

California Autism Foundation

A Better Chance School Grand Opening Celebration

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By: Globe Staff

On January 8, 2005 Laura Briggin welcomed the community to A Better Chance School to its new site on Lakeside Drive in Richmond. The school is operated by the California Autism Foundation (CAF) and exists to fulfill special education needs for its students and to develop an extended family support system.

CAF is a program that has been established over a twenty-two year span, now comprised of a deeply committed family of over 250 consumers, their families, and over 250 staff. ABC School was developed to expand the CAF services to include a non-public school with positive community based educational approach.

For the past seven years the school has been meeting the educational needs of many of their own residential consumers as well as many students living with their own families, and other group homes across the greater Bay Area.

In 1982, Executive Director John Clay started ABC One Group home for his foster son Kenny. With each new program and services it has expanded the depth and breadth of its service roots to now include nine residential homes, supported living services for 20 consumers, three day programs with work, classes and behavioral support, a work activity program with work and educational classes, a supported employment program, a transportation services and staff training programs.

ABC School was started with one student, Owen. As of January 2005 it has grown from one student to 40, but the CAF philosophy remains the same.

In December 2004, a new student's parents asked its Executive Director, Laura Briggin about the philosophy and methods of the school. "I told her that our school used a unique blend of individualized, structured functional academics, community based living skills, positive behavioral supports and therapy programs, but more importantly, we provide a passionate and compassionate extended family.

"The school and all of the CAF programs are philosophically and methodologically dedicated to lifelong learning opportunities that expand with the individual's needs and progress overtime. As with any family, we support our students, consumers and their families through their rough periods. It is a truly a joy to overcome a difficult challenge and to witness and commend the many successes."

Concluding her remarks to guests, Briggin said, "Today CAF celebrates its beautiful building. We know it will provide our students, their families and our staff the needed space and a multitude of ways to grow in, ultimately benefiting the entire CAF family."