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Laura Shumaker Speaks at New Parent Support Group Meeting

Submitted by Jodi Binder-Shwartz

A newly formed parent support group, POISE (Parents of Individuals in Special Education), will kick off the 2009-2010 school year with its first monthly meeting from 7 to 9 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 17 at Orinda Books, featuring Laura Shumaker -- author of *A Regular Guy: Growing Up With Autism* and contributor to several anthologies, including *Voices of Autism*, *A Cup of Comfort for Parents of Children with Special Needs* and *Writin' on Empty*.

A regular contributor to NPR Perspectives and a columnist for 5 Minutes for Special Needs, Shumaker's essays have appeared in the San Francisco Chronicle, the Contra Costa Times, the East Bay Monthly, The Autism Advocate and on CNN.COM.

POISE was founded by a partnership of parents, including Anna Tague and Joni Binder-Shwartz, and OUSD's Director of Special Services, Robin Reves. Despite previous attempts, OUSD did not have any institutional network for parents of children in the Special Education program. Parents' strong desire and the partnership with the school district and community members finally brought this group to fruition last year.

POISE is born from a need that is both growing and hidden in our community and in communities all across the country. Many parents are secretive about their children's academic, social, health, or developmental challenges and a byproduct of that secrecy is that families often end up feeling alone and like there is no one else out there with similar challenges. POISE's objective is to give parents not only opportunities to meet and talk to other similarly situated parents, but also to give them resources for support. At meetings, parents will share information on topics ranging from therapists to books to summer camps and strategies.

Since POISE anticipates a large turnout, since Shumaker is a popular and powerful voice in the autism community, they asks that if you would like to come, please RSVP to 254-5084. This meeting is free and open to the public, and refreshments will be served.

For more information about Laura Shumaker, you can visit her Web site at www.laurashumaker.com.

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