

Sonnenberg Consultants Newsletter

Autism Awareness Month

and you end up where you want to go. It's as simple and as difficult as that.

Media Updates/Interviews

Henry Winkler—Every Child Has a Gift

Most of you know Henry Winkler as the Fonz, the high school drop out with a heart of gold. You may also know him through Hank, the fun kid with learning disabilities who gets in a world of trouble in his popular children's books, *Hank Zipzer: the World's Greatest Underachiever*. The real Henry Winkler is a composite of these characters and more. He's a man who has learning challenges, a man who cares deeply about others, a man who wants so much to help children with special needs find their own gift—and their self-esteem—that he is willing to share his struggles with the world. Meet Henry Winkler, CEC's keynote speaker for the 2008 CEC Annual Convention & Expo.

Many people with disabilities are successful, but they don't write books about it. Why did you decide to write books about children with disabilities?

A friend asked me, why don't you write children's books about your dyslexia? I said, "Absolutely not. No way. I'm stupid. I have nothing to say." I didn't even say, "Let me think about it," because it was not something I thought I could do. Two years later, I was asked again, and this time I said ok....You don't know what you can accomplish if you've got something in mind and you are passionate about it. You put one foot in front of another,

Has being an author changed your perceptions of yourself?

I still have those feelings. How you feel about yourself on the inside and how you live life on the outside don't necessarily gel. But, outside of my kids and my family, it has made me proud. The one thing I am proudest of is the fact that these books exist.

Your main character, Hank, reflects your experience in many ways. Is that difficult for you when you are writing?

In my 11th book, Hank must do well or he can't be in the play. Hank gets in an argument with his father—he got the best grade he ever received but not the grade they had made the deal on. I had that argument with my dad when I was 11. Now I'm 62, and it was like it was yesterday. I was on fire. I couldn't speak fast enough. I feel better now, because I realize one part of my brain is not stupid. But, I can't believe it completely.

How have your learning challenges impacted your life?

As a positive. I used to think I would like to cut them out of my brain like a disease. But I'm sure that if I didn't have that challenge, I wouldn't have fought as hard as I did to get where I am. Maybe it was the very fact that I had learning challenges that was the gasoline in my engine. There is something in my brain like a blow up doll that always came back to center.

Not everyone has that resiliency. What enabled you to keep going?

I don't know what was in me that allowed me to get back up when I went down. There were times when I thought, "Oh my God, this is horrible. I can't get any thing going and I'm constantly failing. A couple of days later I just said, "Okay, I will try this again.

How can we help students who have met with failure or rejection keep pushing for success?

If you want something, you figure out how to get it. There are no rules except to do no harm to anybody or to anybody's things. People will tell you all the time that you can't do something. If you feel your plan or wish is the right thing, decide you are going to do it. You can't push too hard.

Recently, I couldn't find a publisher for my books in England. They kept saying they were too American. I acted in a play in England two years in a row and told everyone about the books. I also gave the books to the kids in the play. Now I have a publisher. I didn't know I could do that, I just wanted it.

What is your message to children?

You will have no idea what your gift is, what the greatness is inside, until you look for it. It's there. All I know is that by looking at you and the fact that you walk on earth, there is something great inside. Your responsibility is to figure out what your gift is. When you do, you will feel differently about yourself

What can we do when children have a gift that is not overtly valued in school or society?

Give them examples of people who have the same problem who are successful. For example, who had that particular problem and was a governor or started a major company. Who are great surgeons who couldn't get into medical school?

How important are teachers who truly care to children with disabilities?

Kids with disabilities know when a teacher cares, because they actually feel it. Kids with special needs have a heightened ability to read a teacher's sincerity.

Educators can turn kids, even schools, around when they are sincere and truly care for their students.

What role do extracurricular activities have for students with disabilities?

I couldn't do extracurricular activities because my grades weren't good enough, and that is where I excelled. Those activities would have given me a sense of self, a sense of accomplishment.

How can we help the general population understand that those with disabilities are very capable?

Teach capabilities. When groups are formed in class for a project, give the student with disabilities a task he or she is good at. Then the student with a disability is very much a part of accomplishing the task and everyone getting a good grade. It also allows all the students to see what a great job the student with a disability did. Or do role playing in class, maybe take a sense away from a child. Often children without disabilities can't imagine how difficult life or learning can be unless they are put in a similar position.

What advice would you give to special educators?

First, I would say thank you for being there, because I needed you and didn't have anyone like you. I would also say that self image is the beginning and the end. We can't say enough how wonderful a child is ...their sense of worthlessness is already so engrained.

How can teachers help parents who have children with disabilities?

They can help parents understand that they should not be embarrassed because their child is having difficulty. Also, help parents understand that their child is not this way on purpose. They are not being difficult or unruly or shy or however the disability takes its form on purpose. Helping parents understand this and what their child is going through is essential. That understanding makes it easier for parents, and the child, than to just dive in and figure out what is going on academically.

- **Chevrolet and Autism Speaks Team Up to Drive Autism Awareness** Spread the word: Chevrolet has teamed up with

Autism Speaks to drive home the message of autism awareness. During April – Autism Awareness Month – visitors to the Autism Speaks website (www.autismspeaks.org), can click on the “Help Chevy Help Autism” icon and take a virtual test drive of the 2008 North American Car of the Year – the all-new Chevy Malibu. Chevrolet has committed to a minimum contribution of \$500,000, but every virtual test drive taken gets Chevrolet closer to its goal of donating up to \$1 million to Autism Speaks to support its mission of increasing awareness of autism and raising money to fund autism research. Those who complete the virtual test drive will receive a free 30-day online trial of XM Satellite Radio.

○ **Autism Insurance Bill Introduced in Louisiana**

Legislation has been introduced in Louisiana to require insurance coverage for autism spectrum disorders. The bill has been introduced by State Representative Franklin Foil (R-70) of Baton Rouge. The bill would require Louisiana healthcare policies to cover applied behavior analysis (ABA) and other medically necessary, evidence-based treatments prescribed by an insured's treating physician with annual coverage for up to \$50,000 a year. The Louisiana Session will kick off on Monday, March 31 and residents of that state will have a tight turnaround of fewer than 90 days to push this bill through both chambers to

Governor Bobby Jindal's desk for signature.

Autism Speaks Collaborates to Investigate Molecular Basis of Brain Overgrowth in Autism Autism Speaks will join forces with the Allen Institute for Brain Science on a research grant that facilitates examination of molecular markers of genetic activity in the brain of patients with autism. The study will provide insight into the biological features that underlie autism, and will build on previous discoveries that abnormal overgrowth of particular brain regions likely triggers autistic behavior in infants. Says Eric Courchesne, Ph.D., head of the collaboration and director of UC San Diego's Autism Center of Excellence, "Once we pinpoint the specific brain cells and genes involved in the abnormal growth, it will be possible to see more clearly what is causing autism, which will more rapidly lead to novel biomedical interventions to improve the outcome for each child."

Company Updates:

- All confidentiality forms are due!
- All community trips must be preapproved, ask your senior for details.
- Get your gas cards, all hours must be completed and/or made up if tutor is sick.
- All therapist's must sign their timesheets in order to receive there pay-thanks!

Stimuli/Resources:

Autism Speaks and *The Autism Sourcebook* Partner to Raise Global Awareness

A special edition of *The Autism Sourcebook: Everything You Need to Know About Diagnosis, Treatment, Coping and Healing - From a Mother Whose Child Recovered*, by Karen Siff Exkorn, will be released on April 2, in honor of the first World Autism Awareness Day. The book will feature the Autism Speaks blue puzzle piece logo on the front cover, with a special foreword by Suzanne and Bob Wright, co-founders of Autism Speaks. These special edition books will be donated by Autism Speaks to countries all over the world, to offer help and hope to families and practitioners worldwide.



Autism Awareness keychain
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Charm Keychain
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Autismwear.com

Jokes of the month:

Q: Why do you go to bed?

A: Because the bed won't come to you!

Q: Why did the farmer bury all his money in the fields?

A: Because he wanted his soil to be rich.



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