

New, Fun, and Just Plain Cool

Crazy Wisdom Kids in the Community



By Karen L. Totten

If you'd like to be considered for inclusion in the next Crazy Wisdom Kids column, please contact our columnist at: cwkidscolumn@crazywisdom.net. The deadline for submissions for the January thru April 2012 issue is November 1, 2011.

Treating children with special needs and their families is a specialty of Dr. Tony Boggess of Natural Balance Wellness Medical Center of Ann Arbor. The doctor of osteopathy, with a clinic on Main Street directly across from Michigan Stadium, devotes about 50 percent of his practice to this group of patients. He says, "Our practice recognizes the tremendous impact certain medical conditions have on the entire family...Our goal is to support the entire family unit holistically."

Special-needs children include those experiencing autism spectrum disorder; ADHD; or mood, sleep, or behavioral problems, as well as those with cognitive and speech deficits and physical impairments.

Often, the adults caring for special-needs children neglect their own health and need attention too, Boggess notes. He attributes many of the parents' problems to the accumulation of stress brought about by caring for someone with chronic pain or illness. Stress symptoms can include problems such as insomnia, chronic headaches, mood problems, and even physical pain.

"Acute stress response," says Dr. Boggess, "is activated during times of real or perceived danger." As such, it "regulates or 'blocks' chemicals in the brain and body, which, under normal circumstances, are very helpful. However, left on for weeks, months, or even years, stress can become horribly uncomfortable and ultimately lead to these chronic health or mood problems. Especially for families with special-needs or other individuals facing prolonged hardship, the stress system can get stuck in the 'on' position, and symptoms result."

Natural Balance Clinic offers a program of lifestyle changes to diet, routine, and exercise that help the whole family manage stress. Some of this is done through patient education, which Boggess says is "fifty percent of what we do," and adds, "The root word of 'doctor' means 'teacher'." He explains, "I believe the body has the innate ability to heal itself with proper support, and given the right set of circumstances." In fact, he says, "Many of our programs are devised to require a certain amount of determination and commitment. The patient has to be an active participant in his health."

"Clients generally leave less confused than when they came in. Many have been to lots of different doctors looking for relief or help," he says. Boggess attributes a good portion of his patient base to word-of-mouth advertising. "We are unique in what we do, treating the whole family," he notes. Families come from all over the metro Detroit area as well as Ann Arbor and surrounding areas.



Staff of Natural Balance Wellness Medical Center of Ann Arbor

(Left to right) Brad Naberhaus - President, Building Bridges; Kristen Kwiatkowski - Speech Therapy (SLP); Stephanie Ramser - Occupational Therapy (OT); Deborah Kay - OT; Rosemary Darian - SLP; Dr. Tony Boggess - Medical Director; Lili Boggess - Office Manager; Dena Sabou - Neurofeedback, modalities, specialized diets; Jennifer Bielak- clinical support, diagnostics; Jessica Ferrell - patient services, admin; Dr. Phalguna Reddy - clinical support, nutritional pharmacy.

Boggess feels good that he can take a lot of time with each new patient. A typical initial consultation can take 80 minutes. "We do a thorough history and a physical exam," he states. "If needed, we consult through patient education."

In addition to the aforementioned clinical practices, Dr. Boggess often assists those seeking a switch away from stimulants, sleeping medications, or drugs such as Prozac to natural alternatives, when desired or appropriate. He combines appropriate diagnostic tests of the digestive, nervous, and immune systems with nutraceuticals and therapies to address the underlying causes of "dis-ease." Nutraceuticals are high-grade dietary supplements and functional or medicinal foods that provide health or medical benefits. Examples include vitamins and minerals, as well as omega 3 fatty acids and probiotics.

Natural Balance Clinic works in cooperation with Building Bridges Therapy for concerns such as occupational, speech, and language therapy and psychological services. Building Bridges maintains a satellite center within the New Balance Clinic for patients' convenience.

Boggess, who holds a degree from the Midwestern School of Medicine, completed specialty training in physical medicine at the University of Michigan and earned additional certification in medical acupuncture through Stanford University.

Natural Balance Clinic offers medical acupuncture, massage, water/air filtration systems, and hyperbaric oxygen therapy rentals. The clinic takes standard private insurance, but not HMO insurance.

Check out the clinic website at www.nbwellness.com or call 734-929-2696 for further information.



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Kids Kruiser, a transportation service for children covering the areas of Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, Ypsilanti Township, and Canton, opened its doors in April of 2011. Founded by Angela McCommons, a former engineer who became a

stay-at-home mom by choice, the business developed out of her home as a means of helping children get where they need to go when parents or others are not available.

“My daughter was in preschool,” she says, “and I was working in Toledo, commuting on a daily basis. It became a choice between family and career” — and McCommons chose the former. Friends would often call McCommons for rides for their children, because they knew she was at home. She decided to make the service official and created her business from that idea. “I enjoy kids,” she says, “and I enjoy driving. So I put the two together.”

McCommons is currently operating one van and is working on securing a second vehicle this fall. The Kruiser, a 2008 Chrysler Town and Country, can carry up to six riders, with seat belts. Riders range in age from preschool through high school seniors. The service does not transport infants because, McCommons states, “We like our passengers to be able to tell us what they need.”

The service can arrange to pick up children directly from school when permission is secured from the parents. A teacher or assistant escorts riders to the van. McCommons plans the drop-off schedule around the day’s riders and their destinations. Consideration is given to the start times of lessons or events, as well as the distance from collection points to destinations.

McCommons is the driver. She carries a chauffeur’s license and her business is registered with the state of Michigan as an LLC. She is working on obtaining a limousine license. She has CPR training and a first aid certificate. Also, any drivers she employs will meet these standards, as well as a background check. A copy of her driving record is kept in the Kruiser.

Compared to a regular taxi service, McCommons says her rates are favorable. Rates are based on the number of miles to a given destination and the number of days the service is used. Discounts apply for various situations. Parents pre-arrange payment. McCommons can accept VISA, American Express, Mastercard or Pay Pal.

Typically, a parent interested in the Kids Kruiser will set up a meeting. McCommons meets both the parents and the child or children who will be using the service. Registration forms and transportation agreements are signed. The meeting gives parents an opportunity to ask questions and look at McCommons’ credentials, as well as give the child a secure feeling about who will be driving them. “I like my riders to feel comfortable,” McCommons notes. Also, for their comfort, books and music are available for the riders.

As for discipline, McCommons sets a clear standard. “I reserve the right to cancel service for riders who don’t follow the code of conduct, which includes no cursing, kicking, or throwing things, and no food or beverages.”



“What I do with children is all about them,” says Townsend-Efimova. “I help them bring out what is inside. The children make visible for us things people might otherwise not see.”

Currently, the Kids Kruiser is servicing Western Wayne County and Eastern Washtenaw County on a first-come, first-served basis. The hours of operation are M-F 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Saturday by appointment only. McCommons can be reached at 734-255-3556 or through the website www.kidskruiser.com.

Light filters through the large glass windows of the art room at Rudolf Steiner High School of Ann Arbor, where a dozen children of mixed ages sit at long tables contemplating the projects before them. The room is filled to the brim with all manner of art: pastel mermaids and watercolor landscapes

on the walls, silk paintings and oil pastels, masks, sculptures, and clay pieces. A copy of Mona Lisa smiles knowingly from a corner.

This is a painting class with Elena Townsend-Efimova of Talking Colors Art School and the children are all eager to be creating on a beautiful summer July day. One can see large poster-sized paper sheets spread out before each student, along with trays of tempera paints, brushes, and jars of water.

This day’s project is a composition in straight and curved lines. Townsend-Efimova begins with a story, characteristic of her teaching method. “Everything we see in the world,” she explains, “is made up of straight lines or curved lines. The straight lines are very firm and look a person right in the eye. The curved lines are more relaxed and say ‘maybe.’” She gestures as she says this, her body exemplifying the two types of movement the lines make.

The children are shown examples of both straight and curved lines, then asked to use paintbrush and black tempera to place eight different lines on the paper before them. “Now,” says Townsend-Efimova, “the lines find a way to have a conversation between them.” The children are asked to connect all the lines in some way, so that they all touch. The spaces left will be filled in with color.

Townsend-Efimova continues her story: “Now they are friends,” she says, “mixing with each other so that they blend on the paper. They are like people. What is the name of this school? Talking Colors. You are asking the color, ‘Who do you want me to invite to play with you, who is your friend?’”

The children reach for blues and greens, sunny yellows, and bright reds. They bend over their work while Townsend-Efimova roams the class, offering additional inspiration. “Scoop up the paint as if you were making a sandwich,” she says. “Peanut butter or mayonnaise.”

Townsend-Efimova stops to hold up a picture. “This is quiet like a lullaby,” she comments. Another student’s work is proclaimed “bright like the July day.” She makes a point to honor each child’s efforts, always finding a gentle pictorial way to illustrate a point. Each child has chosen his or her own path.

The dynamic spirit of Townsend-Efimova infuses every class she teaches. The Russian-born, -raised, and -schooled teacher (from St. Petersburg) came to the United States in 1992 for three months to teach and do presentations on art therapy, on which she is an expert.

In 1993 she came to stay, settling in Ann Arbor and immediately opening Talking Colors. She was invited to teach at the Rudolf Steiner School, and has been there for 15 years.

“My passion is children’s art,” says Townsend-Efimova, who has master’s degrees in both architecture and education, Waldorf teacher training, and a certificate in art therapy. Certainly she has touched the lives of all the students who come before her flawless teaching style, her grace, and her warm, charming manner.

“What I do with children is all about them,” she says. “I help them bring out what is inside. The children make visible for us things people might otherwise not see.” She quotes Pablo Picasso, who said, “By age 13 I could draw like Raphael, but it took me a whole life to learn to draw as a child.” It is art from the inside out, says Townsend-Efimova. As Picasso also said, every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain a child.

Townsend-Efimova was a pioneer in art therapy in Russia. She notes that after the Second World War, this discipline emerged and developed. Townsend-Efimova, knowing friends and colleagues with expertise in this practice, began setting up a program in the then-Soviet Union. “I worked with children who were in psychotherapy and with autistic children,” she explains.

Plenty of encouragement came her way as a child learning to do art. She had art class in school through the 6th grade but credits her preschool teacher, now 82 and still a close friend, with helping to instill her love of art. “Nina Aleksandrovna Potapova was passionate about art,” Townsend-Efimova says, “and I see her when I go back to Russia to visit.”

Perhaps the most profound influence on Townsend-Efimova was her father. “My father had a law degree. He lost an arm during the war, but he sat with me for hours to do art with me and nurtured my interests,” she says. “He drew cartoons which were published in the papers.” It was natural that Townsend-Efimova would gravitate toward an artistic career.

Many years later, Talking Colors Art School is quite successful. “Art teachers in town know me and they send their students to me from other programs,” Townsend-Efimova says. “Whole families come and stay for years. I teach home-schooled students and also advise on portfolios for students interested in attending art school after graduation from high school.”

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Townsend-Efimova helps select pieces to include in a portfolio and guides students in creating any additional pieces required by a prospective college. "Some schools send homework," she says. And Townsend-Efimova helps train new teachers as well, through the Waldorf Institute of Southern Michigan.

Her summer art classes, held at the Rudolf Steiner High School on Pontiac Trail, are very popular, but Townsend-Efimova also holds courses during the regular school year, both after school and on school breaks. She also offers parent-child classes and art activities for birthday parties.

Visit her website at www.talkingcolors.com to register online. Her telephone number is 734-995-5959.

Eve Wilson



"I have been a healer most of my life," says Eve Wilson, healing practitioner, of her work with children and adults.

Wilson, an Ann Arbor-based spiritual minister, moved her practice to Ann Arbor from Royal Oak last year (her arrival was announced in this column in the January–April 2011 issue of *CWJ*). She works telepathically with individuals who find themselves in a place where trauma or injury are interfering with their life journeys.

Sometimes Wilson works by "giving" a child a power animal — an unconditionally loving, enlightened being coming through animal energy — to call on for the power inherent within the individual, or a quality that might be blocked. A lion, for example, would impart courage or self-confidence.

"I was always open to people's problems," Wilson says of her early childhood experiences. She began working with her own family members, until by age 26 she was called to devote her life to working with others.

Eve's method is gentle and simple. She can work over the phone with the parents of a child referred for care. The child need not be present, and could be in school or doing other activities. She works back and forth between parent and child, working with the child's higher self and helping him or her work through the issue.

Wilson asks questions designed to elicit possible reasons why a child is having problems. "Tell me what you think I need to hear," she will say. As she explains, "I am not the one in charge of the healings. It is better if I do not have a predetermined belief about the best course of action. That only gets in the way."

A typical session lasts about an hour or an hour and a half, with intervals of four to 10 weeks between sessions. Wilson likes to wait between sessions to allow time for changes to occur.

Wilson explains the children's processing this way: "I access a given moment in a child's current or evolutionary lifeline where they might have gotten 'stuck'. We are one hundred and fifty times more efficient and effective working this way. We don't have to re-traumatize the child to bring about improvement."

Sometimes Wilson works by "giving" a child a power animal — an unconditionally loving, enlightened being coming through animal energy — to call on for the power inherent within the individual, or a quality that might be blocked. A lion, for example, would impart courage or self-confidence. A grizzly bear momma strengthens the instinct of what is safe and what is not, and is especially powerful for children who have been abused.

Wilson does not have to explain the animal to the child. "They know what that animal means to them," she states. She might ask a parent to play lion or grizzly with the child, or to provide a picture or stuffed toy of the animal, as a symbol to help the child keep the power animal in mind.

Of her work with children, Wilson says, "I have seen tremendous healing happen." She is an ordained minister who is also a Reiki master and a certified healing practitioner.

Wilson charges \$100 to 130 per session, depending on its length. Her website is located at www.spiritualhealers.com and her telephone number is 734-780-7635.



Reaching out to the youth of the area with programs designed to teach and inspire is part of the mission of the Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra.

"Music speaks truth to our common humanity." — Arie Lipsky, Music Director and Conductor, Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra

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Every year, thousands of children benefit from the many programs offered to instruct and delight: the Music Field Day, the "Meet Your Conductor" program, the Instrument Petting Zoos and Family Music Concerts, and Ensemble Concerts in the schools.

The Symphony's annual Music Field Day in March brings 5,000 to 7,000 students from a three- to five-county area to Hill Auditorium to hear two performances of music especially suited to the ears of young listeners. Dozens of volunteers work to ensure the success of this event.

The visiting composer for the 2012 Music Field Day will be Michael Daugherty from the University of Michigan. The Symphony will perform from his *Metropolis Symphony* (inspired by the Superman comic books), as well as pieces by Mendelssohn ("Scherzo" from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Opus 61) to Tchaikovsky (the "Waltz" from *Sleeping Beauty*, Opus 66) to the *Harry Potter Symphonic Suite* by John Williams, among others.

Symphony Maestro Arie Lipsky does presentations for the Symphony's Meet Your Conductor program. Lipsky visits schools to play his cello or flute, discuss the life of a musician, teach simple conducting techniques, conduct student ensembles, or teach leadership skills, depending on the age level and experience of the group whom he is addressing.

More widely known are the Benard L. Maas Foundation Family Concerts offered three times during the year. These concerts, designed for all ages, give children a chance to hear music designed for their listening appreciation. Kept to about 70 minutes in length so that attention can be held, the concerts also feature pre-concert activities, including the very popular Instrument Petting Zoo.



At the Instrument Petting Zoo, children get the opportunity to hold a stringed instrument, listen to the sound, and try it out for themselves. Ideally suited for three- to 12-year-olds, even the youngest children can touch the wood and feel the vibrations of the sound, even if they can't actually play.

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The Petting Zoo began in 1991 and was held at Briarwood Mall. It originally included all the instruments of the orchestra, as well as stations where children could do various activities, such as build their own instrument. It stayed in that location for another year, then was scaled down to its present size and format.

The Petting Zoos are possible thanks to the generous assistance of Shar Music, which donates the instruments used at the events. And the Zoo does travel. The program also goes into the schools or day care centers as a more formalized program.

Among the works featured at this year's November 13, 2011 Family Concert will be the works of Poulenc (*The Story of Babar, the Little Elephant*) and Leopold Mozart's *Kindersymphonie*, Hob 11:47. In the latter piece, children take the stage to play "toys" with the music.

The cornerstone of the education program, however, is really the Ensemble Concert, as performed by various small groups of Symphony musicians (brass, string, and woodwind quintets, and a percussion ensemble). They take music directly to the schools for small concerts themed on the music from the Family Concerts. About 35-45 minutes in length, these performances bring music to the children, thanks to the incredible musicians who take time to travel for these mini-events.

And, we cannot forget the wonderful Sing Along With Santa, held yearly at the Bethlehem United Church of Christ. Some type of world music is offered at the concert, along with the carols and of course Santa Claus. In previous years, a calypso band was featured, and one year the songs of Puerto Rico.

Information on all of these programs and more are available at the Ann Arbor Symphony website, www.a2so.com. This year, tickets to the Family Concerts are \$10 each, and the Symphony is featuring a buy-one-get-one-free membership offer.

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