The BELLE FOCUS
News & Notes from the Belle Center of Chicago
All Children Can Learn and Play Together



SPRING 2006

INSIDE ▶
2 DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE
Response to the *Catalyst*
3 TEACHER'S CORNER
Carol Switalla
Queen of Angels
4 BELLE HOSTS
2nd Annual Event

Family Reflection: Look the Other Way

by Louis R. Carlozo

I have this problem with eye contact. I've had it since childhood, and after working on my life issues with more than a half-dozen therapists over the last 13 years (take that, Woody Allen), I'd say it's gotten marginally better. But for some reason, I'm still not comfortable with looking people in the eye, despite all the books I've read on shyness, star quality, effective habits, getting what you want, facing your fears and finding yourself.

I wish I knew the exact source of the problem. It baffles me. But I do know that as a boy, my dad would launch into these lectures on life and decorum—all talk, no listening, all "ought to be" and no empathy—and I would find myself staring out the window, especially at jet planes. And I would fantasize that I was on board one, winging my way to some exciting, exotic locale, anywhere but suburban southern New Jersey.

Knowing that I have this quirk—one that I've allowed to keep me on the margins at parties, on the outs during work water-cooler talk—it disturbs me to see my son exhibiting the very same behavior. Today, I gave him a time out for biting my ear, and when I tried to explain the reason for it, I found him staring to the left, the right, but not meeting my eyes.

"Look at me!" I said, grasping his jaw firmly enough to align his face with mine. Still he rolled his eyes to the side, not out of disdain (he's too young for that) but, it seemed, out of base fear.

If he heard irritation in my voice, it was not from my sore



right earlobe or the toddler horseplay that caused it. As I stared at him not staring at me, it was like coming upon a reflecting pool, one that offered a chilling glimpse of a childhood phobia mirrored back in a generational feedback loop.

The odd, compelling connections between my son and I extend to his very birth. I chose his name, knowing full well that it was neither Italian nor repeated elsewhere in our known family tree. My parents were among those who encouraged me to make him a Lou Jr. And I did give him my first name as his middle name. But I liked the alliteration and crispness of Christopher Carlozo.

> **More than anything else at his age, Christopher wants to know that he is the apple of my eye.**

Then, days after Christopher was born, my older brother Joe related to me a story I had never heard before: "Mom and Dad were all set to name you Christopher," he recalled; he was 10 years old when I was born. "Then they changed their minds at the last minute."

The anecdote gave me chills, and since then I have been tracking our father-son similarities the way some folks obsess over those goofy charts that compare John F. Kennedy and Abraham Lincoln: 1) Christopher, like me, has a photographic memory. Beginning at age 2, he was able to memorize entire Shel Silverstein poems and will correct me if I skip a page or even miss a word in his favorite books. 2) We both love to read, to the point where we often prefer the company of books to people. 3) At eight months, Christopher was lowered into a swimming pool and screamed; he has a fear of water, especially of getting it in his eyes. As for me, I did not swim in deep water until I was a teenager. 4) He has poker-straight hair, much as I did when growing up. I showed him a toddler picture of me and asked him, "Who's that?" "Christopher!" he replied, without hesitation.

And the similarities go on: He zones out when he's absorbed in an enjoyable activity to the point where he cannot (nor will not) hear you; has wild mood swings (is it a toddler thing or a precursor of adult depression, which I am

continued inside

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

I recently read a guest article in the Catalyst (a very well respected monthly publication on urban schools) on inclusion which I found to be extremely troubling. There were three basic messages in the article. The first was that inclusion is more of a celebration of diversity than an educational strategy. The second was that there has been a rapid expansion of inclusion throughout the Chicago Public School system and the impact has been extremely negative. The third was that a cash-strapped system like the Chicago Public Schools can't possibly be expected to take on the added cost of including children with disabilities in its general education classrooms.

After I lifted my jaw off of the ground, I decided to write a letter to the editor expressing a different view of this issue. Unfortunately, the Catalyst declined to print my response. Lucky for me, I have some pull with the editors of *The Belle Focus* and they agreed to let me express my opinions here ☺.

Inclusion is an educational strategy.
In Chicago, the relatively recent push to include children with disabilities in general education classrooms alongside their typically developing peers is largely the result of a 1998 lawsuit called *Corey H.* The lawsuit alleged, among other things, that the Chicago Public School system was illegally segregating children with disabilities in violation of the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

LRE is based on a growing body of research that shows that when children with disabilities are educated and included in general school and community programs alongside their typically developing peers, they demonstrate increased motivation, higher self-esteem, improved communication and socialization skills and greater academic achievement than those children placed in more restrictive, or segregated, environments. We at the Belle Center have observed many of these successes first-hand with the children that we have served in our eight years in Chicago.

The benefits of inclusion are not limited to the child that is being included. Research has also shown that the classmates of included children learn about compassion and acceptance, learn to move beyond stereotypes, increase their level of comfort around people with disabilities and learn to assist and teach others with different abilities. We have also found that many "typical" children benefit from the strategies brought into the classroom to assist the "included" children.

Inclusion is not occurring on a widespread basis.
Within the past two years, the Illinois State Board of Education has threatened to take over special education spending for the Chicago Public School system because of its ongoing failure to include children with disabilities in general education classrooms and programs. Does this sound like widespread inclusion to you?

As an organization that is frequently contacted by families who are looking for positive educational and social experiences for their children with disabilities, we often participate in prospective school visits and school-based planning meetings to explore opportunities for our client-families. I can say with all confidence that very few of our families have been willingly accepted into general public education classrooms and programs. In one of the first IEP (Individualized Education Program) meetings I ever attended, the schools' case manager (in charge of coordinating all special education services) simply stated, "We don't do inclusion here."

Inclusion may prove to be more cost effective than once believed.
Skeptics often point to the presumably high cost of inclusion as a reason to reject it. Successful inclusion does take time, resources and training, and this does often translate into dollars. Any additional cost, however, should be weighed against the obvious benefits. If, as Congress asserted through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, inclusive opportunities can lead to increased independence and economic self-sufficiency isn't there a greater cost if we don't include children with disabilities when appropriate?

I am not suggesting that inclusion is easy. When determined to be the "least restrictive environment" inclusive placements need to be well thought out and planned for. Teachers and community providers require training, resources and adequate support to successfully include children with disabilities in their general education classrooms and community programs. What I am suggesting, however, is that inclusion is an educational strategy, based on research and experience that is making a tangible difference in the lives of children across the country.

Beth Valukas

Volunteer Opportunities: We Need Your Help!

The Belle Center has a wide range of volunteer opportunities and can tailor projects to your interests and availability. We need regular help with special events, fundraising and communications, office work, help with developing and organizing program materials and help with developing and maintaining the Belle Center library, just to name a few ideas. Please call the Belle Center at 773-878-7868 if you are interested in learning more. Let us know if you have particular ideas, skills or expertise that you would like to offer to the Belle Center. As a small and growing organization, we welcome your thoughts and suggestions!



New volunteer Lydia Meyer helps prepare materials for a sibshop

UPCOMING SIBSHOPS

Sibshops provide opportunities for brothers and sisters of children with special needs to obtain peer support and education within a relaxed, social setting. Upcoming dates include:

Monday, May 8th
4:30 – 6:00 p.m.

Monday, July 10th
3:30 – 5:00 p.m.

Monday, August 14th
3:30 – 5:00 p.m.

Please call Lori Duvall at 773-878-7868 or email **lori@bellecenter-chicago.org** for more information or to reserve a space.

TEACHER'S CORNER

By Carol Switalla, Queen of Angels

"It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood," Fred Rogers would welcome his friends each day with a warm smile and friendly greeting. Each class day I welcome 16 students to my preschool classroom with a smile, a prayer for success and hope that these young neighbors will create an atmosphere both warm and stimulating for each other. My assistant, Lisa, and I have prepared the classroom, the centers of interest await, the visual schedule is prepared, and the tools of the learning trade are in place. But what will this day and this group bring?



One of Ms. Switalla's many students

It is a group of two 5-year-olds, eight 4-year-olds, and six 3-year-olds playing and learning together. It is an inclusive class with a mix of abilities, gifts, and challenges. There is flexible scheduling to provide consistency of care and transitions from whole group to small group activity and quiet to active pursuits to engage varied needs. Each center provides the comfort or challenge required by the differing needs of my students.

The sand and water table is a place that calls out to those who seek sensory experiences. The building area and blocks attract the budding architects and planners with spinners and connectors. The dramatic play area provides an outlet for speaking and sharing, pretending and taking on new roles. This provides the opportunity to play and test what is seen and acted out throughout the day with peers. There are varied art tools and manipulatives for the quieter children who thrive on creative expression with paint or writing tools, or those who prefer the challenge of a puzzle or connecting and matching small pieces. There are chaotic moments of disagreement and flashes of anger, but they are balanced by periods of play and harmony, with children engaged in satisfying activity, playing and learning together.

The Alliance for Childhood in their Call to Action for the Education of Young Children says, "We call for teacher education that emphasizes the full development of the child including the importance of play, nurtures children's innate love of learning and supports teachers' own capacities for creativity, autonomy, and integrity." With the help and support of the Belle Center staff and incorporating their philosophy that all children can learn and play together, I am heartened and go on. Each day provides new challenges and there is no rest or sitting back. There are children to be taught, guided, and supported. There are lessons and materials to be prepared and repaired. There are parents to be heard and also supported. And there is life to be lived and enjoyed.

Each day dawns anew, with new challenges and blessings. I pray for strength and understanding to support the ability for each child to learn, to grow, and to thrive.

April is Occupational Therapy Month!

In recognition of all of the ways that occupational therapy contributes to society's well-being, April has been designated as Occupational Therapy Month. People of all ages receive occupational therapy services to help them participate in the activities of their daily life. Sometimes people need occupational therapy to do things we take for granted, like getting dressed, being productive at school or work, eating independently, or even socializing.



Occupational therapy doesn't just treat medical conditions, it helps people to engage in the activities that give them a sense of purpose or meaning to their lives, despite challenges. The nature of occupational therapy depends on the individual and their environment. Occupational therapists consider the whole person when developing a therapy plan. They collaborate with families, teachers, physicians and other professionals to ensure a comprehensive approach.

Pediatric occupational therapists help children function as independently as possible in their major occupations of playing and being students. Occupational therapy often involves enabling a child with a disability to take a full part in life at home, in school, and in the community. Treatment takes place in schools, homes, community sites, and clinics, involving families and teachers as vital team members.

Pediatric occupational therapists help children to develop **school readiness skills** (prewriting/writing, drawing, cutting with scissors, playing, paying attention and interacting with peers) and **self-care skills** (dressing, toileting, washing and brushing teeth).

Occupational therapy helps children who have: low muscle tone, fine motor delays/gross motor delays, poor eye-hand coordination, poor balance, decreased upper body strength, poor organizational skills, difficulty focusing or paying attention, hyperactivity, difficulties with handwriting, drawing, or cutting with scissors, sensory integration dysfunction

Occupational therapists provide assistance for people of all ages and abilities in being active members in their chosen environments and life roles. Research shows when people are able to participate in the world around them, they live happier, healthier, and more productive lives. If you would like to know more about the occupational therapy profession or its specialized practice areas, please feel free to contact Lori Duvall at the Belle Center by phone at 773-878-7868 or by e-mail at **lori@bellecenter-chicago.org.**

Belle Hosts 2nd Annual Event

The Belle Center of Chicago hosted its second annual event, *Belle-a Notte: A Beautiful Night with the Belle Center of Chicago*, on November 10, 2005. We're thrilled to share that the event generated over $74,000 and had over 200 guests in attendance. We owe a very special thank you to Jane Altman and Ines Grzeslo for their exceptional leadership in organizing the event. We would also like to thank Rob Johnson of ABC 7 News for lending his talents as Emcee for the evening.



Honorees Jack and Kathy Lavin with Emcee Rob Johnson of *ABC 7 News*

Each year, the Belle Center honors individuals that have helped to create connections between children with disabilities and their families, and the educational, social and learning environments that all members of society access. This year, the Belle Center recognized Kathy and Jack Lavin with the Bridge Builder Award for the critical role that they have played in the ongoing growth and development of the organization, as well as for their broader advocacy efforts on behalf of other children and families in Chicago.



Board member and auctioneer Bill Altman rallies the crowd

We owe a very deep thanks to each of our lead corporate sponsors, whose support will make a difference in our work for the year to come.



Executive Director Beth Valukas with honoree and Board Chair Kathy Lavin

Thanks also to **CNA**, **Goldman, Sachs & Co**. and **SBC** for their sponsorship of the event. We would also like to recognize the many raffle, in-kind and auction donors who helped to make the event such a success:

Jane & Bill Altman
Selima Ani – Photography
Blue Bayou
Café Luciano
Campagnola
David & Kelly Carini
Cullen's
Lori Duvall
Elizabeth Floersheimer
Giampaolo Nason, Glass & Crystal Restoration
Gioco
Ines & Greg Grzeslo
Julius Meinl
Catherine Kosnik
Kathy & Jack Lavin
La Bocca della Verita
Mystic Celt
Senator Barack Obama
Park Grill
Que Syrah
Tricia Sabathne
Robin Schroud
Sensational Bites
Stefani's Signature Restaurants
The Talbott Hotel
Mark F. Thomann, River West Brands
United Airlines
Beth Valukas
Vinci Restaurant
Don Wiener

Finally, thank you to everyone who contributed to and attended the event. We are so grateful for your support and plan to make very good use of your investment in the year ahead.

killerspin

Wildman Harrold
Attorneys and Counselors

REZMAR CORPORATION

RSM McGladrey

SAVE THE DATE!
FAMILY APPRECIATION NIGHT

Please join us on Monday, June 12th from 5:30 – 7:00p.m. for a year-end celebratory picnic. We will provide the drinks and desserts and ask you to bring your dinner, utensils and a blanket to picnic indoors. Location TBD. Invitation to follow!



ABOUT THE BELLE CENTER

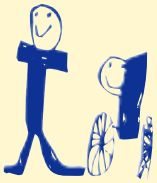
MISSION STATEMENT
The Belle Center promotes the rights and expectations of all children to be fully included in the community. The Center provides a progressive, family-centered inclusive approach to education and community life that supports children with disabilities and their families.

CONTACT INFORMATION
Belle Center of Chicago
1754 West Wilson
Chicago, IL 60640
P: 773-878-7868
F: 773-878-7869
www.bellecenter-chicago.org

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Kathy Lavin, Chair
Anthony L. Abboud
Bill Altman
Robert Blackwell, Jr.
Nancy Buchanan
Mady Lesnik
Cindy Moelis
Tricia Ormsby-Oshea

Kemery Bloom, Co-Founder
Robert Shapiro, Co-Founder

Beth Valukas, Executive Director



Belle Center of Chicago
All Children Can Learn and Play Together

Summer Programming at the Belle Center

Winter is nearly over, spring is soon to arrive, and before we know it, the 2005-2006 school year will come to an end. Please remember that therapeutic and educational services are available throughout the summer. As always, the Belle Center will have a variety of summer service options including providing support to your child at camp, in a small group setting, or within your home. The Belle Center will also offer individual and small group therapies along with group opportunities including but not limited to: Socialization Groups, Handwriting Groups and Communication Groups.

Additionally, members of the Belle Center staff are available to share information with summer camp / program staff to support your child's successful participation and inclusion.

Summer programming materials will arrive in the mail within the next several weeks including a summer planning survey to help us learn what your child will be doing this summer. For more information regarding summer programming please call Suzanne Carr, Program Director, at (773) 878-7868.

WISH LIST

As a non-profit organization, the Belle Center relies on your donations. We always have a "wish list" and welcome any and all gifts. Thank you for your support!

- Letter size laminating pouches
- Disposable cameras
- Gift Certificates to:
  - Office Depot
  - Lakeshore Learning
  - Toys R Us
  - Container Store

Family Reflection

continued from page 1

prone to?) and is a finicky eater. (French fries, cereal, chicken fingers, cheese and ice cream—that's about it for him.)

The inevitable questions of nature and nurture arise here, genes versus modeling behavior. But to me, something else more urgent arises out of all this. It is how the sins of the father can get passed down to the son. One of those is vanity. How else could I look at this creature and forget that he is also half my wife Amy's creation?

Perhaps it's because he is my only son. But he is also his own child, and will one day, I pray, be his own man. And I certainly don't want to handcuff him in the same way that my father did me. "The apple never falls far from the tree," my father would say, especially when we fought. And I'd look at all the doctor's kids who became doctors, and the lawyer's kids who became lawyers. Then I'd remember that my dad was a secretive compulsive gambler who won and lost fortunes—the usual source of our arguments—and I'd sulk for weeks.

"The apple never falls far from the tree." It took me years before I could think of a good comeback, which was: "Maybe that's true. But an apple can't stretch its legs and walk away."

Walk away I did. I moved to Chicago a dozen years ago, leaving my family behind on the East Coast. And I realize now that while it was a step toward independence, it marked a loss as well. It is highly likely that Christopher and Genevieve will not get to know their grandparents, my parents, except through the stories I tell them.

What a father must hand down to his son, I believe, involves more than nature and nurture, roots and wings, and all those other populist proverbs about effective parenting. One necessity is attention. More than anything else at his age, Christopher wants to know that he is the apple of my eye, and of his mother's eye. This may explain why he bit my ear in the first place: He wanted my attention, and sought any means necessary to get it.

How ironic, then, that the ways I choose to expend attention on my son can so often be negative and fruitless. I worry, I spoil him too often with gifts to make up for my absence at work, I yell at him rather than supply thoughtful discipline. (When I think of it, yelling is a form of attention, often better to a toddler than no response at all.)

The other essentials are passion and faith. Of the former, I can only say that I did learn this from my father. He approached everything he did as a teacher, football coach, mentor and salesman with zest. And in an age all too prone to create look-alike drones who buy into the mass hypnosis of mall culture, it's guaranteed that a passion for life cannot be bought, no matter what the car ads might say.

"Enthusiasm," he said, "comes from the Greek phrase meaning 'to be filled with the spirit.'"

Now I'm not a Greek scholar, but I would argue that it actually means: "to be filled with God." My father grew up without faith, unless you count believing in Lady Luck; I got religion in my post-college years.

In our house, we say grace at dinnertime and our son hates it. But Amy and I will persist at this, and the other rituals that surround our Christian faith, because we so deeply believe in a larger force that watches over us.

For me, having a higher "Father figure" is particularly important. It means I am not bound by the confines of genetics or dysfunctional family background, but free to surrender and become a new creation. And no matter how good a parenting job I do, or try to do, I believe Christopher will need this force, too.

I say this because as a dad, I recognize my limits. Someday, it may well be me my kid talks about on the therapist's couch. For despite my best intentions, I am all too often frail and distractible. I get absorbed in the bills. I sweat another production cycle at work. I try to provide. I check the classifieds for used musical gear I don't need. I make lists of to-dos that are 90 percent errand and 10 percent vision. I sit at this keyboard and write late into the evening. All of this, while my son and daughter grow up before me.

My mind's eye, which gets drawn moth-like by the dim lights of so many distractions, needs to learn how to look the other way.

Louis R. Carlozo is a Chicago Tribune DVD columnist and music editor for the Tribune's On the Town section. His son Christopher has been diagnosed with sensory integration disorder and mild non-verbal speech processing difficulties. Christopher has been working with the Belle Center since July 2005. The above essay is from the soon-to-be-published book "Terrible Twos, Tentative Dad: How the Father Became Child to the Man."

SPRING SCHOLARSHIP DRIVE!

Please watch your mail for information about our Spring Scholarship Drive! Every year, the Belle Center provides thousands of dollars in services to children and families who would not otherwise be able to access educational and therapeutic supports. We rely on the generosity of private donors to offset the cost of these services. Please consider making a donation!

Parent Training at the Belle Center

This winter, a group of parents come together on Tuesday nights to learn more about how to promote communication development in children, share ideas, and to plan specific ways to incorporate new strategies into everyday life with their children. They are participants in the Belle-sponsored *It Takes Two to Talk-The Hanen Program® for Parents.*

The *It Takes Two to Talk* program is designed for parents or caregivers of children with language delays between the ages of two and six. These are children who are communicating non-verbally to those who use two to three words together in sentences. Each session consists of the presentation of information, video examples, discussion, and activities all focused on specific strategies that are proven to facilitate communication development.

One strategy that serves as the foundation of the program is "Let Your Child Lead". Parents learn about how their child expresses feelings, needs, and interests and are taught to "OWL" - *Observe* what the child is doing, *Wait* for the child to communicate, and *Listen* to what the child is telling them. By the time the program is over, each parent will have a new set of skills that can be used every day with their child to promote continued improvements in communication.



Video feedback and consultation visits are scheduled every two or three weeks throughout the program. These home visits give parents a chance to practice using new strategies in home environments with their children. The interaction is videotaped so the Hanen-certified Speech-Language Pathologist can immediately review the tape with parents and discuss highlights of the interaction, observe the child's communication, and come up with a plan of what else to try.

The Belle Center is excited to offer this unique opportunity. Please contact Tricia Sabathne at **tricia@bellecenter-chicago.org** or 773-878-7868 for more information.

Upcoming It Takes Two to Talk Groups**:**
Fall 2006: Orientation August 8; Sessions September 12-November 21
Winter/Spring 2007: Orientation January 9; Sessions February 6- April 17

Belle Center of Chicago
All Children Can Learn and Play Together

1754 West Wilson
Chicago, IL 60640