



INNOVATIVE EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

August 20, 2008

Dear TCA Parents and Friends:

I know it's been some time since you've heard from me, but I've continued to work "behind the scenes" over this past spring and summer to develop and implement a program that would make **The Chase Academy's** mission a reality.

Many of you might remember my speaking of a new program format called **The Chase Select Program**, which was designed to be implemented within private school mainstream classrooms. I was working with several local private schools who already service students on the spectrum. These schools and I would form a partnership that would utilize the McKay scholarship grant to pay for classroom support services for their students with autism. The private McKay school would "host" these services by providing their own mainstream curriculum, but utilize my expertise and services as a specialist with an Autism Endorsement, to provide classroom supports that would ensure the student's overall success within the classroom and give additional skills training in the areas we know to be affected by their ASD. The state would pay the McKay school's tuition for this program and in turn they would pay **The Chase Academy** for the contract services we render.

Having tentative agreements from two DeLand locations, I began the process of contacting the Department of Education's Department of Parental Choice, trying to reach our regional representative to get both approval and procedural help in implementing this program. Both I and one local principal tried aggressively from March to July to get the regional representative to even phone or email **any kind** of response, with no luck. Though we did find out the regional position had changed hands, we tried numerous times via phone and email to contact that office and solicit any response to no avail. Academic budgets for 2008 were submitted in mid-July, and once again the opportunity to get support services to children with Autism passed by. This proves quite frustrating for me as each school had four students on the spectrum (including my own Chase), and the eight students would have been a strong opening for this program. Though the deadline has passed for the fall semester, my hope is that we can get a response and clearance from the DOE for this coming spring semester (Jan '09) and perhaps go ahead with this program anyway. I will keep you all informed and appreciate any efforts or ideas you might make on our behalf. There are 15 private McKay schools in Volusia County (see www.floridaschoolchoice.org for the directory), and having this program approved would mean that some program near you would be available to your child at no cost to you.

In other TCA News... I am in my last course for my autism endorsement, which means that by the New Year I will hold an ESE certification with a graduate level endorsement in Autism and Communication-based Disorders. Recent research by a parent reveals that I will be the only certified Volusia county school teacher holding this rare endorsement – though I continue to teach middle school Language Arts! My hope is to utilize this endorsement to support students in public and private school. I'd like to do it through **TCA**, but am perfectly willing to support public school efforts should they decide to take advantage of my endorsement.

Also... I was able to offer **free evaluative services** to several of my parents as I “practiced” my new skills for my classes by creating classroom support materials, completing formative assessments and outlining behavioral plans. This is an area of expansion that I would like to see **TCA** take part in providing for parents. If you feel you’d like to have support for IEP meetings, student evaluations for services, a formative assessment or Behavioral plan (all currently provided free of charge by the county under IDEA), let me know if this service would be valuable to you. **TCA** is looking for ways to provide services and raise the money to run full time, and providing parents with an alternate resource for services might be a path we can head down. Your responses to this idea are welcome. Fees would be on a sliding scale, commensurate with a family’s financial situation. **We’d also like to plan east and west side parent action committees** that meet once a month to support parents, provide local speakers, get involved in legislation and advocate for local educational, therapeutic and medical programs for our kids. If you’re interested in being part of this voluntary committee, please contact me at mtlundell@aol.com. Also, if you’ve got a meeting place available, also let me know.

Summer at Arc... Over the summer I worked with Jim King at the Arc of Volusia and got to see (and help) firsthand the programs they have available for their clients. What many don’t know is that while budgetary cuts are affecting everyone in the non-profit sector, Arc continues to grow its program through grant acquisitions. They recently received an educational grant and are re-vamping and expanding their program of services. Keep an eye on this program as King hopes to eventually offer educational and vocational enterprising programs to those as young as 16. Mr. King and Arc have long been great supporters of **TCA** and our hope is to one day partner with this organization to build an educational program that would meet the educational needs of everyone on the spectrum. Many of the current Arc clients are those with ASD and though many of them remain undiagnosed because their exceptionality lists them as “MR”, these unique individuals receive the care and respect they deserve from the Arc program and I am proud to have had the chance to work with them.

Stetson University continues its support of TCA... also this summer, the business students at Stetson University chose **TCA** as one of the organizations it would help by developing a strategic plan. The plan brought to the table outlines **The Chase Select Program** as the most economically viable program and encourages us to continue to promote its merit. Also, one big target area is our website. Anyone who has seen it lately knows its OLD, and that’s because we haven’t had a webmaster in quite a while – and this is one of the areas where I have *less than no* talent! We continue to solicit for a **webmaster** to volunteer services, update our site and help with newsletter and marketing development in exchange for the promotion of their business and talent. If you know of someone, please refer them to me at mtlundell@aol.com as I am desperately seeking to fill this position. Also, again I am asking for a referral for a **CPA** (required by law) to provide tax services – we FINALLY received our 501(c)3 this past March and need to get our financials squared away.

Last but not least... I am attaching the membership form. Many parents and families have gotten away from financially supporting us, but we’re still here, working and speaking in public, attending community fairs and events and representing our families in Volusia County. No one needs to tell me how hard it is for families to get by these days, but most of us find ways to contribute locally to the organizations we believe in. All I ask is that you think of us as you make those decisions. Please consider a family membership, which at \$50.00 is a modest but vital way to support our cause!

Until next time... Mimi Lundell