

# Breaking Barriers

*everybody belongs everybody serves*

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△ A Ministry of Christian Reformed Disability Concerns

## A Little Help Makes a Lot

Muriel Lamer

**O**ne need not be a full-time caregiver to be a caregiver.

My husband, Jerry, and I have found that small amounts of time given by many people can be a huge help. God has worked through individuals in a variety of ways since Jer was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis.

One day as I began to lift Jer's wheelchair out of the car, a stranger came to me and said, "Let me get that for you." One night Jer fell, and I could not help him up. I called (yes, in the middle of the night) a friend who lives nearby, and he came to our rescue.

Before we got our conversion van, someone would take the wheelchair from the trunk and give Jer assistance into his wheelchair as we arrived at church on Sunday morning. As friends from church realized our need for a van, they took



charge, set up a fund drive, and collected enough to cover a portion of the purchase. The van and power wheelchair make it possible for Jer to get in and out of the vehicle without assistance. Now we can make more frequent stops on a trip because I don't get exhausted from handling the wheelchair and because we no longer fear that Jer might fall getting in and out of the vehicle. It is more fun to go out.

Following a hospitalization, Jer needed a level of care that I couldn't provide alone,

especially because I work full time. Visiting Angels took care of the basic needs. Volunteers from church and friends did more. For a few months men took turns visiting Jer every afternoon for two hours. Others came in the evening to help him into bed. Sometimes the caregiver came with soup or bread. What a treat when I could warm up soup the next evening for supper.

Some men still make weekly visits to play games with Jer or talk. They have helped by washing the van, driving him

for haircuts and other appointments, and repairing holes in the wall that Jer creates with his wheelchair. One friend took Jer out for Saturday breakfast, which gave me some free time; another took him to watch a volleyball game. We celebrated our anniversary with friends who brought in food to a facility where Jer was recovering from a hospitalization. Their loving presence made the hamburgers and fries they brought taste better than food from any

## ? did you know...

Did you know you can donate appreciated stock and real estate to Disability Concerns, deduct the full value, and not have to pay capital gains taxes? It's a great way to give. For more information, call 888-463-0272.

upscale restaurant. Others have brought meals over and eaten with us at home. Friends have traveled with us, providing assistance that took patience and cooperation. Another has offered to weed my flower garden.

I share our story to encourage caregiving. One small thing to help or one hour spent with someone can mean so much to those who have difficulty getting around or who are lonely. It may not seem like much, but its value cannot be measured.

## on the web

We applaud all the men and women who care for parents, spouses, children, and others who have special needs. You can find many resources for helping these helpers by going to our website, [www.crcdisabilityconcerns.org](http://www.crcdisabilityconcerns.org), and clicking on the "Resources for Caring Ministry" link.



**I am very concerned** with the report you published on the child with FASD (Spring 2007). We're told that this child was two-and-a-half years old when she was taken in, stayed for three years as a foster child, and was consequently adopted. Adoption should be a conscious and educated choice, made with as much information as possible—including the difficulties adoptive children have with loss and grief, even without the added challenges of FASD.

These parents must have known what many of the challenges would be if they decided to take the step to adopt, and therefore make this child their own.

We as Christians may be motivated to adopt because we have been adopted by God, and can relate to the fact that he loves and takes care of us no matter how dysfunctional we are, no matter what our problems may be. But to make an important decision such as adoption on emotions alone, or just because we are Christians, is just plain unfair to the child, and to the other children already in the family.

Perhaps this child with FASD might have had a better life in a family with fewer or no other children, so that all the en-

ergy and attention could have helped in her development. Instead, she had to live with parents who already had enough children, and who would blame future problems on her.

Sometimes saying no, even as Christians, to adopting a certain child is better for all concerned—especially the child!

Respectfully,  
Karen Aldrich-Wikkerink  
Cobble-Hill, BC

**My sister-in-law** gave me a copy of *Breaking Barriers* (Spring 2007). The front page article was about a family trying to deal with an FASD child, and how the family members became overwhelmed, stressed, and dysfunctional! That's our family.

We have a ten-year-old foster son whom we've had since he was five. Over the years, we have had many struggles with him and his behaviors. Recently, we have been receiving training on FASD from our independent fostering agency. We have been amazed at how many of our son's behaviors can be explained by FASD and how many of our stressors and frustrations have resulted from FASD.

Our biggest problem now is that the Children's Aid Society involved in this child's case is not supporting us. They feel the child does not need an FASD assessment or supports and that we, as the foster parents, need to learn more and better parenting skills. Suffice it to say that things are not going well for any of us.

The article was so timely for me. It validated my stress and frustration. I was feeling extremely inferior and worthless as a parent because of the CAS worker's belief that the problems lay with our poor ca-

pability in parenting. So much literature about FASD deals with the difficulties of the child and the symptoms of the child, but there is little that states clearly the effects on the family involved. Our family unit has struggled immensely. There is so much dissension, tension, and negativity in our home—so many feelings of failure for us as parents and for the child because he knows he's not "measuring up" but is incapable of change due to the FASD.

Thank you for this article. It was a God-send!

Gwen deWilde  
Aurora, Ontario

**As I live with chronic** back problems and arthritis, I am often encouraged to read in *Breaking Barriers* how other people live with their disabilities. I will be 72 years old in June and have lived with my condition for over 40 years. Thanks to the loving care and help of my husband, I can manage with our daily routines. Wishing you God's blessing in your work.

I remain in Christian love,  
Mrs. Janny De Jong

**I look forward** to each new issue of your newsletter. I like the recent change in layout; it's crisp, and the vision statement is well-placed. "A Letter to God" in the most recent issue is powerful.

Blessings to you and your ministry!

Rev. Stanley Groothof  
Telkwa, BC

*Please send us your  
letters and articles.*

Letters and articles may be  
edited for length.

## Blessed with a Miracle Van and More

Marjean Faber

**M**y husband, Cliff Faber, was diagnosed with ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) in January 2000. Our family and friends at Cascade CRC in Marysville, Washington, have helped us generously on our journey!

The first act of kindness was raising \$17,000 to purchase a wheelchair van. We call it our "miracle van." When Cliff could no longer drive himself to work, three retired neighbors each have taken a day a week to drive him. They have been doing this for three years!

We have received money in the mail just when a big bill was due, or a card when we needed encouragement. We especially enjoyed the mail with a special drawing from a child with the words "We are praying for you." A gentleman in our church even donated his time and materials to make our bedroom larger to accommodate all of Cliff's medical equipment.

Cliff's passion is airplanes. He had been a pilot for light airplanes. When he no longer could fly, our son suggested remote control airplanes. When Cliff no longer could hold a tool, a dear friend worked with him to finish the plane.

Yet another dear friend from church has organized meals for us. We have received two meals a week for the last eighteen months—what a blessing! Sharing stories like these has become a great witness opportunity for our family. We would like to thank our church family at Cascade CRC for being there for us every step of the way.



## Respite Care Is Born

Dick, Pat, & Tim Voetberg

**M**hen our son Tim was three years old we moved to Michigan and to a new church family. Because Tim has severe mental and physical disabilities as a result of ATR-x Syndrome, people asked what they could do to assist us. We met with our pastor and council, and a respite care program was born at our church, Georgetown CRC, in Hudsonville, Michigan.

The number of families who volunteered to provide respite for our son overwhelmed us. At one point we had about forty families on a list of volunteers. We could experience some “normal” activities with our other children.

Our son moved into an adult foster care home seven years ago at age 26. We were honored to host a dinner to thank all of the people who had generously given of their time and energy to be God’s hands of love to our son.



## health corner

### Caregiving: A Fact of Life

*Ann Kutudis and Elly Van Alten, Regional Disability Advocates (and nurses) from Classes Southeast US and Alberta North*

Taking care of healthy, full-term infants is a full-time job for new mothers. But when premature birth occurs or when medical complications for mother or infant create hurdles, caring for an infant becomes even more intense. If a serious accident happens or a disability surfaces during these years in a young family, caretaking places an unexpected curve in life’s road. Every family member is affected. Family energy becomes unbalanced by the needs of one family member. Likewise, accidents, illnesses, strokes, and other challenges can cause someone at any age to need extra help.

Caregivers carry a huge burden of responsibility, and often have difficulty asking for help with this burden. Sometimes they have trouble giving over the care of their loved one to others, even if only for an hour or two. In their effort to provide care to another, they often neglect to care for themselves, which leads to burnout.

#### How can we help the caregivers?

First of all, take the time to visit. Learn about the care that is needed, and simply ask how you can help. Sometimes the visit is enough—a welcome diversion from their 24/7 focus on caregiving. Visiting is not only something that adults can do; taking along your well-behaved children can add to the pleasure for both the care-receiver and the caregiver. Get to know these caregivers and their loved ones, and let them know that you will keep them in your prayers.

Actually taking over the caregiving duties for a few hours can enable the caregiver to take care of chores outside of the home or attend a support group. Some caregivers might be extremely grateful for a ride to and from medical appointments for either themselves or their loved one. Take note of specific needs and offer specific suggestions for help. Sometimes the needs are many, requiring multiple volunteers, and help needs to be organized.

There are lots of ways to support and assist the caregivers in our churches. All it takes is for us to extend ourselves and make ourselves available. The ultimate benefit is that you may find yourself with new friends, and they were among you all the time!



## resources

### Website: [www.caregivershome.com](http://www.caregivershome.com)

Produced by Pederson Publishing, the purpose of this site is “to help you make important care decisions with informative articles and resources—even personal advice from our caregiving Board of Experts. We also provide you with a community: an online oasis where you can share feelings and tips, ask advice, and meet other caregivers.”



### Book: *90% of Helping Is Just Showing Up* (2nd Edition)

Written by James R. Kok, this newly revised book teaches a practical model of caring that is rooted in our actions and choices, not just our feelings. Accompanying Scripture reflections and exercises for personal or group study help bring us to compassionate action for others. Available from Faith Alive, 800-333-8300.



### Book: *The Compassionate Congregation* (Expanded and Revised Edition)

Authors Karen Mulder and Ginger Jurries offer stories, advice, and resources from people who have faced crises in their lives including abortion, abuse, AIDS, Alzheimer’s, cancer, death, depression, and more. Available from Faith Alive, 800-333-8300.



**Conference: August 15** – Orland Park, Illinois. “Autism: a Processing Pyramid—Ideas and Strategies for Support and Hope.” Laurel Hoekman will share about people with ASD, and she will give practical strategies for teaching, parenting, and ministering in a way that promotes successful results for everyone. Location: Orland Park CRC. Cost: \$20. Sponsored by Christian Service Ministries, a ministry of the Chicagoland Christian Reformed Churches. For more information, call Jan at 708-307-2370.

## Please Tell Us How We Have Helped

**I**n the Fall 2007 issue of *Breaking Barriers* we plan to highlight the 25th anniversary of Disability Concerns with a timeline of our ministry, an article or two from past issues of our newsletter, some thoughts about what lies ahead for Disability Concerns for the next 25 years, and letters from our readers. For most of our readers, this issue will be delivered as an insert to the October *Banner*.

What are ways that the ministry of Disability Concerns has had a positive impact on your life, the life of a loved one, your church, or our entire denomination? Please send a brief letter to us by July 31, 2007, at Disability Concerns, 2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49560, or email [disabilityconcerns@crcna.org](mailto:disabilityconcerns@crcna.org). We would love to hear from you!





## meditation

### Mini Miracle

Grace Brouwer

*And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*

Philippians 4:19 (NIV)

My son John was born with Down syndrome and very low muscle tone. I hoped to nurse him, since I have met many mothers of children with Down syndrome who had complete success with nursing. A few weeks after trying, without success, I went to a nursing clinic, to meet with lactation specialists. Many trials later, I was sent home without a solution. Sitting in my home with my son, coming to terms with the fact that I would not be able to nurse him, crying out to God, lamenting this knowledge, my front door opened! (It is ALWAYS locked.) Grace, a nurse friend I had not seen for quite a while, walked in with a bag of goodies from the hospital: every type of nipple, bottle, and formula they carry as samples! After a tearful visit, and many more attempts, I realized that I would need to pump breast milk for my son and feed him with one of the flexible mini cups. It took about two hours to feed him two ounces, but he was breast-milk-fed for the first seven months of his life. This is only one of the "mini miracles" that God has brought into our lives.

### Dear Caregiver . . .

*Alice, whose son lives in an adult foster care home, sent us this item, imagining what her son would say to his caregivers if he could.*

**T**hank you for talking to me when you dress me in the morning. It makes me feel less uncomfortable about needing the help, and it makes me feel like you don't mind helping me.

Thank you for not sharing with everyone else how many times I wet my pants or had a bowel movement. After all, I don't know how many times you went to the bathroom today. Sometimes I don't always smell really good. I am sorry about that and wish it could be different. It makes me feel good when you don't complain about it.

Thank you for feeding me my meals at the appropriate temperature. Yes, I will eat it even if it is not the right temperature, but only because the alternative is to go hungry. And while you are feeding me, I really appreciate your talking to me instead of the people you work with. I would like it if you told *me* about the movie you saw last night or how much you like the weather outside. When you only talk to the people you are working

with, it makes me feel like you forget that I am here. I really like it when you wipe my chin carefully with a napkin instead of scraping off my chin with a spoon. It hurts my chin and makes me feel like a baby.

When you talk to me before you touch me or my wheelchair I feel less scared. Sometimes I get shoved around without even knowing where I am being pushed. I like some surprises, but mostly on my birthday.

Most of all, I like it when you ask me what I would like to do and try to figure out what my choice is. It makes me feel like I matter. Even

thought it is not easy to do, I try hard to communicate with you. Sometimes I smile when I am comfortable. Sometimes I fall asleep right away if you lay me down just right. These are the ways I let you know what I like. If I am frowning, crying, moaning, or yelling it means something is wrong. I wish I could tell you what was wrong so that you didn't get irritated with me so often, but I don't have that luxury. You are my only source of being comfortable and content. It is a big responsibility, but I know you are up to it. After all, that is why you applied for a job to **work for me**, didn't you?

**M**ike Doolittle and Yvonne Mulder (both pictured)

have a special bond. Mike is a student at Special Education Ministry in Holland, Michigan. Nicole Mulder, Yvonne's niece, was Mike's teacher at SEM this past year. She and Mike worked together each Thursday evening using the material from Friendship Ministries, but they had a challenge. Mike is deaf, and Nicole does not understand sign language. One evening Nicole took her aunt Yvonne, who is deaf, to SEM. Through Yvonne's signing, Mike understood the Bible lesson better and enjoyed conversation with Yvonne and Nicole.



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49560-0800

Grand Rapids, Michigan

2850 Kalamazoo Avenue SE

Christian Reformed Church in North America

Disability Concerns



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