



**“If you
cannot
do great
things,
do small
things
in a great
way.”**

— Napoleon Hill



This year we will be highlighting some special people and organizations who are making a difference in the lives of those with disabilities and their supportive families. We hope you make use of these connections as it is our hope that they will link our Special Needs Community in a more personal and supportive way.

oceans of support for siblings!

This month we want to introduce you to an organization that is making a big difference in their community; the **Sandy Feet Initiative**. President and Co-Founder **Mo Langley** states their mission is to provide support for the siblings of a family member with special needs. Is there a need for this? A visit to their website will explain why their work is so important.

Mo explains why she started this very special organization . . .

“The siblings of children with special needs see the world through different lenses than most children. They are the caretaker of their sibling, they are the caretakers for their mom and dad, they feel pressure to achieve great things and see their needs as secondary to the rest of the family. They have the longest relationship with that special sibling. It will last their lifetime – their responsibilities are forever.

As number five of six children, in a family that has battled alcoholism and mental illness, I see through the same lenses as these kids. I felt as if I was a caretaker for my siblings and also my parents. It was my job to be the best behaved, to get the best grades, and to stay out of trouble in order to not be a burden to anyone. And I felt my struggles and triumphs were secondary to everyone else’s.

I see the siblings. I see them as champions of their families. I see their need to succeed as to take care of their family. I see these wonderful children who are mini-caretakers, and I want to take care of them. I want to make each one of them feel like they are number one – even if only for a short time. I want to share with them coping skills and introduce them to peers they can rely and lean on when they need it. I want to give them a breath, since the pressures of their family life can feel suffocating. I want to give them a time to just be, and let it all hang out!

Sandy Feet Initiative has adopted the *Sibshops model for facilitating programs for siblings (*Sibshops are events where siblings gather to have fun and talk about the complexities of having a sibling with special needs and learn about the services they receive. They come from a wellness perspective by celebrating the contributions made by their siblings with special needs). We take it one step further, we give the kids a coping skill; a special one for our team; the gift of the ocean.

The ocean is an incredible healing place, a place to be you, she has no judgment and no expectations, she forces you to be in-the-moment. We teach the siblings how to harness the in-the-moment-ness of the ocean for empowerment, peace, joy and freedom. The ocean tends to make our decisions and force our hand, creating an emptiness and a fullness at the same time!

Sandy Feet Initiative was born from my experiences while working with beach programs for children with special needs. Yes, the siblings are the ones running around or looking bored while they brothers or sisters are introduced to water time on boards. They may even come across as over protective of their atypical sibling. I noticed they sometimes looked ‘left out’. So, we created Sandy Feet Initiative, where we treat the siblings of children with special needs as number one!”

Sandy Feet Initiative is always looking for volunteers! If you are passionate about sharing your love of the ocean with others, and believe in providing a great opportunity for kids, visit their website at <https://www.sandyfeetoc.org> and sign up to volunteer today!

celebrating interdependence

This is the month we celebrate Independence! In the context of supporting adults with disabilities, Independence has become quite the buzz word, and for good reason. Webster’s defines it as “free from outside control; not depending on another’s authority.”

The importance of this concept becomes evident when we consider the many years of abuse and forced control that has been placed on so many adults with disabilities.

The desire to have choice over our lives and a say in our future goes back to the reason our forefathers fought for the birth of our country!

All too often though, the concept of Independence can get mistaken for ‘doing things yourself’ – such as making a meal by yourself, going out by yourself, etc. At Casa de Amma we also recognize the value of interdependence – a concept that is built into the IAC model. Interdependence would recognize that though learning to make my own dinner is an important skill, eating with friends furthers my quality of life better. In the same way, I can learn to clean my room all by myself but doing it with a support staff who can encourage me to get all the steps done, can be more enjoyable and effective.

Some adults with disabilities are influenced to think that living by themselves means they are more capable, but then those same people who encouraged that level of ‘independence’ are surprised when they report feeling lonely. Learning how to depend on others and build important social bonds can be just as important as learning self-sufficiency. They are both important skills that further a person’s ability to create a life they are proud of. So as we celebrate our country’s independence this month, let’s also remember the gift of important relationships and interdependence, because it’s a sign of any great community!

triumphant at the triathlon

This year we held our 6th annual Triathlon at Casa and it was a hit! The theme was “Battle of the Bands” and each person picked their favorite genre of music and joined that team to give it their all. Because of our (3) weekly CasaFit groups, each participant was able to train for ten weeks leading up to the event – and once again there were no injuries and many personal-bests were achieved!

No matter what the participant’s ability level was, we had something for everyone; a 3.5-mile run, 7-mile bike, 1.5-mile 3-wheel bike, 1-mile walk, strength and agility course, and pool swim. We couldn’t have done it without the 20+ volunteers who came to help, ensuring everything went as planned and everyone remained safe. A special thanks to **Hilary Mann** and **Hilary Arentz** for their efforts to provide this great event!



www.casadeamma.org