



# Proxy Parent Foundation newsletter

FALL 2011

ISSUE 8

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### PROXY PARENT FOUNDATION

Proxy Parent Foundation offers two services.

We administer the PLAN of California Master Pooled Trust, which is open as a trust vehicle for any disabled person in California.

We provide Personal Support Services for beneficiaries of our Special Needs Trusts who have a mental illness or brain disorder.

Just like a loving family, we coordinate public and private social services and medical care while providing family-like attention to help the person improve his or her quality of life.

Proxy Parent Foundation is a dba of Planned Lifetime Assistance Network (PLAN) of California, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation.

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## What's going on...

by Gary M. Chang\*

I hope you enjoy and are informed by the articles in this month's newsletter on Personal Support Services. I'd like to remind all our readers however, that although it's nice reaching out in print, we are also available to hit the road and meet with you in person. For instance, since our last newsletter, myself and Director of Social Services, Bruce Lewitt, have spoken at NAMI affiliate meetings in Santa Barbara, Bakersfield and Pomona and in August a contingent from Proxy Parent Foundation attended the Annual NAMI California Conference in Sacramento where we hosted a table and also presented a very well-received workshop on special needs trusts and personal support services.

In addition, board member, John Buck, also appeared on our behalf at the recent 31st Annual Mental Health and Aging Conference in Sacramento, and on November 16, board member, Baron Miller, Esq., addressed NAMI Santa Cruz on special needs trusts in general and also Proxy Parent Foundation and the PLAN of California Master Pooled Trust.

If you would like us to appear at an upcoming meeting or event for your group or organization where we can introduce and explain our trust and/or personal support services in depth, please contact us at [info@proxyparentfoundation.org](mailto:info@proxyparentfoundation.org) or by phone at 888. 574.1258. Also, for any questions about our special needs trusts, I can be reached directly at 213. 925.5526.

*\*Gary M. Chang, Esq. is Director of Legal Affairs for Proxy Parent Foundation.*

## Personal Support Services

by Nancy Nigrosh\*



Bruce Lewitt (shown above) is the Director of Social Services at Proxy Parent Foundation, and he is also my husband. Since I met Bruce I have been very curious about his work. It is rare to be able to see clearly the impact we can have on one another's lives. But in Bruce's case the impact is unusually and wonderfully transparent.

As a parent myself, I must express my appreciation for the echo of dedicated and protective care that goes into the quality of personal support services Proxy Parent Foundation offers for their beneficiaries, who are adults with severe and chronic mental illness. When mental illness makes the kind of independence most of us take for granted impossible, parents and relatives look for alternative care that can approximate the parenting role.



I have known Bruce to be in active contact with a far reaching orbit of folks that revolve around a single beneficiary: parents, siblings, other family members, doctors, nurses, hospital administrators, psychiatrists, lawyers, court appointed conservators, foundation donors, health insurance administrators, police officers, paramedics, fire captains, employers, prospective employers, social workers, dentists, plumbers, electricians, landlords, motel managers, realtors, and every imaginable type of vendor. I am privy to some great improvements, life saving interventions, ongoing and steady effort that yields observable, positive results in the lives of those who truly need ongoing reinforcement of reality.

Recently Bruce shared with me a letter received from a psychiatrist expressing his appreciation for the personal support services that Bruce provides for one of his patients, “Sam has reached a stable phase in his illness, thanks to your excellent guidance, social modeling, gentle persuasion and use of clear and fair communications....”

How does Bruce do this?

I believe he exercises a macro perspective in the practice of considered oversight of financial resources provided by a beneficiary’s special needs trust that he keeps in constant adjustment and fluid

revision while simultaneously, day-to-day, an individual beneficiary’s circumstantial needs are weighed, measured and otherwise checked for prescriptive relief in order to create the best possible outcome. Another factor is that Bruce empowers the beneficiary to give input into the process. In two instances I had the pleasure to meet beneficiaries Bruce watches out for. They couldn’t be more different. One is an intellectual who lives very much in his culture rich mind. The other is a gregarious guy who wants to socially engage as widely as he can. It is clear that these are people with a lot to offer but also clear that they each need pragmatic and collaborative aid as well as understanding/examined encouragement to become active and productive participants in their own independent lives.

*\*Nancy Nigrosb is a former Hollywood literary agent and is currently a literary coach. She recently earned her MA in Education and her teaching credential from Antioch University while concurrently earning an MFA in Film, TV and Digital Media from UCLA. Though she and Bruce Lewitt attended New York University’s School of the Arts in the same 1973 class, they reconnected in Los Angeles 37 years later, in 2010, and subsequently married in January, 2011.*

## Personal Support Services – Image or Reality

by Baron Miller\*

In a world where euphemisms abound and image frequently obscures reality, one tends to question what might simply be a new term to describe old things. Which explains my skepticism upon hearing the phrase, “Personal Support Specialist”, or PSS.

Many of us are familiar enough with the practice of professional case management to recognize its importance, to know how necessary it can be, and to be aware that if it isn’t needed while we are around to do the job, it will be when we’re gone. What I wondered was whether calling a case manager a PSS changes her effectiveness any more than renaming a rose alters its scent.

As I often do when looking for answers, I turned to Proxy Parent Foundation (PPF) Director of Legal Affairs Gary Chang. I told him many of my clients ask about PPF and while I can easily explain how the trust works, I’m not as comfortable talking about PSS’s. He educated me, including the difference between a case manager and a PSS.

First he noted the fact that most county social workers that serve as case managers are sincere, intelligent and experienced. And harried. Counties are short on funds, he said, and their caseworkers



have excessively large caseloads. It is not possible for them to do all they want for their clients. PPF, on the other hand, is screening and hiring PSS's who are able to devote adequate amounts of time and energy to their clients' needs, and who understand this is their job.

Next, he said that the PSS's are just that, they're not case managers. PPF clients are matched up with a skilled PSS who understands their condition and their needs, someone they can relate to and will be comfortable with. The PSS's provide individualized care for each client, Gary says, and personalized services far beyond normal case management, helping clients with living skills and enhancing their quality of life. With housing, for example, the PSS's aren't grabbing the first bed available; they're finding the best residential situation for each individual client. And if there are services, which need to be purchased, PPF can buy them using the funds in the client's trust.

Gary added that PPF only wants PSS's who want to stay on the job for the long haul. He explained that they're going to be spending time with the clients, and frequent turnovers aren't good for the clients. And what's good for the clients is what the PSS's do; it's all they do.

The PSS's personally interact with the clients, Gary told me. They work with clients to keep them on needed meds, they take them shopping and to restaurants, to physicians' appointments,

to entertainment events. They try to meet the clients' primary needs and secondary needs. And they interact with the clients' families, too. We're proxy parents, Gary reminded me, so the PSS's don't look at the family as interfering. The PSS's want the family's input.

Like a family member, the PSS is available for the client. And like a family member, Gary emphasized, the PSS cannot be fired by the client, no matter how many times the client might say that.

What I learned is that a PSS is one part companion, one part good friend, one part concerned family member, and all parts a PSS. I learned that Proxy Parent Foundation is not calling a case manager a PSS. It is calling a PSS a PSS.



*\*Baron L. Miller is an attorney in private practice in San Francisco who specializes in estate planning for California families of the mentally ill. He is a long-time NAMI family member, and an advocate for the rights and interests of families of the mentally ill and a board member of Proxy Parent Foundation. He does not charge for telephone consultations on the propriety of making payments for the benefit of an SSI recipient. He can be reached at 415.522.0500.*

## Book Review

by Joseph DeCarlo\*

Your Mental Health: A Layman's Guide to the Psychiatrist's Bible by Allen Frances, M.D., & Michael B. First, M.D.



Joe DeCarlo has been reviewing books for each newsletter relating to mental illness. This issue's review will be a book titled

Your Mental Health: A Layman's Guide to the Psychiatrist's Bible by Allen Frances, M.D., & Michael B. First, M.D. These two psychiatrists cover the full spectrum of psychiatric disorders such as personality disorders, obsessions and compulsions, impulse-control, cognitive disorders and developmental delays. In all, they cover 20 disorders devoting a full chapter to each one.

They discuss the medical practice of extensive description of psychiatric disorders and how they are classified. The latest is known as DSM-IV or Diagnostic & Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. The goal of the authors is to "help people identify their psychiatric problems as soon after they begin as possible. Catching symptoms early make them easier to treat, less likely to come back, and less able to damage your life."

Having an autistic son, I was very interested in Chapter 17, Delays and Development. This chapter covers mental retardation (IQ less than 70) and addresses the description, differential diagnosis (may be autistic & mentally retarded) and treatment options. This is a good book to look up symptoms and has a comprehensive list of references for future reading and where to go for supportive resources at the end of each chapter. It's very positive and is easy to read for specific issues, however not from cover to cover.

*\*Joseph DeCarlo is the father of a 34 year old autistic son "Joey" who also has epilepsy. Joey lives at home with his parents and goes to Project Independence, a Regional Center of Orange County funded program. Mr. DeCarlo is President of the Proxy Parent Foundation and can be reached at joe@jdproperty.com.*

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*a dba of Planned Lifetime Assistance Network of California*

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