

Combined Voices for Leadership



D.J. with Marian Edelman, center, and the Directors of Special Kids Inc. Agnes Johnson, left and Rose Ferguson, right.

Marian Wright Edelman was one of the featured speakers at the 8th Alliance National Conference in Washington, DC on February 3, 2005. The conference theme was "Our Combined Voices: Making a Difference for Children with Disabilities". As President and founder of the Children's Defense Fund (CDF), Ms. Edelman has been one of the strongest voices in the country for the health and education needs of children. This gathering of the federally funded national network of Parent Training and Information Centers and Community Parent Resource Centers was an ideal setting for the message Ms. Edelman delivered. She was very clear that the strong voice of parents and advocates will be needed if we are going to fight back against the special interests in the country who are claiming a larger and larger share of our resources while at the same time child poverty is climbing at an alarming rate.

According to Ms. Edelman, a child is born into poverty every 40 seconds and last year we witnessed the first increase in infant mortality in 40 years. In using the analogy of the threat levels employed by Homeland Security, Ms. Edelman said we are at Red, the highest level when it comes to looking at the prospect for poor children in this country. States on average are spending 3 times more on jails versus schools and there is the looming need for 200,000 more Special Education Teachers over the next 5 years.

Medicaid needs to be expanded, as well as Headstart. Ms. Edelman stated very clearly that the "Bush tax cut should be repealed and proposals to make these cuts permanent must be resisted".

Ms. Edelman's message was well received as evidenced by the standing ovation she received. The combined voices of advocates for children will be necessary if we are going to make a difference for children in America.

— D.J. Markey

Pyramid Community Parent Resource Center

Newsletter

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THE MISSION OF THE PYRAMID
COMMUNITY PARENT RESOURCE
CENTER IS TO STRENGTHEN
COMMUNITY BY REACHING
UNDERSERVED FAMILIES OF
CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS
WITH DISABILITIES WITH THE
INFORMATION, TRAINING, AND
SUPPORT THEY DESERVE, TO
ACHIEVE THEIR MAXIMUM POTENTIAL.

LEADERSHIP: Views From The Front

Since the beginning of the Family Leadership Academy, we have been fortunate to have Jim Comstock-Galagan of the Southern Disability Law Center and Ted Quant of Loyola University's Twomey Center for Peace through Justice as our facilitators. Not only are they highly respected leaders in their fields of expertise, they bring clarity, vision, and inspiration to Academy sessions. So, with this in mind, I sat down with both of them to get their views on leadership as well as their experiences of the role the Academy has played in developing leadership for the most important child advocates of all, family. Following are highlights from these interviews.

Jim Comstock-Galagan



1. What is your definition of leadership?

Jim sees leadership in the form of a leader who has vision, who stands FOR something, and who is willing to stand UP for that. Leaders have integrity and inspire others to stand up and be

heard as well – to not just follow but to join in.

2. What forms have you seen it take? Who are your leadership role models?

Jim has seen leadership take shape in people running disability organizations and community organizations because they inspire parents and consumers to get involved in schools, the legislative process, and their communities as advocates for other children as well as their own. More famous leaders who Jim respects include Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mohandas Gandhi.

3. Define yourself as a leader.

Jim tries as a leader to communicate that each person can make a difference – he believes that everyone has value and he tries to give them the skills to use their talents. He tries to inspire them to see issues in a more human than legal fashion – to try and put themselves in the other person's shoes.

4. Please share some of the highlights for you from the Academy.

For Jim, seeing Academy participants go back to schools and become very active in advocating

Jim, contd. on page 3

Ted Quant



1. What is your definition of leadership?

Ted takes his definition of leadership from "Leaders: Strategies for Taking Charge" by Bennis and Nanus. In the book, the authors discuss transformational leadership, which defines leader-

ship as not so much the exercise of power as empowering others to act. Leaders are seen as people who are committed to action; have a vision of what they want to accomplish; are able to communicate that vision; inspire others to act; and turn followers into leaders and leaders into agents of change – a leader is measured by the accomplishments of followers.

In addition to those characteristics listed above, Ted's definition of leadership requires leaders to "walk the walk, or what the book calls "trust through positioning." Leaders also acknowledge their own strengths and weaknesses, what Bennis and Nanus call "deployment of self," and encourage the strengths of others. Finally, leaders create a sense of urgency and the possibility we can do something about it. Leaders have a vision of a better world – what OUGHT to be and what CAN be.

2. What forms have you seen it take?

Ted shared two examples of transformational leadership in action:

- Ted serves on the Board of Steven Foster's

Ted, contd. on page 3

Jim: from page 2

for cultural change at that school, not just for their own child, has been a big highlight. In particular, he mentioned Justina Williams, a graduate of the Academy who went on to work at Families Helping Families of GNO as a LaSIG Family Facilitator, because he sees her as having really translated Academy information into everyday action – making the connection between advocating for her own child and other children and not being intimidated at all to go up against the "powers-that-be."

5. How have the Academy and its participants affected your approach to leadership? As a result of the Academy, Jim has added "courage" as a component of leadership since courage has been reflected back to him by Academy par-

ticipants. Academy graduates have manifested courage in work with the schools and with other parents because they are willing to be labeled "troublemakers" and put their own child's school experience at risk in working for others. It takes courage to keep going when what's important is not just about them. Jim feels good leaders have good hearts.

6. What projects/leadership roles have you undertaken as a result of the Academy? Jim reports that he is much more involved in Louisiana again, which he is particularly happy about since "I started in New Orleans, I love New Orleans, and as a result of the Academy, I'm reconnected with New Orleans." He has enjoyed having more contact with parents from Louisiana, giving technical assistance and

advice about issues.

7. What is the most important leadership role parents must be encouraged to play in school system change?

Jim believes school system change must be driven by parents – if we, as a community, really want change, parents must lead the operation of schools. He feels that, right now, parents are really just an afterthought, so they don't get involved because they feel like they're not wanted and not included. Jim believes that schools can do a better job of involving parents – community organizations have done a good job in letting parents set the agenda, why not schools?

Ted: from page 2

Mid-City Dance Workshop, an organization that encourages and demands the inclusion of children with diverse physical abilities. Ted recalled a performance of the Dance Workshop where one child with a disability took the stage for a performance but walked in the wrong direction. Another one of the children performing steered the child in the correct direction and helped him to

catch up in the performance by clapping his hands together. This child understood that his peer had the ability to perform but needed to be empowered to do it.

- Ted also shared a story about Pyramid's Co-Director, Ursula Markey, acting as a transformational leader. The U.S. Department of Education had scheduled federal hearings to discuss the state of education in Louisiana, and Pyramid wanted to make sure that the

voices of parents of children with special needs were heard. When an invitation to speak was given to a gathering of Pyramid parents, no one volunteered. Taking it in stride, Ursula expressed her respect for their decisions but encouraged them to attend a meeting the next week to discuss future actions.

At that meeting, Ted asked each of the 15 people in at-

Ted, contd. on page 4

Ted: from page 3

tendance to tell them about their child and what was and wasn't working for their child in the school system – but with a time limit of 3 minutes! In the beginning, most went over their time limit, but as the evening wore on, everyone was able to share powerful stories within the time limit, and all were encouraged to reconsider attending the hearings. Many decided to attend, and as a result, representatives of the federal government focused in on their stories in determining what needed to change in Louisiana. Ursula empowered these parents by exposing them to the speaking skills and confidence they needed to share their expertise about how to improve education for Louisiana's kids.

3. Define yourself as a leader. As a member of the Equal Rights Congress, Ted feels that he has shown leadership in creating a vision to protect and extend the Voting Rights Act, and motivating others to action. Also, as the Director of the Twomey Center, he sees his most important leadership roles as being clear on the Center's central vision and constantly challenging himself and other staff about the values they carry in doing this work. He does not see his job as TELLING others what to do

but rather, WORKING WITH them to hold themselves accountable to the vision and values of the Center. Finally, Ted feels that he is able to empower others in trainings on leadership development and team building.

4. Who is your leadership role model?

Ted cited his father as being an important role model in his life, giving him his moral standards and teaching him the importance of integrity. He also recalled being challenged by a priest to examine his actions and efforts by asking him, "Have you proved your existence today? Have you proved yourself as a human being?" And Ted spoke of a friend from school who encouraged him to study for two hours in the library for every hour of class he attended – instead of hanging out during breaks. These examples have stuck with Ted throughout his life and influenced how he approaches his work as a facilitator and leader. Ted also cited three leaders of larger movements who have inspired him – Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and Jesus.

5. Share some highlights for you from the Academy.

Ted has enjoyed people coming back after the Academy and saying they have used the information in a personal or professional situation. He is

happy about what people have done or achieved as a result of the Academy.

6. What potential does the Academy have to create change?

Ted sees the Academy as a breeding ground for leaders, who go on to create more leaders. He sees the Academy as a place where people are empowered to be agents of change. He also has experienced synchronicity at the Academy – a group of people thinking together about something and coming up with things they had never thought of before – expanding possibilities and expanding the sphere of influence.

7. What leadership role must parents be encouraged to play in school system change?

Ted feels parents must have a presence in the schools – but not as defined by school administrators and staff. They should not be relegated to a certain role but MUST BE PARTNERS in working for change. And parents who cannot have a presence in the school (due to work commitments, family commitments, etc.) must be kept informed and represented by parents who can have a presence.

EVERYDAY LEADERSHIP: Family Leadership Academy Graduates in Action

When we sponsored our first Academy three years ago, we didn't expect to graduate 75 family members over the course of three Academies. What we haven't been surprised by is the dedication, initiative, inspiration and expertise that Academy participants have shown. All of the graduates have gone on to positively change the lives of their children and to improve the educational experiences of other children by serving on boards of community agencies, writing grants for inclusion, finding employment as an associate director or family advocate of agencies serving those affected by disabilities – or simply by passing on the information to other parents. Following are updates on two of the Academy graduates – their efforts on behalf of children since the Academy and how the Academy helped them achieve their goals.

Rosalind Johnson, Fall 2003 Family Leadership Academy Graduate



1. What have you been involved with since the Academy? Rosalind was asked to serve on the Policy Council of Total Community Action, or TCA, while attending the Academy. The Council is made up of two representatives from each TCA Head Start. At the time of the interviews, she also was serving as the Chairperson for the Council and had attended the National Head Start Parent Association Conference in Puerto Rico. Because of her role on the Council, Rosalind meets a lot of parents and is able to share with them what TCA represents and hear their issues. She plans to focus one meeting of the Council on children with special needs and will include information from the Academy.

2. What skills that you

learned at the Academy have served you well?

For Rosalind, the negotiation skills she learned during the Academy have assisted her greatly in advocating for her son. For example, she found that her son was only being changed one time per day and knew it needed to be more. She was able to successfully change this situation by using her negotiation skills, rather than having to fight the staff for a lengthier time to improve her son's day-to-day life.

3. What would you say to other parents of children with special needs?

Rosalind wants other parents to know that they are their children's teachers. Also, our children need to see that we represent them. Parents should remember that they have the final say in their children's wellbeing – there is an appeals process to get what's best for your child. Don't stop with the first person – someone is over someone is over someone. Keep going until you get what you need.

She also urges parents to stay calm and composed, and to ask questions if they don't understand something being presented.

Doriana Vicedomini, 2002 Family Leadership Academy Graduate

1. What have you been involved with since the Academy?



Doriana has been extensively involved in working to receive funding for an inclusion initiative in Jefferson

Parish schools. The initiative was not funded initially, but the superintendent made funding available after the group working on the grant continued to apply pressure for the program. They also received funding through the Louisiana State Improvement Grant (LaSIG). Monies from the grant have been used for

Graduates, contd. on page 6

Graduates: from page 5

parent linkage, including a parent survey about inclusion.

Also, monies have been used to create a Resource Room, to support PBS initiatives in the schools, and to ensure the correct implementation of inclusion. As a result, the number of children with disabilities who have been included in more general education services has increased dramatically.

2. What skills that you learned at the Academy have served you well?

Doriana gained a better understanding and more information about inclusion as a result of the Academy. She feels she received reinforcement from

Jim due to his encouragement and his making the information more accessible. Also, Ted helped her to improve her skills in working with others.

3. What other skills have you found useful in advocating for children?

Doriana feels that she has needed negotiation, communication, and research ("being able to do your homework") skills in her work for children. She also suggests that other parents find out what they want for their child(ren), not just what they don't want – have alternatives to what you don't want for your children.

4. What would you say to other parents of children with special needs?

Doriana reminds parents that they know their child better than anyone, so they should have a dream for their child and go for it. For her, she knows that inclusion is extremely important in children becoming successful adults, and so she fought for it.

Also, she feels that parents don't realize how powerful a voice they have and urges parents to get with other parents and work with school administrators, who may actually welcome the help, to get what they want and what they need.

Join us in congratulating all of the parents who have shown leadership in improving education in Louisiana by attending the Family Leadership Academy. The graduates:

Julie Parlow Andrews, 2004 • Merrie Barrilleaux, 2002 • Therese Barthelemy, Fall 2003 • Leigh Bates, 2002 • Todd Battiste, 2002 • Nadia Berry, Fall 2003 • Mary Berryhill, 2002 • Carole Bodden, Fall 2003 • Bernadette Bode, 2002 • Kermit Bradford, 2004 • Melinda Bran, 2004 • Simone Burrell, 2002 • Janice Bursey, Fall 2003 • Vanessa Cashen, 2004 • Algina Causey, 2004 • Anna Coleman, Spring 2003 • Letrionne Collins, Fall 2003 • Rosalind Condoll-Johnson, Fall 2003 • Dione Cosse, 2002 • Regina Damore, 2002 • Lois Ann Davis, Spring 2003 • Rose DeMolle, Fall 2003 • Betty de Paz, 2002 • Kagerine Dolison, Fall 2003 • Myra Engram, Spring 2003 • Lynne Farlough, 2002 • Melissa Holmes Francis, Fall 2003 • Vivian Francis, Fall 2003 • Patrice Garrison, 2004 • Sigrun B. Gibson, 2004 • Karen Gonzales, Spring 2003 • Shannon Gross, Fall 2003 • Christina Hampton, 2002 • Vera Harrison, 2002 • Ann Heier, 2002 • Earlene Henry, 2004 • Juliet Holmes, Fall 2003 • Tyra Holmes, 2004 • Nina Jackson, 2004 • Najia Jacques, 2004 • Elizabeth Ann Johnigan, 2004 • Lucille Johnson, 2002 • Tammy Jones, 2004 • Cheryl Knight, 2004 • Richard La Comb, Fall 2003 • Cheryl Lalonde, 2004 • Tasha Landry, 2002 • Sheila Lewis, Fall 2003 • Yvonne Lyons, 2004 • Mary Mathews, 2002 • Sue McCann, 2002 • Betty McGee, 2004 • Irma Miller, Spring 2003 • Teiwana Miller, 2004 • Sushama Nagarkar, Spring 2003 • Laura Nata, 2002 • Thuy Nguyen, 2002 • Judith Otto, Spring 2003 • Tanya Patterson-Prince, 2004 • Loretta Powell, 2004 • Sue Roesky, Fall 2003 • Karran Royal, 2002 • Terral Rushing, 2002 • Doris Sykes, Fall 2003 • Debra Taylor, 2002 • Anne Templet, Fall 2003 • Levitta J. Thomas, Spring 2003 • Demetrice Thompson, Spring 2003 • Hope Tippin, Spring 2003 • Doriana Vicedomini, 2002 • Valerie Washington, Spring 2003 • Justina Williams, Spring 2003 • Yolanda Williams, Spring 2003 • Barbara Womack, Spring 2003 • Wanda Womble, Spring 2003

Discovering The Leader In You

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead

Long, long ago in a New Orleans that now seems far, far away, parents could kiss their children goodbye, send them off to public schools, and trust that they would be taught and treasured. It was the kind of trust that allowed parents to

focus on home training and respectfully leave educational leadership to the teachers.

However, in these complex times, the role of parents has changed. Many parents, especially those who have children with special needs, have realized that they must take a leadership role if their child is to be properly educated and supported at school.

Increasingly, parents come to Pyramid looking for help in solving an immediate problem – their child has been suspended, expelled, or is not successful in school. Usually they tell us that they are unable to get the school district to respond to their concerns.

With support from Pyramid, parents, family members, and professionals have demonstrated that things can get better, even in the worst of times. We have seen them use information and strategies presented in our IDEA/NCLB roundtables and other activities to become effective advocates for their child.

As parents, we see district administrations come and go, however, we are in this for the long haul. We invite you to join us on this journey. Come out to Pyramid activities as often as you can and discover the leader in you.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

School Choice Under No Child Left Behind

Now that the annual LEAP Test results are in, school districts are required to notify parents whose children attend schools designated as “unacceptable” that they have an option for “School choice”. In Orleans Parish, that means if your child attends a school that is in “School Improvement Levels 2-5” your child’s school is required to send you a letter notifying you of your "School Choice" options before the start of the upcoming school year. If you have not received your “School Choice” letter and your school is a Title I school in School Improvement Levels 2-5, contact the Title I Department of New Orleans Public Schools at 504-304-5680.

Positive Behavior Support

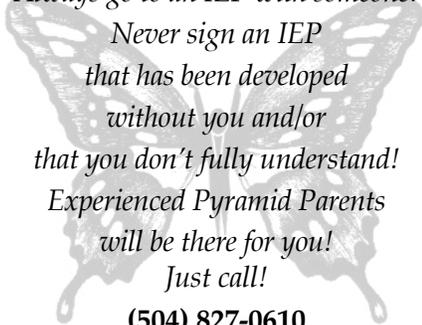
Parent Associate Lynne Farlough and Early Childhood Consultant Joaniko Kohchi presented on “Positive Behavior Support for Parents of Young Children in an Urban Context” at the annual conference, “Addressing Challenging Behavior” at Clearwater Beach, FL, on May 6, 2005. The conference was well attended by early childhood caregivers and other professionals. Clearwater Beach was a beautiful backdrop for many good connections and energizing conversations. Lynne and Joaniko enjoyed presenting together for a diverse and interested audience.

Pyramid will offer other chances to learn more about Positive Behavior Support at future events, check the newsletter calendar for updates.

J U L Y

C A L E N D A R E V E N T S

Pyramid Community Parent Resource Center will be providing many new events and programs the rest of this year and will begin planning for the new year. Please continue to look for upcoming events in your newsletter. And as always, remember to register for events prior to the date of the event and request a stipend if needed by calling Pyramid staff at (504) 827-0610. Have a wonderful summer!!



*Always go to an IEP with someone!
Never sign an IEP
that has been developed
without you and/or
that you don't fully understand!
Experienced Pyramid Parents
will be there for you!
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