

Client Rusty and instructor Terri Jones show off their handiwork



Director Kathi Schmidt and Andy Colson share some fun at the Reach for the Stars Gala



Reaching for Their Dreams

Cy-Fair's Reach Unlimited Offers Support and Friendship

A well-kept secret in the Cy-Fair area for more than 20 years is a place that believes “everyone deserves an enriched life”—even those with developmental disabilities who society often overlooks or disregards. That place is Reach Unlimited.

“There are always services while your child is in school,” says Rosalind Mandler, mother of 29-year-old Jessica, a Reach client. “But when they graduate, it’s ‘what now?’” For Cy-Fair residents like Jessica, Reach is what’s now.

Giving Purpose to Those Who Need Hope

Reach provides the most comprehensive programs and services for persons with developmental disabilities than any other agency in Northwest Houston. They offer continuing education, group living, independent living, recreation, vocational training, supported employment, community service, and creative development. Reach clients, who range in ages from 16 to 76, also give back to the community, working for agencies such as Habitat for Humanity and Meals on Wheels.

Kathi Schmidt, Executive Director, has been at Reach for 23 years and believes her clients deserve the best that life has to offer. “They want the same things that we all want. We want them to have a future and make every day productive.” Schmidt adds with passion, “Everyone can learn. When our clients come to us, they have been told so often that they cannot do anything, they then believe it themselves. They don’t know how much they CAN do.”

That is the mission of Reach: “to encourage personal development and active participation as responsible citizens within the

community.” Sue Hulme, whose son Jonathan (25) goes to Reach five days a week, learned of the program just months before the Learning Activity Center opened in January 2005. “In most of the programs I visited before finding Reach, their clients were just sitting and staring into space. I found out about Reach through a friend and was blown away. Jonathan never liked school. Now he wakes up and says ‘Mommy is taking me to Reach.’” Hulme adds, “They treat the clients with respect. The spirit at Reach is that they want to provide something of quality to these clients that don’t have anywhere to go.”

Respecting Enough to Challenge Their Clients

Finding a place for a family member with special needs where they are treated with respect, love, and an expectation of success can be quite difficult. “I looked at everything all over Houston,” says Rosalind Mandler of her search to help daughter Jessica. “There were a few years that Jessica and I just sat and looked at each other and I thought, ‘Is this my life now?’” After two years of searching, Mandler discovered Reach. “When Jessica was growing up, I thought--we’ll find something when she’s out of school--but it was very hard until I found Reach. Jessica loves Reach.”

Jessica has a vision impairment and some difficulty walking causing her to fall. “When I fall,” says Jessica “the nurse takes care of me.” Giggling she adds, “The nurse says I have to start wearing bubble wrap panties.” Jessica smiles when talking about doing contract work and earning a paycheck, an obvious huge source of

Reach Enterprise Program Needs Your Help

The Enterprise program started when a group of clients wanted sodas and the Reach staff encouraged them to make clay Valentine's Day pins to sell and raise money for a soda machine. Today, clients continue to make and sell the pins, but also make fused glass jewelry, crosses, ornaments, and greeting cards.

Clients also assist area businesses by shredding paperwork, stuffing envelopes or assembling kits and mailings. Kathi Schmidt, Executive Director, is in the planning stages for a separate Enterprise building, so that they can increase contract work and make more products. The new building, which will include a storefront, would offer Reach clients valuable training opportunities, as well as increase work production as much as 300%.

"The Enterprise building will allow us to offer services to at least 45 more clients," says Schmidt. Because of limited space, Reach currently only operates one small kiln, which fires only seven crosses a night. But, they have six large kilns that sit unused due to a lack of space.

Schmidt says the building will include areas for fused glass, large contracts, and a loading dock. "I would like to have the Enter-



The Reach Unlimited Learning Activity Center

prise building completed by late next year, but first we have to raise the funds," says Schmidt, who estimates a build out cost of \$750,000.

To see the gift items that Reach clients create, check out the Reach Holiday Market on December 5 from 2 pm to 6 pm and on December 6 from 8 am to 2 pm at the Learning Activity Center.

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“When Jessica was growing up, I thought—we’ll find something when she’s out of school—but it was very hard until I found Reach. Jessica loves Reach.”

—ROSALIND MANDLER, MOTHER OF REACH CLIENT JESSICA



Jessica shares a smile with her Mom Rosalind Mandler at Reach

pride. The contract work is through the Reach Enterprise program (see sidebar), where every client—regardless of their limitations—works on projects such as stuffing envelopes and making products to sell. “I do consignment work,” beams Jessica.

With more than 220 clients, Reach serves people of varying abilities. Shawn (34) has been at Reach for a year and a half. Unlike most Reach clients, Shawn was not born with a disability. In 1989, Shawn suffered a severe head injury during a team roping contest, and now suffers seizures, limited mobility, and short term memory problems. “They are absolutely wonderful at Reach,” says Jim Eubank, Shawn’s father. Before finding Reach, Shawn was in a group home that the Eubanks realized was not meeting Shawn’s needs. Today, Shawn works in the Enterprise program stamping napkins, stuffing envelopes, and making fused glass. “Reach seems to be

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The Enterprise Program motivates and inspires clients like Alex



“Reach is an amazing place with amazing people that are as dedicated as can be.”

—JIM EUBANK, FATHER OF REACH CLIENT SHAWN

able to work with him better than anywhere else we have gone to,” says Eubank. “Reach is an amazing place with amazing people that are as dedicated as can be. This has been the best experience we have had with Shawn since the injury.”

Reaching Out with Open Arms

Reach offers tours of the Learning Activity Center on Wednesdays at noon, but call ahead (see sidebar) to reserve a place and ensure that they are conducting a tour that week. “Watch out for those tours,” says Kelly Ann Norton, an enthusiastic Reach volunteer. “The clients are so friendly they hug you, and before you know it you came for a tour and leave as a volunteer.”

Reach Clients Tamara, George, Brendan, and Cynthia love participating in Reach programs



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Just one tour with Executive Director Kathi Schmidt immediately reveals why the hugs are so plentiful at Reach. Everywhere she walks, Schmidt calls each Reach client by name and hugs them all. Clients greet her by first name with all the familiarity of a good friend. Part of the tour was led by Susan W., a client at Reach. "I've known this lady for years," says Susan as she hugs Schmidt. "Reach has been my family for a long time."

With a family kind of love like that and a support network their clients need to succeed, it is no wonder this program has found a special place in the hearts of many Cy-Fair area residents. **CFM**

Laurie Roddy has been a writer for more than 25 years and currently has her own company. She lives in Northwest Houston and recently completed the book, "60 Hikes Within 60 Miles: Houston," to be published later this year.

Contact Reach Unlimited

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To volunteer, tour or donate
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For client contract work
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For Enterprise information
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