

"The Clubhouse for Special Needs"

November 9, 2008

I am a single mom of a 16 yr boy with Down syndrome. For fourteen years I was self-employed so I could be home for my son to help him to reach and even exceed his potential. My business provided just enough to make it through each month. After 9/11/2001 I lost two major contracts and thus my business was fading. That summer I was diagnosed with ovarian cancer and the chemo didn't help in motivating me to rebuild the business - thus, the business ended. I found a job that allowed me to be home for my son after-school but that only lasted nine months. They wanted 40 hours a week instead of 30 but I could not do that. I needed to be home for my son after school. I was terminated.

Now what, Lord? I asked myself, what do other working people do with their special teen? I discovered that there was nothing in all of Northeast Tarrant County (Dallas/Texas area) for teens and young adults for after-school. In Oct. 2005 I got a Doing Business As, named The Clubhouse, and started the process to do something. By January 2006 I incorporated - The Clubhouse for Special Needs, Inc. Our Mission Statement: provide a safe and fun place for teens and young adults with mild/moderate, mental/physical challenges -- an opportunity for education, socialization, and independence in a recreational atmosphere. In summer 2006 we opened my two bedroom apt. for four young people and that August occupied 1,737 sq ft commercial facility.

Before The Clubhouse, my son would say in his limited speech, "Mom, I want friends." I couldn't let him play with the kids at our complex because he needed to be supervised. After The Clubhouse opened - three weeks later -- my son said - actually verbalized, "Mom, I have friends." Summer 2007 we had 8-10 and summer 2008 we had 22 throughout the various programs. We have out-grown this facility. We're open during the school year after school as well as Friday/Saturday nights. We are also open on no-school days, and in the summer [all day long] drop off service. One third of the budget is provided by the parents or a service provider. The remaining 2/3s comes from donations. Since summer 2006 we typically start the month off with under \$20 in the bank and by the end of the month our bills for the month are paid. Each month I have no idea where the money is going to come from; but it does.

The past three years have been a monthly challenge. We have outgrown our 1,737 sq ft. and we need a larger facility. But - moving to a larger facility also means a larger budget. We're looking at a building that has a gymnasium - that would be soooo awesome. In this new facility we can service more teens and young adults. We can help

those parents with providing a safe and fun place for their young people with special needs.

The economy is really bad and there are "day cares" across the U.S. that are closing down because parents can't afford their service. Without a minimum - 6 months budget in the bank as a reserve we can't move to a larger facility or provide for more and more challenged teens and young adults. There have been several times I didn't get paid [like last month]. There have been many times where I didn't get paid the full amount throughout the three years. There have been many times where I've paid for expenses of The Clubhouse out of my salary -- out of money that is already stretched as far as it could go. I've given up a lot over the past fourteen years - and that's been my choice, FOR MY SON, and now for the teens and young adults of others. This is not a complaint. There are days I have to choose between milk and bread. I do not need to be rich to be happy. I do not need fancy cloths and materials, etc. The Clubhouse for Special Needs is soooooo needed.

Darlene

Texas