

Voices From the Crowd: Why I Created Hands-On Development

By Jeana Gump

When a child is twelve years old, they should be able to stay home alone, do the dishes, vacuum, clean their room, help make dinner, set the table, and various other household chores. Their willingness to do so may leave something to be desired, but physically and mentally, they are able. When my child turned twelve, I prayed that she would be able to use the bathroom properly, and put herself back to sleep when she woke in the middle of the night. For twelve years I have changed her diapers and been up at all hours of the night and day with her. I am pleased to report that she is currently fifty percent potty-trained and able to put herself back to sleep, so I'm changing fewer diapers and getting a good night's sleep most of the time. I consider this a victory.

My twelve year old is 100% dependent on others to get her through her day. We have to feed her because if we hand her food, she will throw it. We dress her, try to bathe her (key word is TRY), take her to the restroom, and pro-

then said toddler becomes a preschooler, and then a school-age child....and we are back where I started with the average twelve year old.

We have a pre-teen with a toddler mentality and it's not going to get easier, in fact, with each passing year, it gets harder. Many tell me they don't know how I do it and I am going to share with you how. I do it because I have to. I was not given a choice. I do it with wine and with coffee and a number of friends that I cannot imagine living life without. I do it with the assistance of wonderful respite care workers who come into our home and put up with what most people would not tolerate. I also do it by creating what she needs to get through a day, a week, a month, and even a summer.

This is why I created Hands-On Development. With the invaluable dedication and help of Eric Urban, I filled the void with what was needed to survive the summer. Vernonia had nothing to support families of children with special needs, and Vernonia does have its fair share of families like mine, to justify the creation of Hands-On Development and other special needs support programs. Most of us are too exhausted to attempt this, but I am crazy so I did. This is only the beginning. Vernonia, like many other communities has its problems, but it is an amazing place to



what worked and what didn't and have implemented changes for this year. Our goal this year is to provide an aide for each child registered. In the past we required parents to attend. I'm hoping to drop that requirement this year.

Someday perhaps we will become bigger. For now we are meeting a need for my family and several others in our community. I am grateful for all those who volunteer and could not do it without them.



vide support for every activity she does. We are exhausted. A few years back we were so exhausted that I began to wonder how much longer I could do this. I dreaded Christmas break and summer vacation and not for the typical reasons that most parents do, but because a break in her routine meant total destruction of any kind of peace in our home. Now I'm sure some toddlers may have rivaled her behavior, but really those are phases in life. They last a short time and

raise children and it can be an even more amazing and safe place to raise children with special needs. Everybody knows Savannah, and most welcome her with a smile. For that I am forever thankful.

Hands-On Development runs twice a week for just a few hours. The goal is to provide a consistent activity in the middle of summer to help these kids stay in a routine. Last year was our first year. We only had a few kids, but it was a good trial run. We found out

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