

The Bridge

HSAO Newsletter

Giving Thanks and Appreciation

By: Doreen Barkowitz

Thanksgiving is rapidly approaching. It has been an annual tradition in the United States since 1863. However, it was not until December 26, 1941 that President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed a bill into law with Congress, making Thanksgiving a national holiday and assigning it to the fourth Thursday in November.

Thanksgiving Day is a holiday to express thanks to family, friends and others we know. It's also a day to acknowledge and appreciate the good things we have in life. And many of us, regardless of our family or financial situation, have many great things in our lives.

Unfortunately, there are those who are unable to recognize the good they have around them. Sometimes it's difficult to do this when dealing with sadness, anger, frustration and exhaustion. Sometimes it's difficult when you're coping with betrayal, loneliness, illness or crisis. It's also a difficult thing when there is no income and no way to make ends meet. Sometimes people need help identifying the good around them. They have so much to dig through to get that point. They need people to notice the good in **them** to help them realize their own self-worth. Then they will be able to pass it along and give it back to others.

Although services are meant to be strength-based, we often have to talk about all the negative things our child has done in order to qualify for the services. When we are forced to think and communicate this way, it becomes a challenge to then identify all the things our child does right and how truly remarkable he or she is.

Noticing the things our child or children do that are positive is very important. It could be a hug, or being nice to a sibling or the family pet, or bringing their plate from the table to the sink after a meal. It could be getting up in the morning without a big protest. It could be picking a piece of paper up off the floor. It doesn't have to be big, and it could already be what they are supposed to be doing, but you noticing that they did it is what counts.

Kindness goes a very long way towards making someone feel better, and appreciated. All of us can do better to notice, thank and appreciate the little things someone does no matter how old they are, or what relationship we have with them. And it's something we can all do every day of the year.

Have a wonderful Thanksgiving holiday!

Help write *The Bridge*, our HSAO newsletter!

We would like to have more family and teen voice in our newsletter. Please be a part of this newsletter by sending in your life and family experiences. You can also share your thoughts, questions and concerns about HSAO, this newsletter, specific articles, etc. We are open to suggestions about how to improve and better meet your needs. Just call or e-mail me!

Thanks, Doreen

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2010 4th Quarter



HSAO Online

Did you know that the Human Services Administration Organization has a website?

HSAO online contains information about us, the services we provide, *and* has tons of great resources for YOU! You can even look back at past newsletters we've sent. Check out the **Family** or **Teen** tabs for Helpful Links to other area agencies and interesting websites with useful information and fun activities. Want to contact us? HSAO online provides phone and fax numbers, allows you to email us or get directions to our office.

www.hsao.info

Do you have suggestions for the website? How about some other helpful links you would like to be included on the website? Email us and let us know!



Youth and Family Services

By Bob Struth and Doreen Barkowitz

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Youth:

Teen Unity is HSAO's teen group for individuals 14 years of age and older involved in HSAO programs. This group is for social and educational purposes. Teen Unity meets regularly.

HSAO has a Teen Council comprised of teens and young adults who meet monthly to discuss activities for the larger teen group (Teen Unity). They work on leadership, good decision-making skills and other skills that will help them in life. Teens are invited to be a part of the Teen Council by their Service Coordinators. Teen Council continues to meet on the first Thursday of every month. In the next few months, Teen Council will be finishing their work with money management and budgeting, and will begin to work on interviewing skills and job readiness.

Teen Unity and the HSAO Teen Council assisted with the HSAO Family Picnic on June 24, 2010. They are a very active group:

- On July 29, the teen group went to the Pittsburgh Zoo and Aquarium.
- On August 20th, Teen Unity had their Back-To-School Picnic.
- On September 27, 2010 Teen Unity attended a meeting with parents and guardians from the parent support group to learn about Cyber Safety. Our presenter was a Senior Supervisory Special Agent from the Office of the Attorney General.
- In October, several teens attended HSAO's Fall Family Pumpkin Festival.

If you are involved with HSAO, and are 14 years of age or older (or you have a child who is), please consider involvement in our teen activities. For more information about the Teen Council or Teen Unity, please contact Bob Struth at 412-942-0785 or bstruth@hsao.info.

Parents, Guardians and Families:

HSAO offers the families in our programs support in a variety of ways. For parents and guardians, we offer evening social events throughout the year. We also offer monthly day and evening meetings to parents and guardians for support. For families, we offer an annual summer picnic and a fall or winter event.

- On Monday evening, August 23, 2010 the parent support meeting included our annual **"On Top of It"** program. Parents and guardians of children in HSAO programs received a folder for all the papers we accumulate from our children, and a calendar to help them begin the school year in an organized manner.
- On August 31, 2010 several parents whose children are in HSAO programs were invited by HSAO's Family Support Partner to participate in a **community focus group**. We gave feedback about an intervention that the Office of Behavioral Health and System of Care's Starting Early Together (SET) program are proposing to implement with some of their families.
- On September 27, 2010 the parent support group combined with Teen Unity for a special presentation about **Cyber Safety**.
- On October 4, 2010 many HSAO parents and family members joined the HSAO Cruisers Team to participate in **NAMIWalks** which raised over \$127,000. This annual walk is held to spread the message of hope and recovery. Eliminating stigma and the barriers to treatment is another goal of NAMIWALKS. We were one of 75 teams, and 2,000 participants.
- On October 20, 2010 our **Murder Mystery Dinner Cruise** event aboard a Gateway Clipper Riverboat attracted 95 people (parents/guardians of HSAO and a guest). In order to help parents attend, we assisted with childcare and transportation. Raising children with special needs was the common denominator, and many relationships were formed. Knowing that you're not alone in your challenges seems to make the situation a little more bearable.
- On October 24, 2010 HSAO hosted our annual **Fall Festival Pumpkin Festival** at Reilly's Summer Seat Farm, and 199 children and family members involved with HSAO participated. It was a beautiful day!

In the past several months, our parent support meetings have been very well attended. These meetings have been an informal and comfortable way to express and discuss concerns and frustrations we face as parents and guardians of children, adolescents and young adults with special needs. The meetings are facilitated by Doreen Barkowitz, HSAO's Family Support Partner.

The **morning meetings occur on the second Wednesday of each month from 10:00 AM to 12:00 noon. The evening meetings occur on the fourth Monday evening from 6:00 to 8:00 PM, unless there is a social event that month. Both meetings are held at Panera Bread on Blvd. of the Allies in Oakland, unless otherwise specified.** Please try to join us to for coffee, bagels, pastries and a huge dose of understanding, compassion and acceptance. Call Doreen at 412.942.0790 if you are interested. Our following few meetings are:

- Nov. 22 (let's get ready for the holidays) from 6-8 PM
- Dec. 8 from 10 AM to 12 PM (no evening meeting in December because everyone is just too busy!)
- Jan. 12 from 10 AM to 12 PM
- Jan. 24 from 6-8 PM
- Feb. 9 from 10 AM to 12 PM

If you'd like to receive our weekly HSAO E-Newsletter which includes reminders and updates on HSAO and community events, please e-mail your request to dbarkowitz@hsao.info and your address will be added.

Parents and guardians are very important to HSAO, and we encourage their involvement. For more information about our parent meetings and family services, please contact Doreen Barkowitz at 412.942.0790.

HSAO Fall Family Pumpkin Festival

By Adam W.
(Father of a child in our LIFE Project)



Every Pennsylvanian knows how beautiful our state is during the fall, and most of us take advantage of the time to get outdoors before the bitter winter weather comes upon us. I never considered my autumns complete until I had spent a day at a farm enjoying what they had to offer: riding the rural rollercoaster that is the hay wagon; visualizing what faces I could create on each pumpkin in the patch; and enjoying the unforgettable taste of the fresh apple cider to quench the thirst of the day's fun. Now that I have kids of my own, I relish getting to share these events with them. However it has become a challenge to coordinate this day of fun with my special-needs children. This yearly celebration has been becoming more and more difficult with planning the day, where to go, activities to keep the kids entertained-but-not-too-overloaded, coordinating food, getting everyone comfortable on the hay ride and hoping that the melt-downs are few. And that is where HSAO has come in.

This is our first year with HSAO helping us out and to my surprise they sponsor events for the whole family. Recently my family and I were fortunate enough to be able to participate in the Fall Festival at Riley's Summer Seat Farm on October 24, 2010. What made the day even more delightful is the support that HSAO provided in taking care of a lot of the tiresome preparation that goes in to a day like this.

When we arrived at the farm we were welcomed with a boxed lunch (provided by Panera's—yum!), and activities for the kids. After the kids were fed we jumped on to the next hay wagon and had a picturesque ride to the pumpkin patch. It was wonderful watching our children go from one pumpkin to the next deciding which one was the most "perfect". After we claimed our pumpkin we had a pleasant ride back to the part of the farm that had lots of events for the kids, also provided free-of-charge by HSAO. Our children had a great time petting young farm animals, riding pedal-powered cars around a mini track, getting their faces painted and gorging themselves on kettle corn. The farm even had wheel barrows you could borrow to get the pumpkins back to the car. HSAO provided arts and crafts for the children, and smaller pumpkins to paint and decorate.

At the end of the day the kids were happy and worn out and my wife and I declared the day a huge success. Talking with other parents about the day revealed that they, too, had a wonderful day. And we owe a big "Thank you" to HSAO for making such a wonderful day possible.

HSAO Murder Mystery Dinner Cruise

By Adam W. (Father of a child in HSAO's LIFE Project)

HSAO, in addition to providing much-needed support to us for our child with special needs, also works to take care of the parents. It came as a wonderful surprise when I received a flyer in the mail inviting my wife and me to participate in a "Murder Mystery Dinner Theater" cruise put on by the Gateway Clipper on October 20, 2010. Not only was HSAO willing to cover the cost of the cruise, but they were willing to help us with babysitting. I was skeptical at first—could they really be able to do all this? Do they know how badly my wife and I needed time together out of the house?

It turns out that they did, and our sanity was important to them. That is what makes HSAO such an indispensable resource that we are blessed to have found.

Having rarely traveled on a boat, boarding was novel—pictures were taken just before you stepped aboard, and the friendly staff was happy to direct people to their tables. The food was surprisingly tasty and I noticed many people going back for seconds on their favorite foods. I'm not sure what happened to the originally-planned "murder mystery" entertainment, but we were instead presented with a "People's Court" style comedy-drama where the guests decided who the guilty party was. While a lot of the audience had fun participating as the jury, a lot of people went outside to enjoy the unique views that downtown Pittsburgh has to offer. The view from the top-most of the three decks was wonderful. As dusk approached the lights came on in our wonderful city, and some friendly people nearby were able to name off many of the buildings we passed. In a time where the stress hits us in our daily lives this was a welcome romantic evening that will not soon be forgotten.

If you have yet to take HSAO up on one of these events, I encourage you to do so. Doreen Barkowitz, a wonderfully supportive employee of HSAO, does an amazing job of coordinating them so that these seemingly too-good-to-be-true affairs are within your grasp. And our indispensable Service Coordinator, Meghann R., helps us to function so that we are able to catch our breaths, and take advantage of them.

Feeding Your Soul...

By: Doreen Barkowitz

I just spent some time looking for "words of wisdom" about feeding our souls. I couldn't find exactly what I was looking for. Of course, what makes us feel good is different for everyone. It is a very subjective and personal thing.

Rule number one for feeding your soul... Use your own ideas and words. It doesn't matter whether your idea of what you need to feel better and be healthier is approved of by anyone else. It is what **you think** will work for you... what will make you grow, prosper and bloom. It's important to keep in mind, though, that what you need cannot negatively impact someone else, or put them in danger.

A year or two after my youngest was born, I decided to begin exercising. If it was a good morning, I'd watch my son get on his First Student bus to go to his approved private school, and I dropped my oldest daughter off at her school. I would put the baby into a stroller and walk. We began in the neighborhood, moved to the school track, and eventually progressed to the mall. Even if it was just for an hour combined (including travel time, diaper changes and feedings), I did this whenever I could. There were times that my son had a crisis in the morning, or the children were sick or off of school and those were the days I stayed home. We couldn't afford the gym, and I didn't have sitters. My husband was traveling three weeks out of four, and I needed something to do for myself. Even though I walked with my little constant companion, it was still for me. It was what I could do and what I needed to do. By the end of my **always** unpredictable day, I could at least say that I did it.

Life constantly pulls at us. Everything seems to need our attention. The few times we do something for ourselves, we feel that our time could be better used elsewhere. But taking time out does not mean that you are selfish or wasting time. When we constantly care for others, we can become irritated and short-tempered. This impacts our relationships. This can create so much tension that our sensitive children may act out in reaction to how we feel and behave. But by taking time out, and finding ways to release tension and stress, we create an environment that is peaceful and thoughtful. This will benefit not only us, but those around us.

Please write in with the ways you *feed your soul*. In the process of sharing, maybe you will help someone else find what soothes and feeds their soul.



Our Partnership with HSAO

By Donna W. (Parent of a child in HSAO's LIFE Project)

This is a story about how I got to know HSAO. It has been a life saver.

I have been happily married for 15 years, and a fulltime working mother of three great kids ages 12, 11, and six. We are a very sports-oriented family. My 12-year-old son plays club soccer and baseball, and school basketball. My 11-year-old daughter is a cheerleader for her school's football team. My six year-old son, Eric (not his real name) gets to go to all the games. We have played on every playground in Pennsylvania and Ohio. Eric is signed up to play on the American League special needs baseball team in the spring.

Eric has Down's syndrome, and I am blessed that God loves me so much to have given me a wonderful life. As with everyone, about three years ago, I found that one day he gave me too much to handle and I reached out for help. Eric is high functioning and went to a typical daycare all of his life. But he has a severe delay in speech which makes communication difficult. Eric was also having behavioral problems in daycare. He would push other children, not participate in circle time, and he got away with many of his behaviors because he is so cute. It was a case of a very smart kid, being loved and cared for, and taking total advantage of it.

One particular day, the daycare called me. Eric had pushed another child and gave him a bloody nose. The behavior was escalating to a point that I felt I might have to quit my job in order to take care of Eric. I went into a conference room at work and cried. When I composed myself, I started to call the numbers on the back of my insurance cards.

I don't remember who or how, but I ended up talking to someone from HSAO. I would not let this person hang up. She spoke with me for hours. Her name is Jenn Z. and she is our Service Coordinator. She has such great ideas and has done so much work. She has given me guidance, and helped me organize all of the information. I simply could not have gone on without her help. She met with me days later to sign all of the paperwork, talk and help. Eric was able to get a Behavioral Specialist Consultant (BSC) and Therapeutic Staff Support (TSS) and we were on the right track from there. Everyone helped. Our team was made up of the Dart* therapist, the daycare providers, family members, the BSC and TSS, and especially our Service Coordinator.

It has been three years since my call with Jennifer, and Eric is in a regular kindergarten class with 45% pull out for special services. Don't get me wrong, I am still struggling with non-compliance issues and the lack of communication. Some days a struggle does not even begin to describe the issue, but it is at a level that Eric can attend school and learn.

Jenn is with me at all of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, during Eric's tests and evaluations, and just to listen. I read the HSAO E-Newsletter weekly. I find the newsletter a great source of information and I have it in my back pocket for when I need more help. It is with the help of HSAO that Eric is able to get off the bus smiling every day. As with any child, with or without special needs, my Eric is a masterpiece in the works.

**DART is an acronym that stands for Discovery, Assessment, Referral and Tracking. The purpose of the AIU's DART program is to find eligible children, ages three to five, who have developmental delays or disabilities. Special educators, therapists, medical personnel, social workers, and psychologists evaluate and deliver services to preschoolers with special needs and help support their families. Early Intervention services are free.*

LIHEAP and Other Heating Assistance

Heating Assistance / LIHEAP ... Reprinted from the Department of Public Welfare website:

www.dpw.state.pa.us/servicesprograms/liheap

The Pennsylvania Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) helps low income people pay their heating bills through home heating energy assistance grants and crisis grants. You need not have an unpaid bill to receive home heating energy assistance. You can receive this money without being in the Cash Assistance program -- a family of four with an annual income of up to \$35,280 can qualify for assistance. No lien is placed on your property if you receive this help.

Applications for LIHEAP are available beginning November 1, 2010 until March 31, 2011. The Department of Public Welfare may extend or shorten the program depending upon the availability of federal funds.

The fastest way to apply and to check to see if we made a decision about your application is by applying through [COMPASS](#), the online resource for [cash assistance](#), [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#) benefits, help with child care, health care coverage, home heating assistance (LIHEAP), school meals, SelectPlan for Women and long-term living services.

You can also:

- Download an application for LIHEAP benefits by clicking on the links below and return it to **Allegheny County Assistance Office Headquarters**, or [English- Energy Assistance Application](#) or [Spanish-Energy Assistance Application](#)
- File an application at **Allegheny County Assistance Office Headquarters**, Piatt Place, 301 5th Avenue, Suite 470, Pittsburgh, PA 15222. Phone: 412-565-2146.

For more information, please contact LIHEAP (Cash) 412-562-0330; LIHEAP (Crisis) 800-851-3838; FAX: 412-565-3660 or contact the LIHEAP hotline at **1-866-857-7095**, Monday through Friday (individuals with hearing impairments may call the TDD number at 1-800-451-5886).

Crisis Grants

Beginning November 1, 2010 through January 2, 2011, households without heat may qualify for additional help. To be considered “without heat”:

- The main heating source or second heating source (a source that is used to operate the main heating source or used if the main heating source is not working) has been completely shut-off; OR
- A household is completely without their main heating fuel (coal, fuel oil, kerosene, propane, wood, etc.).
- Households without heat should contact the Allegheny County assistance office (Allegheny County Department of Human Service) at 1-800-851-3838

Beginning January 3, 2011, additional money may be available if you have an emergency situation and are in jeopardy of losing your heat. These emergency situations include:

- Broken heating equipment or leaking lines that must be fixed or replaced
- Lack of fuel
- Termination of utility service
- Danger of being without fuel or of having utility service terminated

Assistance with home heating crisis situations is available 24 hours a day. In Allegheny County, please call 412-562-0330.

Dollar Energy Fund Now Accepting Applications for Heating Bill Assistance Reprinted from the Department of Human Services (DHS) October 2010 newsletter at <http://www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/newsletter.aspx>

DHS is now accepting Dollar Energy Fund applications from individuals and families who need assistance with paying their heating bills. **Applications are being accepted Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Human Service Building, One Smithfield Street.**

FISH!



When we think of the word *culture* we often think of the rituals and traditions within various societies. However, culture is not only part of the BIG picture; it is part of the small picture as well. The definition of culture is “the behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a particular...group” (dictionary.com). Each group within a society has a culture: places of worship, businesses, schools, and even families. What is the culture of your family? Do you know how to enjoy each other or is there constant arguing? Do you make an effort to say positive things to each other or are you focusing only on the negatives? Do you schedule time to have fun together?

At HSAO, our culture can get a little stressful, but we have found that when we make the effort to lighten the atmosphere, our workplace is happier and more productive. One of our very important goals is to pass along our positive attitude to you. We hope we succeed in doing this, and if so, that you might consider taking some of our tips and implementing them in your own home.

In attempts to bring a positive spirit to our office, we implement the Fish Philosophy. Through **FISH!** we apply four practices to our workplace on a daily basis: **Play, Be There, Make Their Day, and Choose Your Attitude.** Over the next year, we will showcase one of these practices in each newsletter along with ideas of how you can carry out the practice in your home. Obviously, the culture of your home is much different than the culture at HSAO, but hopefully you will experience the same long-term effect; a less stressful and more positive daily atmosphere.

This quarter we will discuss **PLAY.** Play is not a specific game or activity. It is a state of mind that brings new energy at hand and sparks creative solutions. Play taps into natural ways of being creative, enthusiastic and having fun. Play is the spirit that drives the curious mind, as in “Let’s play with that idea!” It’s a mindset you can bring to everything you do, regardless of the task.

Ideas for how to **PLAY** together:

- Let the kids help make dinner.
- Create a game out of homework time.
- Set aside one night a week to do a fun activity as a family: play board games, watch a movie, read a book, charades, and the list could go on...
- Make homemade play dough.
- Tell jokes
- Play Hide-and-Seek
- Create a game out of weekly chores

Strength to Accept the Things I Cannot Change

By Shannon J.

Here I stand once again, tip toeing on thin ice
Knowing that each step that I take, becomes a sacrifice
The further that I try to walk, the more my icy floor cracks
The lighter I try to step it seems, the more weight’s put on my back

But if I don’t step at all, my support will melt slowly
And I will fall into the abyss, before the ground gets to know me
So I step lightly, asking for help and that isn’t even like me
But even with a response, a predicament change is unlikely

And now unseen in the distance, growing with consistence,
The tide rise by the instance, flowing with persistence,
I start my repentance, because life’s shorter than a sentence.
So I run on to the fence, which is my last line of defense,

I cannot stop the waves, nor lower it
Sometime what will happen, has to happen for a little bit
So try to do what you can, until you come up out of it
Then hopefully you will let go of the fence, once you get over it



Holiday Survival Skills

By Doreen Barkowitz



I put an article similar to this in the newsletter in 2008. Preparing for the winter months, and the holidays and diverse ways we celebrate is something we all do in some way or another.

The fall and winter holidays are fun and magical for children. There are also several days of vacation from school and daycare. So, while we (parents) are working our jobs, shopping, decorating (if this is what you do), wrapping, entertaining and cooking, our children are home requiring and deserving our time and attention. It's a very delicate balance for everyone.

Now add to this mixture a child who has autism, or has depression, anxiety or another mood disorder. Add to this a child who can't sleep or eat properly or whose medications are not balanced. Add to this a child who explodes, for unknown reasons, or cannot transition well. Everything we do can be undone in no time at all. The entire situation becomes unbearable for everyone, and the stress can be overwhelming.

There is nothing that can take away the unpredictability of our existence with our children who have special needs. But there are things we can try during the next several months:

1. Begin now. Begin gift shopping or creating as soon as you can. Make your list and stick to it. Mark names off your list as you wrap, and hide the gifts away. If you have a child who takes without permission, hide the money you've set aside for the holidays, as well.
2. People tend to get very generous around the holidays. This is good if you have an enormous amount of money. With the current economy, there aren't many of us in this situation, though. Try to plan by listing names and how much you want to spend on each person. The bills will come in before you know it. Be extra careful this year.
3. Hand-made gifts and cards are a great family activity and may be more economical.
4. Without depriving yourself of sleep, wrap gifts and take care of things after your children go to sleep, or when the older ones are out.
5. Shopping at this time can be a wild ride. Some stores are open very late or even 24 hours. If you have a partner, one of you can stay home with the children while the other shops. Take turns. Your children have all year to learn how to shop. This may not be the best time to teach them. The stimulation alone can set off your child if they have Attention Deficit Disorder, or Anxiety, for example. If you don't have someone who is helping you raise your children, ask a trusted family member, friend or neighbor.
6. If you or your children need to see their psychiatrist for a medication check, try to do this in early December so that if changes have to be made, the benefits from the medication can be in place before school lets out.
7. On this note, make your appointments as early as possible. Doctors and therapists, like many other people, like to take time off when their children are out of school. This is for you, too. If you are sadder around this time of year or dealing with grief, make sure to go to a support group or see your own therapist.
8. If you anticipate that your child may have increased behavioral problems around the holiday time please call **Re:solve at 1-888-796-8226**. Don't be afraid to ask for help, and remember that you are not alone.
9. Take good care of yourself. Feed your soul. If things become too stressful, contact your Service Coordinator. Call Re:solve for you, your children or other family members if you find yourself in a crisis situation.
10. **Find time to take it easy and enjoy your children. Remember, it's their magical time, and it can be for you, too!**

