

“In Good Company” Respite Care News (continued)

Q&A with Lisa Ackerson Lieberman

Interview by Shauna Foss

Nationally recognized trainer, writer, speaker, and parent, Lisa Ackerson Lieberman will be the keynote speaker at our **5th annual Connecting Families event on Saturday, April 8, 2006 at the Alliant Energy Center.** She is the author of *A “Stranger” Among Us: Hiring In-home Support for a Child with Autism Spectrum Disorders or Other Neurological Differences*, and travels nationally to present issues related to living with disability in the family. Lieberman received her Masters of Social Work in 1977, and has 27 years of professional experience. She has been married for 26 years to a man with multiple sclerosis, and together they parent a teenage son with autism.

As a preview to Lieberman’s participation at Connecting Families, and to her book (if you haven’t already read it) she answered some questions about how other families can benefit from her professional and personal knowledge of this subject:

Q: What experiences led you to research and write *A “Stranger” Among Us*?

A: I have been hiring in-home providers for my family since 1987. My husband has an advanced case of multiple sclerosis and needs someone full-time to provide all his personal care. Our son, Jordan, has autism (now 17) and had in-home providers until he began high school. Of course, the job description changed dramatically as he developed. When he was very young, providers helped him with personal hygiene, attending therapies, recreational outings. As he grew, they assisted with homework, facilitated independence and social interaction. We have probably employed at least 50 people in our home over the past 19 years, and at some point it dawned on me that I had learned a great deal about how to successfully hire people to support those in my family with disabilities. I learned both from successful hiring as well as from the many mistakes that we made.

Q: What are the most important messages in your book?

A: Although it is hard to pick just a few important messages in my book, I will try to do so.

- 1) Don't allow desperation about finding someone to help your child(ren) ever get in the way of taking all the necessary steps (comprehensive interviews, criminal checks, reference checks, etc.)
- 2) Don't be afraid to get too personal with questions you ask a candidate. You are hiring someone to care of one (or more) of the most precious beings in your life. You cannot afford to allow a fear of offending a candidate get in the way of discovering crucial information that you need to know in order to make an informed decision.
- 3) Trust your "gut." If something doesn't feel right, pay attention and ask more questions until you feel comfortable.

- 4) It is crucial to include your child in the hiring process to as great an extent as possible. Even children who are non-speaking can indicate preferences. As children get older, they will need to have greater input in the decision of who will support them to be as independent as possible.
- 5) Hiring in-home providers is an experience that provides mutual benefits for all people involved; your family, your child(ren) and the people who are supporting your children. You get the comfort of knowing your child is in good hands, your child feels safe and cared for, and the provider gains training and the opportunity to be a significant part of your family. When done correctly, everyone wins!

Q: Who might benefit from reading this book?

A: Obviously, anyone who intends to hire an in-home provider will benefit from using this book as a resource. Parents can use it as a how-to guide, following step by step throughout the process of writing a job description, advertising, screening, interviewing, reference checking, orientation and training, setting up communication processes within the home, and termination. The book includes input from my 19 years of experience, as well as several other families who have successfully hired in-home support.

People who are responsible for consulting with parents would find this book immensely useful. Also anyone who is training people to provide in-home services. I have also been told that people who hire staff for group homes have found this book to be helpful.

Q: What have you found as the most difficult part about hiring in-home support for your child, and how does your book address this problem?

A: I have had many parents tell me that one of the hardest things is finding good candidates to interview. They conclude that there just aren't enough quality candidates out there. My book gives suggestions of many ways to advertise for candidates, including sample ads and job flyers.

People express fear about how to conduct an interview and ask the right questions. This book has an extensive section on how to conduct an interview, including suggestions for questions to ask that aim at those crucial areas that should be explored.

This is a user-friendly book that uncovers the mystery surrounding the hiring process, as well as how to incorporate that provider into the culture of your family in a positive way.

Q: Are there other books you'd recommend for parents looking for care providers for their child(ren) w/ disabilities?

A: In all honesty, one of the reasons I wrote this book is that there was not another book I could find out there that covered this topic in a comprehensive way. I read "how to hire a nanny" books, and in a few cases, there might be a few paragraphs or a short chapter that discussed hiring in-home providers for kids with disabilities.

