement Therapy (OPT) program. I have continued to train with my mentor, Sara Rosenfeld Johnson, as well as her counterparts. The children we see are achieving beautifully articulated speech with tongue tip elevation, retraction, and, of course, jaw stability. This year’s progress in the school system is that two schools, one school in both the SRV and the Mountain View school districts, have agreed to pay for Oral Placement Therapy services. Other good news is that, through the DS Educational Alliance (a DSCBA program), we are educating our educators about the importance of sensory-motor therapy for our children. I am also finding 1:1 aides very helpful in implementing OPT daily at school. Below, I have shared a few stories to help inspire you to continue or to begin an OPT program in 2014.

Bella Lucia is a three-and-a-half-year-old girl who has been receiving OPT since eight months of age. She is currently using phrases like “my turn,” “ew, gross,” “more, please,” and “read book.” She has perfect lip puckering and retraction for /oo, oh, ee/ sounds in speech. She also is using /m, b, p, k, t, d, w/ sounds in her words. She talks to everyone around her, and one of her earliest words was bump for fist-bumping her siblings. Bella’s mother states:

I have seen an incredible amount of progress with Bella in just the last few months. She is not only using one to two word utterances, but she is using them spontaneously and in proper context. She can also now spontaneously count to ten, which is amazing! I have visibly seen her jaw strengthen and stop shifting while doing oral motor therapy. It is really amazing to see! I am so proud of her and so thankful for Heather and Talk Tools.

Sarah Williamson is a six-year-old girl in the first grade. She has been following an OPT program for three years and is now using incredibly long phrases and sentences with clarity. She tells me stories about her sisters and the holidays. She is currently targeting /L/ blends like “fly, flea” and has mastered /s/ blends. My favorite saying of hers is, “Pack it up and move it out.” Sarah’s mother states:

Sarah really does surprise us every day, not only with her vocabulary and phrases, but also with her patience when others have trouble understanding her—which is happening less and less! She loves seeing Heather and practicing her Talk Tools with her dolls. Lately, Sarah enjoys talking to everyone—from her family to the grocery store cashier—about losing her first tooth. She’s a charmer!

Ainsley Dodge is a seven-year-old girl in first grade. She went through our Communication Readiness Program this summer at the DSC and has been receiving OPT since age two. Ainsley has Apraxia of Speech and has worked very intensely with her mother to reach her goals. This summer she jumped from one word to multiple word utterances; her clarity has improved since the summer. This past week, while looking at photos, she said, “Oh my god!” “Wow,” and imitated “so cute.” Ainsley is targeting the /L/ sound right now in therapy. Ainsley’s mother states:

All of our hard work at OPT is starting to pay dividends. We are hearing new sounds and clarity is improving month over month. It is giving Ainsley confidence to initiate social interactions with peers!

Lucas Paterno is a six-year-old boy in kindergarten. He also went through our Communication Readiness Program this summer and has been receiving OPT since age three. Lucas made huge social and length of utterance gains this year. He is speaking in phrases and sentences with nice clarity, helping other children answer questions, and beginning to read. Lucas’ mother states:

Lucas has shown much improvement with feeding and speech since we first started Oral Placement Therapy with Heather. We are very happy with his progress. Many others have commented on his improvement. His gastroenterologist is also very impressed with his progress and, as a result, wants to refer her patients to Heather.

For more information please go to www.dsconnection.org
**Shrinking Heads at Steppin’ Up**  
*Laura Briggs*

Steppin’ Up started on a sad note this fall. We had to say goodbye to our very good friend, Anthony. While we made him a goodbye card, we laughed about purple underwear—his favorite joke. We miss you, Anthony, and wish you a happy birthday.

We had lots of fun dancing, playing Uno, and making our cool hanging bat. Then because it was Halloween, we had our annual costume, popcorn, and movie day. This year the winning movie was *Halloweentown*. Along with our popcorn and Pirate’s Booty, we had a tasty punch with a few shrunked heads tossed in. It was a good fall season, and now we are looking forward to upcoming holidays!

Top left: Tasty punch (apples with carved faces)  
Top right: Flying bats on Halloween  
Bottom: The Steppin’ Up gang

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**2013 Educational Alliance Update**  
*Jennifer Cooper*

The Down Syndrome Educational Alliance (DSEA) has continued a variety of training and consults with educators. The team from the summer Communication Readiness Program (CRP) has been working diligently to follow their eight students into the beginning of their school year. They have been able to meet with most of the children’s IEP teams in order to provide information, tips, and communication resources. Most of the teams have been receptive and appreciative of the support. We continue to navigate and attempt to make progress in those situations that don’t feel as open to our supports and information.

We have held two Down Syndrome 101 trainings thus far this school year. One was for educators in a specific district, and the other was open to educators from all districts. Due to high demand, we moved the venue to a larger site—a good problem to have. Already several DS 101 trainings are scheduled in specific districts for early 2014. Remember, we will travel to districts and do an in-house class if they can guarantee us at least 25 participants. We will continue to hold DS 101 and other trainings periodically and will always alert our list of educators. If your child’s teacher would like to be put on our email list, let us know! Also, let us know if you are interested in another DS 101 geared towards parents.

We held two successful and well-attended first-time trainings this fall: one on Literacy and Alternative Communication and the other on Inclusion and Ability Awareness in General Education Classes. In addition to continuing instruction, we are also busy with classroom observations, continuing to refine and organize materials, and facilitating ability awareness trainings in classrooms. We hope that the students and educators who open themselves up to our training all echo the sentiment made by a second grader towards the end of a recent ability awareness training. She quietly raised her hand and said, “I have so much respect for Maria right now. More than I did before I understood about Down syndrome.” Let us know if you’d like help with an ability awareness training for your child’s classroom.

We hope your child is having a successful school year!

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**Small Steps Grows Soup**  
*Laura Briggs*

This fall, Small Steps “grew vegetable soup.” The inspiration came from the book *Growing Vegetable Soup* by Lois Ehlert. We planted peas, cauliflower, spinach, and other fall vegetables in our back garden. We gave the new plants a drink with water from our water table, after we finished playing there.

Our obstacle course had a garden theme by “planting” seeds on the balance beam, “watering” seedlings while standing on a balancing disk, growing, growing, growing as we climbed over our new climbing structure, and then picking our plastic veggies while we scooted by them on a roller board. We ended by matching the vegetables to their corresponding written words.

Finally the day arrived when it was time to make our vegetable soup. We went out to our obstacle course garden and picked our “planted” vegetables. Then we washed, cut, and put them in the pot. While our soup cooked, we completed one last obstacle course. Then we had a delicious treat; we had grown vegetable soup!
Step In Falls into Fun

Marianne Iversen

Step In has been having some great times this fall. They made tie-dyed shirts together, created fun Halloween silhouettes, and made a Thankful Tree with gratitude leaves. Each participant wrote what they were thankful for on the leaves and then shared their feelings with their classmates. This group has been together for quite some time now, and their friendships with one another are truly a blessing in themselves.

At top: Starting the work on the Fall Thankful Tree
Above: Creating the Thankful Tree’s trunk
At right: The finished tree with gratitude leaves from each participant

Step Out Delves into Discussion and Dance

Harold Burns

This autumn, the Step Out team has continued to nurture a sense of peer-community, physical resilience, and emotional intelligence through dance and discussion. Joey and Annika teamed up in October, as did Nicole and Athena, to create dance combinations and to teach them to the group. It was a great lesson in teamwork and the challenge of sharing skills with friends. We also welcomed a fun new friend, Amanda, into the group and look forward to learning more about her.

When exhausted by dancing, we took time to discover our capacity for balance poses that can challenge our sense of safety while also helping us build confidence and trust in each other. Emotionally, we continue to grow in our communication skills as we discuss the struggle of anger at ourselves and others, as well as the frustration of not being good at a particular skill and having to work hard at learning. We are grateful that we have one another and our families to support us.

SF Step-Baskets for Fun and Fundraising

Christina Lewis and Harold Burns

This year SF Step has stepped out on a limb and organized a holiday fundraising sale to raise money for group adventures! Following the lead of our extraordinary volunteer Wendy Earl, the group came up with several fragrant herbal treats for gifting. We will be selling our gift baskets to our families this December. Additionally, the group has been improving our theater skills, as we explore role-play and performance. We are excited to put together a small showcase in the spring of 2014. Watch for more information about the showcase at www.dsconnection.org.

At left: Wendy Earl, volunteer, and Emma Yungert
At left: Matt Hillman
At right: Robert Humphreys
At left: our gift baskets
Next Step - A Few of Our Favorite Things

Marianne Iversen

Next Step participants worked on a fun silhouette project this fall. Each student brought in pictures of some of their favorite things: musicians, foods, TV shows, movies, actors, friends, family members, and pets. The students first painted their canvas with their favorite color, then glued on their silhouettes, and finally glued their pictures on the silhouettes. The students loved going in front of the room to show off their personal artwork and talking about their favorite things. It was a wonderful way to learn more about each other and practice so many skills, including fine motor skills, following directions, public speaking, and the all-important skill of listening.

At left: Back row left to right: Tatiana Casadont, Bill Dickson, Christian James
Front row: Emma Tippett, Patrick Harkins, Juliana Portoni, Adam Ferguson

Benicia Step Goes Tie-Dye

Tamara Reed

The Benicia Step group had a great time tie-dying T-shirts. They worked in teams and were proud to show their handiwork at this year’s Step Up for Down Syndrome walk!

Above from left: Damien Carlon, Michael Rury, Lauren Reed, Lisa Silva, Martin Gonsalves

2014 Winter-Spring Schedule of DSCBA Networking Groups and Classes

DANVILLE LOCATION CLASSES

Music Therapy
Saturday: 10:00–11:30 a.m.
Jan. 4, Feb. 1, Mar. 1, Apr. 5, May 10, June 7

Baby & Me (Formally Baby Steps)
Wednesday: 10:30 a.m.–12:00 p.m.
Jan. 15, Feb. 19, Mar. 19, Apr. 16, May 21, June 18

Small Steps
Monday: 3:30–5:00 p.m.
Session 1: Jan. 6–Feb. 10
Session 2: Feb. 24–Mar. 24
Session 3: Apr. 7–May 12

Steppin’ Up
Wednesday: 4:00–5:30 p.m.
Session 1: Jan. 8–Feb. 12
Session 2: Feb. 26–Mar. 26
Session 3: Apr. 9–May 14

Next Step
Tuesday: 4:00–5:30 p.m.
Session 1: Jan 7–Feb. 11
Session 2: Feb. 25–Mar. 25
Session 3: Apr. 8–May 7, 13

Step In
Thursday: 4:00–5:30 p.m.
Session 1: Jan 9–Feb. 13
Session 2: Feb. 27–Mar. 27
Session 3: Apr. 10–May 15

ADULT CLASSES THROUGHOUT THE BAY AREA

SF STEP
Tuesday: 4:00–5:30 p.m.
Session 1: Jan. 7–Feb. 11
Session 2: Feb. 25–Mar. 25
Session 3: Apr. 8–May 13

Step Out (Oakland)
Wednesday 3:45-5:15 p.m.
Session 1: Jan 8–Feb. 12
Session 2: Feb. 26–Mar. 26
Session 3: Apr. 9–May 14

Benicia Step
Wednesday: 4:00–5:30 p.m.
Session 1: Jan. 8–Feb. 12
Session 2: Feb. 26–Mar. 26
Session 3: Apr. 9–May 14

PARENT TO PARENT GROUPS

Parents with Children Ages 0–3
Facilitator: Martha Hogan
Location: DSCBA, Danville
Tuesdays: 7:00–9:00 p.m.
Jan. 28, Mar. 25, June 24, Oct. 28

Parents with School-Aged Children
Facilitator: Martha Hogan
Location: DSCBA, Danville
Wednesdays: 7:00–9:00 p.m.
Feb. 19, Apr. 16, Sep. 17, Nov. 19

Parents with Teen and Adult Children
Facilitators: Marianne Iversen and Tamara Reed
Location: DSCBA, Danville
Thursdays: 7:00–9:00 p.m.
Mar. 20, May 15, Aug. 21, Oct. 16

Grandparent to Grandparent
Facilitator: Martha Hogan
Location: DSCBA, Danville
4th Wednesday of every month:
10:00–11:30 a.m.
Jan 22, Feb. 26, March 26, April 23, May 28, June 25

Parent Mentor
The Parent Mentor program consists of parents who have been trained to mentor a new family or a family that has moved into the Greater Bay Area. Mentors will be matched up with a family according to location, needs, and common interest. For more information, please contact Martha Hogan at Martha@dsconnection.org or 925-362-8660.

Sibling to Sibling
Facilitator: Terese Ghilarducci
If you are interested in learning about the possibility of a sibling group, please call the Connection at 925-362-8660.

For questions or to RSVP before meetings
Contact Marianne at 925-362-8660 or check the website for more information:
www.dsconnection.org
DSCBA Halloween Fun Photo Contest
Thanks to everyone who turned in photos!

1st Place: Nico and Cruz, policeman and prisoner
2nd Place: Josias, fisherman
3rd Place: Hailey, lollipop princess

Grateful for the Gates
Marianne Iversen
Special thanks to Mark Sypien of Bay Area Exteriors for the wonderful gates that he built for our garden area. The children in our Step classes can now safely work in our garden and play in our sand water table. Thank you so much, Mark, for your continued support!
Beautiful Friendship

Gloria Casadont

Now that Thanksgiving is approaching I want to say thanks to Olivia, a true friend of our daughter, Tatiana.

Olivia saw straight into Tatiana’s heart and spirit back in first grade and continues to do so today.

I believe that because we fought to have Tatiana included in regular classes this beautiful friendship happened.

Eleven years after having met, Olivia drove Tatiana to the movies—just like I used to drive them both before. And I say thank you, Olivia.

Top right: Olivia and Tatiana, eight and nine years old, respectively.
Above right: Tatiana and Olivia, 11 years later, after the movie.
Above left: Tatiana, center, and Olivia, left, with other team members at Step Up for DS.

Step Up Walk Creative T’s

Kathy Harkins

On a rainy Saturday morning, folks braved the stormy weather and came out to make their Step Up for Down Syndrome T-shirts. What a creative group we had. There were T-shirts with bling, jeweled crowns, and slogans such as “Keep calm, it’s only an extra chromosome” and “Peace, love, and Down syndrome.” We had paint, glitter, jewels, markers, and stencils—you name it, and it went on a shirt.

We shared a lunch of pizza, enjoyed each other’s company, made new friends, and laughed a lot.

Thanks go to the Connection for the T-shirts, lunch, and art supplies. Thank you Marianne Iversen for all the setup and cleanup help. And thank you to those who made the trip in the nasty, weird weather.

Ringing the Bells

Kathy Harkins

This September, on Friday the 13th, at 13:00, the bell rang 13 times from the Bell Tower at the Winchester Mystery House in San Jose. This fun tradition of ringing the bell honors the late Sarah Winchester, who was fascinated by the number 13. Adam Ferguson and Patrick Harkins were the honorary bell ringers, representing the DSCBA. The DSCBA will receive a donation from the Winchester Fountain Fund, which is money collected from the coins that visitors throw into the mansion’s various fountains. I wonder if there are 13 of them.

Patrick Harkins and Adam Ferguson
Otto at Two

Brandy Gavenda

Words escape me
My mind, it tumbles
My heart is beating
My thoughts are jumbled
Down syndrome...
Just words, they don’t define
He is happy and joyous
Life-loving, mine
My boy is walking
And signs more than speaks
He is perfectly boyish
My heart no longer seeks
An answer to a prayer
One I didn’t know I asked
He completes our family
If we’re up to the task
He challenges us
Each and every day
To be better and better
In every way

A Big Thank You to Virginia Bonham

Marianne Iversen

Participants from Step In, Benicia Step, and Step Out came together for a movie night at the Connection to spend time together and to wish Virginia Bonham great success as she goes off to school to get her master’s in special education. Virginia has been teaching Step classes since 2004. Thank you, Virginia, for all the time and dedication you have given to our many Step participants throughout the years. We wish you all the best in your new venture!

Top: Trisha is sad to see Virginia leave
At right: The group at movie night

Grandparents Group Volunteers Their Holiday Cheer

Martha Hogan

Among the most important ingredients in the family unit are grandparents! Since the inception of our grandparent support group at the Connection, we have seen wonderful friendships formed, a sharing and caring for each other, a reaching out to new members of the group, and tremendous growth in understanding their grandchild born with Down syndrome—as well as being more supportive to their own children. It is a pleasure and a privilege to be able to reach out to these wonderful folks and to have them more involved in the Connection’s family. This holiday season, some of our grandparents, as well as an aunt, graciously gave up a morning to make gingerbread houses for the centerpieces and raffle prizes for our Holiday Party.
Austin Burks Makes His Dream Come True

Barbara Burks

Austin Burks has had many accomplishments over his 22-1/2 years of life, the most current one being his self-advocacy, perseverance, and sheer determination to get hired at Chuck E. Cheese in Dublin, California. It has been his dream and goal, since he was 13 years old. Taking the initiative, he pursued the company tirelessly for three years. He never gave up or lost hope—in fact, he was convinced it would become a reality! Austin’s dream came true October 5, 2013, when he became an official Cast Member (employee)!

Austin approached management in mid-October wanting more responsibilities than just washing dishes, but was told no. Then there was a change in management in late October, so Austin boldly and confidently approached the new General Manager. She was very impressed with his ability to advocate for himself. He wants to grow on the job, not just be a token on staff. He wants to be seen as abled, not disabled. He wants to prove he can do more than they think he can. He has demonstrated incredible maturity in going after what he wants, which is to be treated with the same dignity and respect as anyone else. He wants to be accepted for being Austin Burks and who he is, not for being labeled the young man with Down syndrome. I applaud my grandson for stepping up and making a difference, not just for himself, but for paving the way for other young adults. He is an inspiration to all who know him. I am so proud of him!

Austin told the new General Manager what other duties he would like to do and supported it with the list below he composed and typed himself, then gave to her. She immediately began implementing some of them and has increased his hours! As you can see, Austin is definitely a take-charge kind of guy!

**CHUCK E CHEESE JOB SOMETHING ELES**

1. MAKING PIZZAS
2. SET UP BIRTHDAY PARTIES
3. BIRTHDAY STAR DANCE WITH CHUCK E
4. WASH CLEAN TABLES BENCHES HIGH CHAIR
5. PASS PRIZE OUT FOR THE KIDS PARENTS
6. FIX EVERY GAMES TICKET MEDCINE
7. TAKE GARABGE OUT
8. WASH CLEAN AT THE SALAD BAR

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A Black Belt for TJ

Donna Crawford

T. J. Crawford received his black belt in martial arts on October 12. TJ studied with Martial Arts America in Walnut Creek, for the past six years. Congratulations, TJ! You worked hard to achieve your black belt promotion. We are so proud of you!

TJ with his brother, Paul, at the black belt ceremony

Olivia on Her Path

Lili Byers

Congratulations to Olivia Byers-Straus—from her final solo performance, in June, with the Steppin’ Out dancers in San Francisco, to the start of her two-year college career in the Pathway program at UCLA. If she looks happy, it’s because she loves living in her own apartment with three Pathway roommates, taking classes, cooking her own meals, learning to get around Los Angeles on transit, and participating in all kinds of social activities, from sports events to parties and picnics. Her parents’ only complaint is that they don’t hear from her often enough! But when they do, she sounds joyful. Nothing could make them happier!

Above: Olivia dancing her solo

At left: Olivia, front and center, surrounded by her Pathway classmates

Thank You, Keller Williams

Marianne Iversen

A big thank you once again to our friends at Keller Williams Realty for helping to assemble office furniture for the DSCBA. Thanks to realtors Randy Burchfield, David P. Johnson, and Kerry Trembath for giving their valuable time to help us.
Volunteer Nicole Nathlich is combining her love for dance and her passion for the kids at the Down Syndrome Connection with her Girl Scout Gold Award service project. Nicole has been teaching basic dance skills classes for children 4–6 years old and another class for those who are 7–10 years old. Session 2 will run from January 11 to February 15, and Session 3 from March 1 to April 5. If you are interested or would like more information, please contact Nicole at nicanat@yahoo.com.

The following comments are from parents whose children were enrolled in Session 1 this fall:

"Jadon had a great time in dance class and looked forward to going. Nicole and her friend, Jesse, are wonderful girls—super-encouraging and patient. The dance class has sparked an interest in him and has been great exposure for him." (Charlotte Habecker)

"This class was perfect for Hailey since she needs special one-on-one attention. Nicole and her partner, Jesse, did a phenomenal job following Hailey's lead so that she could be successful. We are so very grateful and touched that Nicole donated her time and efforts to teaching Hailey in her very first dance class. She gave Hailey the opportunity to enjoy music that she so loves and to dance, dance, dance!" (Jennifer Bornstein)

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In November, 2012, Nina Krietzman and her mother, Connie Johnson, were invited to visit Washington DC as part of the National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS) fly-in campaign for the Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act. NDSS flew in self-advocates from around the country to encourage key senators and congressional representatives to support the ABLE Act. (This bill will allow people with Down syndrome and other disabilities to create a tax-free savings account to cover qualified expenses, such as education, housing, and transportation. It is a supplement to other plans. The bill aims to ease financial strains faced by individuals with disabilities.)

Nina met with aides to Senator Dianne Feinstein, Leader Nancy Pelosi, and Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy. It was exciting to be in Congress and to learn how bills move through to become laws.

The ABLE Act has been reintroduced in Congress this year, and happily, Senator Feinstein has decided to sign on this time.

This summer, Nina went to Sweden, Denmark, and France on vacation. In Sweden, she met a lot of relatives from all over the world who came together for a family reunion. From Sweden, she went to Denmark to meet a family friend, then on to France, where she spent a lot of time in Paris.

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The Aktion Club of San Ramon Valley (SRV) held a car wash to raise funds to provide services to their community. The club voted to purchase toys for those in need and will be delivering them to the Bay Area Crisis Nursery on December 14. The Aktion Club is growing in members and continues to have fun while building their leadership and decision-making skills.

This group is sponsored by Kiwanis Club of SRV and provides a wonderful opportunity for the members to give back to their communities. If you know someone who might be interested in joining, please contact Marianne at Marianne@dsconnec- tion.org or 925-362-8660.

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The Aktion Club at the car wash fundraiser
For Your Time, Talent, and Treasures We Are Grateful...

Foundations, family funds, and service organizations
Anonymous Family Foundation
Baner Family Foundation
Ray Benton Family Fund
Lowell Berry Foundation
The Calhoun Family Fund
California Communications Access Foundation
Chevron
Children’s Support League of the East Bay
Dialy Country Club Foundation
Jam Handy Character Building Foundation
KIDS-N-NEED
Kiwanis Club of Pleasanton
Kiwanis Club of San Ramon Valley
Lencioni Family Fund
The Joseph & Vera Long Foundation
Thomas J. Long Foundation
Million Dollar Round Table Foundation
M Squared Consulting, Inc.
Noll Foundation
Quest Foundation
San Ramon Rotary Foundation
TWANDA Foundation
Wayne and Gladys Valley Foundation
Wells Fargo Foundation

AT&T Employee Giving Campaign
Frankie Juarbe
David Kimble
Joanne Leach
Raymond Rhodes
Krista Veri

Bank of America Matching Gifts
Christina Ireland

Car Donation Services
Rosma Suansing

Chevron Humankind
Paul Casadont
Mark T. Janke

Del Amigo Pool Association
Lap-a-thon

Kaiser Community Giving Program
Burt Hasiguchi
Karen Mui
Richard LaBelle for the Ruth Chiavetta Scholarship Fund
Gail Hibson-Lawton
Larry Lawton

Microsoft Matching Gifts Program
Anonymous

PG&E Corporation
Give with Liberty Campaign for the Community
Derek Kent

IN HONOR OF
Sarah Najar
John Najjar
Leny Rios

IN HONOR OF
Lulu Jensen
Sommer Family Foundation

IN HONOR OF
Ability Awareness Training
Leonard A. Caetano, Jr

IN HONOR OF
Caleb Adams’ birthday
William and Linda Watson

IN HONOR OF
Nico Barillas
Kevin and Anita Moore

IN HONOR OF
Matthew Bauman
Jacquie Christianson

IN HONOR OF
Harold Burns
Robert Guter
Michelle Vanni

IN HONOR OF
David Collins
Pixieland Amusement Park

IN HONOR OF
Emery De La Cruz
Robin Luke

IN HONOR OF
Ainsley Dodge and our CRP and DS Educational Alliance Programs
Wendy Cooper

IN HONOR OF
Linda Fountain
National Charity League Diablo Valley

IN HONOR OF
Baby Kota’s 1st anniversary
Ravi Kota

IN HONOR OF
Larry Kota’s 50th anniversary
Jeanne and Steve Karabin

IN HONOR OF
Sheri Milser’s 21st birthday
Vicki Ellefson

IN HONOR OF
Jay Puchio
Jeanne Leland

IN HONOR OF
Matthew Stamey’s birthday
David and Judith Havlick
Margaret Jensen
Rick LaFeret
Kim Lindeberg
And a generous match from
Matthew Stamey
Peter Tschernenko

IN HONOR OF
Cora Slocum
Karen Slocum

IN HONOR OF
Taylor’s 21st birthday
Kim & Linda Henrie

IN HONOR OF
Mark and Cathy VandenBerge’s birthdays
Victor and Kathy VandenBerge

IN HONOR OF
Ronald and Patty VandenBerge’s wedding anniversary
Victor and Kathy VandenBerge

IN HONOR OF
Victor and Kathy VandenBerge’s birthdays
Karen, Mike, Mason, Major, Kate, Jason and Maggie

IN HONOR OF
Mason Zolnier’s 5th birthday
PaPa and Gamma

IN HONOR OF
all the parents who give everything for their wonderful children every day of their lives. Our hearts are always with you!
Frank and Michele O’Connor

IN MEMORY OF
Fay Burford
Kevin and Martha Hogan

IN MEMORY OF
Tatiana Casadont’s grandfather, Ron Casadont
Julie Casadont
Roger and Sara Pinkert
Matthew and Megan Portoni

IN MEMORY OF
Gina Covello
The Covello Group

IN MEMORY OF
Marie Harrington
Anna and Lynn Azzopardi
Lorraine Delia
The Fleisher Law Firm
Teresa and Anita Fraguliga
Mary Greene
Norma Kennedy
Joan LaPorte
Maureen Lewis
Bev & Gary Passanisi
Larry & Bobbie Ross
Sue Schwartz and Howard Muchnick

IN MEMORY OF
Doris Lindeberg
George and Martha Levison
Kim Lindeberg
Pamela Sherman

IN MEMORY OF
Kyle Martinez
Jim and Melinda Borelli
Connie Burnett
Timothy Covello
Tony, Armida, Tony Jr., Sonia and Danielle Martinez
Lori & Kevin McIntire
Beverly Schuetz

IN MEMORY OF
Ruby Nadelhoffer
Barbara Melton

IN MEMORY OF
Larry Nobriga
Eve Cummings

IN MEMORY OF
Peter Saeveke
Tim and Carolyn Lane

IN RECOGNITION OF
Karen VandenBerge-Zolnier’s Birthday
Mom and Dad

IN LOVING RECOGNITION OF
Kathy VandenBerge’s Birthday
Victor VandenBerge

IN RECOGNITION OF
Kate VandenBerge-Roysdon and Jason Roysdon’s birthdays
Mom and Dad

In recognition of
Victor VandenBerge’s birthday
Kathy VandenBergh

Our daughter Sophie supports DSCBA
David and Sophie Fielder

SPECIAL THANKS TO
Jennifer Cooper for ability awareness presentation at Oliver Nakahara’s first grade class
Dan Nakahara

GENERAL DONATIONS
James Corr
Daetz Family Charitable Fund
Michael and Kinney Edlinger
Kelly Fayaud
Garret and Cathy Girvan
Mary Greene
Kim Lindenberg
Geetanjali Magodia
John Maury
James McKenna
Steven and Lizette Miller
Valerie Perkins
Kenneth and Marilyn Rasler
Jeanne Riley
Mary Schust
Peter and Cynthia Trueblood
Michael and Coni Whisler

VOLUNTEERS

2013 Holiday Party
K. Leigh Alfrey
Brian Bornstein
Hannah Bornstein
Jennifer Bornstein
Darren Briemie
Mike Cannon
Gloria Casadont
Tami Castelluccio
Mike DeMasi
Madison Ferguson
Michael Ghazal
DSCBA Grandparents Group
Marie Jimenez
Carrie Kiel
Robert Koei
Los Creos Middle School Leadership and friends
National Charity League Diablo Valley Chapter
Jessica O’Reily
Ashley Parish
Lisa Upton

Around the DSCBA help
Virginia Aquilar
Randy Burchfeld
DSCBA Grandparents Group
David Johnson
Mark Sypien
Kerry Trembath
Lauren Viarengo

Please know we work very hard to ensure your kindness is acknowledged. If your contribution to our success was received after the newsletter went to press we will be honored to highlight your generosity in the next edition. Thank you!

December 2013
23
Join the DSCBA Medical Outreach Committee!

Give back by being involved in a program that will positively impact how a diagnosis of Down syndrome and the news of delivery to new families are given and received at delivery medical facilities throughout the Bay Area.

We will ensure information about Down syndrome and how the DSCBA can help is current. Also help schedule and deliver training where needed regarding “delivering the news.” We can definitely use help in the San Francisco area.

The next committee meeting is Thursday, January 23, 6:30 p.m. at the Danville DSC office. Call 925-362-8660 for more information.

Upcoming 2014 Events • Save These Dates

**Saturday, March 8**
Empowerment Conference and Annual Meeting, Danville

**Saturday, May 3**
Gala for Giving at the Diablo Country Club, Diablo

**Sunday, October 5**
Step Up for Down Syndrome Walk and Family Picnic

For details and updates go to http://www.dsconnection.org