

Special Parents Helping Special Kids



Local parents and children benefit from Special Kids Crusade, an advocacy group for developmentally disabled youth. An Oct. 4 dinner auction raises funds for activities and trainings.

Sabrina Manno and Susan Oros are local mothers and friends. Manno has 4-year-old boy and girl twins and a 6-month-old daughter. Oros has 11- and 7-year-old boys, and a 9-year-old girl. Besides the normal parenting challenges the two mothers share, both Manno and Oros have children with developmental disabilities. Manno's son has severe autism, and Oros' oldest son has Down Syndrome and her daughter has autism.

According to Manno, there are 1,000 kids in the County with developmental disabilities that

can range from autism to cerebral palsy to mental retardation, and while services exist for them, Manno and Oros decided they needed to do much more.

"It's very difficult for parents to find services and programs," Manno says. Last year, with the help of other parent volunteers, Special Kids Crusade was launched.

"We got a major grant from San Andreas Regional Center, a local agency that acts as case managers for children with developmental disabilities," Manno says. "We are designing

ourselves to become the go-to organization."

One project Special Kids Crusade is currently developing is an after-school program in conjunction with the Boys and Girls Clubs in Seaside and Salinas. Special needs children will have adaptations which will allow them to enjoy the program side-by-side with typical children. Manno hopes to dispel the impression of the kids being "scary" and to create a level of compas-

sion in the other children.

"We will provide [kids with developmental disabilities] with one-on-one aides," Manno says. "We want... a sense of inclusion and acceptance for all the kids involved."

Special Kids Crusade also offers mom's night out evenings, helps set up parent support networks, provides parent trainings, offers ability awareness workshops for the community, and is working with the Monterey County Office of Education to develop a parent advisory committee and to create a parent handbook.

"We want to let parents know they are not alone," Manno says. "There are resources. We want to empower parents and change the face of special education services."

The Starry Night Dinner Auction takes place Saturday, October 4th at the Monterey Marriott, and raises funds for Special Kids Crusade. For more information, call 831/214-6541 or visit www.specialkidscrusade.org.

—Brett Wilbur



Waiting for a Family

Smart and energetic would best describe Lolita, this sweet 8-year-old girl who loves to dance, sing, play with Barbie dolls, watch cartoons and roller skate. This little girl will bring a lot of joy to the right family.

Children of all ages and backgrounds are waiting for a home. They need the same love, care and safety your child counts on every day. For more information, please call Kinship Center at 831/455-9965.