

Published February 20th, 2019

## SEED foundation opens eyes, offers support to special needs kids

By Diane Claytor



Picture it: a classroom of third-graders, all wearing socks on their hands and trying to button a shirt, lace a shoe or open a piece of candy. Or fourth-graders cutting paper with their nondominant hand, feeling discouraged performing what seems to be a laborious exercise.

Diverse Ability Awareness, a program brought to Lafayette schools by SEED, the Special Education Enrichment Development Foundation, is designed to teach the students what it's like to have fine motor difficulties. "The kids experience the frustration special needs children often feel, as well as the sense of accomplishment when the task is completed," explains SEED co-president Elsa Troy-Slovik. "They cheer enthusiastically when there is success. It's the most powerful way to develop empathy."

Photos provided

This is only one of many outstanding programs sponsored by SEED, a nonprofit organization benefiting diverse learners in the Lafayette School District. A community foundation run by volunteers, SEED works in collaboration with the school district, providing funding and programs both inside and outside the classroom. "Our primary goal is to help make a difference by providing support and resources to families of children with special and diverse learning needs, as well as offering training programs, materials and funding for the educators who work with these children," states Cathy Kauder, SEED board member.

According to Troy-Slovik, approximately 10 percent of students nationwide qualify for an individualized education program. The special needs classification is very broad; it includes learning disabilities and difficulties, emotional and physical disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and autism, among others. Families with children experiencing any of these special needs often feel isolated, confused, or disillusioned with what's available to them and their children.

SEED was formed in 2006 by a small group of Lafayette parents searching to increase support and services for families whose children have special learning needs. When the organization began, its attention was on early intervention through eighth-grade students; as children have aged, the need to continue the program has become apparent. Consequently, SEED High School began recently, focusing on the requirements of special needs students in the Acalanes Union High School District.

In addition to the Diverse Ability Awareness program, which is also offered to adults, SEED has a selection of supportive, educational and fun programs available to special needs children and their families throughout the community. While SEED's bylaws state that in-school activities are limited to Lafayette schools, parent programs are open to anyone - and with an active database of approximately 800 names, these programs attract people from throughout the area. "Families with special needs kids are looking for resources and a supportive community," Kauder notes. And with SEED, they've found it.

For parents, there is a free monthly breakfast, which is an excellent way for parents of special needs children to meet others in the same boat and share ideas, thoughts, resources and concerns; there are movie nights, where a meaningful documentary is screened and followed by a discussion; parent educational programs ("our lives were changed by the Positive Parenthood behavioral class . the leaders understand the unique challenges that special needs families face." wrote a recent attendee); a SEED book club, featuring Lafayette mom and author Laura Shumaker discussing her book, "A Regular Guy: Growing Up with Autism," is meeting on Feb. 28. There is an annual fundraising auction and dinner (this year on May 18) and regular parent forums, all designed to educate families and offer them support and opportunities to socialize with their peers.

Among the most popular of SEED's programs are the communitywide events. "Our children are often isolated . they're frequently bystanders, unable to participate in regular activities, which just increase their feelings of loneliness," Troy-Slovik, the parent of a special needs child, says. "How do we give them joy?"

There is an annual picnic as well as festivals featuring entertainment and a variety of fun and inclusive activities. These events continue to attract more and more special needs families, Kauder notes. With the opening of the all-access playground in Moraga, SEED began hosting Spectacular Special Needs Birthday Parties on a regular basis. "Every special needs parent will tell you that their special needs child is rarely invited to birthday parties. They see their siblings go off and have fun while they're unable to participate,"

Troy-Slovik explains. "We now host inclusive, accessible birthday parties, complete with entertainment, birthday cake, games and a treasure chest filled with trinkets. They can invite their friends from school, their siblings come . just like any birthday party." The next one is scheduled at the Moraga Commons' All Access Playground on Saturday, March 16.

"What SEED does is really broad," Troy-Slovik says. "It feels so good to know we're not alone . to have our concerns heard and to know we have each other."

Info: [seedlafayette.org](http://seedlafayette.org)



Reach the reporter at: [info@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:info@lamorindaweekly.com)

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA