

# Preface

**W**hen we (Janice and Karen) met in 1994, we quickly learned that we shared a passion for understanding parent-professional partnerships. From both personal and professional experiences, we knew that when partnerships between families and professionals worked well, everyone felt confident, empowered, and energized. A sense of enjoyment and fulfillment pervaded these relationships, and most importantly, the children with disabilities benefited with responsive, creative, and comprehensive interventions.

We also knew that when these partnerships were not working well, everyone felt drained, stiff, and waning in their sense of hope. Everyone dreaded meetings and wished that the relationship problems would just go away so that the focus could be about the child. To everyone's surprise, forming partnerships often felt more challenging than living with and teaching a child with disabilities. We spent many hours discussing what we had termed this "dance of partnership." As we dug deeper into the topic, we wanted to engage the broader community of parents and professionals to enhance our understanding of what skills, perspectives, and attitudes made partnerships work. How is trust developed? How is conflict successfully negotiated? How are relationships sustained when time and resources are limited? How do we encourage, nurture, and support positive relationships, especially given the emphasis on parent-professional partnerships in educational, health, and human service settings?

In 1995, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation awarded the Center for Human Development at William Beaumont Hospital in Michigan a grant that allowed us the time, energy, and resources to study parent-professional partnerships for one year. We were excited! We conducted a literature review; met with scores of caring, talented, and committed parents and professionals; participated in

numerous trainings; and met weekly to discuss our evolving ideas and questions. We brought our voices and unique experiences as a parent of a child with disabilities (Janice) and a psychologist working with children and families (Karen) to each and every discussion. We learned more about our similarities and differences, and were humbly reminded that our different voices both challenged and enriched our partnership.

## **LEARNING FROM PARENTS, PROFESSIONALS, AND THE FIELD**

With the support of the grant, we developed a daylong training on building effective parent-professional partnerships titled *The Dance of Partnership: Why Do My Feet Hurt?* and piloted it in Michigan, Iowa, and Indiana during the grant period. (Janice continues to facilitate this training as a workshop and keynote nationally to parents and professionals.) We set the expectation that whenever possible, the audiences should be comprised of both parents and professionals. We viewed this being “in the same room” as a very effective strategy to enhance the understanding of what parents and professionals uniquely experience.

Responses from the participants overwhelmingly confirmed what we hoped would occur as a result of these trainings—a better understanding of each other’s perspective, a keener appreciation for the complexity of forming partnerships, enhanced empathy for each other’s constraints and contributions, and an increased sense of hope that partnerships are indeed necessary and possible.

## **THE BEGINNING OF THE BOOK**

In 1998, as a result of our study of partnerships and the valuable thoughts offered by the participants at our trainings, we compiled some of our writings on partnerships into what we called a “little book” inspired by our conversations, trainings, and investigation. The W. K. Kellogg Foundation graciously funded the printing of 1,000 copies of this collection, which we distributed, at no charge, to parents and professionals, mainly across Michigan. We never anticipated that this “little book about partnerships” with its long

title, *Do You Hear What I Hear: Parents and Professionals Working With Children With Special Needs*, would go beyond the first printing in December 1999. Surprised and delighted, we received numerous requests for the book for use in professional development trainings, university and community college classes, family workshops, and for personal reflection by parents and professionals. A decade and eight additional printings later, *Do You Hear What I Hear?* continues to have relevance and significance for families, for new and veteran professionals, for the higher education community, and for professional development trainers.

When Corwin expressed interest in publishing the book with additional vignettes, essays, and strategies, we were thrilled. We invited Arlene Feldman to join us as an author and to contribute her valuable experiences and rich insights gleaned from her forty years as a general and special educator, a principal, a director of special education, and a college instructor. Her desire to pass the torch to new and future educators of students with disabilities, so that they may work hand in hand with the families of the children, has enhanced the depth and breadth of the book, and its relevancy to educators.