



2011 G.E.A.R. Parent Network winning poster, "Hand In Hand" by an 11-year-old Maine artist.

## **Family Organization Support Makes The Difference**

*By Lisa Toole*

*Children's Mental Health Awareness Day - May 3, 2011*

*Hall of Flags, Augusta, ME*

Hello. My name is Lisa Toole and I'm Callum's mother.

The turning point in our family's journey came just over a year ago when we found a family organization and gained "inspired clarity and empathy."

Too often in the process of evaluating a child, the emotional climate becomes clinical. Laws, terminology, and diagnoses become the discouraging vocabulary we parents use to find help.

After ten years of searching through therapists, specialists, educator-- anyone with an informed opinion-- we found Southern Maine Parent Awareness, which became our bridge to clarity and confidence.

Family organizations understand the frustrating and uncertain process we go through. They also recognize our children as human beings with unique gifts. And they understand the ignorance of others that our children endure daily. They get the prerequisite determination of parents advocating for their children's rights.

Our advocate has taught me the power of empathetic listening and patience... nodding quietly as I recalled our detailed struggle to find help. She reminds me to choose "partnerships" instead of "frustrated divides."

What I'm inspired by is my son's determination and success. I'm inspired by tireless family advocates who work diligently for family after family searching for what we all want for our kids. I'm inspired by all those who roll up their sleeves to figure it out.

To learn more about Maine's Family Organizations [hold up card] please come to the Maine Alliance of Family Organizations table and pick up one of these cards. You'll get a list of the names and links to watch a video with parents, including me, telling how family organizations have made us stronger.

Thank you