

Circle of Friends, a project of Community Partners
11508 West Pico Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90064 www.circleofriends.org 310.312.6600

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1** Planting a Partnership in Portland
- 1** "A Toast ~ To Good Friends"
- 1** A Very Special Homecoming Prince and Princess
- 2** A Mother's Perspective: How COF Changes Robin's Life
- 3** Expanding the Circle to UCLA
- 3** What's New with COF?
- 4** Don't Laugh at Me
- 4** Eva Makes a Difference

Planting a Partnership in Portland

By Dani Meyer
*Student Director, COF
Lewis & Clark University*

My participation in Santa Monica High School's Circle of Friends (COF) was such a life-changing, eye-opening experience; I wanted other students with and without special needs to have the opportunity to be involved in such a meaningful program. During my first semester at Lewis & Clark University, I found a faculty member to support my ideas for an independent study project, with the hope of implementing a COF chapter at a nearby high school.

After two years of weekly visits, the Wilson High School chapter of COF, with the support from the Speech Language

Partnership continued on page 3

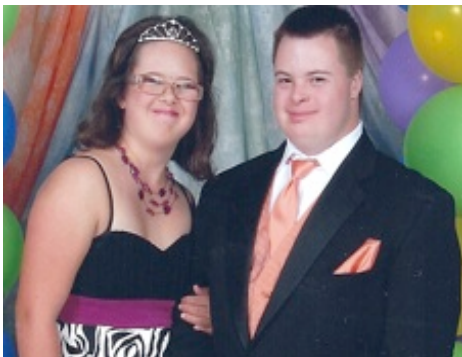
"A Toast ~ To Good Friends"

COF invites you to *A Toast ~ To Good Friends*, our annual wine tasting and silent auction fundraising event. It will be held on Sunday, May 2 at 5:30pm at The Mark in Los Angeles. Sample delicious wines from around the world while bidding on silent auction items you can't go home without. Please join us for this fun evening. With your generous support, you will be helping to fund COF programs: the expansion of COF chapters on high school campuses and many activities throughout the year.

For more information regarding our event, or to learn about our exciting sponsorship opportunities, please contact Tamra Mariott, COF Program Manager at 310.312.6600.

A Very Special Homecoming Prince and Princess

By Marianne Miller
*Speech/Language Pathologist, CCC-SLP
Clairemont High School, San Diego USD*



COF students Racquel and Clark of Clairemont High School.

There's lots of excitement for the COF members at Clairemont High School. Recently, two of our students were nominated to represent their Junior class in the 2009 homecoming court. Racquel Crosby and Clark Gurley went on to win the titles of homecoming princess and homecoming prince, respectively. Racquel and Clark are the first students with Down syndrome to be voted into these positions. They were recognized during halftime at the homecoming football game and at the homecoming dance later that evening.

Clairemont High School's COF has also been honored in an article in the *San Diego Union Tribune*. The article came out on Thanksgiving Day, featuring our wonderful Thanksgiving Feast and even mentioning Racquel and Clark's homecoming success. The speech pathologist, Marianne Miller, and her assistant, Susan Lemmons, continue to strive for participant involvement in school as well as in extracurricular activities to promote integration with the rest of society.

A Mother's Perspective: How Circle of Friends Changes Robin's Life

By Penny Rosman
Mother of Robin Rosman
Circle of Friends Volunteer

We often hear the term "life-changing" to describe COF. Sometimes I think that might sound like a cliché and the words lose their impact. However, I cannot think of a more powerful way to describe COF because I believe my daughter Robin's life has been, and forever will be, very different than it would have been had she not been involved. All her greatest joys in life have come from COF, by way of the meaningful friendships and heartwarming pride in herself this program has afforded her. No matter how many opportunities her family gives her to succeed, or how much we love, guide, and praise her, we cannot secure this quality of self-esteem at home. Of course Robin derives self-esteem from other sources, but it is her relationships within COF that make her feel really important, and that is a beautiful thing.

Robin, who has autism, became involved with the COF Program in 2000 when she started the tenth grade. She is now 23, so we are in our ninth year of being part of COF. Our son, Doug, who is now in college, joined COF when he entered high school. As Robin's brother, he already knew a lot about acceptance of differences, but participating in the program raised his awareness a great deal more. Over the years I have come to realize that being part of COF changes the lives of the general education student and benefits them as much as it does the lives of the special education students like Robin.

On a practical note, the social and communication skills Robin has learned from her involvement with COF are phenomenal. I believe these skills cannot be taught as effectively in traditional speech therapy, the



The Rosman Family: Doug, Penny, David and Robin.

classroom, or even at home from the most devoted and committed of parents. Whether one-on-one with a friend or in group settings, the learning happens. Robin learns so much better from being in these natural situations, and what she learns stays with her because she is motivated to interact with her friends and to "fit in" with them. In addition, her phone skills are excellent, owing to the hundreds of calls she has received from her COF peers. I never dreamed they would be as good as they are, but practice makes perfect!

COF has enhanced Robin's life in so many ways. It opened up a whole new world to her. While she was happy before COF, she wanted to have friends her own age to go places and do things with, to talk to on the phone, or to just hang out with like every other person. COF gave her all that and more. The vital part COF plays in Robin's life and, by extension, the life of our family, is beyond measure. Thank you Barbara and all the extraordinary young people who have given so much of themselves for the benefit of others.

Barb's Helpful Hint: Disability Awareness Presentations

Please check out the site below. Have teachers show the 3-minute video clip by Peter, Paul, and Mary before Disability Awareness student presentations. It sets the tone and is a great addition to the presentation. Take out the Kleenex – prepare for tears! Thanks to Chavez High for this great idea. (See *Don't Laugh at Me* article on Page 4.)

http://s123.photobucket.com/albums/o308/jbriicpa/page%202/?action=view¤t=dont_laugh_at_me.flv

*"A friend is someone who knows all about you
but loves you anyway."*

Expanding the Circle to UCLA

By Matt Rosenstein
Student Director, COF
UCLA

COF at UCLA is off to a great start! So far we've recruited over thirty UCLA student participants. Each week the UCLAer's (as we call them) spend time eating lunch, playing basketball, and going to the Diddy Riese ice cream shop in Westwood with their new friends from Pathway. Pathway is a two-year program for students with special needs, who live in Westwood and take classes at UCLA Extension. Circle of Friends has partnered with the Pathway program to help with inclusion on the UCLA campus.

As a four-year COF participant at Santa Monica High School, it is really a blessing to be able to continue the program in college. It's funny; the initial goal of the program was for UCLA student participants to form genuine friendships and "coach" Pathway student

Partnership from Page 1

Pathologist serving as the program faculty advisor, was solidly established. While developing COF at Wilson, many of my peers at Lewis & Clark became increasingly interested and asked if there was any way they could be involved. In the fall of 2007, with Barb's support, I implemented the LC chapter of COF.

Both chapters are solidly established with student officer boards, faculty advisors, and enthusiastic participants with and without special needs. The LC student board puts on 2-3 group activities per semester at which LC and Wilson students have the opportunity to socialize and have fun together.

There is great passion from all participants in both chapters. I have high hopes that they will continue running effectively in future years.

Please help us bring the COF experience to more teenagers by supporting our founding organization. Thus far, we have 27 chapters in CA. With your contribution, we will double our numbers in the next three years. Please make your check out to "Circle of Friends" and send to the address below. Thank you for your support!

Circle of Friends

11508 West Pico Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90064

Phone: 310.312.6600 Fax: 310.312.6609

Executive Director: Barbara@circleofriends.org

participants on life skills. Ironically, my friends from Pathway have taught me more than I could ever teach them. I've learned so much over the first quarter, from how to do Jujitsu, to where the best dining halls are.

I'm really looking forward to our two upcoming events. On March 4th, the Center for Jewish Studies at UCLA is hosting the first luncheon with UCLA professors and COF participants. This event is bringing together professors from multiple academic departments. COF Pathway participants will have the opportunity to eat lunch and converse with university professors and with UCLA student participants who will facilitate those interactions. The following night, March 5th, COF and Pathway volunteers are putting on an ice cream social/karaoke night for all COF participants at UCLA.

I feel fortunate to be part of COF at UCLA and am looking forward to another three-and-a-half incredible years!

What's New with Circle of Friends?

By Barbara Palilis, MA
Executive Director, COF
Speech Language Pathologist, CCC-SLP



COF has changed its consultation model. We believe that this will be more affordable to schools and build better community and support for advisors and sites. While we are continuing our two years of consultation, it will be in a Workshop Series: Year One – 4 workshops, Year Two – 3 workshops.

Each three-hour workshop will be given to up to five schools in one central location. Every school has the option to bring a "team" to each meeting. Teams could consist of a speech pathologist, a special education teacher, and an administrator, for example. Thanks to each of you, I've learned that the most successful chapters are those that have a team, each bringing a different area of expertise to the program.

Workshops will help customize the program to fit the needs of each individual school. Participants will learn to recruit and train general education students as well as ways to set up and run COF. They will be taught how to recruit a student officer board, establish off-campus activities, and organize fundraisers. They will also develop the skills to train students for the Disability Awareness presentations. We're excited to implement this new consultation model -- I'll be sure to keep you posted of its success over time.

Eva Makes a Difference

By Eva Alvarado
 Student Participant, COF
 Standley Middle School, San Diego

Rosa Parks once said, "Each person must live their life as a model for others." I knew that for my eighth grade school year I wanted to be different. Instead of being someone who wanted the world to see her as someone who didn't care as long as she fitted in, I decided to be me and for once make a difference.

Early in the school year, the Circle of Friends (COF) advisor came into my English class and talked to us about the COF program. "Yes!" I thought, finally I have the chance to make a difference and help out my peers! So I decided to sign up. Since I already had experience working with kids with special needs, I was assigned to go into a classroom and help out every Tuesday at lunchtime.

The first Tuesday I went into Ms. Owens' classroom I felt nervous, but as time passed by it felt just like home. My favorite two activities to play with my friends were Trouble and "counting tickets." Every week I couldn't wait for Tuesday to arrive so I could hang out with my friends that I felt in my heart were like brothers and sisters.

My younger brother Joshua had Down syndrome. Participating in the COF program allowed me to be his mentor. One of the many things I was able to teach my brother while in the COF program was the "nice hands Joshua" trick: in which he would put his hands together and stop pulling or pinching me and smile. Unfortunately, all good things have to come to an end. On October 21st, Joshua had a Crub attack followed by a fatal cardiac arrest. My brother's doctors couldn't do any more and diagnosed Joshua brain dead and connected him to life support. On the seventh day of his fight, my seven-year-old brother finally got to rest in peace and take care of my family through the sky.

My brother's death hit me pretty hard but I had to go back to school, back to COF. Just the thought of going back into Ms. Owens' room and seeing kids with Down syndrome terrified me. I still wanted to make a difference but was scared of letting go; I just didn't know what to do. I found a dusty book under my bed titled: *Be the Change*. I scanned it through and the first thing that caught my eye said: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world, indeed it's the only thing that ever has" (Margaret Mead). I soon realized that what matters most is what one gives up to make a difference among others! COF makes a difference because it's not about the people who help but about the people whom one has helped. I mostly thank the COF program for helping me find *myself*.

Don't Laugh at Me

By Anna Marsden
 Health Small Learning Communities Lead
 Chavez High School, Stockton USD

I am a general education teacher and was asked to have my students do the Disability Awareness presentations. When I invited them to teach their peers about tolerance and friendship, I got about half the class to buy into the idea. After some strong encouragement from me, a few more grudgingly agreed. Each group modified it a bit to blend to the talents they possessed. It did not take too long for them to learn their parts. Finally the day arrived to present their lessons to the freshmen students.

Several students wanted to back out of the presentation, claiming, "You don't know the freshmen, Miss Marsden. They won't care, they will make fun of us!" I was surprised at them because they were upperclassmen afraid to talk to freshmen. I prodded them along and reluctantly most agreed to complete the assignment. Then, I showed them the video by Peter, Paul and Mary called "Don't Laugh at Me."

After that there was no more complaining. The students happily paired up with their disabled partners and took the presentation to the freshmen. I emailed the "Don't Laugh at Me" video clip to all the freshmen teachers. Most of them showed the video in class before the students presented.

My students came back ecstatic! They said they were so glad they had the opportunity to do this assignment. Further, they said many of the freshmen were touched to the point of tears. My students agreed that it was the best project they had done all year. I am so grateful that we could spread the message of acceptance and inclusion throughout our school.



Kevin, Evan, Emeka, Jennifer and Oliver participate in COF Fall Bowl-a-thon.