



Making It Work at the Broken Arrow Clubhouse

It was seven o'clock on a Friday evening, and no one had come to pick up Michael. The police had to be called, and while we were waiting for them to arrive many thoughts passed through my mind. I thought about Michael's first day at the Broken Arrow Clubhouse and how out of control he had tried to be. He had come to us with the diagnoses of Attachment Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder. We had taken one look at this beautiful child and our hearts had melted immediately. Unbeknownst to us, he would become one of our most challenging children and one of our greatest success stories.

Michael was three years old and one of the smartest little boys to ever enter our doors. Because he had been asked to leave several child care programs, his mom was apprehensive about trying yet another child care program. At the insistence of her counselor, she had called us. At the first meeting between myself and the mother, I had explained to her that one of the first things we do with each child is begin the process of building relationships. I told her that she would have to trust us and support us in every way. Her help was needed, and she was to prepare her son to come to his new school by talking about his new school, his teachers, and how he would always be safe at school. I already knew from visiting with the therapist that we would have to work on not only bonding with Michael, but also with the mother. Our work was cut out for us. As their car drove into the parking lot on that first morning, the fight between mom and child began. As I watched from my office window, I smiled to myself, took a deep breath, and began our journey with Michael.

Down through the years we have had many children like Michael come to us. Repeatedly we are asked, "Why do you continue to take these

children?" and "How do you maintain your staff?" People also ask about the expense of hiring counselors and special needs teachers to work in child care. The answer to the first two questions is really quite simple. It's called PASSION! My staff and I are passionate about our lives' work. As for hiring special needs staff, there is nothing special about our staff except they are willing to learn, willing to change, willing to let go of their style of teaching, and willing to trust the experts. We support each other. When we lose it or mess up, we laugh and say, "Oops, I blew it!" and life goes on. We model nurturing. We respect each child's feelings, learning styles, talents, skills, culture, and personality. We build a trust level between the staff and the children in care. In essence, the key component to accommodating children with challenging behaviors is to establish a relationship with each and every child.

As for what happened to Michael? Space will not allow me to go into detail, except to say that we had to turn him over to the police and he was placed in a shelter. You may be asking yourself how this could be a success story? It is a success story because for three and half years we were allowed to nurture and love this child. My staff and I bonded with a child that had not bonded before. We planted nurturing and tenderness in the limbic system of his brain. No one can take that away. It will always and forever be stored in the unconscious part of his brain. Someday, when he needs to be able to nurture and develop tender feelings, it will be there. He probably won't remember us individually, but we

know that we will always be with him. This is making it work because this is success.

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