

*Supporting ALL People to Be Part of Their Community*

The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched - they must be felt with the heart.

Helen Keller

*Feature story:*

*5-year-old with autism makes strides in learning thanks to his Tunland at-home service provider.*

Centerspread pages 4 & 5

*Tucson Region Honors Retiree Marie Bhappu  
For Her Years of Devoted Service*



Led by Southern Arizona Regional Director Charlie Bley, staff and friends of Marie Bhappu gathered on December 20, 2012 for a special retirement party honoring her for her outstanding services as Administrative Assistant in the Tucson office.

“She was definitely the mother figure for our office,” said Director Bley, “and she will be greatly missed.”

Marie began working for the Tunland Corporation’s Tucson Region in 1995. She is looking forward to spending more time with family, especially grandson Marley.

*Above: Regional Director Charlie Bley presents a gift to Marie during the party at the Tunland Tucson office. Below: Marie is joined by grandson Marley and Program Coordinators Denise Limberg and Angela Ontiveroz.*





## *Check Child's Early Growth, Get Prompt Diagnosis for Early Intervention Services, Say Child Experts, CDC*

Our feature story on pages 4-5 tells us how one parent's prompt action ensured that her child got vital early intervention services—speech and occupational therapy—thanks to a prompt diagnosis of autism spectrum by a developmental pediatrician. According to autism experts and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) parents should carefully observe the growth milestones in their child from birth through the child's earliest years. If parents suspect milestones aren't being met they should seek prompt professional screening to ensure that a child is diagnosed properly—crucial if developmental delays are suspected so that children with disabilities may be eligible for federally-mandated state early intervention services.

The CDC maintains an informative website called ***Learn the Signs. Act Early*** that provides parents and healthcare professionals with expert advice on early child development so that they may check their children for any early signs of autism or developmental delay from birth through age five. The website discusses early childhood development, including fact sheets about autism, intellectual disabilities, fetal alcohol syndrome and other disabilities. Also, there are age-specific checklists for parents to use to check their child's development, and recommendations on what parents should do if they believe developmental milestones are delayed.

Don't know what to say to a doctor, school, or a state early intervention official? The website has practical scripts that show parents how to voice their concerns plainly to professionals and officials. *Prompt professional diagnosis is the first step to get a child with a disability the services he or she needs. Early intervention therapies can help the child grow and lay the groundwork for a richer, more fulfilling life.*

*Where to get information about early childhood development and milestones:*

**CDC website: Learn the Signs. Act Early.**  
[www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly)

**National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities**  
**1-800-695-0285**

**Arizona Early Intervention Program (AzEIP)**  
**3839 North Third Street, Ste. 304, Phoenix, Arizona 85012.**  
**Call 602-532-9960 toll free in Arizona 888-439-5609**  
**Fax: 602-200-9820**

**PBS Parents. Information on everything about kids, including measuring children's early development.**  
[www.pbs.org/parents/child-development/](http://www.pbs.org/parents/child-development/)



## *Wyatt Learns New Skills Thanks to Tunland Provider Donna Higgs—His Great-Grandmom*

Wyatt can name 30 parts of the human body. He can count in English and Spanish, spell his name, identify shapes, colors, animals, and family members. When he answers questions successfully he gets large chunks of a puzzle, and when he solves the puzzle Wyatt earns ten minutes on the computer, which like any 21st-century kid he knows how to use. The computer program teaches Wyatt the alphabet, words, music, numbers, and language skills that include basic Spanish.

The adorable five-year-old with the movie-star smile who was diagnosed with autism has grown by leaps and bounds thanks to the hard work of his professional provider and great-grandmother, Donna Higgs, under the auspices of Tunland's Habilitation at Home (HAH) program. Donna continues to pursue training to hone her skills as Wyatt's provider.

"After Wyatt was born, his mother and I didn't notice anything different about him at first," Donna explains. "We thought the constant fussing and lack of emotion was just a phase." As Wyatt grew they began to realize he wasn't responding in the usual milestone patterns for his age.

"Nothing excited him. He just stared," Donna says. She praises Wyatt's mom for promptly taking him to a developmental pediatrician who diagnosed Wyatt with autism, paving the way for the early intervention services such as speech therapy and occupational therapy that helped the boy gradually improve. Today Wyatt is a lively child who wears a big smile as he learns and engages with his environment.

Wyatt works on his tasks at his "floor ta-



bles"—Donna explains that Wyatt associates sitting at a table with work but sitting on the floor with fun, so she and her husband made flat board tables painted with his name. Wyatt is proud and protective of his cherished collection of toy cars, according to Donna. When *The Tunland News* and HAH Junior Assistant Director Maribel Barroso visited Wyatt and Donna the boy was busily sorting his "car cards", numbered cards with pictures of autos. To achieve his goal Wyatt must put the cards in numerical order. Briskly Wyatt flipped the cards into solitaire-like columns, getting all the numbers in correct order.

Each day Donna spends between four and six hours running through a series of programmatic tasks with Wyatt in a regular routine. Apart from his sessions time is also allotted for breaks, lunch—and the times when any red-blooded five-year-old just wants to act like a five-year-old.

"I can tell when he's tired from all the speech therapy, occupational therapy, and our work,"

Donna says. “Sometimes we need time out just to ride our bicycles, go for a walk, and play outdoor games like hide-and-seek.” Donna quickly adds, “I never let him out of my sight, but I try not to let Wyatt know it.”

Why did she take on the responsibility as Wyatt’s life-skills provider? “I love him with all my heart,” Donna answers without a beat. “I was his main babysitter, I was the one who became the most familiar with him.”

Watching Donna work with Wyatt leaves no doubt about that. Caring makes learning happen.

The program Donna runs is written by autism specialists ensuring scrupulous recording and measuring of Wyatt’s daily progress. As Donna runs through the puzzles, posters, pictures, and other program tools she records how Wyatt responds to each task. When Wyatt occasionally balks at a given task she offers him choices within the range of tasks for the goal. “He learns to make decisions,” Donna says.



HAH provider Donna Higgs uses a variety of learning techniques geared to Wyatt’s interests to stimulate Wyatt to learn—with measurable results.



“Now I am helping Wyatt learn action words—*running, flying, jumping, throwing,* and so forth. The goal is to understand the movement and action in the words and not just say ‘bird fly’ but ‘the bird is flying.’” She goes on to explain that children such as Wyatt learn best when their program includes continuous reviewing of the things they have already learned.

Donna states that the family is united in the goal of providing Wyatt with all the tools he will need for a successful and fulfilling life in the mainstream of society. Currently at school he receives speech and occupational therapy in special education classes. In the future Wyatt is expected to be integrated into mainstream education classes alongside special education.

Describing the process that led Wyatt to Tungland and her to deciding to become his provider she adds with a gentle laugh, “I had no idea how extensive habilitation services are.”

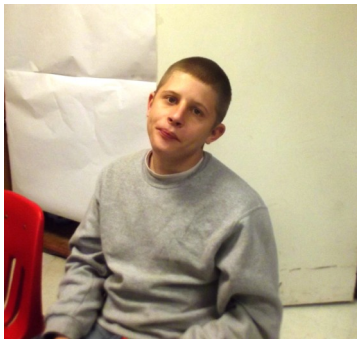
Getting one of the spontaneous daily hugs that lets her know how much Wyatt appreciates his great-grandmom she says proudly, “Wyatt is the joy in my life.”

## *Phoenix Christmas Party*

### *A Huge Success at Nama Ste*

There was music and dancing, great food, festive smiles, and gifts from Santa Claus for all when residents and staff from Tungland's Phoenix group homes gathered at Nama Ste day center in Phoenix on Dec. 15th for a holiday party. Organized and emceed by Alta Vista Mgr. Josie Watkins and Asst. Dir. Tiffany Rivera, the party, done in three shifts to accommodate everyone, was an enormous success.







# 2013 Winter Games Special Olympics Arizona

February 22—24, 2013

Arizona Snowbowl, Flagstaff AZ 86002

## Events:

Alpine Skiing - Cross Country Skiing - Figure Skating  
Floor Hockey - Speed Skating - Snowboarding

For information contact: 602-230-1200



## *About Habilitation at Home*

*Our story about Wyatt and Donna Higgs in this issue shows how Habilitation at Home (HAH) may offer people with disabilities a way to learn valuable new life skills right in their own homes. The Tunland staff customize the program to suit each person's unique needs.*

*The HAH program is one of several offered by The Tunland Corporation's In-Home Support Services (IHSS) network. The major skills that HAH aims to provide are self-help and daily living, socialization, adaptive skills, communication, community participation, and motor skills.*

*To learn more about Tunland's IHSS programs and how they might serve you or someone you care about, please call us at 602-224-5052 ext. 8057 or visit our website at [www.tunland.com](http://www.tunland.com).*

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