

The background image shows a young boy climbing a tree trunk with a rope. In the foreground, another young boy is sitting inside a large tire swing that is hanging from a tree. He is wearing a red t-shirt and is holding a small glass with a green plant stem in it. The setting is a lush, green field with many trees in the background.

The Road to HANDLE[®]

*Leads to Hope for Children with
Neurodevelopmental Needs*

By Peg Simon

Last November, I sat in the front row of a small conference room at a HANDLE® community information night, listening to Mary Robson, a HANDLE practitioner, talk about neural plasticity – the fact that the nervous system adapts continuously. Movement can create new pathways in the brain, she said. (HANDLE is an acronym for Holistic Approach to Neurodevelopmental Learning Efficiency.)

“This is reasonable,” I thought, only partly paying attention. I was worried about some of my students. As a reading tutor, I was passionate about helping children heal from the stigma of not being able to read. Although I was successful with most, in some children, there was something else going on beyond their difficulty decoding words and mastering other reading skills. I felt driven to understand what that “something” was.

Robson explained that specific activities, designed to work with specific neural pathways, could help people with a wide range of needs – from handwriting and reading problems to ADHD, to traumatic brain injury, to autism and cerebral palsy.

“Now wait a minute!” I thought, suddenly alert, “how can one approach help people with such obviously different problems?”

And then she told the story.

Judith Bluestone, the founder of the Seattle-based HANDLE Institute International, LLC, was working with a severely autistic 12-year-old boy. Frail and thin, his speech was limited to a few set two-word phrases, such as “Taco Bell” or “Captain Crunch.” He couldn’t dress or feed himself, made no eye contact, and kept to himself unless he became agitated, when he would spit on people.

Bluestone gently took him through a series of exercises, thanking him for any cooperation that he showed and constantly reassuring him that she knew it was difficult for him. She did a face-tapping exercise, in which she gently tapped her fingers along the outline of the trigeminal nerve, one of the cranial nerves emerging through the skull at the temple and branching out across the face.

Dylan Summerlin, 11, of Kent, demonstrates “Crazy Straw,” which is usually done with the eyes closed. This seemingly simple exercise can improve inter-hemispheric integration, eye teaming, sound sensitivity and many other brain functions. Dylan’s brother Ryan, 9 (higher in tree branch) helps with some of Dylan’s exercises . PHOTO BY BRANDY STONE

As she tapped, she explained to the boy that this would help him to form his words so he could speak and be understood. She told his parents to do these exercises twice a day at home.

The following day, as the mother was doing the face-tapping exercise, the boy began to contort his face. She had long been in the practice of speaking to him, though he never answered, so she paused and said, “Am I hurting you? Do you want me to stop?” To her astonishment, the boy responded, “No. Need to talk better.”

With tears in her eyes, she called her husband to tell him the astounding news. The boy had never spoken a sentence to his

father, but before she hung up, she asked him, as she had done a hundred times before, “Do you want to talk to your dad?” The boy took the phone from her and spoke into the receiver, “I love you, Daddy. I love you, Daddy.”

It was at this point that I started to pay close attention.

Judith Bluestone’s Story

Judith Bluestone’s profound understanding of autism and other neurodevelopmental difficulties begins with her own wrenching childhood struggles.

Born with abnormalities in the brain and skull, her face was so misshapen that she could not swallow solid foods. By age 3 she was still babbling an unintelligible speech. By age 8, the bones in her inner ear fused shut, leaving her deaf until surgery corrected the defect. She engaged in self-stimulation activities such as “riding” her tricycle for hours each day by turning it upside down and watching the wheels spin round and round

or riding her pogo stick everywhere. She suffered from seizures and was the object of continuous ridicule at school.

It took numerous surgeries to reconstruct her skull and face. It took courage, an irrepressible will and her own unique genius to train her neurological and muscular systems to see, speak, hear and move in an organized and coordinated fashion. Not knowing the scientific reasons at the time, she instinctively supplemented her speech therapy and medical treatments with her own improvised exercises. Partly because of this, Bluestone can “see” and understand what is going on in a person who has been given one of the various labels such as autism, ADHD, Tourette’s Syndrome or dyslexia. To Bluestone, a person’s behavior is a logical result of his neurological processing.

Continued on page 18

Success Comes a Step at a Time

Dylan's Story

Dylan Summerlin, the son of Kim and Ray Summerlin, has just finished fifth grade at Lake View Elementary School in Auburn.

When he was younger, Dylan had difficulty with reversals in handwriting. In reading, he switched letters around, jumped from line to line, left out words and had difficulties with comprehension. Math was hard, too, and he had some attention problems. "He struggled so hard just to get the words right, by the time he got the sentence out, or the paragraph, he would say, 'What'd I just read?'" Kim Summerlin says. "I cried so many times with him. I talked to them in school all the time. It just got worse and worse. And they'd say, 'Well, he's still young.' And then he was in fourth grade. The other kids were leaving him behind in reading and comprehension. That really hurt his self-esteem."

Dylan also got into trouble at school, touching and bumping into people.

"He'd kind of lean and fall into you," Summerlin says. "I just felt like I had to be right next to someone," Dylan explains. The family turned to the HANDLE program in the summer before fifth grade, on the recommendation of a school counselor. Their practitioner, Pamela Ruffner, explained that Dylan wasn't trying to invade other people's space when he bumped into people. His sense of proprioception (where his body is in space) was not well integrated, so he needed that close physical connection to know where he was. Also, his eyes were not teaming (working together well) and several other senses were not well regulated.

"At first I didn't know how doing the activities could help," Dylan says, "and I didn't want to do them." But they persisted, spending 10-15 minutes each day on the program Ruffner prescribed.

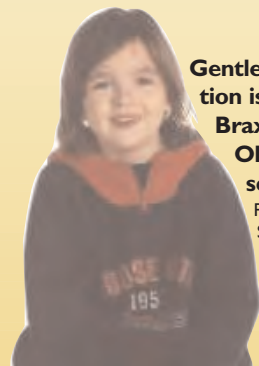
"It's kind of like playing games," Dylan adds. "You do it at home. It's not hard. Don't think it's a waste of time. Stick to it, because if you slack off, it will just take longer."

"Right off the bat, we saw improvements in him," Summerlin says. "His grades went up; he's a more happy boy. He was never mean, but never wanted to be hugged. He was rough when he showed affection. He's not like that anymore. He's more open."

"When I do a math test or reading, I feel like I can do it better. Before, I was barely passing. Now I can read more and under-

stand more," Dylan adds. "At school, when we read books, we take quizzes on the computer. I've been getting mostly 100 percent."

Dylan says he is proudest of the changes in how he can be around others. "Now we go out walking, and he says, 'Mom, look, I haven't bumped you at all!'" says Summerlin.



Gentle, organized stimulation is helping 5-year-old Braxton McQuilkin of Olympia to organize his senses and his body.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SARAH MCQUILKIN

Braxton's Story

Sarah McQuilkin of Olympia is raising her grandson, Braxton, 5. Braxton has been diagnosed autistic and suffered traumatic brain injury as a result of shaken baby syndrome. She found the HANDLE Institute while surfing the Internet, and it matched her philosophy of using a holistic and natural approach. She took her grandson to Marianne Wagner, an independent HANDLE practitioner in Olympia.

"Some of the things Marianne taught were amazing. You wouldn't think that

these exercises would make such a difference," McQuilkin says.

Wagner explains that Braxton's vestibular system (part of the inner ear that allows us to experience gravity and balance) was "most likely damaged when he was severely shaken as an infant." She describes how the activities work: "Through very gentle, organized stimulation, we taught his vestibular system to tolerate and process the sensory input. Now that it's functioning more

reliably, we are focusing on strengthening the sensory systems that build upon it – visual functions, sounds and language, his awareness of his own body and the space around him. He doesn't need to engage in so much self-stimulation, such as hand-flapping; this frees him up for social interaction."

McQuilkin has seen significant progress. "Before, it was pretty hopeless," she recalls. "Lots of times, he would have a meltdown, as if he's in pain." McQuilkin and her husband like to travel a lot, and it was "difficult with

the child kicking the driver's seat and throwing his body back and forth. Now there's none of that." Braxton enjoys the head tapping now and is tolerant of more daily activities.

"You have to do it every day, you have to be committed. The HANDLE Institute gave us the tools to help, but we have to follow through," McQuilkin adds.

Samuel's Story

Christine Roberts, whose son, Samuel, was nearly 6 when they went to the HANDLE Institute, is the director of Nurturing Pathways in Lynnwood. There she combines her love of dance

Continued on page 18



Preparing children
of all ages for
what comes next.



- Warm and nurturing environment
- Well rounded curriculum
- Attention to individual learning styles
- Summer programs and before & after school enrichment activities



Preschool through 8th Grade



Kirkland/Bothell
Montessori Preschool
& Kindergarten-4th Grade
16017 118th Place NE
425-488-8000



Woodinville
Montessori Preschool
through PreKindergarten
18670 NE Woodinville-Duvall Rd.
425-788-7575



Shoreline
Montessori Infant
through Kindergarten
19935 19th Ave. NE
206-367-4404



Lynnwood
Preschool-8th Grade
6717 212th St. SW
425-672-4430



NobelLearning.com

A Step at a Time

Continued from page 16

education, her “professional life experience with Sam” and everything she learned about the brain to provide the benefits of movement to enhance brain function in children ages birth to 3.

For Roberts, HANDLE was “the last thing in a long line of interventions.” Sam was left partially paralyzed at 4 months from the pertussis vaccine. He did not receive early intervention, and she strongly believes that if he had received it at the time of the injury, he would have seen far more gains. He didn’t walk until he was 3.

Roberts saw a HANDLE brochure and remembers thinking that “this could really help Samuel.” At that time, Sam’s sensory system was easily overloaded, his sensory modulation was very poor, as was his attention regulation, and his visual systems were weak. As well, his left side was compromised.

“He had a 4-month-old brain trying to function in a 6-year-old’s body,” summarizes Roberts. “I love how Judith (Bluestone) works, and how she is so sensitive to what the nervous system can handle in terms of it being a productive therapeutic session versus a session that’s going to put the nervous system into overload,” Roberts says. “I became much more sensitive as a parent to when my energy level, or what I was doing, was over-stimulating Sam, or was more than he could handle.”

Roberts says the changes were subtle, over time. He gained a much better attention regulation and is “calmer in his body.” He made some gains in his visual system. He’s more organized and less impulsive. He’s using language, although it’s still hard for him to get the words out clearly. He’s turning 10 now, and still has a vulnerable system and a severe disability. But, his mother says, “He’s skiing independently. No one would know he was paralyzed. He has good balance. His emotional self is totally intact, and he loves language and music and dance.”

— Peg Simon

HANDLE®

Continued from page 15

Bluestone did her graduate work in neurological impairment, behavioral disabilities and special education. Her doctoral studies were in neurodevelopment.

She spent 11 years in Israel, where she designed therapeutic activities for at-risk young children in a crime-ridden area, teaching preschool and kindergarten teachers how to integrate the activities into the curriculum. She succeeded, where everyone else had failed, in mainstreaming the children. It was there that she developed many of the insights that were to become the HANDLE approach. In 1989, she received Israel’s National Prize for Early Childhood Education.

The HANDLE Institute was founded in 1994, as people in the Seattle community observed Bluestone’s work in a private school, a King County hospital and a major medical organization. She worked with special needs children, adults with brain injuries and people with learning and language disorders.

Bluestone’s methods moved her clients forward much more rapidly than it was thought possible, and achieved progress

Is Your Child Fidgety or Forgetful?

Join a research study to treat your child’s symptoms!

This Bastyr University research study of an herbal medicine, funded by NIH’s National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, could help treat ADHD symptoms like difficulty sustaining attention, interrupting others, acting before thinking or difficulty organizing tasks.



Eligibility:

- Children 6-17 years old with ADHD symptoms
- No severe depression, neurological, liver, kidney or systemic disease
- Child and parent must attend all study visits
- No charge

If eligible, your child will receive an herbal medicine or a placebo for the 9-week study. Physical exam and psychological testing are included. \$75 compensation for both parent and child upon completion.

Call 425.602.3419 or visit www.bastyr.edu/research/ADHD.

Bastyr University is internationally known for pioneering work in science-based natural medicine.

BASTYR
UNIVERSITY

Excellence in Dentistry for Infants, Children and Adolescents

KYOKO AWAMURA, DDS, MSD, PLLC

- New Patients Welcome!
- Sedation & General Anesthesia available
- Member - American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry
- Orthodontics available for children and adults



Bellevue Pediatric Dentistry and Orthodontics, PLLC

(425) 614-3777

875 140th Ave. Ste. 200
Bellevue, WA 98005



Try virtual kayaking in the San Juan Islands (without tipping over).



ODYSSEY

Seattle’s Hands-on Maritime Museum
Pier 66 • 2205 Alaskan Way
206-374-4000 • www.ody.org

with some brain injury cases that had been judged hopeless. Bluestone founded the institute to train others in the methods she had been using for more than 20 years. In 2004, it was re-formed and renamed the HANDLE Institute International, LLC. Bluestone is clinical and educational director. It is now the hub of an ever-growing network of HANDLE practitioners and screeners – throughout the United States and in South Africa, Switzerland and England.

Bluestone was one of five winners of the 2004 Washington State Jefferson Awards and is the winner of the prestigious Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Award for public service. The author of two books, *The Churkendoose Anthology, True Stories of Triumph Over Neurological Dysfunction* (The Handle Institute, 2002), and *The Fabric of Autism* (The Handle Institute, 2004), she is working on a third book, *My Body, My Math Skills*, which will show how math must first be learned in the body before it can be understood in school.

The HANDLE Approach

HANDLE, as the name implies, is a holistic and developmental approach to

neurological systems. It incorporates research and techniques from the fields of medicine, rehabilitation, psychology, education and nutrition, emphasizing nondrug methods to treat root causes of disordered behavior.

Treatment begins with a full assessment, in which the client is asked to do a series of tasks and family and birth history are evaluated. Practitioners design a home-based program of activities tailored to the individual. The activities typically take 20-30 minutes a day, and can be interspersed throughout the day, as best fits the family's schedule.

"HANDLE assessments are not tests. We're not testing you; we're 'learning you,'" Bluestone says. "The child is teaching us a lot of important things that will help us understand and translate back to you and the family why particular things are difficult for you." Behaviors are communication, she says, not problems to solve.

For example, if a child in the autistic spectrum is seen, "We allow the child to hum and spin and tap, because we need to learn who he is, and when is it that he does make eye contact, and when is it that he needs to hum and spin," she elaborates.

"Each of these things gives us information. Behavior is not a negative. It's a telling."

The HANDLE philosophy is one of "Gentle Enhancement[®]" – because "stressed systems do not get stronger." The therapeutic program is designed for the particular client so that the stressed systems can calm down and existing neural pathways can be enhanced or new ones gently built. "Scientists have known for more than 50 years about the neuroplasticity of the brain and nervous systems," says Bluestone. "They are in a constant state of adaptation, except when there's stress."

Recently, Dr. David Lewis of the University of Washington conducted a pilot study of adults with traumatic brain injury who were given a HANDLE program of activities. Scans of their brains, conducted at Harborview Medical Center, showed that the activities produced significant changes in their brain functions both while doing the exercise and at rest. All the participants were at least three years post-injury, with no further improvement or changes in the brain expected by normal healing. Lewis is applying for a grant

Continued on the next page

**SUMMER 50% off
CLEARANCE**

- European styled children's fashion
- Exclusive labeled playwear
- Fall 05 Robeez Shoes
- Leather shoes/sandals
- Soft toys / gift ideas
- Size newborn to 4T

JOJOkids
Bellevue Square
425-452-8787
www.jojokids.com



ROBEEZ

TV

RUSS



Peggy Washburn
Museum Quality Fine Art Portraits

(206) 323-6705
www.peggywashburn.com

Our Nurses Will Baby
Your Baby

For a referral to one of our excellent OB Specialists call:
425-774-BABY • www.stevenshealthcare.org





HANDLE®

Continued from previous page

to do further research.

Bluestone emphasizes the “H” in HANDLE. She knows that holistic means that nothing stands alone, including the HANDLE therapy. Practitioners make sure that their clients know about nutrition and may suggest other complementary therapies such as cranio-sacral treatments or allergy testing. The methods do not replace medical treatments, but work with them.

Says Bluestone: “One thing I’d like to get out to the community interested in learning differences, is that when parents say, ‘We’ve tried everything, we’ve tried it all,’ what they may have done is tried individually each of many things. They’ve gotten a little benefit from each and see no more, and so they say it doesn’t work. But they need to try it all together. Life is a holistic experience. You can’t just deal with nutrition and not deal with detoxification. If you just take away allergies and leave behind sensory stressors, then the body’s stress develops neuro-toxicity and you’re back with the allergies. A holistic approach is the only real way for it to be lasting.”



Judith Bluestone helps Brianna Wilkinson with “Imaginary Chin-ups,” an exercise that helps the vestibular system and the eyes.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE HANDLE INSTITUTE INTERNATIONAL, LLC

The Road to HANDLE – Postscript

The other night, I attended another community information night – this time, it was Bluestone who was the speaker. She told us of a recent email from a family expressing their gratitude for the help they’d received. Bluestone had never met this family, or the HANDLE practitioner who helped them. The practitioner was trained by one of HANDLE’s certified instructors. It was a quiet moment in the presentation, but a big

one for Bluestone: Her dream of seeing her work spread around the world is starting to become a reality.

As for me, it has been quite a journey since that first informational night. I’ve completed both the introductory training and the intermediate level, and have recently received my certification as a HANDLE screener. I’m taking the advanced course this summer, and will then begin my internship. In the process, I’ve learned a great deal about the neurodevelopmental systems. I know that for some children, reading problems are a sign of other needs that must be addressed first in order to integrate and organize their systems to allow them to work efficiently. I’m already performing screenings and incorporating HANDLE exercises into my tutoring program, and seeing the results. It’s a very hopeful time.

Peg Simon is a reading tutor, proofreader for Seattle’s Child and Puget Sound Parent, and a certified HANDLE screener. She recently began working at HANDLE part time. She may be reached at: pegsimon@emerald-forest.net.

Visit us at careworkseattle.com

DISCOVER THE DIFFERENCE
Known for our exceptional personal service, long-term support and unique approach to finding just the right fit for your family, YOUR CHILD DESERVES THE BEST. AND SO DO YOU.

CAREWORKS
INNOVATIVE NANNY SOLUTIONS

206-325-7510
425-641-9522

Creating Big Smiles on Young Faces

We specialize in creating outstanding pediatric dental experiences.

Everett:
425.355.1136

Sno-King:
425.745.9435

Olga L. Ortuzar, D.D.S., M.S., P.S. and Associates
Limited to Pediatric Dentistry

913 128th St. SW • Everett, WA 98204
www.childrensdentalcenter.net

FAMILY FUN AT REMLINGER FARMS

■ Open Weekends Mid-May through October
■ Open Daily Late-June through Labor Day
■ One Low Admission Price Includes Interactive Family Fun with Access to Over 25 Rides and Attractions

Call to book your Birthday Party!
Visit our website for details
www.remlingerfarms.com
(425) 333-4135
or (425) 451-8740

PRESENT THIS COUPON AND RECEIVE \$8.00 ADMISSION TO THE COUNTRY FAIR FUN PARK!

Offer expires September 2005.
Limit of 5 discounted admissions per coupon. Regular Admission is \$9.00.
Not valid with any other offer.

SWIMMING LESSONS

Linda Riggins

Teaches “A Method that Works”™

Celebrating 25 years teaching swimming!

Kirkland & Redmond Locations

Specializing in toddlers and young children

- Individualized attention.
- Pool heated to 90 degrees.
- Year round program.
- Only four children per class.
- One class at a time in pool.

(425) 823-0177
TOLL FREE 866-310-1179
www.lindariggins.com
e-mail: info@lindariggins.com

TOP-TEN-TOYS

LOTS OF TRADITIONAL TOYS!

FUN TOYS • EDUCATIONAL TOYS • CREATIVE TOYS

Over 15,000 Toys & Gifts for the Entire Family

Arts & Crafts • Books • Baby Accessories • Dolls • Kites
Puppets • Puzzles • Musical Instruments • Science • Games
Environmentally Conscious Toys • Party Favors

Hours: 7 days, 9-6
plus Wed, Thur,
Fri til 9 pm

(Just across the street from Fred Meyers)
104 North 85th
782-0098
www.toptentoy.com