

RELATIONSHIPS

KIDS IN THE CITY

JUST FOR KIDS
WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

If you're a parent of a child with special needs, Concord mom Kirsten Rorke knows what you're going through. Her 8-year-old son, Michael Yarbrough, is a special needs child who attends PS 373R, an elementary school for kids with disabilities.

"One of the best things I ever did," Ms. Rorke reports, "was joining the PTA at my son's school when he began kindergarten. I made friends and we got together for play dates, something I always felt too isolated to do before."

She continues, "The PTA at PS373R has parents who have children with all sorts of disabilities: autism, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, emotional disabilities, Down syndrome and learning disabilities."

"We find strength through laughter. Everyone seems to have an extreme

MELISSA
CHAPMAN-MUSHNICK

'public moment' to share," she notes.

"I went from being lonely and confused to feeling joy at helping others discover opportunities for their child 'out there' in the big, wide world."

To help other families of special needs children, Ms. Rorke created a Web site, www.373virtualpta.wordpress.com, which is chock

full of links, resources and daily updates. Here are some of her best bets for families as well as some additional ideas I researched on my own.

For more information about activities, books and groups for families and their kids with special needs, check out Melissa Chapman-Mushnick's blog, <http://blog.silive.com/kidsinthecity/>. If you're a parent who would like to guest blog about your experiences living with a special needs child, please e-mail madijack@earthlink.net.

FIREFLIES NY

This after-school program involves a blend of TaeKwonDo, music/movement, balance, stretching and breathing exercises all guided by applied behavior analysis therapists. FirefliesNY believes the study of martial arts can help a child with autism build strong bridges between mind and body, between the child's inside self and the world outside.

Address

20 Terrace Place, Brooklyn.

Cost

Private intake evaluation: \$100, drop-in session, \$80 (please call ahead for availability), 10-week package (one session per week) with one make-up session allotted: \$695.

Date

Rolling admissions. Classes, Monday to Thursday, sessions run 4:15 to 5 p.m., 5:15 to 6 p.m. and 6:15 to 7 p.m.

Age appeal

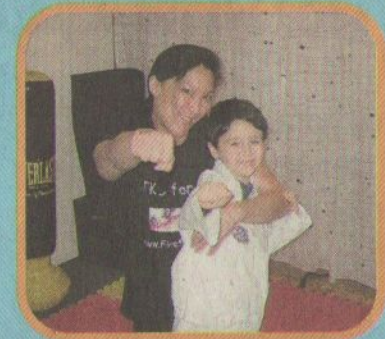
Three and a half to 15 years old.

What will kids will go gaga for

Amid a background of motivational, instrumental music, and under the watchful eye of the instructor and volunteers from local schools, students will kick, punch, block and strike non-human targets: Mr. Everlast bag, Mr. Whale (hand-held double striker), and The Curve (a hand-held body shield).

Parent perks

Watching their kids gain a sense of mind-



HIGH PUNCH: FirefliesNY founder, Lisa Chin, with student Arren Ordovery.

body awareness, fine-motor and gross-motor strengthening, flexibility, balance and self-confidence. During the sessions, parents can either sit in the waiting area, or drop their kids off.

Drawbacks

You'll have to drive to Brooklyn.

Overall

TaeKwonDo can bring a sense of calmness and peace, both physically and spiritually, that increases focus, reduces stress, anxiety and aggression, prevents or minimizes "meltdowns," and helps the child progress more smoothly along their often rocky path.

Information

718-355-9480; www.FirefliesNY.com.

YAI/PROJECT GROW

This six-part workshop series is structured to help parents understand and manage their child's behavior. A free nine-week follow-up course is offered to help parents with an individualized behavior plan for their child, including data-keeping charts and one-to-one meetings.

Cost

Free.

Ms. Rorke says

"The workshop helped me change our family dynamic and I now have a more stress-free environment at home."

SOCCER CLINIC

Time

Staten Island workshops will begin in January.

Address

PS 373R, 91 Henderson Ave., New Brighton.

Information

Contact Nicole Kirby at 212-273-6200; www.yai.org

G.R.A.C.E. FOUNDATION

The G.R.A.C.E. Foundation (Getting Resources for Autistic Children's Equality) parent support groups enable folks to share advice, technical help and moral support about the issues that one encounters in raising a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Address

264 Watchogue Rd., Westerleigh.

Time

ASD parent support groups meet the sec-

ond and fourth Tuesday of each month at 10 a.m. Asperger parent support group meetings are held the third Thursday of each month at 7:30 p.m.

Information

G.R.A.C.E. has a variety of programs for kids on the spectrum like social-skills classes and swimming, baseball, bowling and gym. 718-983-3800; www.graceofny.org.

Special needs kids can participate in a skills training clinic and a soccer league sponsored by Special Olympics, Staten Island youth soccer league, and the Staten Island-based families helping families resource and recreation center.

Address

Miller Field on Mill Road, New Dorp.

Dates

Skills clinics: Sept. 27 and Oct. 4.
Games: Oct. 18 and 25, Nov. 1, 8, and 15.

Age appeal

Special-needs children of all functioning levels, 6 to 16 years old.

Cost

Free.

What kids will go gaga for

Playing soccer!

Parent perks

During the skills training sessions, children will be assessed and placed on teams according to functioning level, age and size. All coaches, assistant coaches and shadows will be trained by Special Olympics. Siblings and extended family are encouraged to hang out and volunteer.

Overall

It is a welcoming, relaxing, social and a cathartic experience for all involved.

Information

Walk-in registrations on Sept. 27 will be accepted with a signed medical release form in hand and parent consent; <http://familieshelpingfamilies.webs.com/eventsactivities.htm>.

TELL ME A STORY

'The Misunderstood Man,' a West African folktale

Once upon a time in the hills of Ghana, there lived a young man named Kofi. People called Kofi "Know-It-All" because he was forever bragging about how much he knew. No matter what anyone said, Kofi tried to outdo him.

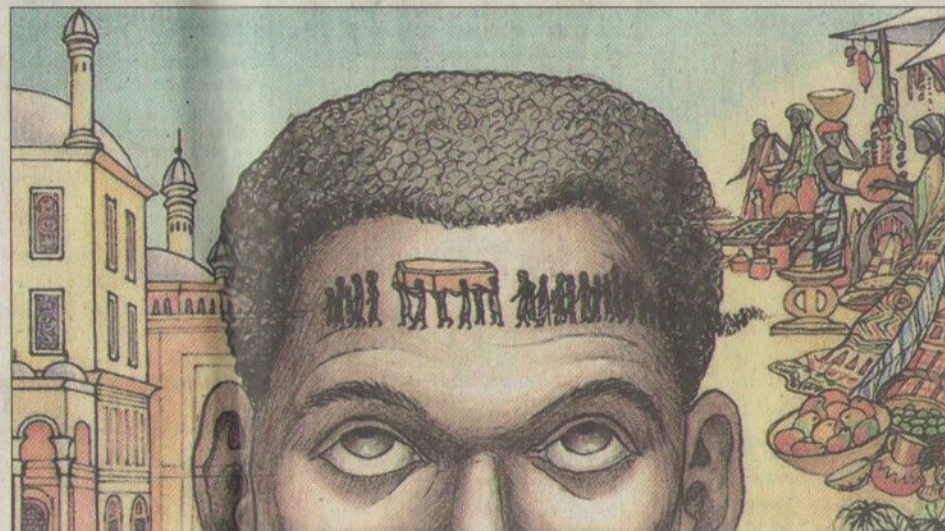
When his sister, Adzo, tried to teach him how to milk the goat, he brushed her aside. "I know how to do this!" he said, and when he failed, he simply shook his head and said, "There must be something wrong with this goat."

Their language is Ga, and they will never understand you, nor you them. I worry about you."

As usual Kofi brushed aside his father's concerns. "I shall make myself understood, Father," he said. "And when I return, I will know the ways of the city."

His parents could only shake their heads. There was no arguing with one so stubborn. "He'll have to learn the hard way," his father whispered to his mother.

At dawn the next day Kofi set off, carrying a small sack of clothes. As he



fleet of fishing boats. "Who owns these?" he asked one of the sailors.

"Minu?" the sailor replied, and Kofi almost burst out laughing. "This is the man I am determined to meet," he said, and now he hurried on. He thought he must be coming close.

As he was walking down a busy street, he happened to see a funeral procession with so many mourners he could not believe his eyes. "This must be for someone important," he said to himself, and so he stopped a mourner and asked, "Who has died?"