



Eleanore's Project, Inc.

# *Expedition Journal*

Volume 4, Issue 2 ♦ Fall 2008

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## *Contact us!*

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Eleanore's Project, Inc.  
is a 501 (c) (3) non-  
profit private operating  
foundation.

## *Welcome!*

It is hard to believe that Eleanore's Project is four years old, but we celebrated that landmark on August 2 on our way to Montreal and Jordan.

Much has happened since then – the faltering economy has moved into recession, a new president has been elected, and everywhere people are wondering about a future that in many ways seems uncertain. In the non-profit world donations are down and Eleanore's Project is no exception.

These are hard times to ask for support and yet we must, on behalf of the children and families who cannot ask for themselves. I hope that you will be inspired to give by the images and words inside, and realize as we do, that in North America we give from an abundance that is unknown to most others in the world.

~ Tamara

## *Welcome to new board members*

In the last year, Chris Clasby resigned from our board. We are grateful for his work and we miss his parliamentary procedures skills! Two new board members have joined and we are glad to introduce them to you:



**Lynne Koester** joined the faculty of the Psychology Department at The University of Montana in 1993, and is currently a Professor of Developmental Psychology. She is also the Director of a new Master's Degree in Intercultural Youth and Family Development, a partnership between The University of Montana and the United States Peace Corps. Her research interests focus on parent-infant interactions, the impact of deafness in early childhood, and cross-cultural perspectives on development. Previously, Lynne was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Ethiopia, taught preschool in NYC and Wisconsin, and served on the Board of Directors of the Missoula County Head Start. Her skills, support and warmth are great assets to our board!



**Chris Merriman** joined the faculty at the Communicative Science and Disorders Department at the University of Montana in August 2008 where she supports students in their clinical education. She devoted the previous 5 years to developing skills in evaluation and treatment of clients with Augmentative and Alternative communication (AAC) needs, and in consultation, training others in the area of assistive technology and AAC. She worked in educational settings from early childhood through high school for over 20 years. Chris' expertise in supporting adults and children with communication disabilities through AAC tools and strategies is just what our board needs as we expand our AAC focus.

## **Did you know?**

This newsletter will come right to your inbox!

We wish to remind friends of Eleanore's Project that the newsletter is always available in electronic form.

If we do not have your e-mail address yet, please consider sending in the form on the back page or drop us a line saying you'd like to switch! Contact us at info@eleanoresproject.org.

## *Project Updates: Peru & Jordan*

### **Peru**

Plans are underway for our next Peru Expedition, March 14-28, 2009. We are gathering referrals from our partners and Tamara will fly to Sioux Falls, South Dakota in mid-December to help with the loading of our shipment from Hope Haven International Ministries.

Our time in Peru will be divided between Lima, working with Yanacana Huasy, and Arequipa working with Equip KIDS. The shipment will include a good amount of pediatric rehabilitation equipment such as standing frames and walkers in addition to wheelchairs. We anticipate working with our partners to serve the wheelchair recipients with the most complex needs; we will leave additional wheelchairs for them to fit for less complicated children.

We will again be focusing on providing education and mentoring for professionals and families and in Arequipa we look forward to collaborating with Equip KIDS on designs for building positioning equipment such as stationery chairs, bath chairs and other items.

### **Jordan**

Our August 2008 expedition was unique as we focused on education as well as follow-up for wheelchair recipients we had served in 2006 and 2007. In addition, for the first time we began to incorporate augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) into our wheelchair clinics with some wonderful results!

We offered a two day course for OTs and PTs at the Hashemite University in Zarqa, and a one day workshop for professionals and parents in Ma'an. In addition we mentored several eager wheelchair mechanics in wheelchair repair – it was amazing to see wheelchairs that were unusable come back to life.

Through this expedition we learned a great deal about the importance of follow-up, education, appropriate screening of wheelchair recipients and cultural influences on the functional use of wheelchairs. We will use this data to improve our services in the future.

We are most grateful to the Part

ners in Justice Fund of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet for their generous funding of this effort.

A newly formed Eleanore's Project Jordan committee met for the first time on October 25. The group consists of several professionals (occupational and physical therapists, medical doctors) and parents from around Jordan and was organized by our Jordan coordinator Rizan Al-Kurdi.

They are developing a wheelchair service plan involving education of families and professionals, and referrals that will be made by regional teams. They are also arranging for tax free admittance of our shipments and seeking support for team living expenses. There has been talk of offering a longer educational program next year, perhaps 3-4 days in length.

It is exciting to see our work progress over time and we believe this new committee will contribute to the long-term development of a sustainable wheelchair service in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

## *Student News: Minnesota & Montana*

We are excited to report growing student involvement with Eleanore's Project. Last March our occupational therapy student program began with the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, Minnesota. Five occupational therapy (OT) graduate students and a professor, Kate Barrett, joined our team for two weeks of intense work in Lima and Cusco, earning them credit for Level I fieldwork. By the time they finished work with us, they had more exposure to complex wheelchair seating than most working therapists in the

United States!

The program was a great success and we plan to continue collaboration with the St. Kate's OT program in the future, with five more students planning to accompany us in March 2009. The OT students are able to earn academic credit for their work with us, have an international learning experience and gain specialized knowledge in wheelchair seating and mobility.

Two graduate students from the University of Montana's Intercul-

tural Youth and Family Development Program are beginning work with Eleanore's Project this fall.

**Waganesh Zeleke** and **RaShelle Soper** will be working with us as a site for their grant writing class; this will include seeking funding sources for some of our projects in Peru and Jordan. In addition, RaShelle will be an intern with Eleanore's Project. We are looking forward to her practical help, especially her fluency in Spanish as we prepare for our next trip to Peru.

## *What is AAC? And what does it have to do with wheelchairs?*

In this issue of *The Expedition Journal*, we have referred to something called "AAC" a few times. You may be wondering exactly what we are talking about and how it fits with the mission and vision of Eleanore's Project. The answer to that question begins with Eleanore's life, which inspired our vision. Eleanore was profoundly deaf in addition to having been born with a significant motor impairment; moreover, her deafness was not diagnosed until she was nearly 5 years old.

We learned firsthand about the frustrations of living with a communication disability and experienced the joy of seeing our daughter's life changed when she was given access to alternative and augmentative communication (AAC). During Eleanore's life appropriate mobility

equipment, American Sign Language and AAC transformed her world.

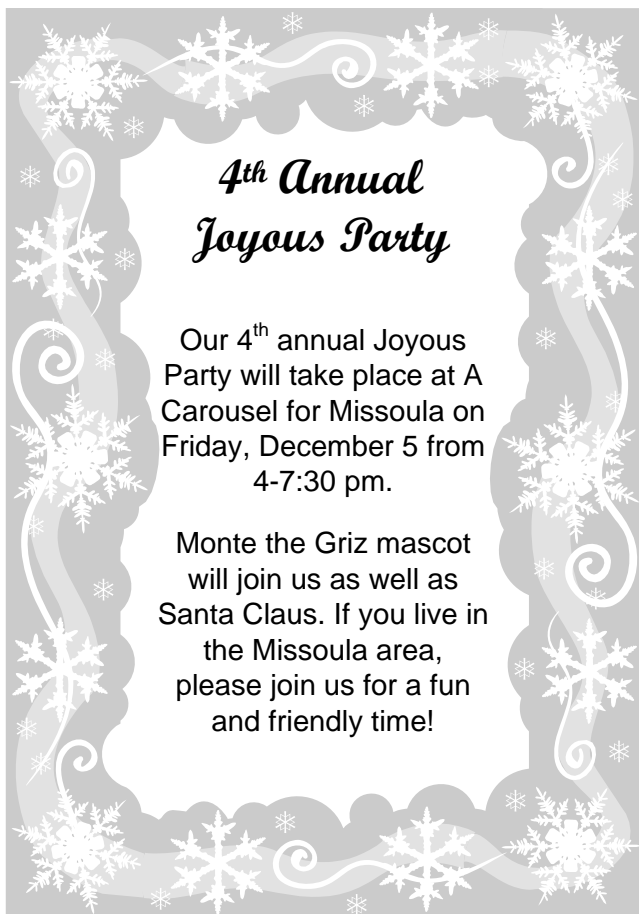
Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) includes all forms of communication (other than oral speech) that is used to express thoughts, needs, wants, and ideas. We all use AAC when we make facial expressions or gestures, use symbols or pictures, or write. People with severe speech or language problems rely on AAC to supplement existing speech or replace speech that is not functional.

Special augmentative aids, such as picture and symbol communication boards and electronic devices, are available to help people express themselves. A person who cannot speak still has plenty to say, and AAC allows these individuals to communicate more freely.

Stephen Hawking is perhaps the most famous person who uses AAC today.

We have shared our family journey seeking a communication system for Eleanore at the International Alternative and Augmentative Communication Conference – Latin America in 2005 and 2007. In addition, Tamara was asked to present on the importance of seating and positioning as a foundation for communication. In August 2008 we gave similar presentations at the International Society for Alternative and Augmentative Communication Biennial Conference in Montreal. Later that month we began to flesh out our commitment to AAC by incorporating it into our wheelchair seating clinics in Jordan. When children were non-speaking we

*(Continued on page 5)*



### *Attention computer users!*

It's easy to support Eleanore's Project without sending a dime!

By using GoodSearch for web searches or by doing online shopping through GoodShop, a donation will be made to Eleanore's Project while you make purchases or do web searches you would do anyway.

Please visit the GoodShop website at [www.goodsearch.com/goodshop.aspx](http://www.goodsearch.com/goodshop.aspx) to see the many stores available through this page.

GoodSearch can be found at [www.goodsearch.com](http://www.goodsearch.com).

## *Faces from Jordan: August 2008*



*Left: We saw Zaynab for the third year in a row.*

*Right: Sopha had grown so much since we saw her in 2006.*



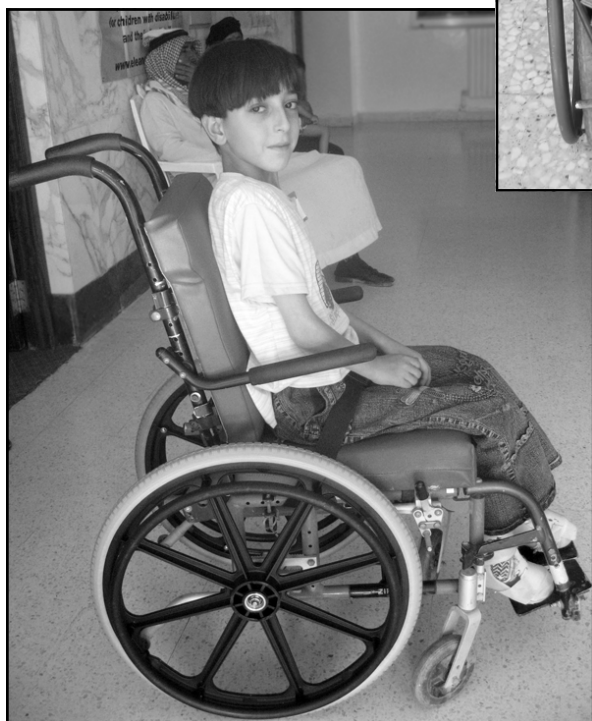
*“And we are put on earth,  
a little space, that we learn  
to bear the beams of love.”*

*William Blake*



*Left: Rahma in Irbid can't wait to get back to school.*

*Below right: We met Amera in 2007 and this year, we introduced her to AAC symbols.*



*Left: Riham poses in her newly-adjusted wheelchair.*



(Continued from page 3)

asked simple questions such as “How does your child communicate?”, “Who understands your child?”, and “How do you know what your child wants?” We then offered some very basic AAC strategies primarily based on yes/no questions. It was heartwarming to see the excitement of children

like Amera, Nermien and Yosef when they were given a new way to express themselves.

You see, helping a child sit up for the first time in a wheelchair is not the end of the story. It is only the beginning – the opening of a door. The goal of our wheelchair clinics is much more than putting kids into chairs that roll so that they can get

from point A to point B. We aim to foster their growth and development as people and to change attitudes toward disabilities in their societies - and communication is a crucial part of the equation. That is what AAC has to do with wheelchairs!

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## *Reflections on Jordan from Isabelle Cormier*



What a wonderful adventure it has been for me to join Eleanore's Project one more time! I am a Canadian

occupational therapist who participated in the first Eleanore's Project trip four years ago in Peru. I have always believed that helping kids with disabilities and their families is possible not only by providing them with wheelchairs and individualized positioning, but also through ongoing education and empowerment.

This summer in Jordan, we had a small team of two therapists and two technicians, plus several other valuable team members helping with coordinating, translating and the many challenging tasks in-

volved with traveling to the various regions of this beautiful country to reach out for the kids and their families.

We found that many wheelchairs were in serious need of repairs while new positioning was usually always required as kids had grown or their needs had changed...It was a beautiful experience to work as a team to put together all the pieces of the puzzle to allow mobility, ensure optimal comfort, function, and interaction with people and the environment...more special was, how, through our work, families and community members were mobilized in taking ownership of the equipment, with creativity, such as creating custom seating or going to a bike store to replace unusable

tires...lots of unknown talents were discovered!

I will also always remember with fond memories all the laughs and pleasure we had working together as a team, the pride of accomplishing what initially appeared impossible, the smiles and sparkly eyes of the children, the unbelievable hospitality of the Arab people, the natural beauties of the landscape, the tasty food and amazing sweets, and overall, an amazing sense of satisfaction from being able to contribute to such a wonderful project with wonderful people...one child at a time, one wheelchair at a time!

Thank you!

## *We thank...*

Eleanore's Project is grateful to the following organizations:

**Montana Knights of Columbus** and the several councils that donated to Eleanore's Project this year, and we thank Chris Clasby for spearheading this project.

**International Order of Rainbow Girls** (Montana) for their generous fund-raising efforts on our behalf.

**Partners in Justice Fund** (Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet) for their grant that funded a large portion of our work August 2008 work in Jordan. We are grateful to have their support for two years in a row.

## *Do you want to hear from us again?*

We know that our cause may not be your cause. We want to send this newsletter only to those who want to receive it. Please tell us if you want your name removed from our list – we will not be offended! Call us at 406-370-4717 or email us at [info@eleanoresproject.org](mailto:info@eleanoresproject.org) if you wish to be removed, or use the form on the reverse of this page to indicate your mailing preference.



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