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Dawn Zibricky Devotes Life To Special Needs Children

by NANCY KENNEDY

When Dawn Zibricky was working as a nurse at The Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, caring for patients with devastating neurological injuries, she never suspected that in her future she would find herself applying her professional experience and expertise to her personal life.

But that is exactly what Zibricky did when she and her husband Greg learned that their son Aaron had pervasive developmental disorder, a diagnosis within the autism spectrum.

Zibricky had a fulfilling career in nursing, specializing in rehabilitation of persons with brain trauma and spinal cord injuries. She had a master's degree and was working toward a Ph.D while teaching at Lewis University in Romeoville, Illinois. But she put all of that on hold, recognizing that her priority had to be her son. A career switch to school nursing seemed like a good way to meet the needs of her family while continuing to work within the profession that she loved.

"I became certified as a school nurse and went to work for the Lincolnway Area Special Education Cooperative," she recalls. "A job as a nurse-consultant was developed for me, and then, through a grant from the state Board of Education to the LaGrange Area District of Special Education for autism, I became a member of a regional team that teaches school districts how to work with children with autism and their families. I am the parent on the training team.

"In giving presentations, I quickly realized that the future needs of these children and families were being neglected. Parents of children with disabilities are so overwhelmed that we take things one day at a time. But we need to be pro-active and thinking about future planning. Drawing upon my experience at RIC, I knew that a multi-dimensional approach was needed."

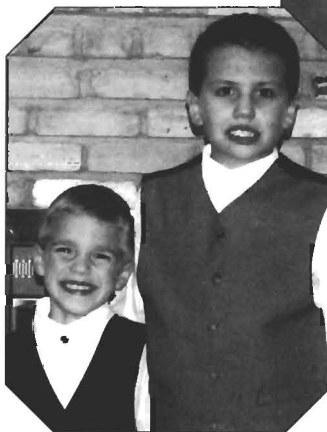
Zibricky remembered a chaplain at RIC

who used to ask patients to tell him about their dreams and fantasies, and then about their reality. Then he would work with them on how to merge the two, so that they could still achieve within the limits of their disability.

"I was inspired by that. I knew that we had so many pieces in place: education, community support and social and emotional support. But the missing piece was a huge one – what was going to happen to these children when we were gone? What if something happened to a parent now? We never know what lies ahead and for parents of children with special needs, this is especially important. It would be unfair to leave siblings saddled with a responsibility like this. Kids with disabilities have hopes and dreams too. There had to be money in place to fund adult services, so that the dreams could come true and parents could relax about the future."

Together with her husband, a Certified Financial Planner who is the President of a company called Provider Group Ltd., and Benefits Specialist Michael Frantz, Zibricky created a program called "Special Needs, Special Circumstances." The program assists the family in developing a plan that maintains benefits, provides resources to finance the child's lifestyle and care and manages those resources to assure stability and protection.

Assets can be structured so that they provide long-term care and support while supplementing basic benefits and services. A team of advisors works with each family, giving consideration to special issues such as the impact of an inheritance on government benefits eligibility, insurance needs, wills and the establishment of a trust. Specific guidelines for highly individual-



The Zibrickys live in New Lenox, Illinois with their sons, Aaron who is now 9, and Benjamin, who is 6.

ized care and personal preferences are written in a "Letter of Intent." Each family assembles their own team, comprised of family members, friends, health care professionals familiar with the child, members of advocacy groups and financial planning experts.

All of this is accomplished through a process that addresses every short and long term contingency, creating a living document that offers the parents something beyond price: a sense of security and peace of mind, derived from knowing that everything possible has been done to assure continuing high quality care and support for their child.

For Dawn Zibricky, her work as a Disabilities Consultant and trainer is one more way that she is able to use her nursing experience and education. "Nursing is my passion; kids with disabilities are another passion. I am using all the resources I have. The beauty of nursing is that you can be this creative and do so many different things with your degree. My son inspires my work and I get to make dreams happen for parents and children."

For more information about Special Needs, Special Circumstances, call (877) 483-0426 or (630) 789-6313 or e-mail greg@providergroup.com or specialneeds49512@yahoo.com.