



Growing Times **October 2021**

Promoting the maximum development of the whole child and adult through innovative, individualized and comprehensive brain-centered programs and services.

A Living, Breathing Miracle

We recently heard from an old friend, Sharon O'Shaughnessy, with an update on her daughter Rachel's progress. Their story is not only inspiring, it shows the extraordinary lengths ACTG parents are willing to go to in order to give their children the best chance at a full life. And that's exactly what Sharon did.

When Sharon was pregnant with Rachel, 26 years ago, they were in a very bad car accident. "Somebody crossed the center line and took us out," remembers Sharon. "We were never really sure if that had anything to do with anything," but it was clear from birth that there were problems. As luck would have it, Sharon isn't just Rachel's mom, she is also a speech scientist, who trains people to use residual reflexes to phonate through neurodegenerative diseases, like Parkinsons. So she had the knowledge needed to understand what was going on with her child and what it would take to help her.

From birth, it was clear Rachel was facing significant challenges. "Her eyes were open when she was born, but then we didn't really see her eyes for nine months, like she was just sleeping all the time. There was no evidence that she was impacting her world at all. I tell people who are non-medical, it's like a coma, she was not responsive, you could do all kinds of things and she wouldn't react."

They lived on the East Coast. "This was before the Internet, in 1995, and I knew I needed to find some kind of neurological training, but it was just not to be found locally. So I reached out to friends all over the country, and eventually, a speech pathologist who worked in Minneapolis said she'd heard of A Chance To Grow and thought it might be what we were looking for."

"It was exactly what I was looking for, something crafted for Rachel!"

Story continued on page 2



Rachel, working in the kitchen at her former school, Child & Career Development Center



Vision Care for the Whole Family

ACTG's Vision Clinic is now accepting clients of all ages! If you or a loved one are struggling to see clearly, or if you just need an annual check-up, please call us today at (612) 789-1236 to schedule an appointment. Our Vision Clinic offers:

- Quick appointments with minimal wait times
- Exams and assessments for the whole family
- Preventative eye care and developmental visual testing
- Referrals and recommendations for continued treatment
- Most insurance plans are accepted

"I knew that it was going to take a lot of repetition to affect her neurology. So we came out to meet Art Sandler and he was amazing. Rachel's reflexes were just completely in disarray, so we had to start with basics."

Sharon and Rachel began to make regular visits to work with Art, using his neurophysiological reflex-based approach. "We'd come at six-month intervals, we'd get a hotel room, we'd go to Mall of America because that was fun, and Art would teach us reflexes, like the China Doll reflex." Sharon would then do them with Rachel for 20 minutes, six times a day, six days a week in a therapy room she created in her home.

"I knew it could be a long, long time before we saw anything happen and I also had a healthy respect for the fact that if we didn't do anything to her, maybe she might improve on her own." But over time, she began to see progress, so she was sure that the process was working. "Rachel was 10 months old before we realized she had any sentience at all," when she was able to display some intentional movement. Still, Sharon kept at it. "Rachel had been completely silent as a baby, but when she was 3, we were on a family vacation in a big hunting cabin and my aunt came down the stairs and said 'Rachel's making such a lot of noise up there!' and I said, 'she can't be, Rachel's silent.' And we went up and she was actually doing the very first baby sounds of babbling, which she had never done before. She started to walk when she was four, which was also a huge milestone no one outside of Art and our family had expected."

They stopped coming to visit ACTG then because they knew she was at the level she needed to be for her to pick up the next abilities, but continued to do the exercises at home diligently. "I had been treating her as a communicative person all this time because I know from my training in speech science that people understand before they can communicate, but it was a one-way street. Then, when she was 5 years old, I was reading to her and said, 'I went to the doctor and the doctor said,' which is a call and response activity, and she actually responded with all the vowels in the phrase, in order! I was thunderstruck. We knew then that she had intellect that we hadn't been able to otherwise access."

She continued the work until Rachel was six, when she was able to start school. "The rest of our lives was colored with my ACTG knowledge. We always felt like school was extra. They offered OT, PT and speech every week, which we knew was woefully inadequate. I was very involved in how they worked with her, keeping the ACTG principles in mind. And we always made sure that we really worked with her a lot at home."

But all that work came with a cost to family life. "There were so many things that were just really difficult. It changed the dynamic of my marriage; we got divorced. I also had a 2-year-old and he grew up knowing that his sister's difficulties were going to take most of our resources. But every day, the hour before he went to bed, I made sure that I was his and his alone. I think that helped a lot. We have a great relationship. Now he's a neuroscientist!"

All of that work was worth it. At 26, Rachel is "doing phenomenally well. She talks in complete, complex sentences, she's completely ambulatory, she plays basketball, she swims independently. She's living in a group home where she can choose activities she enjoys, like horseback riding and going to the movies. She has agency over her life. This means everything to me -- when she was little, I didn't even know what food she liked. She did not express herself at all."

Sharon's message to other parents: "Whatever you do now will give your child more independence in the future, every single gain is really important. It's going to be hard in the short term, you may not see gains, especially if you're not trained to see them. But what you're doing is building neurons. If you think about that, you realize any positive motion forward will pay off."

"To know that Rachel is a living, breathing adult with friends, who has great relationships with her whole family, it's a stupendous miracle to me. I would never have guessed when she was nine months old and we started this whole thing that she would be living as independently as she is now. She'd be the first to tell you: 'I am an independent woman!' It's awesome."



Stay updated about current brain-based workshops, seminars and events!
www.facebook.com/AChanceToGrow/



S.M.A.R.T. Workshops - Registration Now Open!

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We are now accepting registrations for our 2021-22 S.M.A.R.T. and S.M.A.R.T. Pre-K Workshops. Boost your students' learning readiness skills with this amazing program! Our experienced instructors will help you understand how to easily implement brain-stimulating activities in your classroom. If you are an educator working with Pre-K-3rd graders, this program is for YOU! [Register today at ACTG.org/workshops](https://actg.org/workshops).

S.M.A.R.T. K-3 Workshops

- October 26-28, 2021
- February 22-24, 2022

S.M.A.R.T. Pre-K Workshops

- October 19-21, 2021
- March 1-3, 2022



All workshops will be held at A Chance To Grow in Minneapolis. Register two weeks in advance and save \$25!

Join the S.M.A.R.T. Steps Team

S.M.A.R.T. Steps, a pilot project to bring S.M.A.R.T. activities to Family Child Care Providers, has entered its second year and is now beginning a new session to train providers. We are now seeking providers in Blue Earth, Brown and Dodge counties in southern Minnesota. Participants will receive virtual training, mentoring, and equipment free of charge. If you or someone you know who provides child care services is interested, we invite you to visit our website at [ACTG.org/smartsteps](https://actg.org/smartsteps) and submit the form to see if you may qualify.



Need Help Caring for a Loved One with Special Needs?

If so, ACTG's Home-Based Services and Personal Care Assistant (PCA) program can help. Our experienced staff is here to help you navigate the various requirements from the MN Dept. of Health to get you and your loved one the support you need. We are dedicated to helping families achieve positive outcomes by providing custom plans tailored to each situation. Additionally, our services allow clients to hire a family member or a friend to serve as the PCA. To see if you qualify, please call us at (612) 789-1236, or visit [ACTG.org/homebaseservices](https://actg.org/homebaseservices) to find the right program for your family!

Turnquist Child Enrichment Center is Hiring!

Turnquist is seeking a full-time Assistant Preschool Teacher and a full-time Infant Assistant Teacher. Each position starts at \$15/hour, includes health and dental benefits, paid time off, paid training and a \$500 sign-on bonus! For more details on the positions, and to apply, please visit [ACTG.org/employment](https://actg.org/employment) and submit an application.

Give to the Max Day 2021 is Thursday, November 18

Minnesota's annual Give to the Max Day is approaching! For 24 hours, donations made to MN nonprofits will provide opportunities for those organizations to win bonus funding! A \$5 donation could turn into thousands! When you give to ACTG, you ensure that individuals whose brains have been affected by injury, illness or inadequate development get the innovative, individualized and comprehensive therapies they need. On November 18, please visit www.givemn.org/organization/Achancetogrow/ to help our clients GROW TO THE MAX!

give TO THE **MAX**

November 18, 2021

[givemn.org/organization/Achancetogrow](https://www.givemn.org/organization/Achancetogrow/)

The holidays are on their way and ACTG is here to help you find the perfect gift for that special someone! Our Holiday Gift Auction returns on **Black Friday, November 26** and runs through **Sunday, December 5**. Amazing gifts for all ages! Electronics, outdoor gear, tickets and sports memorabilia, housewares, toys for kids, gift cards and more! Avoid the crowds and shop from the safety of home. Make and monitor bids from your phone or computer. Free shipping and delivery by Tuesday, December 14! Don't miss this 10-day event and your chance to get great deals on fantastic items! **Registration for the online auction is now open at ACTG.org.**



Featured Items:

- 21" Toro Lawnmower
- Bluetooth Turntable
- Jeep Power Wheels



Proceeds support the programs and services of A Chance To Grow!

Thank You For Your Support at the Race for the Children!

Thank you to all the sponsors and attendees of our 30th Running of the Race for the Children at Canterbury Park this past August. We are so grateful for your continued support of our organization and mission. Your generosity helps us provide essential services to children and adults in need, lifting them up to reach their highest potential. Thanks to you, the event was a tremendous success and we can't wait to do it again next year!

We would also like to congratulate Mr. Pat Fagerlee (right), the big winner for our 50/50 Raffle! Pat won \$3,020, and ACTG raised the same amount for its programs and services. Pictured alongside Pat is our # 1 ticket seller, Al Morelli! Thanks to Al and Pat, and everyone that bought or sold tickets this summer.

If you would like to learn more information about A Chance To Grow's events, including details on sponsorship and partner opportunities, we invite you to visit our website at ACTG.org/events.



Will you support A Chance To Grow's programs and services?

Visit ACTG.org, click on the "Donate" tab on the homepage and fill out the form. Your contribution makes a difference in the lives of children and adults with learning disabilities, developmental delays and brain injuries. All donations are tax-deductible. Thank you for your generosity!

Want to view our newsletter online? Visit ACTG.org and sign-up to receive news and updates from A Chance To Grow.

Equal Employment Opportunity

A Chance To Grow provides equal employment opportunities to all employees and applicants. Employment is based upon personal capabilities and qualifications without discrimination because of race, color, ancestry, religion, sex, sexual orientation, pregnancy, age, national origin, disability, gender identity, genetic information, service in the military or any other protected characteristic as established by law. This policy of Equal Employment Opportunity applies to all policies and procedures relating to recruitment & hiring, promotion, compensation, benefits, termination, layoff, recall, transfer, training and all other terms and conditions of employment.



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