Celebrating Over 20 Years 1995-2015
Serving Nevada

2015 YEARBOOK

Celebrating a collection of stories honoring those who make a difference for children and their families.

nvpep.org
Governing Board

Lois Tarkanian
Advisory Board

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PEP is Nevada’s statewide Parent Training and Information Center for families who have children with disabilities and the professionals who support them. Nevada PEP is also the Statewide Family Network for families who have children with emotional and behavioral health needs. Nevada PEP believes that the family is the fundamental unit in society. Our philosophy is that children with disabilities, without regard for the nature and severity of the disability, have an inherent value, that all life has a purpose, that communities benefit from providing appropriate interventions and that individuals with disabilities make valuable contributions to society.

**OUR MISSION**
To increase the opportunities for home, community and school success for children with disabilities, including those who are at risk or who have serious emotional disturbances, their families and their service providers, through education, encouragement and empowerment activities.

**WHAT IS NEVADA PEP?**

**WHAT SERVICES DOES PEP OFFER?**

- Information and Referral
- Statewide Lending Library
- Newsletters Biannual
- Conflict Resolution Support
- Individual Assistance
- Training Workshops
- Volunteer Opportunities
- Family Support Services
- Monthly E-Newsletters
- Webinars

**WHO SHOULD CALL?**

- Parents of children with special needs, illness, and disabilities
- Parents of children with mental health needs
- Parents needing encouragement and support from other parents
- Family members, friends and persons with disabilities
- Professionals in the medical, educational, and human service fields
- Community Leaders who make decisions about programs of support for children with disabilities and their families

Parents of children with special needs, illness, and disabilities
Parents of children with mental health needs
Parents needing encouragement and support from other parents
Family members, friends and persons with disabilities
Professionals in the medical, educational, and human service fields
Community Leaders who make decisions about programs of support for children with disabilities and their families
FUNDAMENTAL GOALS

ONE
Nevada PEP will be a long-term reliable statewide resource to families and the individuals who support them by providing information, support, and training programs to empower them to better advocate for the needs of their children, adolescents, and young adults.

TWO
Nevada PEP will assist families and the individuals who support them to better understand the nature and needs of disabilities. Adolescents and young adults will understand their strengths and weakness and how to advocate themselves.

THREE
Nevada PEP will conduct community outreach and public awareness activities to families, professionals, organizations, and traditionally underserved populations that directly or indirectly work with children with disabilities and their families to raise awareness of available support, link families with other families in similar circumstance, encourage community acceptance and enhance the family centered community-based service delivery.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

• We believe that children, adolescents, and young adults have a right to access appropriate intervention as well as participate in all opportunities accompanied with membership in their own community.

• We believe that children, adolescents, and young adults reach their full potential when families and professionals build a partnership based on trust and respect.

• We believe that children, adolescents, and young adults and their families deserve the opportunity to live, learn, and participate fully in their communities.

• We believe that the family is the child’s first and best teacher, that professionals must be sought after as experts in their fields to enhance the family.

• We believe that the family’s strengths, weakness, and cultures must be respected to meet the true needs of the family.

• We believe that information, support, and training enrich and empower families and professionals.

• We believe that every person has an unrealized potential for growth and that services should be designed to maximize that potential.

• We believe that a diverse culture is essential in an interdependent world, and we believe in acknowledging, embracing, and respecting diversity.

• We believe that it is crucial that families participate in policy-making decisions at the local, state, and national levels to guide the development of meaningful services that are family-driven.
LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF NEVADA PEP

As Nevada PEP celebrates the organization’s 20th Anniversary, it is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the accomplishments of the many dedicated individuals who have had a hand in the success of Nevada PEP. I want to thank each and every Volunteer, Board Member and PEP Team Member for being the heart of the organization. I am grateful for the educators and service providers; agencies, districts, and organizations for the many community partnerships over the years. Most of all I want to share how honored I am by the trust families have placed in Nevada PEP for over 20 years.

Nevada PEP has had many accomplishments in the last 20 years, and is now providing one or more support services to over 16,800 individuals each year. Our training workshops are trusted and attended by educators, service providers and parents, we now offer over 25 different workshops titles statewide. The greatest reward has been the many invitations to High School Graduation ceremonies by families who have been a member of the PEP Family for all those years; seeing the young adult and their family celebrate their accomplishment and hearing their dreams for the future is truly inspiring.

One of the excellent programs that Nevada PEP developed 14 years ago is the Hand in Hand Appreciation Program. The program was created to celebrate the generous giving of extraordinary Nevadans who go above and beyond to make a positive difference in the lives of children and their families.

The Hand in Hand program can only continue with the support of the generous donors who share the funds and resources needed to support this appreciation program. These magnificent sponsors make it possible for Nevada PEP to widely recognize the thoughtfulness and humanity of this year’s Hand in Hand Honorees.

I want to congratulate all of the Hand in Hand Together We Can Honorees for their selfless acts of kindness. I also want to show my gratitude for the families who have submitted nominations; it is so important to let others know how much they are appreciated. “Hand in Hand Together We Can” and do make a positive difference for children and families.

With Admiration,

Karen Taycher
Executive Director
Welcome to the 2015 Hand in Hand Together We Can yearbook. The Hand in Hand Together We Can program began in 2002. Nevada PEP wanted to find a way to recognize and honor the special people who have made a positive difference in the lives of children with special needs. Throughout the years the stories have been inspiring to read. This year’s stories are no exception.

Nevada PEP continues to stay true to its mission. Our goal is to educate, encourage and empower families to become their child’s best advocate; Nevada PEP believes that parents know their child better than anyone else. When parents have the tools they need, their child can reach their potential and become successful adults living life to their full potential and benefitting their communities.

As Chair of the Nevada PEP Governing Board, I would like to take a few moments to celebrate a few of our many accomplishments this past year. This has been an outstanding year; a milestone achievement of 2015 was the 5th Annual Run Walk Roll Against Bullying. With the generosity of our “Trailblazer” sponsors, we were able to invite fourteen schools to attend the event free of charge. The event was a huge success with over 900 attendees statewide. I would like to personally thank the University of Las Vegas and the City of Reno for hosting the event and supporting bullying prevention. Another milestone Nevada PEP celebrated was its 20th year as the Parent Training Information Center for families in Nevada. Over the last twenty years we have served thousands of families and pride ourselves on the excellent reputation that we have earned statewide. Nevada PEP remains committed to supporting families and we will continue to strengthen families through education, empowerment, and encouragement activities.

As we move into 2016 we are excited to welcome the New Year and are looking forward to celebrating our 21st year of providing excellent support and information to our families who have children with special needs. Nevada PEP continues to see a dramatic increase in the need for our services. Your support at this time is more vital now than ever. On behalf of Nevada PEP, we are grateful to all of our community partners, volunteers, and generous donors who continue to support and believe in our mission. Working together, we are building a stronger community for our children.

Bryce Loveland  
Nevada PEP Governing Board Chair
“I was so weary, searching for answers when I finally found Nevada PEP. It seemed that no one wanted to get involved with my complicated situation. I dialed your number and you were there to listen. What a needed miracle you turned out to be for my family.” ~Parent
Because of the information you received and learned at the workshop, do you feel your child has received more appropriate services?

...Yes, 100%

The information you received from the workshop was very useful.

...Yes, 96%

The materials you received at the workshop were of high quality.

...Yes, 96%

Because of the information you received at the workshop, do you feel you are more knowledgeable about how to work with schools.

...Yes, 92%

Did the information you receive at the workshop help you to address a critical need relating to your child’s education?

...Yes, 80%
“Families come to a point where they need to know who they can trust and who they might be comfortable with. You have given us the strength to breathe another day and to even smile. You taught us that knowledge is power that transcends empowerment.”

~Parent

**Disability Categories**

**Disabilities of all Children Served**

**Volunteer Contributions**

Nevada PEP encourages volunteers, board members, and family members to be involved in their communities. Students, parents, professionals, and the general public have donated 5,361 hours of valuable service to Nevada PEP. Volunteers provide office assistance by helping with general office tasks: answering telephones, copying, faxing, assisting with bulk mail, filing office forms, and assembling training packets. Volunteers assist with community fairs, special events, outreach, public awareness, trainings, and support groups. Nevada PEP encourages family and student involvement on task forces, focus groups, and at committee meetings. Thank you to all of the valuable volunteers who contributed to Nevada PEP!

**Volunteer Hours:**

5,361
Nevada PEP provides support services by first providing Information & Referral Services and helping parents find their way through the maze of services. Another important support service is Individual Assistance, which targets the specific needs of the individual or family. If a family requires additional support, Nevada PEP attends Education, Wraparound, or Child & Family Team meetings.

- **Home Visits**: 32
- **Child Family Team**: 408
- **Education Meetings**: 495
- **New "Intakes" Families**: 1,754
- **New Individual Assistance Contacts**: 14,181
- **Individual Assistance Contacts**: 24,734
- **New Individuals Contacting PEP**: 3,292

Responded that the information they received from PEP helped them to make decisions about their child’s education.

Responded that the information they received from PEP helped them to get more appropriate services for their child.

Responded the material they received from PEP were of high quality.

Responded that because of the information they received from PEP, they are more knowledgeable about how to work with schools.

Responded that the information and support they received from PEP helped them to resolve a disagreement with the school.
COMMUNITY OUTREACH & PUBLIC AWARENESS

Nevada PEP provides outreach presentations for service providers, professional organizations and parent groups throughout Nevada. By educating community members, Nevada PEP continually enhances understanding of the needs of children with disabilities and their families.

- **70** Number of committees to which Nevada PEP representatives provided the parent perspective
- **161** Number of public forums, information fairs, & community outreach events
- **337** Number of meetings attended to enhance the support systems for children with special needs and their families
- **278,192** Number of E-Newsletters sent
- **259** Number of schools visited across Nevada
- **126,492** Number of yearly Website hits at nvpep.org

**Top 10 Reasons People Contact Nevada PEP**

- Family Support: 30%
- Advocacy: 19%
- Behavior Issues: 17%
- Special Education/IEPs: 12%
- Disability: 8%
- Assessments: 5%
- Transition: 3%
- Best Practice: 2%
- Related Services: 2%
- Family Involvement: 1%
CONSUMER DEMOGRAPHICS

Gender of Children Helped
- Male: 70%
- Female: 30%

Ethnicities of Consumers
- Caucasian: 42%
- Hispanic: 27%
- African American: 16%
- Undisclosed: 11%
- Asian: 2%
- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander: 1%
- American Indian/Native American/Alaskan: 1%

Ages of Children Helped
- 0 through 2: 37%
- 3 through 5: 21%
- 6 through 11: 24%
- 12 through 14: 7%
- 15 through 18: 7%
- 19 through 21: 3%
- 22 through 26: 1%

YEARS
- 0 through 2: 3%
- 3 through 5: 7%
- 6 through 11: 1%
- 12 through 14: 21%
- 15 through 18: 42%
- 19 through 21: 27%
- 22 through 26: 11%

Consumer Relationships
- Parents: 76%
- General Public: 9%
- Service Providers: 5%
- Special Educators: 4%
- Other Educators: 4%
- <1% Surrogate Parents
- 1% Students
- 1% Other Relatives
- 1% Advocates
- 1% Foster Parents
Nevada PEP has formed strong relationships throughout the community with corporations, professional organizations, and individuals. It is only through the ongoing support of our community partners that we continue to grow.

Our greatest need is for corporate sponsors. In giving to Nevada PEP, you will be rewarded with a lifetime of achievement and partnership.

“Families come to a point where they need to know who they can trust and who they might be comfortable with. You have given us the strength to breathe another day and to even smile. You taught us that knowledge is power that transcends empowerment.”

~Parent

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EXPENDITURES Total: $1,247,066
MAJOR FUNDERS
MGM Resorts Foundation
National Institute of Mental Health
Nevada Department of Education
Nevada Department of Health and Human Services
Nevada Division of Child and Family Services
U.S. Department of Education
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration

INDIVIDUAL FUNDERS
A and J Ledstrom
Assemblyman Richard Carrillo
Chonie and Robert Marshall
Chris Giunchigliani
Cirilo Maldonado
Councilman Bob Coffin
Councilwoman Lois Tarkanian
Dr. Julie Beasley, Ph.D.
Dr. Peter Balle, DDS
Erika and Bryce Loveland
Glenda and Richard Failla
Joseph Johnson, MD.
Judge Michelle Leavitt
Macie and Harley Nichols
Nadia and John Harper
Regent Sam Lieberman
Retta Dermody
Robert Kilby, ESQ
Robin and Dean Bryan
Seaynoah & Helen Mayfield
Stephen Fong
Trish and Andy Leavitt
Nilza Shellhamer

COMMUNITY PARTNERS
AIS
Abbott Custom Printing
Activity Planners
A Cut above Hair Salon
Alexander Library
Ajah Management Group
AMC Theatre
American Legion Youth Auxiliary
Applied Behavior Technologies
Applied Staffing Solutions LLC
Atlantis Hotel and Casino
Bahama Breeze Island Grille
Bank of America
Barnes and Noble
Best Buy
BJ’s Restaurant
Billy’s BBQ
Bonnie Springs Ranch
Brio Tuscan Grille
Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck
Burger King
Carson Valley Inn
Casa Blanca Hotel and Casino
Catholic Diocese of Las Vegas
Century 16 Theater
Chefs for Kids
Chico’s
Cheesecake Factory
Chili’s Restaurant
Chipotle Mexican Grill
Chuck E. Cheese
Cirque du Soleil
Coffee Bean and Tea
David Barton Gym
Denny’s Restaurant
Dignity Health-St. Rose Dominican
Dough Boy Donuts
Disneyland Resort
Eagle Energy
Egg Works
El Dorado Hotel
Elements Spa
Fast Lap Indoor Kart
Findlay Automotive Group
Findlay Chevrolet
FLIPnOUT Fun Center
Fogo De Chao Brazilian Steakhouse
Frontier Financial
Gold Dust West Casino and Inn
Grid Bar and Grill
Grocery Outlet
Harrah’s Lake Tahoe Home Depot
Hush Puppy Restaurant
Imperial Wine Wholesalers
Incredible Events
In-N-Out Burger
Jamba Juice
King Putt Indoor Mini Golf
La Luna Insurance
Lake Mead Cruises
Las Vegas Finance
Las Vegas Ice Center
Las Vegas Injury Law Firm
Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department
Las Vegas Mini Grand Prix
Las Vegas Motor Speedway
Laser Quest Las Vegas
Lazy Dog Restaurant
Lev Restaurant Group
Lion Habitat Ranch
Lithia Volkswagen of Reno
Lowe’s Lucky Star Nail and Spa
Macayo’s Mexican Restaurant
Magic 95.5
Mandalay Bay Shark Reef
Massage Envy
Mob Museum
Montevista Hospital
Mt. Charleston Resort
Mutual of Omaha Bank
Nature’s Bakery
Nevada State Bank
Nothing Bundt Cakes
Our Little World Treatment Center
Orleans Arena
Outback Steakhouse
Parent Teacher Aides
People Dedicated to Quality (PDQ)
P.F. Chang’s Pole Position Raceway
Pump It Up
Red Lobster Restaurant
REI
Renown Health
Royal Las Vegas
Seaworld San Diego
Serverpoint
Silver and Blue Outfitters
Sky Zone Trampoline Park
Slotzilla Zip Line
Southpoint Casino
Smith’s Food and Drug
Sunrise Casablanca
Southwest Airlines
Southwest Gas
Spring Mountain Treatment Center
Springs Preserve
Sports Authority
Streetcar Po Boys
Sweet Tomatoes
The Adventure Dome at Circus Circus
The Frozen Frog
The Lovaas Center
The Seegmiller Law Firm
The Venetian Hotel and Casino
Total Wine and More
Trampoline Park
Trader Joe’s
Triple Play American Grill
US Bank
Uniform Sports
Whole Foods
Wynn Las Vegas

Thank you to our Anonymous Donors. We are truly grateful for your continued support.
LEADERSHIP

Natalie Filipic is the mother of two and grandmother of six. As the Director of Operations, Natalie is generally responsible for the business and information management of Nevada PEP, ensuring the smooth operation of the organization’s infrastructure. Natalie enjoys the day to day routine of office management, knowing that what she does makes a difference in the lives of others.

Charlene Frost is the Statewide Family Network Director for Nevada PEP and is a Certified Parent Support Provider (CPSP). The Statewide Family Network focuses on systems change and helping families who are involved with more than one child service system, specializing in children with serious emotional disturbance and behavior disorders. As the parent of two children with emotional and behavioral disorders, Charlene has had personal experience advocating for children with special needs. Charlene has called Nevada home for over 19 years and has been an active part of the Las Vegas community working on behalf of children.

Robin Kincaid is the Director of Educational Services. Robin has over twenty years of experience educating parents and professionals on special education law, advocacy, best practice, parent/professional collaboration, and positive behavior supports. Other responsibilities include outreach activities and individual assistance to families. Robin has served on the Interagency Coordinating Council for the past ten years, representing the parent perspective in early intervention services. As co-chair for the Families First Statewide Conference in 2007, Robin provided leadership and coordination for the conference program.

Stephanie Vrsnik is the Community Development Director. Stephanie is the mother of two and a very proud grandmother. Having a son with disability brought her to Nevada PEP. Her passion and expertise is focused on bringing public awareness and community support to Nevada PEP. “It is vital that the community supports our children to be successful contributing members of our community,” Stephanie is a member of the American Fundraising Professionals and the Alliance of Nevada Non-profits. She oversees the Annual Statewide Run Walk Roll Against Bullying event, raising awareness in the community about bullying prevention. Building a stronger community for all children is her primary goal.
LEADERSHIP

Alex Cherup is the Director of Transition Services at Nevada PEP. Alex first became involved in disability advocacy during his time as an undergraduate student at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan, where he met his close friend Micah Fialka-Feldman, a fellow student and advocate and speaker. In May of 2014, Alex graduated from Northeastern University School of Law, in Boston, Massachusetts with a Juris Doctor degree. As the Director of Transition Services, Alex supports families of youth ages 14 to 26 in their transition into a meaningful and inclusive adult life.

Dorithia Coleman is the SOC Family Support Services Manager at Nevada PEP and is a Certified Parent Support Provider (CPSP). She is a wife and mother of an incredible teenage son with special needs. Dorithia serves as a member of the State of Nevada Medicaid Infrastructure Grant Program Advisory Group. She believes that the parents are the first and best teachers of their children. Her goal is to empower families with useful strategies and provide resources that address their child’s needs through PEP.

Teri Kirby is the Statewide Family Network Coordinator and is a Certified Parent Support Provider (CPSP). Teri was introduced to PEP over ten years ago while seeking help for her own family. She values the opportunities to give unparalleled support back to families who face challenges in the community and schools. Helping to educate, empower, and encourage families is not only an honor, but a drive for her.

Kelli Walker is the Information and Training Specialist for the Satellite Office. She has four children. Her youngest is 17 years old and has Autism. Since she has had many struggles getting what her daughter needs at school, she has wanted to help others learn how to advocate for their children. Working for PEP has given her the opportunity to help parents get the tools they need, let them know that they are not alone, and there is help. She is so thankful for the opportunity and privilege to work with families and make a difference.
PROFESSIONAL STAFF

Belen Herrera is the Program Accountability Specialist at Nevada PEP. She makes sure the administration department stays running correctly. Her tasks include inputting memberships, donations, and many more fun things. “I am always up for something new and adventurous. She enjoys helping others and PEP is a perfect fit for her. PEP does so much for families and she is proud to say she is a PEPper.”

Havander Davis is the Communications Specialist at Nevada PEP. As the Communication Specialist, he enjoys talking to families who call or come into PEP looking for help, support, and resources. “I am proud to serve an organization that enhances opportunities for those with disabilities. I am honored to be a member of the PEP family and look forward to continue to help families who have children with disabilities.”

Kelly Figueroa is a Family Specialist at Nevada PEP. She is the proud mother of five children who received information and support from Nevada PEP. She now feels empowered as an effective advocate for her children. Kelly’s goal at Nevada PEP is to support and empower families to do the same for their own children.

Cheri Day is a Family Specialist working in the Satellite Office. After her own personal experience, she discovered that there is wonderful help if you know where to find it. She joined Nevada PEP after a year of working with the staff on her own IEPs to assist her children with disabilities. Her goal is to help empower others as she has been empowered through PEP.

Belen Herrera is the Program Accountability Specialist at Nevada PEP. She makes sure the administration department stays running correctly. Her tasks include inputting memberships, donations, and many more fun things. “I am always up for something new and adventurous. She enjoys helping others and PEP is a perfect fit for her. PEP does so much for families and she is proud to say she is a PEPper.”
Bob Humphreys is one of our Family Specialists in the Central Office. He is the father of a 22 year-old daughter with a learning disability and has a desire to assist families in the transition process from high school to post secondary education and competitive employment. He works closely with Challenger Little League and Traditional Little League by bringing the two together for all kids to enjoy, teamwork, friendship, and companionship.

Stephanie Houle is the Educational Services Manager at Nevada PEP. Stephanie is the mother of a feisty little red-head with a developmental delay. She enjoys sharing information and resources with families who also have young children with disabilities. Stephanie is grateful for the opportunity to support children and their families through education, encouragement, and empowerment activities at PEP.

Jennifer Jones is a Family Specialist working in the Reno Satellite Office. She is a single mom of a 17 year-old son who has unique emotional needs and a learning disability. Her work at NV PEP has increased her empathy for parents and families of children with special needs in ways she could never have imagined. Jennifer shares, “I find my work at Nevada PEP extremely satisfying because I am constantly learning more as I help families with situations similar to my own.”
Amanda Miller is the Administrative Specialist at Nevada PEP. She loves that she is able to give back to the organization that helped her family. She has a BA in English and is looking into graduate programs that would allow her to work with children with special needs. As an individual with Asperger’s Syndrome, she made use of the accommodations provided to her while in college and she hopes to share her school and work experiences with other children and young adults with disabilities.

Dr. Christa Peterson is a licensed psychologist with over 29 years of experience developing, administering, and delivering services to youths who have developmental disabilities and behavioral health disorders. In the last thirteen years, Christa has served as principal investigator for several grant initiatives, such as the Neighborhood Care Center Project. Christa has co-authored many research and other publications in professional psychology, including studies of the wraparound process. She is also the parent of a child with behavior health problems. Christa enjoys being a part of the Nevada PEP Family.

Erica Lozoya is the Information & Referral Specialist at Nevada PEP. Erica is the mom of a beautiful child with autism. She is really passionate about providing information and guidance to families at Nevada PEP. Erica helps families by teaching them about their rights as parents of children with special needs and how to assert their rights so their children can reach their full potential. Like Erica always says, “With patience, dedication and effort, of course you can!”

Diane Lombardo is fulfilling her lifelong dream of helping families through Nevada PEP. She moved to Las Vegas in 1986 for a better opportunity for herself and family. After seeking help for her own two boys, she began volunteering to give something back. She has been helping families at PEP for over nine years. She has a dream of one day staging a huge fundraiser and ultimately helping children with disabilities through her musical talent and PEP.
Robin Renshaw is a native of Las Vegas. “I’ve been with Nevada PEP for seventeen years as a Transition Specialist and I’m looking forward to seventeen more! There is nothing I would rather do, not only for youth with disabilities, but for myself. In the coming year, I want to show young adults how to advocate for others in our community.” Robin found that advocating for yourself is powerful, but it’s even more exciting to help others advocate for themselves!

Magdalena Ruiz is a bilingual System of Care Family Facilitator. She is a proud mother of three boys; her oldest and her youngest son has a disability. Before she became part of the Nevada PEP family, she was lost and overwhelmed with stress. Thanks to the help she received from PEP, she was able to keep going. “I now feel confident and capable to do the same for all my families. My goal is to make a difference in a child’s life and to help families become better advocates for their loved ones.”

Jennifer Schell is a Family Specialist. She is a proud mother of a beautiful little boy with special needs. After receiving support from Nevada PEP, she knew that she wanted to help other families. Working with families and educating them how to be their child’s best advocate is very rewarding and fulfilling. Jennifer knows that working at PEP she is making a positive difference for families.
Kenneth Taycher is a Special Project Mentor at Nevada PEP. He enjoys being a part of the PEP team and PEP’s commitment to helping people with disabilities and their families. He is truly passionate about helping young adults to be a part of their community. Kenny has been involved in the Challenger baseball program as a coach for the last 12 years. Kenny’s goal is to Educate, Empower, and Encourage people to be their best advocate.

Chad Uhl is the proud father of an energetic eleven-year-old girl and the Web & Graphic Designer for Nevada PEP. Chad maintains PEP’s website and online social media networks. He also designs PEP’s e-newsletters and publications for families. Chad is passionate about spreading awareness of the effects of bullying in our schools. “Bullying prevention is important because it allows us to build stronger relationships within our community.”

In Loving Memory of Ron Kopicko, Outreach Specialist for Nevada PEP.
Nevada PEP has developed a great partnership with the Las Vegas Clark County Library District educating preschoolers, their families and staff on inclusion and bullying prevention. Nevada PEP’s Include Me Puppet Program enjoyed a successful year performing for over 1,900 preschool children and their caregivers.

Our dedicated puppeteers have volunteered many hours to perfecting the scripts and bringing the puppets to life. The children are excited as they interact with the puppets by asking questions about different disabilities and bullying prevention. Educating younger generations with parents and professionals is an encouraging step towards building friendships and positive outcomes. The response we have received in our community has been extremely positive. Professionals, educators and parents all commented and said the program is very educational for children and they would like to see it expand to all children throughout the community. Our multicultural, child-size, hand-and-rod puppets represent Cerebral Palsy, Autism, Learning Disability, Spina Bifida, Visual Impairment, and Hearing Impairment.

Our goal is positive inclusion for all children, with and without disabilities. This program teaches all children good things happen by learning together and building friendships. The Include Me Program was established by Walter and Jackie Jagodzinski in honor of their daughter Andrea.

Include Me Sponsorship

$100 - $300 - Puppet Partner
- Receive a unique PEP Puppet Partner Certificate
- Individual recognition in the PEP POST newsletter and Hand in Hand Yearbook

$301 - $699 - Exceptional Partner
- Attain a personalized Exceptional Partner Certificate
- A photo of you and the puppets as a keepsake
- Individual recognition in the PEP POST newsletter and Hand in Hand Yearbook

$700 plus - Proud Parent
- Honored with the prestigious PEP Proud Parent Certificate
- A photo of you and the puppets as a keepsake
- Individual recognition in the PEP POST newsletter and Hand in Hand Yearbook
- Recognition on Include Me Puppet Program materials

By educating our community on disabilities, we are building a brighter future for all children.

For more information contact:
Nevada PEP 702-388-8899
Mr. REID. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize Nevada PEP for its more than 20 years of service to children with disabilities and their families.

Nevada PEP was founded more than two decades ago by a handful of families who wanted for their children what every parent wants for their child: the opportunity to learn, grow, and succeed in all areas of life, regardless of their ability. Since then, this organization has helped children with disabilities by increasing opportunities for home, community, and school success. Although Nevada PEP started as a small organization with meetings around a kitchen table, the organization has now served more than 17,000 people throughout the State and has had a positive impact on many more Nevadans through its greater advocacy efforts.

The “PEP” in the organization’s name has a number of meanings, including, “Parents Encouraging Parents,” “Parents Educating Professionals,” and “Professionals Empowering Parents.” Nevada PEP truly embodies all of these meanings through the services it provides. The organization offers support groups, webinars, and other skill-building activities to help the families of children with disabilities become effective advocates for their child. Nevada PEP also works to connect families to essential community resources, including organizations and professionals in the fields of education, health care, housing, and employment. Additionally, the organization raises awareness and engages the community through events, such as the “Baldy Bash,” the “Run, Walk, Roll Against Bullying,” and an annual art show.

I applaud Nevada PEP for their years of dedicated service to children with disabilities and their families. Their work is truly appreciated and admired. I also commend Karen Taycher, a parent and passionate advocate, as well as founding member and the executive director of Nevada PEP, for her fine leadership throughout the past two decades. As Nevada PEP begins the next chapter, I wish them continued success for years to come.
Nevada PEP:

Congratulations on your 20 years of serving families in Nevada. The highest of kudos to Karen Taycher who had the determination and skills to begin this project two decades ago. And the highest of praise to her staff which continues each day to work with perseverance & passion to help those in need. I’ve watched in awe as PEP has grown from one parent’s concern to the strongest of advocacy groups in our state working for children who are the most in need. Your accomplishments make you heroes. I’m honored to have been able to work with you.

Sincerely,

Lois Tarkanian
Councilwoman, Ward 1

LT/Kr

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ltarkanian@lasvegasnevada.gov | www.lasvegasnevada.gov
NEVADA PEP BOARD MEMBER

It is an honor to be celebrating Nevada PEP’s 20 Year Anniversary of serving families of children with disabilities statewide. I am the parent of a 15 year old caring and loving son named Allen and a 25 year old amazing daughter named Jessica that has multiple disabilities including autism and special health care needs.

This journey started 25 years ago when my daughter was born. Jessica received Early Intervention Services through the Special Children’s Clinic in Reno. I had the opportunity to interact with many professionals that provided home services. I felt the need to help families in my area of rural Northern Nevada to become stronger, helping families to navigate the system and supporting them in facing the challenges that were before them. I also wanted to inspire professionals to advocate for families and children with disabilities.

I have proudly been a member of the Governing Board of Directors for Nevada PEP for over 20 years. Nevada PEP has provided me with great opportunities to participate on committees, task forces, councils, and advisory boards that evolved into system improvements and changes, giving families the resources and support they need to be successful. Some of my involvements with Nevada PEP include bringing the parent voice to the early intervention Interagency Coordinating Council; and the University Center for Autism and Neuro-Development, a multidisciplinary evaluation team that provides parent perspective, support, and resources, for young children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Being a part of these teams really spoke to me because of my daughter. I am also proud to have attended numerous events representing PEP such as UNR Dual Sensory Project-Annual Parent Conferences, and outreach activities such as trainings and public awareness for the underserved population in the rural areas of Northern Nevada.

In conclusion, I am so grateful and proud to be a part of this incredible organization and a part of the PEP family. I have seen throughout the years the positive impact Nevada PEP has made on people’s lives every day. “It takes a village…” and I am so happy that Nevada PEP is that village for families in Nevada.

Congratulations Nevada PEP!

Yours Truly,

Nilza Shellhamer
Nevada PEP Board Member
Nevada PEP kicked off National Bullying prevention month in October with their 5th Annual Run Walk Roll Against Bullying Statewide event. Participants arrived in record numbers to the event on the gorgeous UNLV campus on Saturday, September 26th and in Reno a day later on Sunday, September 27th at the beautiful Mira Loma Park.

We were honored to have Mark Shunock from the popular Rock of Ages show as the Grand Marshall and his co-star from Rock of Ages Becca Kotte who took the honors and sang the National Anthem to kick off the event. Southern Nevada’s Emcee, Chet Buchanan got the crowd going early, leading the cheers for the competitive runners in the race as well as those who chose the fun walk. He expertly worked his magic, moving smoothly through the agenda and presenting the raffle prizes and awards to the many generous community partners. This year the business community was extremely generous and sponsored fourteen schools to attend the event free of charge, everyone received a free T-shirt and participated in the walk holding a Bullying Prevention Banner made especially for their school. The site of seeing fourteen schools walking holding a bullying prevention banner was both magical and powerful.

The festivities in Reno were headed up by popular celebrity personalities Ryan Nutter and Kristen Snow from Magic 95.5 both co-emceed the event. The event began with the National Anthem sung beautifully by Kira McGolthen. The talented UNR Cheerleaders cheered on the runners and walkers as they crossed the finish line. The crowd in Northern Nevada cheered honorary guests, Assemblywoman Amber Joiner, Alfie from UNR was on hand to get the crowd energized. Even the Miss Sparks USA teens and queens joined in on the festivities. The raffle prizes were a huge success thanks to all of our community businesses who generously donated fantastic raffle prizes.

Children were treated to some awesome face painting and got to hang out with some pretty cool mascots such as Smokey the Bear, Mc Gruff the Crime Dog, Cosmo from the Las Vegas 51s and more. A proclamation recognizing National Bullying Awareness Month was presented to Nevada PEP by Assemblyman Richard Carrillo. Opening and closing remarks by Nevada PEP Board Chair Mr. Bryce Loveland, and Regent Sam Lieberman made a huge impact on all in attendance. A very special thank you goes out to PEP Board members Trish Leavitt the Run Walk Roll Event Chairperson and Rita Varney for their outstanding leadership, and continued support. Their countless hours of dedication are priceless. Many thanks go out to our amazing volunteers who gave the gift of time to make this event such a success.

Nevada PEP is part of a national movement to stop bullying and thanks to all of our supporters this successful event continues to grow, making a positive difference in the lives of those targeted by bullying. Together, all children can be in a safe learning environment so they can be successful.

Remember the END of Bullying begins with YOU!
Thank you to all our wonderful volunteers for their time, dedication and support. We couldn’t have done it without you!
Volunteer Connection

The gift of time is priceless and Nevada PEP sincerely appreciates every one of our VIP volunteers. PEP volunteers are simply the BEST and their continued loyalty to PEP’s mission is admirable. Likewise, our volunteers consistently let us know that they value the rewarding feeling they gain from contributing time and effort to an organization that truly cares about others. Nevada PEP provides opportunities for families, youth, school groups, and other community members to give back by volunteering. Volunteers are always needed statewide at Nevada PEP! Apply online or visit one of our offices for details.

CRS Volunteers Make A Difference!

Our Community Resource Specialist Volunteers are parents and professionals who represent Nevada PEP by providing information about PEP services and resources at community events, assisting in parent training and providing public awareness in their own communities throughout the State of Nevada.

My name is Arlene and I began my volunteer experience at Nevada PEP in 2015. I have found PEP to be the BEST organization to volunteer for. I enjoy all the different projects at Nevada PEP but the bulk mail project is one of my favorites. I enjoy working with a group of awesome and friendly VIP volunteers as we make it our goal to finish a nearly nine thousand bulk mail project mailing of training flyers. Diane the Volunteer Coordinator is always so friendly and makes me feel so welcome. Whenever I come in I always get warm greetings from the PEP staff. PEP is a wonderful place to volunteer. I have done a wide range of projects over time for this local non-profit who reaches out to help families who have children with disabilities. Hand in Hand together we DO make the difference. By Arlene Vargas

Volunteer Hours:

5, 361

VIP Program!

Nevada PEP has provided our Very Important Partners with volunteer experiences in our Central and Satellite PEP offices. Parents, students and community partners, including our school groups, have volunteered their time in business related activities, community-based activities and back to school fairs. Not only does Nevada PEP benefit from their assistance, the VIP volunteer learns new skills and experiences that will contribute to their success in future opportunities.
The “Hand In Hand, Together We Can” appreciation program was designed to proudly recognize and honor special people who have made a positive difference in the lives of children with special needs. The program began in October 2002, when Hand In Hand forms were mailed to thousands of interested parents and professionals across the state. With each special story sent to us, Nevada PEP delivered the Hand in Hand award recipient a beautiful certificate and lapel pin to display as a proud supporter of Nevada’s community of people with disabilities.

The stories are also recognized in our quarterly PEP Post newsletter. The inspiring stories you are about to read are celebrations of wonderful teachers, doctors, therapists, family members, and many others who have worked with children with disabilities and have gone above and beyond to make a positive difference in a child’s life. Touching and original, the stories in our 2015 Yearbook span over a one year period. We, at Nevada PEP, are excited to honor these very special Hand In Hand recipients and will continue to do so throughout the years to come.
ERIC AND SUSAN BENOIT  
*Family Friends*

The Benoit’s are a great blessing to our family. If there is an activity taking place they provide the supervision for our son giving my husband and me a little break to relax and watch our son enjoy himself. They are sure to always include him in any activity. The family is as good as a social skills teacher in any classroom and they always treat our son with dignity and because of their involvement our son earns more rewards at home.

MICHAEL PERRINE  
*Parent*

NICOLE BLAIRE  
*Professional*

Miss Nicole Blaire has done wonders with my son over this past school year. Her patience with our son and communicating with us has kept the entire IEP team updated and on the same agenda in working towards improving our son’s behavior needs as well as keeping him up to speed academically. Her ability to think out of the box and take every day to communicate struggles as well as successes. Our family and son greatly appreciate her diligent work and positive attitude, patience and understanding. She has encouraged our son so much he finally enjoys going to school.

LAURA BREWER  
*Professional*

We are writing this to thank and recognize Mrs. Laura Brewer for the difference she has made in our son’s life. Mrs. Brewer is a true professional who values our son and what he is capable of doing. She has been a positive influence in our son’s life. Thank you Mrs. Brewer for all that you do. You have been a blessing to our whole family.

THE AGUILAR FAMILY  
*Santos, Sandra, Kyle*

TERESA BRUNI-DIPIETRO  
*Teacher*

Teresa has worked with schools for over 30 years- 22 years in Los Angeles and 9 years with the Clark County school district here in Las Vegas. It wasn’t until last year that she finally got assigned to what is close to her heart-teaching students with autism. I think Teresa should be a Hand in Hand Honoree because of all of her efforts to make the Clark County School District and her particular school a better place for all children.

TONY DIPIETRO  
*Parent*
IRENE BYRNE
Wife

My wife of 29 years has always stood by both of my daughters. Especially my daughter who has learning disabilities in most of her subjects in school. My wife always tries to keep my daughter on task- like checking her homework, waking her up in the mornings, making sure she’s in bed by 10pm. My wife even always finds events that my daughter will be interested in on the weekends or after school.

JOSEPH BYRNE
Husband

JAN CRANDY
Mom

I would like to nominate my mother for this Hand in Hand award; she has done so much advocacy and work in the community. My mom is the founder of one of the BEST autism organizations in the world F.E.A.T. Families for Effective Autism Treatment. She is the heart and soul of the whole autism community. She has helped so many people who felt like there is no hope she has proved to everyone there is hope. As her daughter it makes me feel proud to see all the work she has done and I want to follow in her footsteps.

Thank you mom for all of your hard work.

MEGAN CRANDY
Daughter

HAVANDER DAVIS
Friend

I have known Havander, since I was 13 years old. He is showing me the way to reach my dreams and teaching me to never give up. We met at the Blind Center during the summer while I was in middle school. It was meant to be that we met again after I graduated High school. Havander has encouraged me to volunteer at Nevada PEP where I’m presently on a regular weekly schedule. I’m more social and confident about my accomplishments because of all that he has achieved. I want to follow his footsteps and make a positive difference by changing the lives of people with disabilities. Havander. I would like to thank you for being such a great mentor and influence in my life.

AARIUS WHITE
Friend

MARISSA DOMINGUEZ
Daughter

I would like to give appreciation to my daughter. She is a wonderful child and does so much for her brother. At times it is very hard to deal with her younger brother. But she always stands by his side.

KELLY FIGUEROA
Mom
**CHRISTINA DUMAS**
*Teacher*

Christina was my son's teacher for 2013/2014. That school year was particularly hard for him because even though he was 3 years old, he was only about 18 months developmentally. He had a hard time following directions and controlling his temper at times but Christina never once lost her patience with him or me. She worked hard with him and taught me how to help him at home. Although she’s no longer his teacher she has continued to help us both. What she has done for us is a big part of why my son is doing so well now.

**LEAH PAULI**
*Parent*

**AMANDA ENGLAND**
*Daughter*

My son has autism and behavior problems. My daughter takes time out of her life to help and care for her brother. She now takes pride in always trying to help anyone with special needs. I am so proud of her and her dedication to her brother.

**KIMBERLY LUCAS**
*Parent*

**DAILY FISHBoughER**
*Teacher*

Mrs. Daily Fishbougher is not only an amazing teacher but she helped walk us through the problems our child was having and how to help him succeed through his kindergarten class. She is my favorite teacher from the school.

**JOEL BIRMINGHAM**
*Parent*

**LISA FLETChER**
*Teacher/Kids and Horses*

Lisa Fletcher, of Kids and Horses, in Minden, Nevada, has been a calming force in the on-going medical storm of my daughter’s life. Not only has my daughter benefited from core strengthening of horseback riding, but Lisa has also helped with her speech and volume levels. She also taught her how to use the reins and control her horse. She can now ask her horse to walk on or whoa. Lisa has also incorporates number, letter and other academics skills into her lessons. Lisa has also educated my daughter about these beautiful, gentle animals. She has taught her to respect them and nurture them. The experience with Lisa and Kids and Horses has been extraordinary. I can’t express our gratitude enough for both Lisa and the Kids and Horses organization. My daughter has received so much more from this group than we could ever hope to give in return.

**KRISTIE THOMPSON**
*Parent*
BLANCA GONZALEZ
*Sister*

One of my sisters has a baby that was a preemie, weighing only 3½ pounds. She was in an incubator for 4 ½ months. After the pregnancy my sister was having some medical problems so my other sister stepped in and took care of my niece for the first 2 years of her life. She would visit her every day as if she was her own child. She loved and nurtured my niece and created a special bond with her. My niece is now 13 ½ and is a very smart and loving teenager.

CRISTINA MENA
*Sister*

PATSY JUDY
*Grandma*

Patsy Judy has been a positive influence on my son’s whole life. She is more than his grandmother. She is his biggest cheerleader and nurturer. She gives him unconditional love and encouragement. To this day, she does not believe he has autism spectrum disorder because she just sees a sweet, smart, funny kid who is perfect in her eyes. She has always put his needs first. He is the wonderful 14 yr. old today partly because of her unwavering guidance and dedication. Thanks mom for loving my son so completely.

DOREEN RODRIGUEZ
*Parent*

JENNIFER KIMBALL
*Teacher*

My son is in Mrs. Kimball’s Pre-K class. When he first started at age 3 he was significantly behind. Mrs. Kimball was able to make my son comfortable with being away from his family and love going to school. Her classroom allows my son to feel like he can be a part of things even though his skills are a little behind those of the other children. I truly believe that Mrs. Kimball has given my son confidence by encouraging him to be his best. Without Mrs. Kimball I’m not sure that he’d be as successful as he is today.

LEAH PAULI
*Parent*

ROBIN KINCAID
*Advocate*

Robin Kincaid has been there for me and my son from the first day I called. She called me back right away and scheduled a meeting with me to talk about my son’s needs. When I arrived at her office I was very sad and crying but it did not take her long to calm me down. She explained all the things my son needed. She made me feel very comfortable and made me understand all of the things I have to keep fighting for. Over all I would like to thank Robin for being there and staying beside me to help further my son’s education.

TSEHAY DESTA
*Parent*
MARY ANNE KOCHEN
Grandma

My son’s grandmother has been a huge part of his life since the day he was born. She stayed awake for hours waiting for him to arrive into this world. Since that day she has always pushed for him to learn and love, although she spoils him like most grandmas’ do she also teaches him things that he enjoys doing with my wife like baking. Now we can’t walk into the kitchen without him grabbing his apron to come help us. We would not change it for the world and we are glad to have her close by at all times.

ROBERT WILSON
Parent

KYLE LINDBERG
Principal

We want to thank Mr. Kyle Lindberg, principal of Manse Elementary school for his dedication of making Manse Elementary a safe and nurturing environment for children with disabilities. He always goes out of his way to engage and motivate students. He has been very helpful and supportive with our son that has ADD and a learning disability. We are grateful for everything he does.

HEIDI LABASTIDA
Mom

DIANE LOMBARDO
PEP Staff

I’ve been a volunteer at Nevada PEP for three years and have learned a variety of tasks that range from office work to community work like the Include Me Program. As a volunteer I work for one of the most patient women I’ve ever met- Diane Lombardo. Under her guidance volunteers not only learn skills that will aid them in their future careers, but you will also find a friend, mentor, and a role model all at once. She is extremely friendly, welcoming, and kind. Diane is someone I have come to respect and hold in high esteem.

CHRISTOPHER STROUM
Volunteer

DIANE LOMBARDO
PEP Staff

I want to nominate Diane because she is the best person that I have had the opportunity to know at Nevada PEP. I want to thank her for giving me the opportunity to be a volunteer at PEP and for making me feel comfortable and confident. Diane is always smiling and has patience and love in her heart. She is always making people feel at home and gives them the opportunity to participate with Nevada PEP.

BERSEY RAYMOND
Volunteer
**CYNTHIA MCCULLOUGH**  
*Professional*

I am nominating Cindy McCullough, for everything she has done for my son. When she first saw our son, he was not speaking to anyone outside our home due to his diagnosis of selective mutism. After tons of therapy with her, he finally was able to speak. He is doing great, but sometimes still struggles. Without her help, he would still not be speaking. She is awesome and I cannot thank her enough.

**DENISE ESPINO**  
*Parent*

![Image of a family](image1.png)

**RYAN MERRITT**  
*Principal*

My name is Joanna Gonzalez. I would like to nominate the principal at Stanford Elementary School, Ryan Merritt. I would like to thank him and his staff for helping my daughter and myself. I now know if I have any questions or concerns, I could always count on Mr. Merritt for help. I really appreciate that you guys do the best you can to help your students. Once, I had a question about the new law Ab -341, which will help students with dyslexia, Mr. Merritt heard my concern. I could finally see the positive attitude my daughter has towards school. She’s now comfortable with reading and writing because of your school.

**JOANNA GONZALEZ**  
*Parent*

![Image of Joanna Gonzalez](image2.png)

**MIKE MEYER**  
*Director of Youth Charities of Southern Nevada*

Nevada PEP’s families have been a proud recipient of the Piero’s Thanksgiving dinner for over a decade. For the last ten years, Mike Meyer, Director of Youth Charities of Southern Nevada has coordinated this amazing event, each November Mike reaches out to Nevada PEP and extends a generous offer to our PEP families to attend a delicious traditional Thanksgiving dinner at the exclusive Piero’s Italian Restaurant free of charge. Each year, Mike always finds a way to accommodate all of our PEP families, even when we receive last minute calls. His goal is to be sure that families have a beautiful thanksgiving dinner with all the trimmings. Over the years we have had countless families enjoy this fantastic dinner, many families have commented how special they felt and how much they enjoyed spending time with their families at a beautiful restaurant. Every year we receive calls from families looking for help with Thanksgiving food, we are so honored to be able to offer families this outstanding dinner. Mike has definitely brought many smiles to our families in the community and deserves this Hand in Hand recognition award.

**STEPHANIE VRSNIK**  
*Community Development Director, Nevada PEP*

![Image of Stephanie Vrsnik](image3.png)
TOM MONTESANO  
Grandpa

My father-in-law has helped me with my son while I have been in emotional crisis. He has picked him up with only a moment’s notice to come help provide me with respite on many occasions. What makes this so honorable is that he is recovering from his own health problems, but yet he unselfishly always comes to my aide.

TRISH MONTESANO  
Daughter

PASTOR BRUCE MORRIS  
Pastor

Pastor Bruce Morris has been a great support and influence in the betterment of my daughter’s life. After other religious leaders would not perform a baptism because they believed my daughter did not understand. Pastor Bruce took the time to not only teach my daughter, he learned a positive way to communicate with her and he believed she had a childlike love of God and he baptized her. It used to be if she was having a bad day and it was going to be reported she used to say not to tell dad, however it is now do not tell Pastor Bruce. He has always encouraged her and her friend to sing and praise and uses them as an example of expressing our emotions and the purest of honesty and love, and this always makes her happy. He has been a blessing to our house and especially to my daughter, for this we thank him.

BOB HUMPHREYS  
Parent

ELBA PEREZ  
Teacher

Ms. Elba and I worked extremely well together. We had a great classroom routine and were genuinely a great team. A few months ago, Ms. Elba left her comfort zone and the children she deeply cared for to work with children with disabilities. She explained to our classroom why she was leaving. To this day when the children think of her they say “she had to go help the kids with owies.” Anyone could see this wasn’t an easy decision for her to make but her decision is admirable. She’s helping children and setting a great example for them also.

JACQUIE VALLES  
Teacher

CHERYSH PUNO  
Friend

I’ve known Cherysh for many years. She has been one of the biggest motivators in my life. She has always pushed me to strive for better. She makes me feel like I can do anything I set my mind to. Having a disability gets tough, but she has shown me that having any disability shouldn’t stop me from doing anything. She is always so cheerful and happy. Just being around her lifts my spirits up and that helps me stay motivated and positive.

MELISSA ABUNDO  
Friend
MALIBU ROBERTSON
Advocate

My daughter is a remarkable 16-year-old from Sparks, Nevada. Not only is she involved and dedicated to her community, she lent her story to help advocate for the passing of Nevada Law SB504. She told Nevada Legislators, the Nevada Governor, Senators and pretty much anyone who would listen what happened to her in school. She wrote, emailed, and called law makers to help them understand what the law would do for Nevada students. She lent her voice, face, and passion to those who could not. Instead of becoming a victim, she became a fighter. She continues to be a pioneer in SB504 and holds herself with a dignity beyond her years. She is currently working on a community project for Nevada’s homeless teens.

LORI ROBERTSON
Mother

HOLLY RYAN
Mother

My daughter Holly Ryan cares for my granddaughter day in and day out. You see, my granddaughter fell extremely ill from Lyme disease in January of 2014. She is so weak that she is unable to attend school so a teacher is sent to the house to teach her. Holly spends every second with her daughter and has made such a positive difference in her life. Holly continues to write letters to the Governor and everyone else of consequence regarding her daughter’s illness. Holly never gives up the fight.

TAMARA BOWEN
Mother & Grandmother

JANET SAX
Special Education Assistant

Mrs. Sax has been my daughter’s special education aid for the last three years. She’s a very kind, positive role model, and is the only person in the school that my daughter trusts enough to talk to if she’s having a hard time understanding an assignment or just having a bad day. She always encourages my daughter, redirecting her when she becomes unfocused with an assignment. Mrs. Sax goes above and beyond her job duties by taking the time to really understand how her students learn as individuals. Mrs. Sax is amazing which is why I have nominated her.

TIA MADIGAN
Parent
JENNIFER SCHELL
Advocate

Jennifer has gone above and beyond in keeping in touch on how my family and I are doing. I have a learning disability and she makes sure I understand all the information even if she has to read it to me and explain each sentence. She reassures me that my feelings are not ridiculous but justified. She tells me I am a good mom and that is so good to hear, she is teaching me how to communicate and work with the school so that I feel confident when it comes to making decisions about my son’s educational goals.

SONDRA MORALES
Parent

I first met Amy at a grief share meeting. She watched the children while parents went to the meeting. But then Amy found a she could not continue to watch the children. But when I was granted custody of my grandson who is autistic, I started taking him to sports social where they helped him with his sports and social skills. They were getting ready for the A games and there was Amy doing volunteer work. She was helping to paint skate board rails and she was helping with the set ups. She told me about many resources offered to kids with autism and she knew my grandson was a child when she was at grief share and she was so happy to see him. She told me about the Easter egg hunt. She told me to look into summer camp. Because of Amy’s help my grandson was able to attend Camp I AM through the Torino Foundation and had the best time. He cannot wait to go again. Amy is a guardian angel to all the kids. She loves them like they were her own. She makes a difference with everyone she touches. She is amazing.

LINDA SCOTT
Parent

KIM STEVENS
Friend

Kim not only took my kids in when they were in CPS. At the time she only took in kids six and under. My daughters ages four and six years. My son was seven so the next day she went back to kids cottage and got my son so that he could be with his sisters.

BETTY WISE
Mom

JOSH & GRETCHE
SWEET
Friends

Josh and Gretchen have been a great support to my family, there are often times that I am at work and there is some sort of crisis or something being delivered to my home and I can always count on them to step in for me. Thank you both for all of your support.

KELLY FIGUEROA
Parent
KENNY TAYCHER  
*Friend/Self-Advocate*  

I believe that Kenny deserves a Hand in Hand nomination because he has helped me out in many different ways including keeping me comfortable when traveling together. Also, he has helped me find new projects to work on when I come in to volunteer at Nevada PEP. Kenny is a nice and helpful person that I can contact if I have any questions or concerns. He encourages me to try my best and experience different things. He was a great support during my time in the Partners in Policy class. Because of his example it has helped me try to become a better advocate for people with disabilities. I expect that I will be learning a lot more from my friend Kenny in the future.

MO MATSUDA  
*Self-Advocate*  

KENNY TAYCHER  
*PEP Staff*  

I want to recognize Kenny for his wonderful heart, positive energy, encouragement, and for the attention he shows to each individual that steps foot into Nevada PEP. Kenny sets a great example not only for me but for everyone around him. I can see the effort he puts into his work. Kenny’s smile shows his kind spirit. He has so many good qualities and a positive disposition that leads him to help others. Kenny is very intelligent, kind, honest, and loved by many. Thank you so much!

BERSEY RAYMOND  
*Volunteer*

THOMAS TAYCHER  
*Father*  

My name is Kenneth Taycher, for years my Dad enriched my life by teaching me the foundations of growth through companionship and empathy. He gave me, a person with a visual impairment, the gift of hope and courage, showing me how I could help others using the skills and ability I have. I learned a lot from him.  

In honor of Father’s Day, I would like to nominate my Dad, Thomas Taycher, for a Hand in Hand appreciation award. He is the most, open, generous, active, fun-loving and kind hearted person. My Dad is an awesome man who does so much for me and for others. I just want to have this chance to thank him properly for all he has done for me growing up and how he endowed me with his message of strength and compassion.  

Growing up he taught me to care about others, not to be defined by my disability, and to know that I can make a positive difference for others. He is always there for me as a buddy, a friend, and someone to go to the movies with.  

I can say now that I feel good about myself and my abilities and I could not have known that without him and my Mom, he truly made a difference he is a great role model; I love him. He is the true embodiment of a hero and I just hope that I could be like him when I grow up.

KENNETH TAYCHER  
*Son*
KERI TAYLOR  
Teacher

Hello my name is Joanna Gonzalez. I’m writing this letter to nominate Keri Taylor at Stanford Elementary School. My daughter who was diagnosed with a learning disability has always struggled with school and it got to a point when she didn’t want to go anymore. I practically had to force her to go to school because she had such low self-esteem, she always struggled with reading, writing, and math. Last year she started 3rd grade, at Stanford Elementary. My daughter was not excited at all to start 3rd grade but was excited to go to a new school. When she started school she didn’t want to read at all. Finally, after a few months I had seen the amazing changes in her. She started to read, write, and do math and homework all by herself. For any parent who has a child with a learning disability, we all know the struggle. This change was thanks to Keri Taylor who is her resource teacher. She helped her so much, not only with her self-esteem, but with academics as well. Thanks to her, my daughter is now doing multiplication, reading, writing and is so positive towards school. Keri, I TRULY appreciate you and I will forever be grateful.

JOANNA GONZALEZ  
Parent

EMMA VINSON  
Daughter

My daughter has always gone above and beyond when it comes to her brother. She tries to play with her brother every day. She wants to help him to learn and succeed. My daughter is an amazing sister and we appreciate all she does for our family. She is mature, responsible, positive and helpful every day.

KIM VINSON  
Parent

CHERYL VALEARCE  
Teacher

Cheryl is my son’s teacher. I’ve personally never met another teacher so dedicated to helping a student. She not only teaches the entire class but pays a little extra help to my son with his education. When my son is having a good week, she rewards him. In fact, he was student of the month in May and next week is going to be student of the week. She has even helped us with classroom materials that she knew we couldn’t afford. Cheryl is just an all-around very special woman!

CASEY GOMEZ  
Mother

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MEGHAN WESTIN  
*Speech Therapist*

I am nominating Meghan Westin my son’s speech therapist. She is awesome because she believes in my son, she has a ton of patience with him and she has not given up on him. He enjoys his speech sessions and has made a lot of progress from her hard work. Thank you so much for everything you have done for my son. It means a lot to me and you are appreciated.

DENISE ESPINO  
*Parent*

VELVETTE WILLIAMS  
*Friend*

Velvette works with Homeless Youth. She does everything she can to help make each individual happy. She makes sure all their needs are met. Velvette is an inspiration. She deserves recognition for all her hard work and dedication. The work she does means so much too so many! Thank you for your positive energy Velvette!

SHAWNNA MAXWELL  
*Friend*
Hand in Hand
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Show your support for the remarkable people across the state who make the lives of children with special needs better by becoming a sponsor of the Hand in Hand Appreciation Program. Help us to recognize, honor, and publicly applaud those who partner with parents and make a difference for these special children.

**Silver Sponsorship $100 up to $1,000**
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- Receive Yearbook
- Receive the PEP Post Newsletter
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- Receive Yearbook
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- Honorable Mention in “Hand in Hand” Literature

Every October, Nevada recognizes children with special needs. In honor of this annual recognition, Nevada PEP will produce the “Hand in Hand” yearbook. Honorees will also be highlighted in the bi-annual PEP Post throughout the year.