

What is e-Buddies?

e-Buddies is part of the nonprofit organization **Best Buddies** www.bestbuddies.org. The mission of Best Buddies is to provide positive one-one friendships and jobs to people with mental retardation. The e-Buddies program creates e-mail friendships between people with and without mental retardation. e-Buddies provides people with mental retardation the opportunity to learn computer skills, gain access to the Internet and most importantly foster a one-to-one, ongoing, online friendship.

e-Buddies participants with mental retardation are matched with a volunteer who does not have mental retardation. All applicants are screened before a match is made.

This is one of the precautions taken to ensure participants' safety. Matches are based on same gender (unless you request otherwise), age, and interest compatibility. Participants are asked to commit to emailing each other at least once per week for a year. Aside from the criminal background and reference checks that are conducted prior to a match being made, two individuals are never matched in the same state. The vision behind e-Buddies is to increase social opportunities for people with mental retardation, while building self-confidence and stronger communication skills.

Bobbie Quilleon, a parent of two children with mental retardation, who has joined e-Buddies, had this to say, "The elation and jubilation that Ken and Kendra reveal as they receive and send emails to their new friends is impossible to describe. They are very motivated to learn new things about the computer and understand many terms in the computer vocabulary. Both love telling their e-Buddies about what they are doing for the weekend and sharing a happy moment with their e-Buddy."

e-Buddies continues to be a rewarding experience for Cora and James Johnson, (featured in last issue of Family SupportNet Newsletter) whose son Micah successfully signed up for e-Buddies, and has since shared a nurturing online friendship with his e-Buddy. Since joining e-Buddies, the Johnson's have made a commitment to learn more about the world of computers, and have received a donated computer because of their involvement in e-Buddies. They are a testament to the positive impact that e-Buddies has on so many lives.



HAPHI (Haitian American Public Health Initiative) Students Update!

The students at HAPHI (<http://haphi.com>) have completed their Microsoft Word portion of the Family Support Net Project lessons. The next lessons for HAPHI students will be held at Codman Square Computer Center www.tech4us.org thanks to its Technology Director, Kate Snow. The students will learn about Internet searches to access Family Support resources and use their new email accounts to communicate with professionals and other parents about disability related issues.

They are using the lessons as an opportunity to express their views about a number of disability related topics. Look for their published views in the next issue of the Family SupportNet Project newsletter.

The Santos family completes Family SupportNet computer lessons!

Jose And Marilyn Santos, parents of Amalia, (see next page) began their computer lessons at the Washington Village branch of the Boston Public Library system. The library staff were very accommodating to the Santos's needs, allowing the teacher, Meredith Aalto, the chance to teach both parents simultaneously at individual computer stations. The staff also made helpful suggestions about resource sites.

The Santos's were diligent students, starting with the basics of Microsoft Word, and eventually learning email and how to locate Family Support resources in both English and Spanish. They eventually moved their lessons to the South End Tech Center, where Mr. Mel King, Computer Center Director, made them feel welcome. He offered to reserve a weekly morning training session for them and their teacher so that they had quick, easy access to the Internet, as well as the ability to learn how to attach documents via email and send them to others. By learning this skill, Mrs. Santos

—Submitted by Tracie Levine, e-buddies Coordinator for Best Buddies

can communicate with doctors and teachers regarding her daughter's services. Mr. Santos has become interested in other computer classes taught at the South End Tech Center and will explore the possibility of learning more advanced computer skills. His first choice is PhotoShop. Each week they gained more skill and ease navigating the Web to research topics to help their daughter, Amalia.

Some day Mrs. Santos would like to have a computer at home so that she can save time and energy gaining access to resources for Amalia. Mr. Santos states, "My wife has all the physical care for our daughter. She gets very tired at the end of the day." A computer will enable Marilyn to do many things from the convenience of her home and still have the strength to care for Amalia's needs.



Amalia



The Santos Family

The Family SupportNet Project, award # 90DN0053, is a three year Project of National Significance funded by the Department of Health and Human services, Administration for Children and Families, and Administration on Developmental Disabilities.

A Parent's Guide to Special Education

Written by the Federation for Children with Special Needs in collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Education, the Guide is meant to serve as a resource for parents and the organizations that serve them. The Guide contains the most current and accurate information available regarding the special education system in Massachusetts. It is the hope of the Federation that this publication will assist families in obtaining the supports and services that their children with disabilities need to succeed in school. Go to: www.fcsn.org/parentguide/pgintro.html

Call or email Meredith Aalto for more information about upcoming basic computer classes!

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(617) 355-6956 (TTY)



Visit the Family SupportNet Website at:

www.ici.umb.edu/family

Resources include information and links about Disability Resources, Global Communities, ESL, Healthcare, Family Activities, FSN Newsletter, List serves, Searches and more!



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