



Friends of Children with Special Needs

華人特殊兒童之友

# FCSN Dream Builders

June 2016



**Happy 20th** Anniversary

Founders' Memories & Milestones

Salute to Devoted Parents, Volunteers and Staff

Keep Up FCSN's Pioneering Spirit



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## **Newsletter Crew:**

**Editor-in-Chief:** Roger Leung 梁汝坤

**Editors:** Johnna M. Laird

Cherene Wong 何佳玲

Wei-Jen Hsia 夏维真

**Reporters:** Kenneth Song, Johnna M. Laird, Ingrid Cheng



## **PRESIDENT'S VOLUNTEER SERVICE AWARD**

FCSN has participated in the national President's Volunteer Service Award (PVSA) program since 2014 and are now glad to announce the 2015 recipients of the award based on their service hours committed to FCSN activities. The 2015 PVSA award recipients are:

Catherine Huang of Mission San Jose High School – Gold Award in Teens Group

Elianna Ku of Monta Vista High School – Bronze Award in Young Adults Group

Jessica Lam of Leland High School – Bronze Award in Young Adults Group

Jonathan Lam of Leland High School – Bronze Award in Young Adults Group

Anne Marie Tran of Ohlone College – Silver Award in Young Adults Group

The goal of the PVSA program is to encourage youth to contribute to social activities that will have an impact to bring positive changes to the community. Youth volunteers who have serviced FCSN for more than 100 hours will be recognized with a personalized certificate of achievement and a congratulatory letter from the United States president. We welcome youth to join us for volunteer work. For details, please visit FCSN website under volunteer program.

*Happy  
20<sup>th</sup>  
Anniversary*

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## Feature Story

# FCSN from Cradle to Adulthood

by **Johnna M. Laird**,

FCSN Dream Builders Reporter & Parent



*From left- Albert, Anna, Linmei, Shiow, Jim*

When a few pioneers gather to recount the history of Friends of Children With Special Needs, they focus on the fun they experienced.

Rather than dwell on hardships they faced to create an innovative and comprehensive program to serve people from birth through a lifetime, these pioneers laugh when they recall play groups bringing young children together to socialize.

They remember camaraderie developed through bun sales and concert fundraisers to build the Dream Center. They remember a mall shop created to give work experience to their teens. They remember picnics, New Year's Eve celebrations, and simplifying a steamed rice recipe to teach

their children step-by-step. They talk about the friendships and trust they built.

Before FCSN came into existence, Shiow-luan Chen, a passionate teacher who was working toward a master's degree in special education from San Jose State University, worked with individual children and their parents at their homes for five years. Shiow (pronounced Show) was a lifeline when parents felt isolated.

At that time, much less was known about autism and developmental disabilities. There were few places to turn and often the places that offered help required driving long distances.

Shiow was convinced that autistic

children had their own ways of interacting with the world and that: All people are equal in the sight of their creator. Her Sunday School class at a Chinese Catholic Church reflected her philosophy and welcomed children with disabilities. Brian, Lawrence and Chiling, children of Linmei Chiao, Anna Wang, and Su-Fen Wu respectively, were among Shiow's first students.

After working with many families, Shiow invited them to her house for dinner one evening in the summer of 1995. Children came with parents, who arrived not knowing the purpose of the meeting. During dinner, Shiow planted a seed, suggesting families work together to help themselves and their children. Parents sat speechless as she excused herself to maintain crowd control as their children ran about, ready to play after dinner.

Many weeks passed and not much happened. Eventually, Linmei, a former special education teacher, started a conversation with Shiow about how to create movement among the families. Linmei urged participation by non-special needs families for additional help. For several months, Linmei and Shiow exchanged ideas and planned a formal meeting of the parents. They created an agenda and planned out the details. Shiow invited the Special Needs families, and Linmei invited her



other friends Hseu-Yin and Peter Hsia, Amy and Jason Wang, and Joyce and Stanley Yeh. Altogether, there were about 20 families gathered at Linmei's home in April 1996. At the meeting, Shioh talked about her vision for the group, and Linmei presented a comprehensive plan. The parents were all very excited, and they all agreed to move forward. "We use the term '10 founding families' because roughly 10 families were the core group that contributed to form the organization and make things happen over the years," explains Jim Chiao.

The April 1996 meeting laid out the foundation for FCSN today with integrated family support as opposed to delivering services to special needs individuals without including the family. The parent cooperative model required families to invest time and money to insure a successful future for their children.

The April 1996 meeting also included a proposal for teenagers to earn community service credits in a meaningful, educational way working with special needs children. From the beginning, founders wanted to include families whose children did not have special needs.

A planning committee was formed to carry out the formation of the parent support group. The 10 founding families launched with integrated playgroups as the backbone of their children's activity. The next year, 1997, was formative. They expanded the first integrated playgroup to an all-inclusive, biweekly Family Gathering, which combined integrated classes, parent seminars, and social hours – there was something for everyone in the family. By year's end, about 50 families were attending the Family Gathering.

Moms focused on playgroups and support groups, getting parents to identify the needs of their children. The dads worked on many miscellaneous tasks. Friends, without special needs children, played the supportive role. They participated in meetings, helped in cooking, security, and accounting. "They were the glue that bonded all the families together. They were also growing their numbers," says Jim Chiao.

For the first year, the grassroots' parent cooperative held classes in each other's homes and either taught children themselves or recruited others. A social worker, Suti from Asia Pacific Family Resource Center in San Jose, offered help in late 1996; as a result, FCSN began meeting at the Asia Pacific Resource Center in San Jose in February 1997 for meetings and Family Gatherings. Once local programs began in 1999, FCSN members were back using their own homes or borrowed space for meetings.

Beginning in 1998, there were more than 100 member families, prompting the creation of Mother Gathering, where moms met. It was at one of these meetings that the mothers expressed the need for programs closer to home. Based on these needs, Anna created the first "Local Program" by geographic area in Milpitas in 1999 which was quickly followed by Almaden and Saratoga groups. Local groups met by age groups at local churches, YMCAs, recreation centers, and even a dental office. Dads were meeting, too, but talking about the experience of parenting a child with special needs was challenging. "They couldn't hold back the tears and they didn't want to cry in front of other guys. It was just too sensitive, too close to home, not something they could handle in front of an audience," recalls Anna Wang.

During the first two years, meetings were held often by the planning committee, along with debates and discussions that formed the foundation of FCSN. Early on they faced a decision of whether to go alone or fold into another organization, less broadly focused. Although they did not know exactly where they were headed, these families decided to continue on the path to develop an organization reflecting their values. These were immigrants who had come to the U.S. from Asia, bringing with them a culture of self-reliance.

They developed the mission statement that still drives the organization today: "to help individuals with special needs and their families to find love, hope, respect, and support through integrated community involvement."

They searched for a name to capture the essence of the program they were evolving, but none seemed suitable until Linmei and Jim Chiao were walking out of the Saratoga Library one day. Jim's eyes fixed on a plaque with the words "Friends of Saratoga Library." Friends of Children with Special Needs won unanimous support.

In early 1999, FCSN was ready to discuss a five-year and 10-year plan at the board meetings. At the January board meeting, Linmei proposed creating a special needs community as a long-term goal. Several board members thought the idea was too farfetched and impractical; others thought it was an impossible dream. Half-jokingly, the board adopted the name, "Dream Community" as a long-term goal. The Dream Community was intended to place special needs individuals at the center of the community. The Dream Project evolved from the Dream Community; the first phase of the Dream Project was building the Dream Center, followed by a

second phase to build programs once construction was complete.

At this point, Dr. Albert Wang became more active, stepping up and drawing on his fund-raising experience for American Cancer Society campaigns. Then one of Albert's golfing buddies, developer John Wong, offered to sell 1.5 acres on Peralta Boulevard. Disagreements about the wisdom of buying land ensued. Not everyone thought this a wise move. In two weeks' time, however, 26 families took out loans, borrowed from relatives and/or jockeyed their finances to amass \$860,000 to purchase the land.

"We didn't know how, but we believed we could build a center," recalls Albert.

There was a faith among the group that what they needed would materialize. A warehouse full of dim sum buns were offered to the FCSN when an owner decided to close his business. This was an opportunity to fundraise. The bun expiration date was only two months away. Within FCSN, pessimism could be heard. "These buns won't sell," given the timing after 911. Moms mobilized, and the buns sold for \$8 a box. Moms talked to friends and contacted local store owners. Their sales, they explained, would help realize their dreams for their children. Before the eight weeks ended, every bun had been sold and \$12,000 was generated by FCSN's first fundraiser.

The next year, 2002, FCSN held its first gala with assistance from Citizens for a Better Community, a Fremont-based organization. Limin Hu, relatively new at FCSN, volunteered to chair the event. His organizational skills were put to the test, but he did not disappoint. The first gala turned out to be a huge success. Bun-buyers were in

the audience, having established a bond with Friends of Children with Special Needs. The gala was established as an annual fundraiser. There were also three fundraising concerts, bringing cultural Taiwanese folk music to the Bay Area.

"I think we learned that when the time is right, things will happen," recalls Anna, whose family was among the 10. "Often, we tried to make things happen, and they just would not. When the stars align, things happen. That's how it was with the Dream Project. We had to take a leap of faith."

It took almost six years for the Dream Center to be built. There were meetings to rezone property and subdivide it. When families met with their prospective Peralta Boulevard neighbors, parents brought their children who served cookies and shook their future neighbors' hands.

"They didn't have the heart to say no to us," recalls Linmei.

"I just think of it as higher planning from above," says Albert Wang. "The Big Guy picked the time, and we ran with it."

"God sent us all these angels," says Anna.

John Wong was one of them, when he sold the land to Peralta Dream Limited Liability Corporation, parent investors. The land sale, Wong admits, was because of his relationship and respect for Anna and Albert.

"I had no idea Anna and Albert could do so much for our community and FCSN children," says Wong. "I am honored to be a small part of FCSN efforts. FCSN organizers are role models in our

community. . ."

Leadership, and a strong board made up of families, has contributed to FCSN's success. During the first two years, FCSN was guided by a planning committee led by Shiow, Peter Hsia and Linmei. In 1998, FCSN set up its first Board of Directors which in turn elected Linmei as its first chairperson/president. The next year in 1999, Tsai-Wei Wu served for a year. From 1999 to 2006, Albert Wang served three terms as president, followed by Anna and Limin Hu who assumed the presidential responsibilities. Jim Chiao became president in 2006 for one term before Tsai-Wei took the reins of president. With its building completed, FCSN launched phase two to build programs. With Sylvia Yeh, Linmei Chiao, Anna Wang, Josephine Chou as key management staff and Lillian Lin as volunteer, FCSN launched Supported Living Services, Adult Day Program, and a host of local programs in the East Bay. In 2007, Tsai-Wei began an unprecedented six terms as president. During his tenure he formalized FCSN's organizational structure and set a growth path for FCSN programs. By 2013, FCSN had reached maximum capacity at 200 adult students in FCSN's vendorized programs, served by 100 staff members.

Lives of special needs individuals changed because of FCSN, but the lives of their parents changed as well.

"This experience led me into a different world. I could have been talking with people about stocks and investing," says Linmei, "and name-brand purses. Instead, we are telling touching stories, helping each other. My son, Brian, took me into a totally different world and I am better for it."

## Management Message

# Creating a Brighter Future

## 攜手同心 共創美好未來

by **Yee-Yeen Wang,**

President of FCSN

FCSN has entered its 20th year. It is an incredible feat for a non-profit organization to grow from 10 families to today's more than 1000 family members and 100 staff.

### The Constants: FCSN's Mission and Visions

The force behind our growth arose from setting a clear mission and vision from the very beginning: we want to help children with special needs and their families, and to build a community for them. Because of this simple yet consistent message, it was easy for the members, staff, and friends to bond together and to receive support from the community. I believe FCSN will grow the next 10 or 20 years under the same philosophy.

In the past, we have often heard at FCSN that "we are not here to provide you with fish, but to teach you how to fish." Many of our programs are based on the needs observed by the parents, designed by the parents, and organized by the parents; such programs help our own kids and other individuals alike. We can think of FCSN as a platform, where parents can gather together, design and develop the necessary programs and services. After 20 years of growth, FCSN has gained more experience and ability to help parents. However, at the same time, we are concerned about losing that entrepreneurship or drive due to preoccupying with service programs in market.

### The Changes – New Way of Thinking and Service Content

Over the past 10 years, both in concept and in practice, FCSN has developed many new ideas and

techniques for our educational and training programs. In the decade ahead, FCSN will continue to encourage our parents and staff to try new ideas and methods to help our children and adults.

The widespread use of the Internet and social media has changed the way we communicate with others. FCSN will expand our use of the new technologies to bring us together, to share our needs and experiences, and to allow better understanding by others in our community.

### Together, let's build a brighter future

People are at the heart of our organization. To have FCSN as a platform in the long run, we need to involve more, younger families. Our care of individuals of all ages with special needs will provide new challenges for FCSN as our adult population advances in years. We also need to take care of our staff, because they are the force who bring our wishes into reality.

In 2006, the completion of the FCSN Center in Fremont marked a key milestone for the first Dream Project and the beginning of services in East Bay. Ten years later, in 2016, we have just witnessed the completion of the FCSN South Bay Center in San Jose. This milestone also marks the beginning of phase two of the second Dream Project to provide more services in the South Bay.

Members, staff, and friends: let's continue working together for the next 10 years to continue to create a community of love, hope, respect, and support for our special children. Thank you.

FCSN 邁入第廿個年頭，從一個十多個家庭開始到今天有800個家庭會員和一百位員工的規模，對一個非營利的組織來說，這樣的成長多麼不可思議和不容易的事。

FCSN 的堅持 -- 我們的願景和宗旨

這樣的成長動力是因為FCSN從開始就設定了明確的組織願景和清楚的服務宗旨，大家一起來幫助特殊兒童，個人和我們的家庭；因著這樣的堅持和不變的理念，使得會員、員工和社會的支持能緊緊的結合在一起。我也相信，FCSN 仍會在這樣的理念下進入下一個十年和二十年。

在過去FCSN常常告訴父母們，'FCSN 不是給你魚而是教你怎麼釣魚，這也是就是說FCSN 的各項服務都是因為父母們看到需要，而自己組織起來，設計和推動這樣的服務，已滿足自己孩子的需要，同時也幫助別的孩子。如果我們用現在通行的用語說就是'FCSN 是一個平台，可以幫助父母們在一起，設計和發展我們孩子需要的服務和環境'。二十年的成長，FCSN 其實有更多經驗和條件，來幫助父母們，但我們也擔心，因為各種單項服務充斥著市場，困擾了父母們，而減少了 entrepreneurship 式的動力。

與時俱進的改變

-- 新的思維和服務內容

在過去的十年中，無論在理論或操作的實務上，對特殊兒童的教育和訓練上，都有很多新的觀念和技巧發展出來，FCSN 會繼續推動和鼓勵父母和我們的老師們引進新的思維與方式，來幫助我們的孩子和家庭。

網路的普及和social media 的盛行，改變了人和人之間相處的方式，FCSN 也開始利用這樣方式讓大家有效聯結在一起，更快速有效的分享我們彼此的經驗和需要，同時也使社會大眾能更清楚我們的情況。

任何一個組織最重要的核心就是人；為了使FCSN 這個平台能繼續延續，我們希望能吸引更多年青父母加入。此外，FCSN 不但要照顧各種年齡層SN 的孩子，我們也要照顧我們的員工，因為他們正是為FCSN 真正落實我們理想中那不可或缺的力量。

FCSN 在2006 年推動了第一個 dream project，開展了東灣中心的服務，2016年，FCSN 南灣中心的落成，將是FCSN 第二個dream project 的開始。

各位會員、員工和支持我們的朋友，讓我們一起為FCSN 下一個十年，繼續為特殊孩子，個人和我們的家庭打造一個有愛、有希望、有尊嚴和有支撐的生活社區而且努力。

謝謝大家的支持和努力。



# 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and Transformation of FCSN

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By **Limin Hu**, Former  
Chair of Board of Directors

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***When you come to a fork in the road, take it.***

**– by Yogi Berra**

Congratulations to Friends of Children with Special Needs for the 20th Anniversary and for the tremendous growth and transformation into “adulthood.” I have been fortunate to participate and witness the beautiful journey of FCSN and also, the journey of my own son, Dennis, now 20 years old. I’d like to share the stories of FCSN and Dennis growing through Childhood, Youth, and Adolescence.

In 1996, FCSN was formed by a group of 10 families, with the mission to build a village to help each other to raise children with special needs, including Down syndrome, autism, and other types of developmental delay. In the first six years, FCSN had become a great group of parents, volunteers and educators, with seminars, local programs, and parents’ support groups. I would describe this as the “Childhood” period.

During this “Childhood” period, I felt my life was shattered by the discovery that my second son, Dennis, is autistic. After countless hours of research on the Internet and with books, I felt my heart sink deeper and deeper because there is NO cure. At that time, I had launched three start-up companies in parallel, wanting to be the next Bill Gates. (Well, today I probably should change my idol to Mark Zuckerberg.) As an immigrant struggling to survive and build my own career, I was really overwhelmed by the conflicting goals of building my career to make money to support my son and dedicating my life to help my son to grow. Then I remembered Yogi Berra’s saying – “Just take it.” I had decided that early intervention was the key, and I would simply do my

best to help Dennis to develop to his full potential.

At that point, I found FCSN to be the beacon in my darkest days. FCSN provided much needed information, guidance and support, but even more importantly I got to know the wonderful people at FCSN. Somehow, knowing that I was not alone brightened my own struggle. After two years of intensive at-home behavior program, a miracle happened and Dennis started to talk. At the age of four-and-a-half, he finally opened his mouth and called me “Dad.” That was one of the happiest moments in my life.

In 2001, FCSN entered into the second phase – Youth. Albert Wang and I both felt that it was almost impossible for parents like us to face this kind of challenges by ourselves, despite the fact that both of us are reasonably resourceful. We had the conviction that FCSN’s vision to build a village with community support needed to be spread, and we wanted to “Dream the Impossible Dreams.” FCSN launched the Dream Project to build a one-of-a-kind FCSN Center in Fremont. In the five years that followed, we raised \$3 million, mostly from small donations in the Chinese community; FCSN rallied support from all areas and dedicated itself to build a center in Fremont, opening the new building and launching programs in 2006.

In the next few years, Tsai-Wei Wu served as President and I served as Chairman of the Board. Mostly to Tsai-Wei’s credit, we were building a strong foundation for FCSN to become a well-organized, self-sustaining (i.e. profitable) charity organization to serve the increasingly larger population of children and adults with special needs. We were getting recognition as one of the best run non-profit

organizations, not only in the Chinese community but also in the mainstream society as well. We have served and helped hundreds of children and adults and their families to find love, hope, and respect. Kudos to hundreds of staff and volunteers!

In recent years, FCSN has entered Adolescence, on its way to becoming a grown-up. The key challenge is to maintain the focus on culture and people. At the end, we want to deliver happiness by daring to dream and pursuing excellence through innovation, and yet remaining open, positive, and fun, respecting each other. This is the only way to grow and expand FCSN.

Under the leadership of volunteer President Jim Chiao and Yee-Yeen Wang, FCSN created core values and helped blend the center operation with paid staff members and volunteer programs. Sylvia Yeh, Lilian Lin, and Anna Wang all worked diligently with staff and volunteers to further the progression of FCSN. Working as a team and as family, FCSN can look forward to the next milestone - the upcoming Grand Opening of our South Bay FCSN Center in San Jose.

Looking back to the past twenty years, FCSN united many families and helped many children to experience a full life. Not every special kid can grow up to be an engineer or an office worker, but they can learn to take care of themselves and be productive citizens of the society. Just look at what the Dream Achiever Band and Special Need Talent Shows have accomplished.

FCSN will continue to grow and flourish in the future. And my son, Dennis, is now living independently and studying accounting in San Jose State University. After all, life is good.



## Remembering FCSN

# FCSN and I : Lives changed

by Linmei Chiao, Former FCSN President, Founder, and Parent

Can't believe FCSN is reaching its 20th anniversary and has become such a fine, fully-grown non-profit organization.

Back in 1996, the year FCSN was born, I was a busy high tech working mom with two kids and a busy engineer husband. My daughter was in Saratoga High, and my special-needs son in Argonaut Elementary School.

Life was hectic with a full-time job, kids' activities, some investment, and endless housework. However, when my son's Sunday school teacher/godmother, Ms. Shioh-Luan Chen, who was also a special education teacher, suggested that parents with special needs children should form a support group, somehow the idea injected great energy in me.

I still remember how I stayed up late to prepare for FCSN's inception meeting on 4/6/1996 at my Saratoga home. Even now, closing my eyes, I can still feel the excitement when at the end of the meeting, the 20 attending families decided to go ahead with forming a non-profit organization. A Planning Committee was established with Shioh and Peter Hsia (a friend experienced in running non-profits) serving as advisors. I'm forever thankful that FCSN has since enriched and become a big part of my whole family's life.

During 1996-1997, in addition to joining in establishing directions for this new organization (finding a name, setting missions, bylaws,



*The Chiao Family*

short/long term goals, etc.), I volunteered to coordinate activities and programs.

Our first event was a picnic that took place on 7/13/1996 at Linda Vista Park in Cupertino. Thanks to Chinese newspapers' reporting, many new families learned about the event and participated. I can't help but smile every time recalling the non-stop laughter during our opening group exercise "Left Twist Right Twist," all the funny ways of crawling through Sufen's creative obstacle courses; and the exciting tug-of-war (see picture 1&2, can you find Anna & Bobo).

Almost immediately following the picnic, we started to plan for the "Family Gatherings" with the idea that we need to meet regularly to build bonding between families and to provide mutual support. In preparation, we conducted "Experimental Classes" at my basement and at Sufen's house to make sure that the volunteer teachers could handle our children. We also had a Chinese New Year's party at Asian Pacific Family Resource Center (APFRC), the

place where Su-ti worked, to test out the location.

Finally, on 4/5/1997, FCSN started its first "Family Gathering," a program to bring all FCSN families together on Saturday evenings to interact closely like a big family.

I will never forget the roast whole pig Sheau-Ying brought into one of our celebrations during the Family Gathering. The whole pig got me screaming. I used a handkerchief to cover up the head. Everyone else laughed and enjoyed the delicious treat.

I also remember the lovely Mother's Day celebration at one of the gatherings. We had all the mothers escorted into beautifully decorated tables (See picture 3, remember Su-Ti & Jason) while fathers sang and performed---all those are priceless memories.

In June 1998, at the first annual meeting, the election results of the FCSN Board of Directors were announced. Shortly after, I was elected the first FCSN Chairperson/

President. During that time,

with high demands, our membership grew rapidly; FCSN started to participate in many community activities such as parades, community fairs and other non-profit events. Thanks to Anna, the FCSN Mother Gathering started. With inputs from the moms, Anna also started our first Local Program in Milpitas in 1999 to support local parents' needs.

From 2001 to 2006 was the "Dream Project" era that resulted in building a brand new FCSN Center at Fremont. Under Dr. Albert Wang's leadership, Peter Hsia, Stanley Woo, Larry Peng and I formed the construction team. I took on the



(3) Mother's Day Celebration at Family Gather - 5/1997

Apartments, FCSN parent-sponsored housing and part of the Dream Project, to provide housing for our adult children. In addition, PDLLC also subsequently

donated land for building the FCSN Center on Peralta. These families' interest and support were timely and incredible.

On the lighter side, during the first couple of FCSN Fundraising

Galas, I volunteered to choreograph dances like Yellow Submarines, Kung-Fu Dance, etc.

Eventually, with the loving support from our families, staff, volunteers, donors, news media, Regional Centers, and other community partners—as if by miracle and hard work—the FCSN Center was completed and became fully operational by summer of 2006.

While the FCSN Center was under construction, starting 2004, we also worked on becoming a Regional Center's certified vendor to operate public-funded programs. During the vendor application process, I was glad to find out that my Master's Degree in Special Education, my teaching certificate, and my experience back in Ohio became a helpful credential in obtaining vendor certification. In September 2004, as a pilot program with Ms. Moon Chia's guidance, I started FCSN's first San Andreas Regional Center-funded "South Bay Adult Day Program," a community-based program that mainly operated from the "FCSN Booth" (an FCSN owned small gift shop located in West San Jose/Saratoga area, see picture 4). While the South Bay ADP was running with support from Anna Wang, Sylvia Yeh and Lillian Lin, I also started working with professional consultants to repeat the application process with the Regional Center of the East Bay. Finally, in 2006, FCSN also successfully became RCEB's certified vendor in Supported Living



Picture 1. 1st FCSN Picnic - 7/13/1996 at Linda Vista Park at Cupertino

coordinator/secretary role and was blessed to learn so much while dealing with architects, contractors, city officials, and neighbors. Despite my nerve-wracking speeches at FCSN-hosted private neighborhood meeting and at city councils, FCSN earned the support we needed to build the Dream Center. My experiences inspired me to join the Toastmasters Club later to improve my public speaking ability.

Forming Peralta Dream LLC was another incredible experience for me. PDLLC funded PDLLC



(2) First family activity: Summer Picnic, 1996



Program, Adult Day Program, and Independent Living Program, just in time for FCSN Dream Center's opening on Peralta.

In 2006, when the Dream Center construction was completed, my husband Jim and I sold our Saratoga home and moved to the PDLLC apartment in the back of the FCSN Center. To help get things started, I took on FCSN's Supported Living Service Director position (Picture 5). It was truly an amazing experience to be able to live in a community with our special needs adults, to do Tai-Chi



(4) FCSN Booth - 2004 at West San Jose/Saratoga



(5) East Bay ADP, SLS started in 2006

with them in the morning and join in the reading club at night, among many other activities. In 2007, after I had fulfilled my one-year commitment, I was ready to retire from the director position, and we moved out of the apartment, feeling confident that FCSN's Supported Living Services had begun and would continue.

Nowadays, Jim and I remain on the FCSN Board; Jim serves as FCSN's vice president. I enjoy being a supporter and cheerleader and still volunteering to take on specific projects that suit me. Mainly, I make myself available as an advisor/mentor to any FCSN member who can use my help. I strongly believe in the FCSN big family and will not give up in making it a loving home

for our special needs families, our caring staff, and our wonderful volunteers/supporters.

My son, among many other special needs individuals, is now happily under FCSN's care through FCSN Adult Day Program and Supported Living Service programs. I, as well as many other parents, cannot thank FCSN enough for giving our children a safe and loving home and for giving parents a well-deserved, quality, retired life without worrying about our special needs sons and daughters. We thank each and every FCSN leader, staff, and volunteer. Your caring hearts and hard work are deeply valued and highly appreciated. We are also thankful for having FCSN to give us opportunities to learn, to serve, to be involved, and to love.

# Milestones of FCSN from 1996 to Present

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*The first planning committee was formed April 1996*



*First-Year Family Support Gathering in 1997 in San Jose*



*First FCSN Annual Family Meeting in 1998*



## **04/06/1996**

First meeting held for "South Bay Integrated Family Support Group" in Saratoga.

## **Q4, 1996**

"Friends of Children with Special Needs" formed and registered as an organization.

## **01/01/1997**

First edition of FCSN newsletter published.

## **04/12/1997**

Family support gathering started at Asian Pacific Family Resource Center in San Jose.

## **6/20/1998**

First Annual Meeting, 10 Board family members elected.

## **07/19/1998**

First FCSN Board Meeting, elected president and officers.

## **1998**

Fremont Local Group started.

## **01/23/1999**

"Dream Community" was proposed as the long term goal for FCSN.

## **2001**

In support of the Dream Project, a group of FCSN parents formed Peralta Dream Limited Liability Company (PDLLC) and acquired a piece of land in Fremont. Part of the land was later donated to FCSN to build the Dream Center.

## **10/6/2001**

FCSN was named San Andreas Regional Center's (SARC) outstanding non-profit organizations award.

## **02/01/2002**

FCSN's Fathers' Choir made their first debut at Chinese New Years celebration.

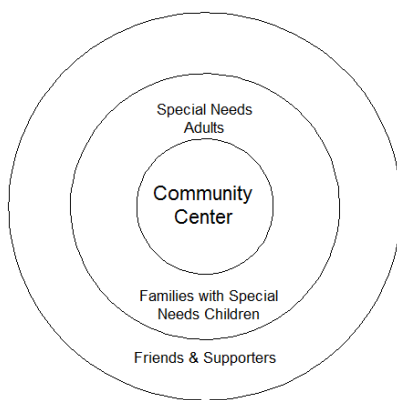
## **10/26/2002**

First FCSN gala event "Make Our Dreams Come True" was held.





FCSN First Fundraising Gala in 2002  
Make Our Dream Come True...



FCSN First Fundraising Gala in 2002  
Make Our Dream Come True...



Poster of the FCSN hosted Campus Folk Song  
Fundraising Concert in Bay Area, July 2003.

**03/14/2003**

FCSN Families joined rallies in Sacramento against budget cuts to the special needs community and became advocates for legislation protecting rights and benefits for our folks.

**07/27/2003**

First fundraising concert "Campus Folk Song" was held.

**09/2003**

First 5 Santa Clara County granted 3 years' funding for 4 FCSN integrated playgroup for

Children with special needs ages 0-5.

**10/22/2003**

Groundbreaking ceremony for Dream Center in Fremont.

**01/05/2004**

FCSN Afterschool Program started in Fremont.

**06/01/2004**

Dream Center construction began.

**07/31/2004**

FCSN fundraising concert at Flint Center in Cupertino.

**09/19/2004**

FCSN Booth grand opening in Cupertino.

**09/19/2004**

South Bay Adult Day Program started in Cupertino.

**2005**

FCSN reached 25 local programs.

The Summer Camp began at Club Sport Fremont.

**06/01/2006**

Dream Center construction completed; grand opening was held on 10/8/2006.

**08/12/2006**

First program held at the Dream Center – Music Camp.

**09/06/2006**

East Bay Adult Day Program and Supported Living Service started.

**10/24/2006**

FCSN received "Asian American Hero Award" for Health and Human Services.

**05/2008**

FCSN South Bay Center established in Cupertino.



*A group of FCSN parents formed PDLLC and purchased the Peralta land in 2001 in support of the Dream Project*



*Many honorable friends had joined us for the FCSN Center groundbreaking event... 10/22/2003*



*FCSN Dream Center, construction completed in 2006*



## **07/2008**

East Bay Community Integrated Day Program (CIDP) started.\*

## **2010**

FCSN reached 40 local programs.

## **08/2011**

South Bay Respite program started.

## **11/2011**

East Bay Respite program started.

## **01/2012**

Start of job-training Soap Project.

## **02/2012**

FCSN founders were honored by Chinese Historical and Cultural Project.

## **03/03/2012**

FCSN started Special Needs Got Talent within the organization.

## **04/08/2012**

FCSN brought awareness to China by sending musicians with autism to Beijing to perform with local autistic musicians in honor of International Autism Awareness Month.

## **2013**

FCSN reached 200 consumers in vendorized programs and 100 staff.

## **4/14/2014**

FCSN purchased S. Bascom property as the future site of South Bay Center.

## **08/15/2014**

FCSN received childcare license and was vendorized by Regional Center of the East Bay.

## **10/25/2014**

FCSN received Service Provider of the Year Award from San Andreas Regional Center.

## **3/14/2015**

FCSN hosts the first annual "Special Needs Talent Showcase".

## **06/2015**

FCSN won the Bernie Graf Excellence in Service Award from the Alameda County Developmental Disabilities Council.

## **09/2015**

FCSN received 2 buses through a federal grant.

# *How FCSN Has Changed My Life*

by Auntie Anna Wang

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Albert and I are proud parents of three wonderful children, two daughters and a son. Twenty-three years ago, we were devastated when our son Lawrence was diagnosed with autism. He has severe deficits in communication, socialization, and behaviors. We didn't know what to do. I thought if I had love and patience for my child, everything would work out. But I was wrong. Things were more challenging than I thought. When Lawrence had self-injurious behavior and bled, my heart bled, too. It was too painful. I felt helpless, hopeless, burnt out, and alone in my struggle. I cried silently every night wondering what our future would be.

Then 20 years ago, we met other families who shared the same passion for special needs children, although some of them did not have special needs children of their own. We understood each other's struggles and pain. We found new hope and strength in each other. Together, we started FCSN.

Our mission is to help special needs children and their families to find love, hope, and respect through integrated community involvement. FCSN started this small model of an ideal integrated community with 10 families, but we have now grown to more than 1000 member families. At FCSN, permanent friendships have developed among the

children. Permanent friendships have developed among the parents, too. Many families found their home at FCSN just like mine. Our integrated activities support the well-being of entire families-- mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins. We knew for our children to do well, the whole family has to do well.

Our families worried that because of poor health, old age or death that they would be unable to support their special needs loved ones. As a result, FCSN families worked together and built a village of support to provide life-long care for our children which in turn gives families peace of mind.

We love each other's children as our own. It tugs at my heartstrings every time I hear the children and adults call me Auntie Anna. What a privilege it is to be part of so many special angels' lives! We successfully achieved the Dream Projects that provide integrated programs to children and adults, including enrichment programs, recreation, employment, and housing. We went from a grassroots, volunteer organization to a well-established, full-service charity. This is a true testimony of the love and dedication of our families and staff.

Lawrence is now 26. He holds three part-time jobs and performs music on the weekend with the Dream Achievers Band, a band comprised

of musicians with autism. He sings and plays five different instruments. So many miracles have happened in his life through FCSN that I would need to write a book to fully share his stories.

How my life has changed because of raising Lawrence and journeying with FCSN! Sometimes our lives may not turn out the way we planned only for the better. My vision was broadened, my love for all children deepened. I met so many kind and loving people, especially pure-hearted angels.

So, what seemed to be a misfortune when my son was diagnosed turned out to be my greatest blessing. Our children are truly our greatest gift.

What I want to say to all parents of special needs children is this: Never Give Up on them because they blossom at different times.

We have to create many opportunities for them.

We can build a brighter future for our children and for the special needs community.

Dreams are not broken, we just have to adopt new dreams.

Together, we can make all our dreams come true.



# How FCSN Got Its Name

By Jim Chiao, FCSN Co-founder

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FCSN started with a seminal meeting on April 6th, 1996 at my home in Saratoga. The idea of forming a support group came from Shioh who was the young, energetic special ed teacher who connected with 15-20 Chinese special needs families in the mid-90s. To get more help, my wife, Linmei, also enlisted a few of her best friends to join. At the very first formal meeting, Shioh gave the group a temporary name "South Bay Chinese Family Support Group." At the time, the name made a lot of sense: we were a group of Chinese families, mostly in South Bay, and a support group was what we wanted.

A planning committee was formed as a result of the seminal meeting, with the goal to form a support group organization. In the second planning meeting on 4/27/96, we spent an hour on naming the group; however, we could not reach a consensus. For weeks, we did not resolve this issue since there was a more fundamental question: whether we should just form a subgroup under an established non-profit organization such as Parents Helping Parents or Association for Chinese Families of the Disabled in San Francisco. At the May 16 meeting, Peter Hsia went through the pros and cons and told us: "It would take lots of time and effort to form a new organization." Yet, we wanted to chart our own course, and decided against forming a subgroup under another organization because we wanted to preserve our culture, values, and retain the freedom to reach our goals.

With the decision to form our own organization, we again found it necessary to decide on a name. In the 6/8/1996 meeting, we voted based on a list of proposals. The result was not surprising: the temporary name "South Bay Chinese Family Support Group" was formally adopted. However, after the meeting, I was not very satisfied with the name. For one, it limited us to a geographic area "South Bay." Secondly, by specifying Chinese, we were limiting ourselves to an ethnic group and a smaller population. At the time, the planning committee was busy with many new projects, such as the babysitting network, integrated classes, library, and summer picnic, with the most important tasks assigned to the ladies. My key assignment was to draft the bylaws – which was not critical to the operation. For months, I worked on the bylaws in my spare time and kept looking for a name that would be more meaningful and more inclusive.

Toward the end of summer, FCSN was getting close to filing papers to apply for Articles of Incorporation and a Federal Tax ID, and whatever name we used would be final. The window to make a name change was closing on us -- and we still didn't have a better alternative.

One day, Linmei and I visited our local Saratoga Library. It was a place we had visited many times before. On this particular day, as we were leaving the library. My eyes stared at a plaque hanging near the front entrance. It read "This library. . .by Friends of Saratoga Library."

Suddenly, a light went on in my head. I asked myself: "If a library can have friends, why not children with special needs?" To me, the word "Friends" so clearly described how our friends had helped us since day one, and how we wanted a community that is more inclusive. Exiting from the library door, I was very excited and told Linmei that we might have the right name: "Friends of Children with Special Needs."

At the 9/14/1996 planning committee meeting, my motion to change the name was put to a vote. Overwhelmingly, the new name was approved. By the end of 1996, our organization was registered as "Friends of Children with Special Needs." That's how our organization finally got its name.



*Bollywood Mix Dancer Jasmine Dana*



## FCSN Spotlight

# FCSN Talent Showcase 2016

By Ingrid Cheng, FCSN Dream Builder Report



*Pianist Alice Jen*

"We believe that a lot of times with our special needs population – people focus on what they cannot do. At FCSN we focus on what they can do (Anna Wang, 2016)."

True to these words spoken March 19 at the Special Needs Talent Showcase of 2016, sponsored by Friends of Children With Special Needs, performers from the special needs community put on a live show that dazzled and inspired the audience and judges alike at the Santa Clara Convention Center.

As introductions were made and judges settled into their seats, performers waited eagerly in the wings. Musical instruments were tuned and moved with extra care; makeup and costumes were applied and adjusted; and lines as well as musical scores were rehearsed over again. Many of these performers have been at their artistry for years, some since childhood. Some were professionally involved in dance troupes or bands, others practiced privately or just for fun. Regardless of talent origin, performers gave the audience entertainment that energized. The audience of

600 people roared with excited enthusiasm for each performance at this, the second annual showcase.

The acts offered a wide assortment of mostly musical instrumentals or vocals complemented by dances and acrobatics. Phenomenal acts of physical prowess were colorful, arresting, and fun to watch as the performers leapt and twirled about the stage. The musically-skilled performances featured diverse instruments for both group and solo. Beautiful notes flowed from pianos, guitars, recorders and a harp, among other instruments. The audience responded rousingly to the drums and guitars, joining in by clapping to the beat. Video highlights are also available on YouTube; search "Highlights of Special Needs Talent Showcase Finals 2016" in an internet browser.

Emcee for the evening, ABC-TV Channel 7 reporter Matt Keller, spoke to each and every performer on stage. He asked questions about craft, performance and personal life. At the heart of many answers were thoughts not only about the love of doing what they enjoyed, but also the love of performing for the enjoyment of others. Performers talked about the feelings of dancing with friends or having their families take pride in what they do.

"It's the courage that it took to perform here, the dedication that it took to develop your skills, the artistry that you shared with us; and we're the ones who go home with the gifts in our hearts," said Matt Keller, expressing appreciation on behalf of the audience.

By the end of the evening, three performers were picked for the final awards: Michael Valcour for

his stunning vocal performance of "Climb Every Mountain" from The Sound of Music; Alice Jen for her lyrical piano solo "Yellow River, First Movement;" and Lawrence Wang for his rousing vocal, drum, and saxophone performance of "YMCA," originally performed by The Village People. Prizes for each included \$500 dollars, a trophy, and a signed commendation from California Assembly member Kansen Chu. Each performer will also receive a promotional video from Galaxy Media that can be used to pursue at future venues with their talents.

For more details on each winner, as well as descriptions and logistics of the Special Needs Talent Showcase 2016, please read the Advocacy and Weekly Announcement section of the FCSN website ([www.fcsn1996.org](http://www.fcsn1996.org)).



*Vocalist Michael Valcour*

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# Dancing All The Way to Enjoyment

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By Kenneth Song, FCSN  
Dream Builder Reporter

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Oftentimes the most difficult challenge for any individual with special needs is expressing inner thoughts and emotions. For these young adults who experience so much on a day to day basis, the lack of a voice can be frustrating as they attempt to connect with their families and loved ones. Fortunately, the boundaries of our expression are not limited to verbal speech and writing. Human history is rife with many colorful examples of modes of communication which speak directly to our sense of existence.

Perhaps the most primal method of them all, music connects people from all around the world, spreading beyond the language and cultural barriers which normally divide people. It should come as no surprise then that music is an especially effective tool for communicating with special needs children, regardless of how skilled they are with words. Another central mode of communication, movement, engages students to train their ability to focus and to control their impulses. These tactile activities not only allow students to practice their fine motor skills but also incorporate the much needed aspect of exercise into their lives. Combining the freedom of music with an acute awareness of one's own body, dance has always been a favorite activity of the students at Friends of Children with Special Needs. Through the eyes of the organization's long standing dance instructors, we can begin to understand the impact of music and movement in these students' lives.

Whether it's in preparation for the annual talent show, fundraising gala, or just for fun and exercise, dance has become an integral component of FCSN culture over decades. Shortly



*Dancing Class*

after the organization's inception, the community's leadership turned to dance as an engaging way for the children to get more exercise. Among the first teachers approached was a long term volunteer who joined FCSN in 1997 as a room parent, teacher's assistant, and special event helper. Happy to share her experiences, she recollects how she was asked to start a program for the students. Since she was enrolled in line dance classes at the time, she started to introduce FCSN Line Dance programs in 2007 with an emphasis on line dancing, aerobics, and Zumba. By incorporating a level of difficulty for everyone, FCSN dance caters to the needs of both high and low functioning individuals. Students who struggle to follow along on their own are partnered up with a teaching aide who guides them through the movements. Since volunteers and parents are more than encouraged to get involved, it's always an amazing opportunity for the special needs students to bond with someone new.

Having taught for so many years now, FCSN's dance teachers are grateful for the opportunity to work with so many unique and wonderful students. Although they are the undisputed experts when it comes

to crafting choreography sets for the student dance performances, volunteer teacher describes the entire experience as very humbling, advising that "Regardless of what it is you do, show self discipline. The foundation of society needs hard workers." Sharing a glimpse into the process involved with creating such a program, she explains how each song has to be analyzed and filtered for its lyrics before anything else. Once the selection has been finalized, she draws on her knowledge and experience to create a dance routine which suits the music without being overly complex. After months of class and diligent practice, her students finally get to showcase their hard work before the entire FCSN community. Watching the students' gleeful expressions and playful movements across the stage, the audience finds it easy to share in their pure joy and begin to understand just how much dance means to them.

Body language, music, dance, and art are all extensions of our native tongue when working with special needs individuals, each of whom shelters a beautiful and unique voice. FCSN's dance instructors and the rest of its incredible teachers who work tirelessly to cultivate a better education for the special needs community are an invaluable part of the family. Just as some students learn slowly or quickly, stay still or move around restlessly, so too does dance have the flexibility to adapt with the tune of our unique lives. By allowing us to communicate without a wall of words, music enjoins that hidden human aspect within all of us, speaking universal language.



## Staff and Volunteer Appreciation

# An Interview with FCSN's Executive Business Director

by Johnna M. Laird

In the 10 years since the Peralta Dream Center opened to its first seven consumers, FCSN has grown to serve approximate 200 adult consumers in its Living Services, Respite, and Adult Day Programs in Fremont and San Jose. Additionally, through afterschool programs, sports, summer camps, therapeutic programs, support groups and family seminars, FCSN serves 300 families with the special needs on a regular basis and has more than 1,000 families in its membership.

In this past decade, FCSN has garnered awards, earned stellar reviews from consumers and families, and developed a prospective-consumer wait list that extends for years. FCSN founders laid the planks of success with their vision, captured in the mission statement that guides the organization.

What makes FCSN successful? Executive Business Director Sylvia Yeh resoundingly credits FCSN's employees, "our devoted staff," for FCSN's reputation and high-caliber experience that consumers and families receive.

"Our staff members are very, very devoted. Their contributions and dedication have made differences in the consumers' lives they serve," says Sylvia. She explains that her management team looks for people who "have the heart" for working with consumers.

"Experience is important, but we can train. We provide training to our staff on a regular basis. The people we hire must have the mindset and want to work with this population. We focus on what consumers can do, instead of what they can't. We are here to help them live out their potential and shine."

As a key to its workforce, FCSN seeks and attracts young, mature, energetic and educated adults, most of whom hold bachelor's degrees, as a key to its workforce. This energy and enthusiasm empowers staff to design creative curriculum to motivate consumers in their learning. FCSN focuses on person-centered services and operates from the consumer's viewpoint. FCSN currently has 100+ employees.

"Due to limited funding from DDS, our jobs are not high-paid, especially for the Bay Area," says Sylvia, "so the staff that work at FCSN find the work rewarding through the relationships they build with this by population they serve and by expressing their creativity to empower consumers."

"I just cannot say thanks enough. The number one reason we have the program that we do is because of our people, our staff. They are the people who deserve the thanks."

Sylvia also indicates another element that distinguishes FCSN from other programs is the Individual Service Plan report, generated by the staff and coordinator on a semi-annual and annual basis. The response from parents is overwhelming positive, says Sylvia. As an example, she remembered a recent comment from parent Kim Bostrom who received a report after her daughter's first 30 days at FCSN.

"I just want to thank you for all the time you put in to creating that 30-day report about my daughter's progress. I have NEVER seen anything so professional in her whole life full of reports, and there have been many, as you might imagine. For the first time ever, I feel as if my daughter is in a place where she can really grow and develop: where she is being actively



ENCOURAGED and HELPED to learn new things, by loving and devoted staff. I cannot express the degree of relief and thankfulness this brings me.

Kim says she maintained her daughter on the wait list for six years because FCSN has impressed her with FCSN's programs.

FCSN ADP staff members also make a video or DVD for each consumer's annual review. The film captures the consumer's daily activities, training, socialization, and participation at FCSN. Consumers seem as delighted as parents, seeing and sharing the videos. Parents whose children participate in the Supported Living Program appreciate weekly communication reports to know how their adult children spend their time at FCSN, in which activities they participate, their health conditions, and the challenges they encounter in the week.

Sylvia started her employment with FCSN in May 2006 as the second FCSN employee. She brought with her 10 years of regional center experience.

Clearly understanding the FCSN vision, Sylvia designed the adult

day program and living services to include socialization, communication, academic and living skills, fun, and community involvement. The first seven consumers started in fall 2006.

"It took us two years to build our reputation," says Sylvia, "and by 2008 we were getting tons of referrals." Both East Bay Adult Day Program (EBADP) and Supported Living Services reached its capacity. To serve more consumers, Sylvia designed another adult day program—Community Integrated Day Program (CIDP) and secured vendorization from the Regional Center of East Bay in 2009. Within a year and half, CIDP reached its capacity of 48 consumers.

The South Bay program, headed by Vivian Chung, currently serves 44 consumers. With a new South Bay Center opening in the next few months, FCSN hopes to expand capacity to better serve the San Jose area.

Sylvia also applied for and obtained Caltrans grants in 2012. FCSN received two mid-size buses in August 2015. In January 2016, FCSN transportation service was vendorized by Regional Center of East Bay. Currently the bus transports 23 consumers to and from the program on a daily basis as well as transports consumers to vocational training sites and field trip destinations. Transportation is expected to continue to expand. Sylvia submitted another grant application to Caltrans in 2014. FCSN expects to receive two more vans in mid-2017.

In 2016, FCSN is targeting growth of its Independent Living Service (ILS) Program as well as developing more job opportunities and volunteer work for its participants.

"As FCSN reaches this 20th anniversary milestone, the FCSN management team and staff are committed to continue to provide quality of services to consumers and their families," says Sylvia. "Building a brighter future for special needs individuals is the ultimate goal of FCSN."

# *One Devoted Volunteer, Staff and Parent*

**By Kenneth Song**

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Lena Sun has played a vital role within the Friends of Children with Special Needs community since early on in the organization's inception. Alongside her daughter Vivian, Lena remains among the most familiar and recognizable faces at the East Bay Center, a result of many committed years of support. For the past decade, Lena has worked at FCSN East Bay Adult Day Program. On a busy, hot Thursday afternoon, I met with Lena at the center in Fremont just as the final class ended for the day and consumers were gathering their belongings to head home.

Lena joined the FCSN family in 1997 where she has received love and support. As a result, she was more than happy to share some of her fondest and most poignant memories. Her story models giving back to the community which has provided so much for her and her family.

It is hard to measure the true nature of Lena's commitment to FCSN without first understanding her relationship with her daughter. After completing her sociology major in Taiwan, Lena moved to Arizona with her husband where Vivian was born in 1984.

Although their daughter's low muscle tone and sensitivity to touch and noise were early indicators of Vivian's condition, it was not until the family moved again to Boston that she was officially diagnosed with autism. Immediately, Lena began searching for ways to help her daughter develop normally. The psychology of that time instructed parents to train rather than attempt to understand their children. Lena was frustrated by the lack of direction. Whereas many instructors simply passed Vivian's behavior off

as childish distractions, the family was fortunate that one of her teachers in Boston helped to find a variety of resources and training programs for Vivian.

Relocating to the Bay Area in 1996, Lena once again faced the daunting task of finding the right place to continue Vivian's education. Within their first year in the Bay Area, Lena had a close friend direct her to FCSN, then still a budding community for families of special needs individuals. Having struggled to find an appropriate culture for Vivian for so long, Lena approached FCSN with initial skepticism, but the skepticism was washed away by the love and warmth she felt from the growing community.

While in Boston, Lena had tried her best to conceal and cure Vivian's autism. Through support at FCSN, Lena came to truly accept Vivian's special qualities.

Reflecting back on her early experiences with the FCSN, Lena tells me that the most valuable lesson she learned was how to accept support: "You have to open up and let people help you. Don't bottle up all [of] your feelings inside [about] your child." As Lena describes it, Vivian may have learned how to write, speak, and listen from the therapy she received, but she learned how to be a part of a family and love others at FCSN.

Vivian graduated from a post-secondary program in 2006. Simultaneously, FCSN's East Bay Adult Day Program (EBADP) started operating in September 2006. Lena immediately contacted the RCEB Case Manager to enroll Vivian in



FCSN's EBADP. Lena also applied for employment with FCSN and has been working at the Adult Day Program since October 2006. Lena states in tears how much Vivian has grown and blossomed through the compassionate FCSN instructors and holistic curriculum FCSN designs and offers.

Today, Lena stands as one of the most senior employees at the FCSN adult program with more than a decade of experience working closely with special needs individuals. Having taught so many different consumers over the years, Lena shares that the most important quality for any FCSN staff is empathy. "We need to help the special needs individuals discover how to express themselves, and we must consider each decision wearing their shoes," says Lena.

Since each child's ability to communicate and express himself or herself varies tremendously, Lena stresses how critical it is to balance unique strengths and weaknesses. Looking ahead to the future of the organization, Lena believes that FCSN will continue to develop the vision for senior programs, caring for special needs individuals into adulthood and old age.

Lena's dedication to her daughter's growth and nurturance by FCSN have shaped Vivian's future. As I speak with Lena, Vivian curiously paces around the perimeter until Lena invites her over to introduce me. From the crying infant who shied away from touch and noise, Vivian has certainly come a long way, having discovered her love for reading, dance, music, and socialization (within her comfort zone) interacting with people. Despite the pains and struggles of raising Vivian while still working as an engineer, Lena has done an extraordinary job of cultivating her daughter's education. Although they faced their share of daunting obstacles along the way, this mother-daughter pair have become integral members of the FCSN family.

# True Friend

by Johnna M. Laird

Amy and Jason Wang have the distinction of being among the families without a special needs child who joined FCSN from the beginning. Friends of Linmei and Jim Chiao, Amy and Jason say they teamed up with FCSN with a goal of helping families.

"We thought we could be a good friend in times of need," says Jason, "helping to release some daily life stress, and we could share resources."

And good friends they have been, never missing a fundraiser. Amy managed GALA registration for four years and used her accounting/finance background to help with the budget. She served as vice president

for a term and cooked for family gathering in San Jose.

Amy used her cooking skills for a fundraiser, recruiting Jason to help her.

"This was the most fun project," Jason recalls. "We spent months of evening baking 1,200 macaroons, two years 2,400. That was a lot of cookies."

What Jason treasures most about the beginning years of FCSN stems from friendship and teamwork. "Every family in the early days had the same goal in mind: to share, to serve, to enjoy every minute of being together. Maybe we were smaller in size, but everyone knew each other's family's kid by name."

One of his most memorable experiences was overnight camping on a school field. "We woke up there and saw the sun rise, with kids running and playing on the school track."

For the first three years of the East Bay Family Gathering, Jason never sat for dinner. He worked outside as a security guard, putting the children's safety first. Many years later, he will be found outside again working security at Family Day 2016 in June.



*The Sun Family*

# *Don't Worry Girl WE Got This*

*By Nayeli Toto, FCSN Living Services Manager*

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“Don’t worry girl WE got this, everything is going to be okay!”

Those were the very first words I heard nine years ago from one of the students at ADP. She noticed my hesitant demeanor as I went through my first day of work at FCSN.

I was very nervous, questioning my ability to perform well, but those words gave me confidence and inspired me to continue moving forward.

Moving forward is a common goal for everyone at FCSN. From day one, the families and the friends of special needs individuals strive to continually grow and never settle for less than the ever-changing, ever-improving dream to better the lives of their loved ones.

When I first joined the Supported Living Services team in 2007, we only served eight consumers. Witnessing the growth of each one and the many more that came after them has been one of my proudest experiences.

During this past decade, Supported Living Services as well as our Independent Living Services have come a long way from when a few of our special needs adults and a handful of staff members led the way. Now with close to 40 consumers, our program keeps growing, finding new doors to venture through as we work to realize the dream of independence and happiness for our special needs adults.

Work comes with sacrifices and many bumps on the road but each difficulty is an obtained lesson. I can simply think back to that first day and the words of encouragement from a consumer to know setbacks are temporary and everything will work out. It’s been an extraordinary journey, but today is simply a reflection of the quality of our service and the hard work of us all.



Over the years FCSN’s Living Services has grown to be a recognized, highly-regarded program, a model to which many other organizations, both within California and other countries, aspire.

We are excited by the success we have achieved, and we know we have to continue growing with quality and the kindness that this job entails. This dream would not have been possible without the contribution of all of our employees that make up this great family and of which we are very proud and endlessly thankful.

And yes. . . WE got this! Everything has being more than Okay! Thank you Renne (ADP Student). I will never forget your powerful words and the positivity that inspired me to keep moving forward.



# Our Youth Volunteer Program Coordinator

by Kenneth Song

For the countless volunteers who have helped build the foundation of Friends of Children with Special Needs over the years, there has always been a dependable hand to support them along the way. Mannching Wang, who organizes the youth volunteer work at FCSN, is something of a mother figure who has guided and inspired generations of youth to value selfless giving. Not only has her dedication to hard work and laborious attention to detail produced the much beloved FCSN summer camp, but she has consistently been a role model for the parents of special needs individuals everywhere. Mannching's younger son, Tony, was diagnosed at an early age with cerebral palsy, a movement disorder which

affects sensory perception. As a single mother with a background working in social psychology, Mannching had to go through some tough times providing for her two children. Now having found a supportive family in which to raise her son at last, Mannching has dedicated her time to giving back to the FCSN community.

After moving to the Bay Area in 1998 from Japan where her son was born, Mannching struggled to find an education that fit Tony's needs. As a low functioning special needs individual, Tony started early intervention training at a young age. However, it was difficult for Mannching to find the necessary services and a good school

program for him. While he switched back and forth between county and school districts, Mannching decided to become more personally involved in her son's education by becoming a school district teaching aide for special needs classes. Under the guidance of several great instructors, she learned about ABA, discrete trials, and other teaching techniques for students with disabilities. Getting to work closely with special needs children across a wide spectrum of functionalities, Mannching also learned how to be more adaptive and understanding when interacting with her son.

Around this time, an acquaintance informed Mannching about an or-



Mannching at Front Right





ganization called FCSN, which was promoting the idea of a family support network for individuals with special needs. Intrigued by the prospect of a community where Tony could learn and socialize at his own pace without the academic pressures of school, she began to attend FCSN's Saturday Regular Gathering where she learned how to advocate for her child from various seminars held at the meetings. While she was certainly grateful for all the information and resources which the community provided her with, Mannching says that what really amazed her was the sense of family and friendship. After having struggled for so long on her own, dealing with medical expenses, social welfare, and societal discrimination, she suddenly now had parents and volunteers who were willing to support her throughout these tough times. Touched by the unwarranted generosity of the FCSN family, Mannching began to think of ways she could repay their act of kindness.

Mannching quickly put her experiences as a school district special needs aide to good use, sharing her wisdom with the rest of the community and the volunteers. With this background in education, she now spearheads the mandatory course required for anyone wishing to become a FCSN volunteer. During this two-hour training session, Mannching challenges her volun-

teers to deal with hypothetical cases emphasizing autism challenge areas to best prepare them for any possible situation. Over the years her constant efforts have sown and cultivated many bright young adults who have gone on to form the very backbone of the organization's volunteer corps. As she describes it, "I love spending time with all of the volunteers. Through their understanding and compassionate work, I feel like my son has a safe future." As the mother of a low functioning child, Mannching also consults with new parents or families who may be facing a similar situation.

One of Mannching's greatest contributions to the FCSN community was her establishment of the annual FCSN summer camp in 2010, a program which has only grown more involved and expansive with each passing year.



Frustrated that there were no local summer programs for her son to attend, she approached founder Anna Wang to start a fun and affordable summer camp environment where the children could learn as well. After receiving the approval to create her camp at the South Bay center, Mannching immediately took full charge of piecing together the massive undertaking. She interviewed every instructor and volunteer for the program by hand, making sure that they prepared separate lesson plans for the high and low functioning students. Then over the course of two weeks, she organized a jam packed schedule of field trips, sports, and fun classes including music, art, cooking, and even simple science. With the intention of having a one-to-one volunteer to student ratio, Mannching knew that it would be a rare opportunity for the special needs children to befriend and really get to know their volunteers. Since the incredible success at its inception, the FCSN summer camp has become an ingrained tradition of the community, anticipated all year long by volunteers and students alike.

Even after so many years of giving back to the community, Mannching can still expect to receive love and help whenever she needs it. Seeing how devoted and receptive the volunteers are to the needs of the students including Tony, Mannching knows that all of her hard work has been for a worthy cause. When asked about the future of FCSN, she hopes that the organization can continue to develop programs equally for both low and high functioning special needs individuals. She encourages the community to continue seeking out professionals to guide and lead them in this endeavor. Having come so far with the help of FCSN, she says her new-found philosophy entails a belief that no matter what kind of life you lead, you should always try to have fun and continue learning.

## Parent's Sharing

# Finding FCSN's Pioneering Spirit Today

By Johnna Laird, Parent

"Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." Maimonides

Articles throughout this newsletter celebrate FCSN's 20-year anniversary. A relative newcomer to the FCSN community, I marvel at the grassroots beginning of Friends of Children with Special Needs. A handful of parents met in a living room with a commitment to give their children the best lives possible. At some level they knew to do that, they needed support. They didn't look outside themselves but from within the group, empowering each other and each other's children.

These first FCSN families didn't have a roadmap, but they had a vision. They envisioned an "ideal integrated community" built upon the foundation of "love, hope and respect" that guided them. They believed so powerfully in that possibility that they never veered, compromised, or gave up.

What strength powered them? Determination? Fortitude? Commitment? They didn't always agree on the process, but their mission unified them. While creating the community of FCSN, they managed careers, families with multiple children, and professional responsibilities, all while advancing their dream a step at a time. In some ways, their success which blesses my life and many others, reminds me of a line from the movie, *Field of Dreams*: "If you build it, they will come."

FCSN has become a magnet for families who want a quality experience for their loved ones with special needs,

offering interesting, engaging, and growthful opportunities that help children and adults feel vital, productive, and joyful about life.

Growth has led to a vibrant, expansive FCSN program that far exceeds its pioneering days of playgroups and parents hosting classes in their homes, but the beginning days held the essential seeds of FCSN's mission today.

The challenge in the coming decades is to remember that FCSN began as a parent cooperative, designed to empower families and special needs individuals. In the years ahead, how does the FCSN community maintain that entrepreneurial, growth-minded spirit within a well-respected, multi-million dollar nonprofit that meets and exceeds state and federal standards in service to special needs individuals? When an organization reaches FCSN's size, there is a temptation to think "oh, FCSN, the organization, will do it."

When my daughter, Kendra, was accepted into FCSN in 2013, I thought of FCSN as an "organization," like a business, where I dropped her off and picked her up and interfaced with staff when called upon to do so. My experience with previous programs trained me that parents were often kept on the periphery. I didn't have a handbook that told me how to function as a parent within vendorized programs; I was so over-the-moon excited to have Kendra at FCSN I didn't want to do anything to make waves. I saw parents involved, but I didn't understand how this happened. I did not understand

until recently that FCSN operates with the heart of a parent cooperative, despite being a Regional Center vendor with all that it entails. I am learning that FCSN needs parents to find ways to contribute, building upon the success of the last two decades.

Sometimes when grassroots organizations reach this level of success, new parents coming in, unaware of the grassroots history, believe the work is accomplished by "the organization."

I am learning that FCSN's community is a triad: a caring skillful staff; capable and creative consumers; and involved parents, vested in guiding the future for their and all special needs' children. Together, the three create a powerful triangle.

My daughter's life improved so much after moving to FCSN, but there are changes that could lead to a more fulfilled life. I feel, however, that I don't know how to create those changes.

I wonder if the answer lies within group-mind, smaller groups within the community, parents who experience similar needs meeting to create solutions. Already a group has begun to meet to discuss creating a second wave of community housing for their children, the way parents invested to build the Peralta Dream Limited Liability Corporation.

Rather than look to the "organization," I wonder if looking to the group would empower me and fuel me with the FCSN pioneering spirit.



# FCSN 20週年，不容易啊！

楊紀明John Yang



Hello, 楊把拔，Accounting 的Judy 迎面走來。

Hello, uncle John, Becky Wang 在我後面叫著。

Yaya 把拔來接Yaya 囉，這是 ADP 老師們看到我下午接Yaya 時的標準招呼詞。

以上是我在FCSN碰到學生也好，員工也好或是家長時，他們總是這麼親切的叫著。當然，我們家的成員在FCSN 裡，還有大家眼中的Linda 阿姨，Mimi 姐姐 (Sherry)，當然還有-Yaya。

97年2月來美，從報紙上第一次看到有關FCSN 的報導介紹，我們全家於同年4月正式加入FCSN。這一路走來，我們不是只看著，而是一路跟著這個大家庭，成長，茁壯。過去20年，有太多太多的人，事，物多方的積極參與及社會各界支持下，開花結果，於是成就了目前FCSN 的規模。這20年裡，有些我各人覺得頗重要的里程碑及人事，我想在這裡和大家，

也跟一些後期加入的家庭們分享。

FCSN 初期，為了讓大家認識這個新成立的非牟利機構，我們所有人員，積極參與社區活動。記得，曾在大太陽下揮汗煎蔥油餅，炒米粉，在母親節園遊會上賣的嚇嚇叫，也曾有善心人士捐了一批冷凍包子，在社區大眾的踴躍認購下，讓我們慢慢累積了充裕的FCSN 辦理各項活動的經費。

2000年，苓美，喬立將心中”夢計畫”付諸實際行動，希望建立一個屬於FCSN 自己的活動中心及孩子們成年後可以獨立生活的社區，像一個village 的理想概念。2001年，在現在Fremont 市中心現址覓得一塊地，由20多家集資先予認購，經過rezone，終於在03年10月22日破土動工，開始了夢計畫的興建。06年10月8日，FCSN 東灣中心正式落成，到現在，我還是形容我們這一群家庭，當初像是日本兵，頂著鋼盔往前衝，摸著石頭過河。這期間，更因為需要籌募中心的資金，於02年開始FCSN 的年度募款餐會，至今已邁入第16年，

並在這期間連續舉辦了3年的校園民歌募款演唱會，更是帶動了灣區民歌的一股風潮。

FCSN 東灣中心自06年正式開始運作後，短短2，3年即達到飽和狀態，因應南灣會員的成長需求，我們開始著手尋覓適合的location，來為FCSN 南灣的擴展做準備，經過中間許多變化及諸多限制，數年後才終於在2014年底選定南灣中心現址，在大家的努力下，終於預定在近期內落成使用。

歲月匆匆，Yaya從一個小朋友，20年過去，成人了，當初共同打拼的這群戰友們，從青年到中年，從中年也漸成初老，回顧這20年與FCSN 成長點點滴滴，楊爸爸我有小小的感慨，覺得現在有些許volunteers 斷層的現象，希望藉由此文，召集新生代，呼籲中生代，大家積極參與，傳承及永續發展我們華人特殊兒童之友的志業。

終歸一句話，FCSN 20年一路走來，真的是不容易啊!!





# Wait! There's got to be something I can do

永不放棄

Sufen Wu, translated by Maria Kuang

## Introduction:

One day I found myself lost in a forest. When I looked up, I saw bright golden lights shimmering from a distance, but I could not find a way out. When I looked down, I saw only mud and rocks, How I wished I could walk to that golden light. Do I give up? Not acceptable. Continue? There was no visible path out. Caught in what seemed like a dead end, I screamed "There's got to be something I can do!"

This is a glimpse into the learning process that Chiling and I have gone through. Let me share our stories with you:

## 1. Piano

Though piano playing is Chiling's first endeavor and his greatest achievement, he continues to face challenges in the learning process.

In the beginning, he had difficulty playing at louder volumes, because his fingers are not strong enough. To compensate, he used his whole arm to play, which is a common mistake made by beginners. Piano players have to manipulate the wrist to play the notes loudly, while maintaining good quality sound. This is difficult for beginners, because the muscles in their fingers are not yet developed.

In order to exercise these muscles--apart from occupational therapy (for example: exercises involving picking up coins or beads)--I placed a limbo stick between him and the piano (see picture 1), posi-

tioned at about the same height as the keys. Because of this, when Chiling plays the piano, he has no other option but to

as Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" or Schubert's "Impromptu".



Figure 1

use the strength of his fingers because he has to refrain from touching the stick. We continue to use this soft PVC pipe during practice, constantly reminding him to use proper form while he plays.

Also, Chiling's sight reading skills are very limited. He plays simpler pieces by ear; however, playing complex classical pieces like Beethoven and Chopin poses a much greater challenge. Some referring to the sheet music is necessary while learning and practicing each piece. Unfortunately, the little "bean sprouts" on the page were confusing to him. By writing out each note by letter name, he was able to recognize and play the correct notes immediately. Writing this by hand for each musical score became my regular task. Only in this way can he play the more difficult pieces such

## 2 Recorder

Ever since he was young, Chiling had a tendency to drool because of his flaccid facial muscles. For this reason, we generally did not consider any wind instruments for him. When he initially tried to play the recorder, the effect was like a running faucet--wetting his shirt even before he hit the first note. We had no other choice but to hold off at that time.

At Chiling's high school, seeing the other students play in the band, working on tightening their lips and controlling their facial muscles, I told myself that we have to succeed this time. It suddenly dawned on me that I can tie a plastic bag to the other end of the recorder to catch the saliva, sparing him the embarrassment. After replacing the 'sandwich bag' twice,

Chiling mastered all the scales, and can play any of the songs familiar to him.

Chiling later joined a band to play saxophone. Unlike the recorder, the saxophone trapped saliva inside the instrument. Before the sound becomes “watery”, I always drain the saliva out of the saxophone. Actually, Chiling is not the only “culprit” in wetting the carpet: all the other trumpet, trombone, and saxophone players also regularly emptied their spit onto the carpet.

I had the experience of coaching kids to play the recorder at FCSN’s South Bay Regular Gathering. I noticed most of the kids’ muscles in their cheeks and fingertips were not strong or coordinated enough. These kids could not multi-task: they were unable to blow into the instrument and coordinate their fingers simultaneously. Covering five holes at the same time presents a big challenge to them. To address this, I covered the whole recorder with tape, leaving only the top hole open. As soon as the kids manage to hold the recorder in place and make a sound, I uncovered the second hole to challenge him or her. Eventually, a few kids were able to play some simple songs. This is called “simplifying the task;” we break down a complicated task into its basic parts. Isn’t this the process that all babies have to go through as they grow and learn? Only in this way can our children and adults with special needs succeed.

### 3. Sheng

The sheng is a traditional Chinese instrument with a unique shape. One has to hold the sheng with two cupped hands, while moving the fingers to cover and uncover the holes to change notes. Playing a scale is not difficult to Chiling; the greatest challenge is maintaining his hold on the instrument as he plays. Whenever he tried to change notes, the sheng would start to slide out of his hands. How could

he hold the sheng firmly then? I found a pair of gloves, and cut off the fingertips so that Chiling’s fingers can move freely. Then, I sewed some velcro to the middle of the gloves and the bottom part of the sheng. This way, when he is holding the sheng, the velcro will hold the instrument in place while he moves his fingers to play. (see picture 2)

### 4. Cello

String instruments can be challenging to



Figure 2

play, as the musician needs to be very precise in order to stay in tune. Chiling has very accurate sense of pitch, so this was less of a concern; however, after Chiling took a few lessons, we realized that he has difficulty coordinating his fingers as he held the bow. The standard bow grip uses primarily the thumb, index, and middle fingers to stabilize the bow: Chiling has to use all five fingers. As a result, Chiling has to use his whole hand to manipulate the bow, resulting in decreased agility and speed when transitioning between notes.

To resolve this problem, I had to think of a way to position his three fingers on the bow while preventing them from slip-

ping. We couldn’t use tape to position his fingers; I tried using velcro based on a former teacher’s suggestion, but it didn’t work in Chiling’s case. After searching around for a suitable item, I eventually found a round plastic cap from a broom. I asked my husband to secure the cap onto the bow: this fit around the thumb like a thimble (see picture 3). I then used a velcro loop to position the other two fingers (see picture 4). Once these three fingers were properly placed, Chiling did not have to maintain such a tight grip in order to play. After practicing for a few years, Chiling’s grip of the bow has improved, and playing the cello became an easier task for him.

Chiling’s former occupational therapist introduced me to a plastic material called Shape Lock, which softens and is easily molded in hot water. This can be used to form any number of tools or assistive devices. My ideas of designing facilitative tools originated from this information.

### 5. Drums

Playing the drums seems like a relatively simple task. Chiling was the drummer in his junior high band. Staying on tempo is not hard for him, but playing with good technique presents a problem because he uses his entire arm instead of his wrist to play. His stiffness prevents him from playing faster tempi.

When playing the drums, the arm is used for large movements, such as switching between drums. For the actual act of striking the drum head, a supple wrist is required. To execute a tremolo (drum roll), the wrist and elbow must be relaxed. But “relaxed” is difficult for Chiling, who ends up overly relying on the muscles in his arms, rather than his wrists or fingers.

At one time, instead of using his wrist, he was turning the drumsticks using his arm muscles, moving his whole body in the process. I had to hold his upper

arm and elbow firm, to prompt him to use his wrist only. To address this, I wrote the numbers 1 and 2 on his palm and the back of his hand respectively, asking him to alternate looking at the 1 and 2. By doing these motions, he is naturally isolating the muscles in his wrist, thereby performing the appropriate actions.

Rome was not built in a day. Over the years, I have been trying hard to face and overcome the challenges that arise. My philosophy is “To put my feet in his shoes.” Why can’t Chiling hold the bow when it seems so easy for others? Let me hold it, too. Where does the problem lie? By identifying the cause of the problem, I am able to design a device or simplify a task. As long as one does not give up, every step is an accomplishment. Chiling my child, keep on learning and exploring, make your life meaningful, we are very proud of you!



Figure 3



Figure 4

## 第三代的拔蘿蔔

葉淑芬

“拔蘿蔔，拔蘿蔔，嗨啾嗨啾拔蘿蔔，嗨啾嗨啾拔不動，

老公公/老婆婆/小黃狗/小花貓，/小老鼠，快快來，快來幫我來拔蘿蔔..... “

季齡10 的時候，FCSN才成立四年，所有的兒童活動都是家長們在擔綱。那時我也 着一班特殊孩子準備表演 目。由於拔 蔔是一般孩子都耳熟能 詳的歌，歌曲輕快而充滿活力，於是我決定要讓他們學習這首歌。

但是”耳熟能詳”這句話對我中文學校的學生固是毋庸置疑，對這群特殊孩子就沒這麼容易了。很多孩子連講話都有問題，何況唱歌？

既然無法唱歌，退一步想，放CD對嘴總可以吧按照我們過去的習慣，大部份特殊孩子可以做的表演也就是如此：孩子們站成一行，隨著CD的歌聲比劃，自由揮灑。

可是，這次我想用不同的方法什麼方法呢我繼續想。？既然是拔蘿蔔，那就應該有一個道具蘿蔔，而且要做個大蘿蔔才醒目。主意既定，馬上付諸實行。我先收集家裡所有的舊報紙，一張張打開，撕成粗細不一的條形。在超市買一大罐的液體澱粉（要不，用麵粉加水加點鹽也成），和幾個圓形氣球。

首先吹幾個氣球，由於一個氣球不夠大，我用紙膠帶將幾個氣球連接成一圈，大約是兩手環抱的大小，看起來像一個巨型蘿蔔頭即可。接著將一片片的報紙浸在漿糊水（液體澱粉）裡，趁濕一張張的貼滿氣球，貼的動作不停的重複，直到厚度達到半公分左右。將貼了漿糊的紙氣球掛起來，讓太陽曬半天，紙加漿糊一乾就硬得和石頭一般。這就是大蘿蔔頭的雛形，至於裡邊的氣球就可以彈出掉，所謂鳥盡弓藏罷。

第二天，由蘿蔔頭開始，繼續往下貼

紙漿，越往下越縮小，如是幾天以後，一個中空的蘿蔔就完成了。蘿蔔乾透了就可以上色，噴漆或壓克力漆皆可。

那麼大的一個蘿蔔！（約5呎長）（見圖）如何讓小朋友玩呢？幾經思量，不外是拔蘿蔔唄！如何讓他們”拔”得有趣，在台上又不至一團亂，可以維持一定的舞台秩序？真的去拉蘿蔔一定不可行！兩三下蘿蔔就會被搗成蘿蔔泥，那麼，拔什麼呢？突然靈機一動，不就是拔河嗎？既然蘿蔔是空心的，放什麼東西都可以，我就去買了一長條的粗繩子，穿過整條蘿蔔，繩子前端加上用綠色不織布（felt）剪成的蘿蔔葉，一群孩子就可以扮成小黃狗，小花貓，等等角色來拔蘿蔔！

但是火力集中在拔，另一邊必須有等



同的的拉力才能讓孩子感受到拔河的樂趣，蘿蔔既是長在土裏，那就是土（earth）在和他們拔河。所以另一邊就設計了一組土地公土地婆，穩穩地坐在地上迎戰。同時，用一大塊土色的布蓋在蘿蔔上表示蘿蔔是長在地底下的。等兩邊的拉鋸戰到達火熱的程度，地母鬆手了，布一掀開表示蘿蔔被拔了出來，猛然的拉力讓貓狗狗跌了一地，不過還是高高興興的爬起來，抱得蘿蔔歸。

當時參與拔蘿蔔的大部分是10歲以下的孩子，如季齡（林志玲），Van-Hai，克里斯蒂娜，托尼，六月等，還有他們的兄弟姐妹，加上家長在旁邊加油打氣，順便抓回溜出去逛大街的





# Pulling The Turnip

by Su-Fen Wu

孩子（自閉症的通性）。所以每次練習都是全家到齊，就算孩子還不太了解全劇的意義，至少很高興的參加了一場拔河賽。表演時連爸爸媽媽都在台上加油打氣，更是體現FCSN一貫的宗旨：面向家庭在表演之餘，孩子們不免對這個蘿蔔大示親熱。除了摸摸抱抱，騎騎乘乘，甚至跳上去當馬騎。幸好紙紙漿的產物是越戳越勇，破了不怕，多糊幾層紙漿後比原來更堅固。蘿蔔被跳扁了，就再糊幾層，然後加上鐵絲網在紙中間，就真正變成了“無敵鐵金剛”了！

歲月流轉，當年的娃娃們現在都已經長大。蘿蔔經過幾度的風光後也就無怨無悔的躺在櫥櫃裏。身上每一層皮膚都包容了孩子們的手印汗漬，似乎連歡笑聲也被包含進去了。

就在今年，FCSN又迎來一群小朋友，兒歌再次揚起，課堂的氣氛充滿朝氣！我這個正式步入奶奶輩分的老師瞬間又活蹦亂跳起來。為了讓FCSN的會員認識孩子們，我決定將他們推上舞台，就像15年前一樣。於是，蘿蔔又被請上舞台。

和15年前一樣，孩子們一見到白白胖胖的大蘿蔔，二話不說就蹦上去又騎又躺又揉又抱！才上了兩次課，拔蘿蔔的歌已經朗朗上口。由於重複了很多次的練習（記得重複演練是一個很重要的過程！），孩子們開始會來拉老師助教的手表示親熱。我們又成就了另一代的大家庭。

“秦時明月漢時關”，亙古存在的月亮看盡人世間的滄桑，無論秦漢，她只是靜靜的懸在天空，印證著一段段人間的歷史。蘿蔔在FCSN成立的20年裏，多多少少也見證了孩子們一路的成長，記錄了三代人的親愛和歡笑。值此二十週年慶，聊以為誌。

When Chiling was 10 years old, FCSN had limited the non-profit organization to four-year olds. All the children activities at that time relied on parents since it was their children in the groups. We didn't have funding either to hire special education teachers for all the class. Being a co-founder--one of the 10 families to start FCSN-- I volunteered as a teacher for a group of young children, mostly under 10 years old.

To encourage our kids to participate in the program, I decided to take them to perform on stage. What to perform? The children song “Ba Lou Bo, To Pull the Turnip” came to my mind. It is a children's song originally from Russia. In the story within the song, Grandpa was pulling a turnip in the garden and found a huge turnip. He couldn't manage working it out, so he called grandma to help. Both of them still couldn't get the turnip out, so they called for more help: little animals like yellow dog, cat and mouse were also helping. By working together, they finally pulled from the ground the .... Not even big, but an enormous turnip!

To have special needs kids perform on stage is not an easy job. Most cannot sing on pitch or on the right beat. Therefore, singing would not work. To ensure their success, one needs to make lots of props to support them. I don't like to just line children up on stage for the whole song. So there comes the

job! What prop? It had to be the turnip, a LARGE one for all the audience to see!

Paper mâché came to mind. I took a large jar of liquid starch and big balloons from the super market. I blew balloons up and taped them together for a big, round cluster. I poured starch into a large bowl and tore newspapers in strips to soak in the starch. Repeatedly, I covered the balloons with the starchy papers until I had a thick layer about half centimeter. The balloon-starch creation dried in the sun for a few hours and became rock hard but very light-weight. More pasting continued with the newspaper stripes until the creation took the shape of a turnip. After two more days of drying in the sun and further hardening, the turnip was ready for acrylic paint. (see picture)

Such a HUGE turnip !! Then I faced the challenge of how to have students interact with it. The song name “Pull the Turnip” would be more interesting if the audience could see my performers doing that. But how? I envisioned chaos. A flash came into my brain, what about ... TUG OF WAR? I bought a long rope, threaded it through the turnip from head to tail. Children who played little dogs, cats and mice could then sit in a row and enjoy Tug of War.

With whom would they compete?



Brain flash, the ground of course, the earth. The opposite side of the rope became the earth children, holding onto their produce. I covered the turnip with a huge brown cloth to represent the earth. The equal battle then formed. After the children used all their energy, the earth finally gave in, letting go of holding. I opened the cloth to reveal the turnip. Everybody carried the turnip home happily and off the stage.

That was in 2000! The participants such as Chiling, VanHai, Christina, and June were mostly under teen age and also extended to their siblings and parents in keeping with FCSN's founding purpose.

After each practice, the children jumped up and around the turnip, giving it a hug or punch. But that was

okay with me. The paper mâché is not afraid of contact; all I had to do was add more layers of newspaper, and the turnip returned as new, just like our spirit.

Time flies. The kids have grown up, and the turnip stays quietly in the garage, wrapped with the "earth," containing imprints from all our children's hands and feet. The turnip is also sealed with their laughter and even their tears.

When I think of throwing the turnip away, I think: the third generation has arrived. We have a little children's class this year. To introduce them to our members, I decided to have the class perform on stage and give life to the turnip again.

Just as they did 15 years ago when the kids saw this big turnip, this year's class jumps on the turnip and gives it a hug. We have only spent two hours together, but the kids already sing this song together. They come to hold teachers' and helpers' hands. It was just like before.

From a Chinese poem: "The moon that has shone in Qing dynasty, now shines on the fort in Han Dynasty." The same moon has seen the earth throughout decades. When we look at the moon, it reveals the history of human beings. The turnip could say the same, although there have been only 15 years, witnessing three generations in FCSN.

Here, I add a little memory for the 20-year anniversary of FCSN.





## “To Dream the Impossible Dream”

### Mission Statement

FCSN’s mission is to help individuals with special needs and their families to find love, hope, respect, and support through integrated community involvement.



*FCSN Special Needs Talent Showcase Closing Ceremony*



*MC, Judges and Anna on stage*

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### Friends of Children with Special Needs

2300 Peralta Blvd. Fremont, CA 94536 T:510-739-6900 F: 510-739-6999  
www.fcsn1996.org Email: [administration@fcsn1996.org](mailto:administration@fcsn1996.org)