

Cy-Fair Angels at Work



Gale Parker's daughter
Emily attends Reach Unlimited

Local Charities Create Everyday Miracles

REACH UNLIMITED, INC.

reachunlimited.org

Established: 1983

Mission: Provide quality support to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities

Gale and George Parker, Emily's parents, felt blessed to watch their daughter enjoy her childhood. But as high school graduation approached, anxiety crept in. "It's an exciting time for most parents as their children make college and career plans," says Gale, thirty-year Cypress resident and principal at Lamkin Elementary School. "But when kids graduate from high school with a disability, it's a scary time for their parents." So when the Parkers learned that Reach Unlimited planned to build a learning activity center that would offer day-services to people with disabilities, Gale joined the Board of Directors and began to help raise money to build the center.

When *Emily Parker* was born with Down syndrome and a congenital heart defect, doctors didn't expect she would live very long.

Medications and advancing technology, however, were in Emily's favor. So was her location in Cy-Fair, where communities and businesses come together to *Make Miracles Happen.*

The Learning Activity Center, which opened in 2005, serves close to 250 clients and has a growing waiting list. The center offers programs to suit all different interests and ability levels—from the arts to vocational and in-house job training. "Emily loves to go there," Gale says. "It's a load off of my mind that she has a place to go that she is happy with, I'm happy with, she's learning, she's safe." Reach Unlimited offers its clients residential programs, community service opportunities, and supported employment. "Our clients love that paycheck," says Executive Director Kathi Schmidt. "We have one young lady whose mom took her to the bank to cash her first paycheck, and when she realized that she had to give up the paycheck to get the cash, she at first refused to cash it. That's how important that paycheck is to them."

Schmidt, who answered a classified ad twenty-five years ago and came to work for the organization before they had any clients, says that she fell in love with the clients' innocence, their enthusiasm for life, and their personal drive. "But to continue to provide high-quality services, we need the ongoing support of the community," Schmidt says. "Every year, there is a four thousand dollar gap per client between the funding we receive through Medicaid and the cost of providing services. It equates to a million dollars each year that we must raise."