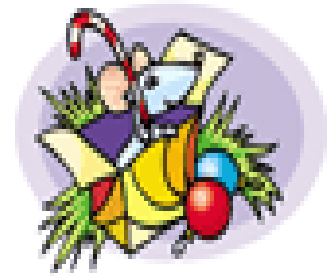


The People First **Connection**



The Voice of Self Advocacy in Oregon
Published by Self Advocates As Leaders

New Things Everyday

Kara Romanaggi
Portland

My name is Kara Romanaggi and I am 21 years old. I was born with Down syndrome. Sometimes people with Down syndrome look a little different than other people. Our faces may be shaped a bit rounder, our eyes turn up at the corner in a pretty way and as we grow up we are usually shorter than people our own age.

We learn a little different too. Sometimes it's harder for us to remember things. I am still learning new things every day in lots of different ways.

Besides the little differences I have talked about, people with Down syndrome are like everybody else. I like to hang out

with my friends, go to the movies and talk on the phone. I like to sing, act and dance. I also like to swim and ski and spend time with my family.

When I was in grade school I was in a regular class. I have lots of friends from school. I went to birthday parties, slumber parties, and had lots of play dates. I used to go to summer camp with my friends.

I just graduated from a program at Portland State University last spring. I was a volunteer in the Day Care there. They thought I did such a great job with the kids that they hired me and I am now a teacher. I love to work with the kids and help them learn. I can't wait for my first paycheck. I am going to go shopping!

I enjoy music and my theater class. I do plays, sing, dance and write stories. Last spring we did *The Music Man*. The class is called Phame Academy

New Things Everyday (cont.)

and I have lots of friends there. The teachers at Phame are teaching us how to be professional actors, dancers and singers.

I love to be on stage and I love being able to write to all of you about my abilities and my life.

Have a wonderful day!

Kara Romanaggi was keynote speaker for the annual Down syndrome Buddy Walk. The walk is sponsored by the Northwest Down Syndrome Association.

**Would you like to do an
article for
*The People First
Connection?***

**For help in preparing a
story simply email us at
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(503) 284-4972

We Will Help You!

Advocate's Corner

**Judy Cunio
Salem**

AN INTERVIEW WITH BILL LYNCH

Bill is the new Director, but he is no stranger to the Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities. He was the Planning and Communications Coordinator for the Council for almost ten years. Bill has worked with and for people with developmental disabilities for more than 20 years.

Q: What would you like to share with people about who you are?

A: I like people. During my career in developmental disabilities, I have met lots of great people – people who make me think and laugh, people who support me in my work and challenge me to be the best advocate I can be. I love this work because of the people and because of the cause.

I believe everyone should have the same rights – regardless of their disability or other “differences.”

Advocate's Corner (cont.)

I believe we are *all* more alike than different. When we pay more attention to our differences than to our similarities, we end up with wars and institutions and discrimination. Our job is to show the world that people with disabilities are a natural part of the “fabric of life.”

Q: As the new Executive Director of the DD Council, people would be interested to know how you got involved in this type of work.

A: Believe it or not, it all started when I wandered into a bingo hall in 1981. Before I knew it, I was a bingo caller for The Arc of Oregon. Soon after that I was hired as a systems advocate. The first thing I wanted to do as an advocate was to help free people who lived at Fairview. I had a taste of institution life (and institution food!) when I was sent away to a religious boarding school at age 13. That experience helped prepare me to become an advocate for the rights of people to be included and supported in their communities.

Q: Where do you see the self-advocacy movement going in the future?

A: Since the formation of Self-Advocates As Leaders (SAAL), the self-advocacy movement has grown stronger and more powerful. More leaders are being developed. More people with developmental disabilities are seeking membership on policy-making groups. And more policy makers are remembering to include self-advocates on committees and advisory groups. We need to build on this progress.

Q: What should the self-advocacy movement be doing that it is not doing now?

A: We need to make greater efforts to include people from different races and cultures in the self-advocacy movement, as well as people from rural communities across Oregon. We need to have self-advocates more involved in the legislative process, and SAAL has plans to do that.

Q: As the Director, how will you support the self-advocacy movement?

A: The main way the Council supports the self-advocacy movement is through our support

Advocate's Corner (cont.)

to SAAL. The State also provides financial support to SAAL. I will work with SAAL leadership to make sure the Council and the State are up to date on the important work SAAL is doing so that the Council and the State will continue to support SAAL.

Whenever I see a policy group that does not have self-advocates as members, I will stress the importance of involving self-advocates and will offer to help the group recruit members who are self-advocates.

=====

Bill Lynch, Executive Director, Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities, can be reached by calling 1-800-292-4154, toll-free in Oregon.

*Judy Cunio is the Council Self-Advocacy Specialist who writes this regular column for **The People First Connection.***

The People First Connection welcomes unsolicited articles. All material is subject to editing for content, spelling and grammar.

My Heart

Troy Lovaas
Eugene

On Valentine's Day, 1980, I invited Jesus Christ into my heart. What an entrance he made! As he came into my heart something happened at the very center of my life. He said to me, "It's dark in here. Let's have some light." He built a fire and banished the chill.

He started music where there had been none. He filled the emptiness with his own loving, wonderful fellowship.

On the day of my fellowship with Jesus Christ I said, "Lord, I want this heart of mine to be yours. Please sit down and relax. Take your sandals off and I will wash your feet for you." The Lord replied, "What great service you have." "Thank you," I said as I welcomed a kiss. Later, we had dinner. I made chicken noodle soup and shared it with him. The Lord said, "This is pretty good."

As I thanked him I gave him a glass of water. He said, "Whom ever drinks from this water will thirst, but whomever drinks from the water that I give will become a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

My Heart (cont.)

I asked him, “Give me some of this water so that I will never thirst again.” And he did.

As I ate and drank with him, he said, “I want to see your library room.” I thought, “Oh, oh. I am in trouble now.” As we were done with dinner he helped me with the dishes.

As we went into the library room he saw my books and said, “First of all, take away all these that you are reading. They aren’t pure and true. Throw them out. Now put on the empty shelves the book called The Holy Bible.

He also told me to put his picture up on the wall.

The next day I found him waiting for me at the door. There was an interesting look in his eye. He said to me, “Something is dead around here. It’s upstairs and I’m sure it’s in the hall closet.”

As soon as he said that I knew what he was talking about. I told him that there is a small hall closet up there and in that closet were two things that were personal to me that I didn’t want him to see. I gave him my key to unlock the door. He threw the putrefying stuff that was there rotting away and

threw it out the door. Then he cleaned and painted and said, “Consider it done.”

So I gave my contracts to the Lord Jesus Christ and said to him, “*Mi casa es sú casa.*” In Spanish that means “my house is your house.”

Things are different since Jesus Christ has settled down and made his home in my heart.

New Editorial Board

The People First Connection and Self-Advocates As Leaders has announced the appointment of four new members to our Editorial Board. The Editorial Board advises *The People First Connection* on stories to cover and helps to edit new editions.

The new members are: Jerry Pattee of Portland, Ruth Morris of Eugene, Dayna Davis of Elmira and A.J. Aldrich of Gold Beach.

If you would like to serve on the Editorial Board or learn more about it, email us at bustaman@ohsu.edu Or phone SAAL at (503) 232-9154 ext. 133.

The Things I Like

**Colleen Conerly
Eugene**

My name is Colleen Conerly. I was born in Portland but I live in Eugene. I live with my dad.

I graduated from Sheldon High School and now I go to the Community Living Program. At the Community Living Program we learn about budgeting, cooking and taking the bus. I like to take the bus around town. I like to go to the store, to the University of Oregon and to many other places.

I like making friends with people. I have had a best friend since middle school. Her name is Amanda. I am 18. Amanda is younger than me. Sometimes I go to her house, when she is not busy, to play video games and talk or watch television. It makes me happy to be able to ride the bus around town, visit my friends and live my life the way I want to.

I have a 22-year-old brother who lives in Portland. He used to have a job at a restaurant but doesn't work there anymore. His name is Scott. We are good friends. Sometimes I visit him

when I go to Portland and we get to hang out and talk.

My favorite animal is a cat. I have a cat named Josephine. She is white and gray. She follows me everywhere and I think that is funny. She sleeps with me, and sometimes, she nibbles my fingers or my chin.

My dad is a good guy. He makes me laugh. He tells me that he loves me. He can tell if I have had a bad day. I can tell him about it.

My dad and I do a lot of stuff together like go to movies, out to dinner or get take-out. I love my dad very much.

I have a lot of dreams. I dream about going to people's houses and talking to them and getting to be friends. One of my dreams is to get married someday and have kids. I like children. They are cute. I don't want my kids to smoke cigarettes.

I had a dream that my ex-boyfriend wanted to get back together.

I want my life to be fun.

I love to travel and I really want to go back to Disneyland.

Things that I like to do include swimming, bowling and talking to my friends on the telephone.

The Beach

**Lois Long
Springfield**

Recently I made a trip to the beach. I went to Reedsport. I went with my care provider Rhonda and with my roommates Carla, Bob, Katie and Erin.

We went down to the beach and walked around. We also visited the Heceta Head lighthouse. It was very cold. I had to wear my heavy coat. But I like the coast, even when it is cold.

We stayed one night at a hotel. We watched television. We had dinner. We ate chicken, potato salad and potato chips.

At breakfast time we went to another restaurant and ordered scrambled eggs, pancakes and hot chocolate.

Then we drove to a place where they sell stuffed animals. I like that place. They had stuffed bears, peacocks and t-shirts. Rhonda bought me a tiger shirt and a bear shirt for Carla. Katie bought a black shirt with a picture of a tiger on the front.

We drove to the old town part of Florence and had dinner. We had shrimp salad and potatoes and soda.

I want to go back to the coast again.

Heavenly Home

**Meredith Mitchell
Hood River**

When I look up at the beautiful, bright sky, I see the stars at night and the sun and clouds at day.

I think of all my family that has gone on before me and are now in heaven with the Lord.

I am sure the Lord is proud to have them up there in heaven.

When I think of heaven I think of a wonderful place that my loved ones are in.

Sometimes when I'm working, or just sitting at home, I wish God would open up the sky and come down and walk with me or sit with me and share his stories with me.

I thank God for his love even though I can't be there right now in heaven with my loved ones.

I believe God has my heaven here on earth right now.

We all have friends and family that have gone on to live in heaven and wish they hadn't left us behind. But listen to me when I say that not all is lost. You should be glad that God has called them to his heavenly home.

Change

**Tristan Harding
Monmouth**

If I could change the earth
Life would be fair at birth.
There is no search
The church would be real.
Nothing to steal
Make a deal.
Moment of truth
I can't lose
Only if I could change the earth.

SAAL Needs You

Self-Advocates As Leaders provides many training and advocacy opportunities. We welcome and need your participation.

**State Office:
161 High Street
Salem, OR. 97301
(503) 232-9154 x 133
chelvington@mindspring.com**

**Staff:
3608 SE Powell
Portland, OR. 97202
(503) 232-9154 x 134
bustaman@ohsu.edu**

Contact Us!!

Advocacy

**Stacy Adair
Eugene**

My name is Stacy Adair and I have Down syndrome. I know this very special person who has inspired me to become a disability advocate by following in her footsteps. I appreciate her honesty, respect, support and the fact that she always has a sparkling smile. Her name is Jessica Gresmak. I believe that she is very dedicated to advocacy for her many clients. Whenever we need her she tries to find a way to be there as a true friend and advocate.

I am not looking at my developmental disability as an obstacle. Instead I am now looking at my ongoing advocacy and activism as a very capable person.

After I graduated from Lane Community College's Adults with Special Needs program, I helped save the downtown center from being eliminated because Lane Community College has been having a real money problem. Within the last two years I also helped to change the name of the program to Adult Basic Skills.

Steve Carter is the teacher of my self-advocacy class. The main goal of this class is to create

Advocacy (cont.)

access between elected officials and adults with special needs and it inspires us to participate with our voice by standing up for ourselves and others.

I have written many letters regarding disabled students and their rights and how politics harm us all. I believe that the Town Hall Speech that I gave to one of Congressman DeFazio's aids is being shared in Congress.

I also have a commitment to keep as an activist/actress and to participate in educational videos for the Iris Media, Inc. I am very proud to serve on the Advocacy and Outreach Committee with Lane Independent Living Alliance and whenever we come together we work as a team.

We are very proud of being disabled. That makes us face our fears and everyday worry. I believe our biggest fear is that "normal" people not discriminate against us by violating the law. In the depth of my heart I believe that we should be treated with respect as people and I hope you never give up on we who need it the most. All I ask is for you to listen to your heart to include us in the main stream of life.

To Be A Soldier

**Christy Wilson
Eugene**

I was born in Myrtle Creek. I moved to Eugene a long time ago with my parents. I went to school at Cal Young, North Eugene and Sheldon High School and now I work at Lane Community College.

I wash dishes, take the garbage out and bus tables. I think work is great because I get paid. Last night I had macaroni and cheese with hot dogs and a soda and I paid for it with my own money. In the summer time I have two jobs. I work in the laundry and at Lane Community College.

In my spare time I like to watch television. I watch the Disney Channel. My favorites are Lizzie McGuire, Cadet Kelly, Even Stevens and Star Trek. I have my own TV, VCR and DVD player.

I have five pets at home. Their names are Cricket, Gabby, Karler, Katie and Tinker Bell. I adopted Tinker Bell when she was a baby kitten but she is grown up now.

In my family I have two nephews and a niece. They come over to my house often. I play

To Be A Soldier (cont.)

toys with them and we watch television together.

I live with my parents and I have two brothers that live on their own. My mom is the one who takes me shopping. In the summertime my parents take me skeet shooting. They also took me to Disneyland.

My dream is to be a star. I want to be a famous actress. I also want to be a rock star, like Lizzie McGuire.

I like to draw pictures. I hang pictures on my bedroom wall by my bed. I draw people, Freaky Friday, self-portraits and my family.

Recently, my mom took me to the theater. We saw "Good Boy", a movie about talking dogs and space ships.

I miss my grandpa, he passed away. I really miss him. I miss him during holidays like birthdays and Christmas

I like to go bowling. It is fun. I also like to go to the Lane County Fair with my friends and ride on the rides.

In the future I want to go to a military school and be a soldier. I like the uniforms.

I Like My Job

**Lois Long
Springfield**

I go to work at 9 a.m. I go to the big dish room and get the bleach water ready for bussing. Then I go out to the food court, bus the tables and push the chairs in.

At about 10 a.m. I put up the sandwich bar and the salad bar and get them ready. I fill up six buckets of ice and dump them in the sandwich bar and then four buckets of ice and dump them in the salad bar.

After this, at 10:30 a.m., we go on break and get back at 11 a.m.

Then I help pick up the dirty trays from the salad bar and bring them down to the food court and haul them over to the dishwashing room.

I go to lunch at noon and stay for half an hour. Then I come back to work. I help gather trays until about 2 p.m. and then I work in the small dish room. I work with a person named Linda. I get along very well with her.

I Like My Job (cont.)

I like my job because of my co-workers. And I like my supervisors as well. My supervisors are funny. They are nice to me and care about me.



Today my supervisor told me that I would get a new assignment. We are going to add Building number nineteen to our tray route. That will mean that I will get paid more because they added a new route. And I like that.

Authors Colleen Conerly, Troy Lovaa, Lois Long and Christy Wilson all wrote their articles at a Writer's Workshop sponsored by Self-Advocates As Leaders and *The People First Connection*.

To arrange a Writer's Workshop in your area call SAAL at (503) 232-9154 x 133. Your work is important.

Odds and Ends

A Writer's Workshop will be held in Grants Pass on March 13. Self-Advocates from southern Oregon are invited to participate. To register please call **Self-Advocates As Leaders**, (503) 232-9154 x 133.

An easy way to submit an article to *The People First Connection* is by email. Mail it to us at mtbclarion@comcast.net

Self-Advocates As Leaders and *The People First Connection* wish to thank the people who have worked so hard on the SAAL Communications Committee. Ruth Morris, Theresa White, Charlie Hammett, Dayna Davis, Gayle B. Gardner and Margaret Whipple have made great contributions to this publication. Thank you.

Trent Minor of Stayton, Charles Oh from Enterprise, Edward Plourde of North Bend, Lindsay Stephens of La Grande, Laddie Read of Portland and Kara Romanaggi have been selected as self-advocate members of the **Partners In Policy Making Class of 2004**.

Congratulations to each of them!

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540 24th Pl. NE
Salem, OR 97301

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The People First Connection

Editorial Board

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