

# Common Ground: Bringing Families Together

The  
**CARE** Project Inc.



*CARE: A Journey to Resilience*  
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**HOW CAN WE, AS AUDIOLOGISTS, CROSS OVER THE LINE OF PROVIDING INFORMATION to the families of deaf and hard of hearing children to providing emotional support and counseling for them? It isn't easy; actually, it isn't even "normal" for audiologists to do that on a routine basis. Yet, time and time again, parents indicate that they need emotional support when they are given the unexpected news that their child is deaf or hard of hearing.**

One effective way to help families is to bring them together for a retreat experience along with a group of professionals who can serve as resources and facilitators for group interactions and activities. That concept was the basis of the First Annual CARE Project Family Retreat, scheduled to be held November 9-13, 2011. The story of how that project came into being may help in the development of similar activities.

Like many great ideas, this one was born in a conversation. I was talking with Wendy Wilmot, businesswoman and wife of the mayor of Bald Head Island, NC, when the topic came up. Using a Wounded Warriors program as a model and incorporating the principles of the CARE Project, we set out to create an island retreat program for families of deaf and hard of hearing children. Our efforts quickly led to the establishment of a task force to organize the event, house it and to raise money to fund it.

The first step was to secure housing. Ginger Dunn, a business associate of Mrs. Wilmot's, secured the use of a variety of vacation (second) homes from homeowners on the island, and the island developer, Bald Head Island Ltd., donated the use of a new apartment building for families to stay in as well. Suddenly, we had the "where" and had to work on an implementation plan.

Next, I sent out an application form to key

professionals in state agencies that serve children who are deaf or hard of hearing. Literally overnight, the available slots were almost full. Nine families identified a strong desire to process their own emotions associated with having children facing hearing issues.

One parent wrote on the application, "We think that this trip to Bald Head Island sounds fantastic, not only as a family retreat, but in helping our child's growth, to gain fellowship with other families going through similar issues, and to learn how to help support those who come after us." Another wrote,

"Knowing we are not alone makes coping easier. We feel the retreat will bring families closer together and provide an opportunity to get to know one another on a more personal level. Ultimately, we want the best for our child and want to ensure we are utilizing all resources available to ensure that he will live a happy, successful, productive life."

I was able to choose two mentor families to join our retreat as well. The mentor families have worked closely with The CARE Project in conducting workshops for parents around North Carolina. They are great leaders for the retreat experience and will host a dinner one night for families only, with no professionals present. Activities are planned that will allow the families free time to be together and enjoy the beauty of the island while bonding.

Parents also will be able to attend morning seminars offering information in the areas of audiology, speech-language pathology, technology and counseling. Experts

on these topics will be available to answer parents' questions, while a certified teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing along with a camp counselor will provide structured activities for children.

How do we feed this many people? Through the wonderful contribution of a local restaurant and catering company (Pine Valley Market), Christi Ferretti, one of the owners, has planned a complete menu for four days to feed 50 people, and she is personally coming to the island to prepare all of the meals. The mealtime also is designed to bring all families and professionals together for group discussions, sharing and interacting.

We asked island residents and businesses



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to donate money or in-kind contributions and found that people do step up when called upon. When the number of applications exceeded the limit of the project, it was the generosity of the Bald Head Island residents and businesses that allowed us to increase the number of families involved. We now have a rare and wonderful opportunity for at least 11 families to come together with eight professionals to learn, bond, understand and perhaps even cry together. We predict the outcome will be one of great emotional support and relief. In keeping with the goals of The CARE Project, we hope to create senses of community, comfort and connectedness. **hpm**

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