

CALENDARtalk

Wednesday, June 10th—Mental Health Association in NC “Advocacy and Education Day,” 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., Legislative Building in Court 1300, Raleigh. Opportunity to meet with your General Assembly Legislators to discuss the need for funding mental health services. Call your legislators ASAP to schedule an appointment with them for June 10th. Find your legislators and contact info at <http://capwiz.com/cdpmi/home/>.

Friday, June 19th—“Second Annual FAN SwimFest & Potluck!” 6:00 to 8:00 p.m., Homestead Aquatics Center in Homestead Park off of Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. and Homestead Road. FAN furnishes drinks and pizza; family participants bring the desserts. This event includes two hours of open swim time in Chapel Hill’s newest community swim

facility. Participation is limited to the first 30 registrants. Deadline to register is June 16th, first come, first served. Advance registration is mandatory. Contact julie@mhaorangeco.org, or call 919-942-8083, ext. 2.

NOTE OF THANKS...to everyone who responded to the recent “Call for Action” alerts from Mental Health Association of North Carolina and other vital non-profit human services groups. Your advocacy on the part of saving human services in our communities across the state is most appreciated. We will soon know whether or not our legislators have listened to our pleas to them by not cutting budgets to vital services that serve our state’s most fragile population.

Schools out for Summer

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with a combination of fun and brain stimulating activities that include swimming, reading, outdoor games like treasure hunts with clues or riddles to decipher, board and word games, arts, crafts, cooking and responsibility building. Also consider organizing neighborhood friends and work on a play to present to the entire neighborhood! Even better - have the kids write their own play! It helps to develop memory and creative thinking skills.

•**Volunteer time:** If your child is old enough - especially teenagers, help them find volunteer opportunities to keep them busy over the summer. The animal shelter,

homes for senior citizens, city parks and recreation departments, pre-schools, libraries, art centers, museums, etc., typically accept volunteer help. If they aren't old enough to volunteer in the community, check with neighbors to see if they can help out in other ways, such as watering and weeding in a garden, walking or washing pets, sweeping porches, etc., on a regular schedule. Besides teaching them how to be good citizens, volunteer time teaches them organizational skills.

•**Educational Support:** Tutoring during the summer will also help your child retain what s/he learned during the school year. If finances are an issue for your family you should ask if flex funds are avail-

Green Fundraiser!

Club Nova Community Thrift Shop is offering Green Japanese Maple Trees for sale starting at \$15.




Enhance your garden while supporting the psychosocial rehabilitation program that serves over 100 members in Orange County. All proceeds benefit Club Nova Community, Inc.

The Thrift Shop is at 103 W. Main Street, Carrboro, behind Wendy’s. Call 919-967-6985 for more info.

able from your child's disability specific non-profit group, or create your own tutoring group with one or two other kids and pool parent resources to rotate tutoring time. Consistency and structure are important.

There are many options for families to consider over the summer break. Regardless of what you choose, if you're outdoors, remember to keep hydrated and use sunscreen and a hat, and above all, be safe. Enjoy your summer!

 Family Advocacy Network
A program of the
MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION IN ORANGE COUNTY
P.O. Box 16246 • Chapel Hill, NC 27516

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FANtalk

A publication of the Mental Health Association in Orange County

June 2009

FAN Family Advocacy Network

A program of the Mental Health Association in Orange County

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Together we can
make a difference

School's out for summer

School is now out for summer in Orange County and Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools, which means vacations and summer camps are just around the corner. Summer is usually the time when we unwind from the daily grind of school struggles with our kids, but it's also a time when we parents of special needs children worry that there is too much down time and our kids will not retain all that they learned during the school year.

So, how can we achieve both fun and academic success for our children over the summer months? Sadly, beyond year-round school, there's not a 100% guaranteed method that improves retention for every child because learning is such an individual process. However, below are some tips to help make summer for your special needs child both fun and provide a few educational reinforcements.

•**Summer school:** While kids are often resistant about this option remind them that it's only for half a day and doesn't last all summer. That leaves plenty of time for the fun stuff.

•**Travel Games:** While driving to your vacation destination, or even while there, invent guessing games or brain-teasers to stimu-



late thinking. Depending on your child's grade level, the questions can be more complex or more simple. Carry puzzles and word games to entertain kids while traveling.

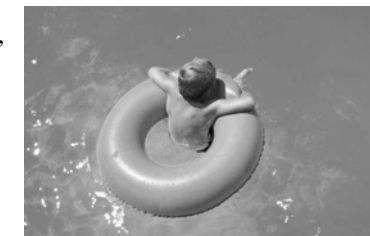
•**Keep days structured:** Too much unstructured, unsupervised time contributes to a number of problems. Summer camps are always a great resource if affordable. Many offer scholarships to help families. If camp isn't an option, design your child's daily activities

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Second Annual FAN SwimFest & Potluck!

Join us for our second annual FAN SwimFest & Potluck on Friday, June 19th, 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. at the new Homestead Aquatics Center in Homestead Park, 300 Northern Park Dr., Chapel Hill. (The park is located near the intersection of Homestead Rd. and Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.) FAN will provide pizza and drinks. Attendees need to bring their favorite dessert! Everybody should bring a bathing suit and towels to enjoy some pool time.

We'll use the meeting room off the main lobby for food setup, dining and a few entertainment options for adults who don't want to swim. We will also have a



FAN
SwimFest & Potluck
Friday • June 19th
6:00 to 8:00 p.m.
Homestead Aquatics Center
300 Northern Park Dr.
Chapel Hill
RSVP by Wednesday,
June 17th

couple of **DOOR PRIZES** to give away! There are locker rooms available for swimmers to change from street clothes to swim wear and back again.

Advance registration is mandatory. Deadline to register is Wednesday, June 17th. Space is limited to the first 30 people who register. When registering, please leave the total number of people attending in your family and the age of each child.

Contact Julie Bailey at 919-942-8083, ext. 2, or email her at julie@mhaorangeco.org to register by June 17th.

PARENTtalk

A Journey of Advocacy

By Donna Carrington

Dealing with mental illness is an integral part of my family's daily life. I am diagnosed with bipolar disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, post traumatic stress disorder and borderline personality disorder. I have four children, three of whom also have mental health issues and one who is legally blind due to congenital glaucoma.



Donna receiving an award at the 2008 FAN family swim party acknowledging her achievements in advocacy for her family.

Journey to FAN

I began to be involved with the Family Advocacy Network (FAN) in June 2006 as a resource for myself, having been newly diagnosed and released from a treatment facility with no outside support. I originally wanted help with coordinating services for myself, like finding a therapist and a psychiatrist, as well as applying for Medicaid. However, my life fell apart very quickly and my family advocate, Linda Boldin, ended up helping me do so much more.

By August 2006, my husband of 13 years left because he couldn't deal with my illnesses. I also had to make the most difficult decision of my life at the time and put my oldest child in therapeutic foster care. My advocate helped me to navigate all of the service details while I was trying to get control of my own issues. Getting control of my illness was especially hard because I lost insurance coverage when my husband left and it was very difficult to get Medicaid as an adult. I also tried filing for dis-

ability benefits with Social Security but was twice denied because I was deemed to be "too high functioning."

As I have navigated the system for myself, I also had to navigate it for each one of my children. It was an overwhelming experience with my first child, but became easier with each additional child.

Navigating the schools system

All of my children are now in the Orange County School system, except my youngest son, who has been attending the Wright School in Durham this year. The public school system was not equipped to support a student with his vast needs. Their reaction was more along the lines of labeling him as a "bad kid" and penalize him for behaviors he could not control rather than work from a therapeutic approach. So, I chose to send him to the Wright School where they could help him with behavior modification and academic supports. I can't say enough good things about the work Wright School does to help kids like my own.

Teachers need to understand that most parents aren't delusional about their child's behaviors. We are looking to them as the professional to help us figure out how to help our children. Teachers need to communicate better with parents and not wait until a child is failing to inform the parent when it's too late to intervene. Kids certainly aren't going to tell the parents when things are going poorly. Good communication between the teacher and the parent is vital—and it shouldn't have to be left up to the parent to initiate contact.

Utilizing community support

I have two community support agencies working with my family. One agency, I didn't choose and have not been thrilled with any of their community support workers. The other agency I chose myself and find the work they do with two of my children has been very helpful. Their staff is an integral part of our lives. They understand the complexities of our family's issues and they are sensitive to everyone's needs. They follow my lead in all decisions, realizing that I know my children best.

Unfortunately, one of our greatest obstacles in receiving services has been in regards to the continuing setbacks our family experiences. I was recently diagnosed with Fibromyalgia, and on top of that our

house was destroyed in a fire and we lost everything. We have had to start over from scratch with nothing and the trauma has affected each of us with emotional and financial setbacks. If not for having a great therapist and community support team we could not have survived this journey.

Advice to others

The best advice I can offer to another parent living in a similar situation is to remember that you are the parent and you know your child better than anyone else. When choosing a treatment provider or setting-up a Child and Family Team, remember that you are in charge. You need team members who support your decisions, and whose advice you can respect. If you feel that anyone on your team isn't supportive, don't be afraid to tell them—or to choose another provider. With all you have to do to insure the livelihood and safety for yourself and your family, having to deal with someone who constantly disagrees with you makes things more stressful. But you have the power to change that.

"...we need to treat the people with the illness, not the illness for the people."

The primary message

If I had one message for Governor Bev Purdue and President Obama about our mental health system, I would say, "Behind every diagnosis is a person. That person might not fit the ideal definition of a disorder, therefore, we have to figure out how to treat each case individually. To see the way I advocate and function for my family you would never know I have chronic physical and mental illnesses that sometimes are debilitating and make me not want to leave my home. Mental illness comes in every shape, size, color of the rainbow, and we need to treat the people with the illness, not the illness for the people."

I never could have learned how to advocate for myself or my family without my FAN advocate being there to help me navigate the system, or sometimes just call to check-in and make sure I was okay. We all have a journey in life. I'm glad I don't have to make mine alone.

New TV series focuses on mental illness

By Julie Jarrell Bailey, Family Advocate

Imagine my surprise one recent Tuesday evening when I turned on the television and began surfing channels only to find a new television show whose title was, "Mental." Naturally, it drew my attention, much like the FOX series that appeared briefly some six or seven years ago based on adoptees searching for biological family members and was titled something like, "Who's Your Daddy?" Yeah. Not very PC, was it? It drew the outrage of the adoption triad community so severely that it was quickly shelved, I do believe.

So, seeing a title like "Mental," threw me back in time nearly a decade, and before I even read the description I was wondering if this was another FOX blunder that would make me turn into an activist again. The word "mental" can conjure up some negative connotation. I recall it being used by bullies I observed in my younger years who used it to insult developmentally delayed classmates and anyone else whose thought process was different from their own. It seemed to take on popularity after other derogatory words became targets for a good lick of soap. (By the way, whatever happened to washing out mouths with soap as a corrective consequence when kids used derogatory or curse words? It worked very well for my entire generation and most of our kids, but for some reason has become forbidden to use in this generation. I wonder if there's any correlation between its lack of use and the growing number of youth today who continually express themselves with foul, vulgar language? Or, maybe it just lost popularity because this generation became the liquid soap generation.)



Chris Vance as Dr. Jack Gallagher talks with hospital administrator Nora Skoff (Annabella Sciorra) in a scene from the new FOX network series, "Mental." (photo from FOX website)

Getting back on the topic, though, when I finally read the description of "Mental" on the TV guide, I was compelled to record the series. The pilot show was actually very interesting. It follows the story of Dr. Jack Gallagher, played by Chris Vance of "Prison Break" fame. The FOX website press release tells us that "Dr. Gallagher is a dynamic young psychiatrist who becomes Director of Mental Health Services at a Los Angeles hospital. There he must reconcile his effective, yet highly unorthodox treatment methods with his conservative boss. As Gallagher takes on new cases, he is confronted with patients battling unknown, misunderstood and often misdiagnosed conditions. Gallagher delves inside their minds to gain a true understanding of who his patients are, allowing him to uncover what might be the key to their long-term recovery."

The pilot's opening scene showed a busy intake room where a patient being escorted by police officers breaks away while having hallucinations about aliens. The staff had been commiserating and wondering what their new director might be like when the patient strips down during his escape. A bystander, observing what's going on, tries talking calmly to the patient and he, too, disrobes in an effort to calm the escaping patient. Of course, going natural actually worked and the patient was

secured safely. Just as the police move in on the naked bystander the hospital administrator introduces him to everyone as the new Director of Mental Health Services. Quite an opening, wasn't it? There are other sub-plots involved that I predict will develop further in future episodes.

I really liked the first episode and hope the remaining shows are able to hold my interest. But I must confess that "Mental" is more than vaguely familiar to another popular FOX network show, "House." In fact, if I had to briefly describe the series I would say it is the mental health version of "House." Only Dr. Gallagher doesn't limp or walk with a cane or insult colleagues and patients, and he appears to be drug-free, all of which are signatures of the Dr. House character played by Hugh Laurie. If you like "House," I think you will also enjoy "Mental." Even if you don't like "House," but are interested in psychiatry, you might want to give "Mental" a view. It's on FOX network Tuesdays at 9:00 p.m. for at least the summer. You can also view missed episodes in their entirety at www.fox.com/mental. Take a look and let me know what you think.



Webinar Series on Learning Disabilities

The Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates will host an inaugural webinar series on "Understanding Reading: Development, Assessment, and Instruction," in four parts beginning Thursday, June 25th. In this four part series, Dr. Elaine Holden and Dr. Melissa Farrall will introduce participants to the stages of reading development, issues related to reading assessment and the principles of direct, systematic multisensory instruction. They will review how reading skills develop in typical learners with the struggle experienced by those with educational disabilities and dyslexia; and will discuss the role of Response to Intervention (RTI) in designing, implementing, and evaluating interventions.

Registration fee for parents is just \$35 and is offered specifically for individuals who have a family member with a disability

and do not receive any income for advocacy efforts on behalf of students with disabilities. When registering, enter coupon code **r8x8td42lh** to obtain the discounted price. Other registration fees for non-members, as well as members, varies between \$50 and \$100. To register online go to:

<https://copaa.webex.com/mw0306l/mywebex/default.do?siteurl=copaa>

The webinar schedule is as follows:

Part One: Learning to Read—

Thursday, June 25th, 2:00 to 3:30 p.m.

Part Two: Reading to Learn—

Thursday, July 9th, 2:00 to 3:30 p.m.

Part Three: Assessment—Tuesday, July 14th, 2:00 to 3:30 p.m.

Part Four: Direct, Systematic Multisensory Instruction—Tuesday, July 21st, 2:00 to 3:00 p.m.