



Tuesday, November 4, 2003

Web Site Helps Out Disabled Children

By Hillary Copsey
The Winchester Star

If knowledge is power, a new Web site is empowering parents of children with disabilities.

Yellow Pages for Kids, a state-by-state listing of tutors, agencies, organizations, and other resources for children with disabilities, now is available at www.yellowpagesforkids.com.

The collection began a year ago as a link on Web sites run by Peter and Pam Wright.

In 1985, Peter Wright, a lawyer with learning disabilities represented a Florida student with disabilities in a U.S. Supreme Court case that helped better define the educational rights of students with disabilities.

After that, Pam Wright said, people began calling and writing with many questions about educational advocacy. To answer all the questions, the Virginia residents began [http://www.wrightslaw.com/](http://www.wrightslaw.com) in 1998.

"I just thought it was going to be a little thing," Pam Wright said. "It just kept going," turning into a publishing company and another Web site, www.feta.com.

"The biggest obstacle is parents, by themselves, having no other place to turn," Pam Wright said. "The No. 1 question we get is, 'I live in (some state). Where can I find help?'"

Not knowing the answer to that question, the Wrights began Yellow Pages for Kids, asking agencies providing help to students with disabilities to send in contact information.

Yellow Pages for Kids lists agencies in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Island.

More than 100 agencies are listed for Virginia alone.

Six weeks ago, wrightslaw.com decided to create another Web site just for the yellow pages because the listings — linked as they were to the other sites — were not coming up on outside search engines, Pam Wright said.

Local advocates encourage other parents to use the site.

“Information is everything. Knowing where resources are ... helps parents pursue things for their kids,” said Lana Hurt, executive director of The Arc of Northern Shenandoah Valley. “Without information, parents can’t advocate.”

Of the more than 100 Virginia listings, Access Independence Inc. is the only local agency.

Some Loudoun County agencies are listed, although the majority of the yellow pages entries are in or around Richmond.

Although Pam Wright “know(s) there are more resources out there” in general, Hurt said there is a dearth of local services.

“We really don’t have much out here,” Hurt said, citing the rural area as a reason. Also, the local lack of resources becomes an endless lack.

“We’ve seen a lot of parents just leave once their kids age-out of school ... so things don’t get developed,” Hurt said.

The yellow pages can help area parents find resources in areas at least near to home, however, and for more local information, parents can contact The Arc at (540) 665-0461.

“We’re trying to create informal structures,” Hurt said. Specifically, she added, The Arc is developing a parent-to-parent mentoring program and workshops about educational advocacy.