

CONNECTION

Sharing the day-to-day learning experience
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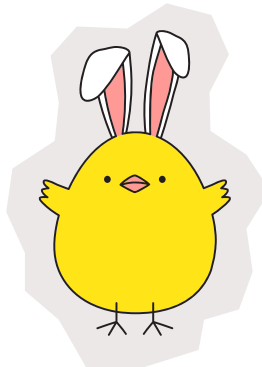
Community Homes & Services
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The Peeps Diorama Competition

We finished our entries for the Peeps diorama contest and they were rushed over to the Alameda Free Library's competition. Winners will be announced on April 3rd!

Good luck everyone!



Peeps Dioramas



Do you remember when Connor won 3rd place in the *national* contest last year?



Great work everyone!



APRIL 2026 NATIONAL DAYS

Poetry Month, Humor Month, Garden Month

Stress Awareness Month, Autism Awareness Month, Guitar Month

4/1 - April Fools Day, Sourdough Bread Day

4/2 - World Autism Awareness Day, Peanut Butter and Jelly Day, Burrito Day

4/3 - Find a Rainbow Day, Tweed Day, World Party Day

4/4 - Vitamin C Day, International Carrot Day

4/5 - Deep Dish Pizza Day, Read a Road Map Day

4/6 - Easter Sunday, Caramel Popcorn Day, Handmade Day

4/7 - World Health Day, Coffee Cake Day

4/8 - Zoo Lovers Day, Empanada Day

4/9 - Unicorn Day, Cherish an Antique Day

4/10 - Siblings Day, Farm Animals Day, Erase Self-Negativity Day

4/11 - Cheese Fondue Day, Submarine Day, Pet Day

4/12 - Passover Begins, Record Store Day, Grilled Cheese Day

4/13 - Scrabble Day, Peach Cobbler Day

4/14 - Pecan Day, Dolphin Day, Gardening Day

4/15 - Titanic Remembrance Day, Tax Day, World Art Day

4/16 - Orchid Day, Banana Day, Wear Your Pajamas to Work Day, Eggs Benedict Day

4/17 - Crawfish Day, Haiku Poetry Day, International Bat Appreciation Day

4/18 - Exercise Day, Poem in Your Pocket Day, Animal Cracker Day

4/19 - Garlic Day, Hanging Out Day

4/20 - Pineapple Upside Down Day, Lima Bean Respect Day

4/22 - Earth Day, Jelly Bean Day

4/23 - Picnic Day, Talk Like Shakespeare Day

4/24 - Bucket List Day, Pigs-in-a-Blanket Day

4/25 - Arbor Day, Zucchini Bread Day, Telephone Day

4/26 - Audubon Day, Independent Bookstore Day, Pretzel Day

4/27 - Babe Ruth Day, Gummi Bear Day, Tell a Story Day

4/28 - Superhero Day, Blueberry Pie Day

4/29 - Zipper Day, Shrimp Scampi Day

4/30 - Tie-Dye Day, Honesty Day, Bubble Tea Day, Bugs Bunny Day

EVERY KIND OF MIND: CELEBRATING AUTISM AWARENESS

April is National Autism Awareness Month and Autism Awareness Day is April 4. It's a time to recognize, celebrate, and better understand the millions of people living on the autism spectrum.

One in every 36 children in the United States is diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). That means in every classroom, every neighborhood, every workplace, there are individuals navigating a world that was largely designed without them in mind. The autism spectrum is just that — a spectrum. It encompasses an extraordinary range of experiences and abilities. Some people with ASD are nonverbal. Others are professors, artists, and filmmakers. What they share is not a single set of symptoms, but a different way of experiencing the world — one that deserves understanding and respect.

Famous Faces on the Spectrum

Several well-known figures have helped build public understanding of autism simply by being visible and honest about their diagnoses.

Sir Anthony Hopkins received his Asperger's diagnosis later in life. Asperger's is on the autism spectrum; it's "Level 1 ASD" in the DSM-5. The two-time Academy Award winner has described autism not as a burden, but as a gift — crediting his intense focus and deep immersion in his roles to the way his autistic mind works.



Dan Aykroyd, co-creator of *Ghostbusters*, was also diagnosed with Asperger's. His well-known fixation on ghosts and law enforcement — a classic case of hyperfocus — turned out to be the fuel behind one of the most beloved films of the 1980s.

Daryl Hannah, star of *Blade Runner* and *Splash*, was diagnosed with autism in childhood. She has spoken honestly about the sensory overwhelm and social difficulty that made Hollywood genuinely hard to navigate.

AUTISM AWARENESS AND ACTION

Satoshi Tajiri may be less of a household name, but his creation certainly is: *Pokémon*. A childhood obsession with collecting insects, nurtured by the deep focus autism can bring, became a global phenomenon. Tajiri rarely speaks publicly about his diagnosis — and that too is worth respecting. It doesn't define him, and not every autistic person owes the world their story.

For every famous name, there are millions of people with ASD living full, meaningful lives outside the spotlight. These everyday people are the heart of what Autism Awareness Month is really about.

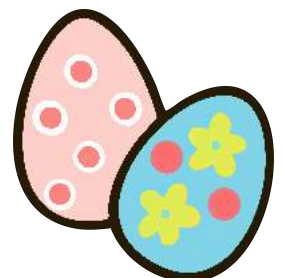
From Awareness to Action

Awareness is a starting point, not a destination. Real inclusion means designing environments — physical, social, and professional — that make room for different kinds of minds. After all, we are ALL unique, so what is “normal” anymore? This month is about listening to individual autistic people about what they need because everyone is different and has different needs.

Easter Word Search



PEEPS
BUNNY
EGG
HUNT
BASKET
LILY
HUNT
CHICK





#NationalTieDyeDay



National Tie-dye Day is April 30. Did you know that tie-dye is more than just a fun craft? It's a form of self-expression. While many people associate it with bright rainbow T-shirts and summer camp, tie-dye's roots go much deeper.

Long before it became a symbol of peace, love, and creativity in the United States, tie-dye techniques were used around the world. In Japan, a method called *shibori* dates back over 1,000 years, using folding, twisting, and binding to create intricate indigo patterns. In parts of Africa and India, similar dyeing techniques were used to create textiles for clothing and ceremonies. Each design told a story.



#NationalTieDyeDay



In the U.S., tie-dye became especially popular during the 1960s and 1970s. It was closely connected to the hippie movement—a time when people were pushing back against social norms and promoting peace, love, and individuality. Wearing tie-dye was a way of saying: “I’m different. I’m creative. I believe in freedom.”

Today, tie-dye has made a comeback. Again. You’ll see it in fashion, art, and even home décor. What makes it special is that no two pieces are exactly the same. Every swirl, stripe, or burst of color is unique—just like the person who made it.



National Tie-Dye Day is a day to celebrate creativity, color, and individuality. We marked the day by making our own tie-dye projects! (Check out the picture on the last page of this Magazine.) Whether you’re dyeing a shirt for the first time or wearing one you’ve had for years, tie-dye is a reminder that art doesn’t have to be perfect—it’s unique, it’s individual, and it’s yours!

CH&S Reading Comprehension

Name: _____

Date: _____

Earth Day

Ready to Read READING COMPREHENSION

Earth Day is celebrated every year on April 22. It is a time when people around the world think about how to care for the planet. The first Earth Day began in 1970 in the United States. Since then, it has grown into a global event, with over 190 countries taking part. People of all ages join activities that help protect nature and build awareness about environmental problems.

In many places, Earth Day includes community cleanups. Volunteers pick up trash in parks, along roads, and near beaches. This simple act helps keep spaces healthy for everyone. In countries like Japan, people often join group recycling events and learn how to reduce waste in daily life. In India, large tree-planting events take place, where thousands of trees are planted in one day. Trees help clean the air, provide shade, and homes for wildlife.

Some cities turn off lights to save energy or hold bike rides to show support for cleaner energy. In Europe, as in the U.S., Earth Day festivals often include music, food, and information booths. These events teach people about topics like climate change, which is a long-term shift in weather patterns. Another important idea is sustainability, which means using resources in a way that does not harm future generations.

Even small actions matter. Turning off lights, using less plastic, or planting a garden can all make a difference. Earth Day reminds people that the planet is shared by everyone. By working together, people can protect the environment and create a healthier world for the future.



Name: _____

Date: _____

Earth Day review questions:

1. What day is Earth Day celebrated each year?
 - A) April 1
 - B) April 22
 - C) May 5
 - D) June 10
2. Earth Day started in 1970. (True/False)
3. Name one activity people do during Earth Day.

4. Why are trees important?

5. Earth Day is only celebrated in the US. (True/False)
6. Which country is mentioned as having recycling events?
 - A) Brazil
 - B) Japan
 - C) Canada
 - D) Egypt
7. People sometimes ride bikes to support cleaner energy. (True/False)
8. Give one example of a small action that helps the planet.

9. How many countries celebrate Earth Day?
 - A) About 10
 - B) About 50
 - C) Over 190
 - D) Exactly 5
10. Why is picking up trash helpful?

More Than a Minority

When most people hear the words “special education,” they picture a separate classroom down the hall — a small, specialized world apart from the rest of the school. But new data released in early 2026 tells a very different story.

Nearly 8.2 million students ages 3 to 21 qualified for special education services in 2024 — an increase of more than 300,000 compared to the previous year, continuing a pattern of rising enrollment since the COVID-19 pandemic. The figures come from an analysis of U.S. Department of Education data conducted by The Advocacy Institute advocacyinstitute.org, a nonprofit focused on improving the lives of

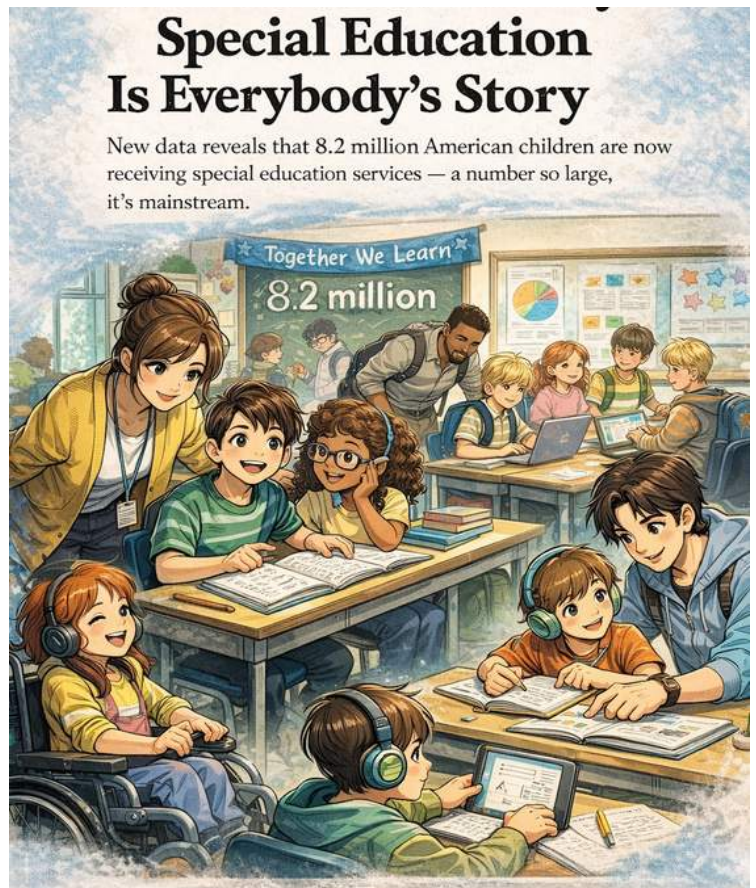
people with disabilities. To put that number in perspective: 8.2 million is larger than the population of New York City. Special education is not rare. These are our children, our students, our neighbors — and increasingly, they are sitting right next to everyone else.

Who Is In Special Education?

The breakdown of who qualifies may surprise you. A third of students in special education were categorized as having a specific learning disability — conditions like dyslexia and processing disorders. About 17% had speech or language impairments, 16% had “other health impairments” such as ADHD, nearly 15% had autism, and 5.5% had an intellectual disability.

In other words, the majority of students receiving special education services have conditions that are largely invisible — and often undetected for years. The child who struggles to decode words. The kid who can’t sit still. The teenager who understands everything but can’t organize it on paper. These are not outliers. They are in every school, every grade, every community.

Autism accounted for 40% of the growth in special education enrollment — a striking figure that tracks with broader trends in autism identification and awareness.



What is Special Ed?

Where Are These Students?

Here's what may be the most important data point of all: more than 68% of students in special education spent at least 80% of their school day in mainstream classrooms — up slightly since 2020. The era of the separate, tucked-away special ed room is giving way, slowly, to genuine inclusion. These students are not somewhere else. They are here, learning alongside everyone else, asking to be seen, supported, and given the tools they need to succeed.

A Shift in How We See Disability

When 1 in every 8 school-age children qualifies for special education services, the word “special” starts to lose its separating power. Learning differences, developmental differences, and neurological differences are not exceptional — they are part of the full, normal range of human experience.

That doesn't mean the challenges aren't real. It means the responsibility to respond to them is shared — by schools, by families, by communities, and by policymakers who fund the systems that make support possible. The students in these programs are not a category apart. They are part of us. And the more we understand that, the better we become at building schools — and communities — that work for every kind of learner.

(Data sourced from The Advocacy Institute's analysis of U.S. Department of Education figures, March 2026).



Fill in the name of the African animal...







Donut Battle

with Daniel and Joe

Daniel and I both think donuts make a delicious morning treat. But which donut is best? We tried two spots 60 miles apart to find out what region makes the best donuts.



The Jelly Donut - Cotati

The Jelly Donut is a small donut and coffee shop offering all the usual favorites, plus breakfast sandwiches and a cooler full of drinks. The shop was empty when we visited, and the staff was friendly and helpful. I went with a custard filled chocolate bar, while Daniel (left) got a chocolate buttermilk bar.

Twisted Donuts - San Francisco

I picked Daniel up at the San Rafael Transit Station early Thursday morning, and we braved the rush hour traffic into the city to try Twisted Donuts on Noriega Street. When we arrived we were greeted with a wide selection of donuts and pastries, as well as kind and helpful staff. We decided to go for three custard filled and a chocolate covered old fashioned (for Daniel's dad).



"It was worth the drive."

It was a beautiful day in San Francisco on the day of our visit to Twisted Donuts, so we decided to eat them on the beach. A great way to spend a Thursday morning!



Donut Battle: A surprise Twist

According to Daniel "The Twisted Donuts were excellent. The custard filled donut I had was moist on the inside, and slightly crunchy on the outside. Plus the filling had a much more complex flavor". And I agree - the filling especially stands out. The vanilla is very rich, which prompted Daniel to suspect the use of real vanilla bean in the preparation.

Twisted Donuts currently holds a rating of 4.3 (585 reviews) on Yelp. This tells us that Yelp alone is not enough to locate the best food.

In conclusion, though it's quite a drive, Twisted Donuts is worth it!



What Are Our Favorite Donuts?

- Michelle - maple cake
- Randall - maple bar
- Hayley - vanilla custard donut
- Daniel - maple bar, chocolate old fashioned, buttermilk bar, or churros because they can be donuts too.
- Colleen - glazed donut
- Nino - vanilla custard donut
- Dylan - eclair
- Thea - cronut/crodough
- Jennifer - maple bar
- Devlin - chocolate glazed
- Martha - old fashioned
- Cat - chocolate
- Zach - chocolate
- Connor - cinnamon glazed twist
- Judy - maple bar
- Joe - chocolate covered custard filled
- Darnell - cinnamon twist

April 23 – National Picnic Day with Katie

Katie says one of her favorite places to picnic is Stinson Beach, where you can feel the ocean breeze. Another place she enjoys is the Marin French Cheese Company, where you can sit at a picnic table by the pond and enjoy the scenery.

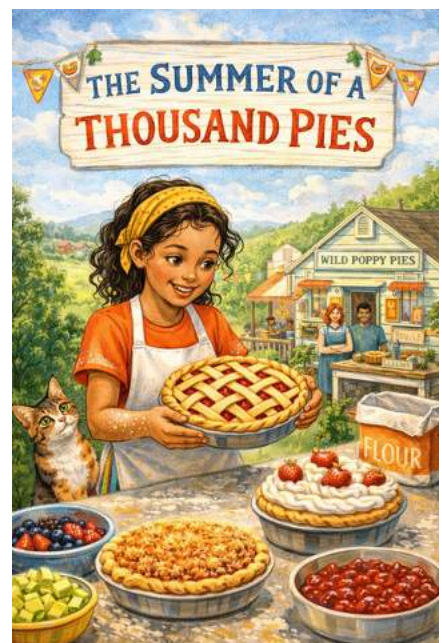
Katie's ideal picnic would start with a charcuterie board with brie, gouda, and goat cheese topped with apricot jam. She would also include prosciutto, green and red grapes, and strawberries. A fresh baguette, sun-dried tomatoes, pistachios, and cashews would round out the board.



To drink, Katie prefers lemonade or Trader Joe's blood orange Italian soda. Katie would also bring a sushi platter with her favorite: crunchy California roll with crab!

For dessert, Katie loves lots of variety: cookies, cupcakes, brownies, lemon bars, and assorted cheesecake bites. Her favorite cupcakes are chocolate with vanilla cream frosting and sprinkles. She would also bring a speaker for music, a journal and art supplies. If her picnic is near the ocean, chances are Katie will be in the water swimming. For people who prefer to stay dry, Katie suggests simply chilling at the beach with a good book. Katie recommends *The Summer of a Thousand Pies* by Margaret Dilloway. (Right: This is an AI version of the book cover.)

Finally, Katie reminds everyone to pack the essentials: a hat, sunscreen, a beach towel, a picnic blanket, water, sunglasses, and comfy sandals. Picnics are a great way to enjoy time outside with good friends!



Staff Training



During a recent staff training, Chas talked about how *everyone* is multi-dimensional. People are not just a set of behaviors—all people have preferences, interests, strengths, and the ability to grow when given the right structure. Because of that, we have to ask ourselves: Is what we're offering just time filled, or does it have real substance?

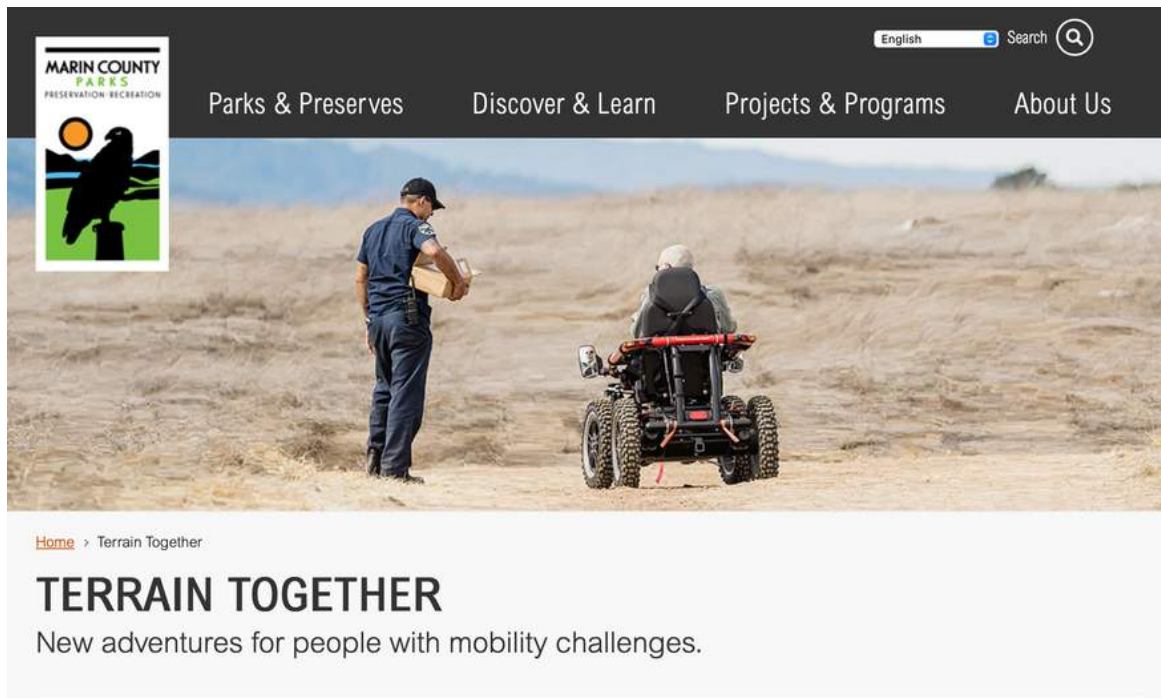
Our goal here at CH&S is to provide a constructive, meaningful use of time—something that feels credible to both students and staff. When what we offer is real and engaging, our students are more likely to buy into it. That matters because much of our work is about shaping how students see themselves. Beliefs about one's self influences behavior. If someone begins to see themselves as capable, productive, or included, their behavior reflects that. But this only works if the environment supports that belief in a *genuine* way.

"Structure plays a big role here," said Chas. When the day is predictable and organized, students can relax. This is why we have daily schedules, which the students sign off on. Predictability lowers anxiety and makes it easier for students to participate, learn, and engage. And from there, we can begin to expand their frame of reference by introducing new topics, skills, and experiences.

This is why we lean into *project-based learning*. Projects are active and visible—they communicate "this is something we can do." They create movement, collaboration, and a sense of purpose. They are engaged in something tangible, which reinforces both internal motivation and external credibility.

Staff training is a great way to learn not only what to do, but also why we do what we do, and how it benefits both our students and staff!

THE TERRAINHOPPER



Did you know that the Marin County Parks has two all-terrain vehicles that people with physical disabilities can use for *free*?

Their website says: *Marin County Parks has acquired two TerrainHopper mobility devices to help adult visitors with physical disabilities enjoy outdoor recreation. This device is more like a small off-road vehicle than a traditional wheelchair. It is designed to navigate outdoor terrain at the speed of walking – no more than 4 miles an hour. It is for any adult visitor with a mobility disability - you don't have to be a Marin resident.*

For more information and to make a reservation for some off-roading fun check out their website: <https://parks.marincounty.gov/discoverlearn/terrainhopper>

**We accept and appreciate donations
of any size or kind.
All donations to CH&S are
tax-deductible.
CH&S is a 501(c)(3) non-profit
organization.**



[@Communityhomesandservices](https://www.instagram.com/Communityhomesandservices)

Happy Birthday (April 4) Maya Angelou!

Caged Bird

A free bird leaps
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends
and dips his wing
in the orange sun rays
and dares to claim the sky.

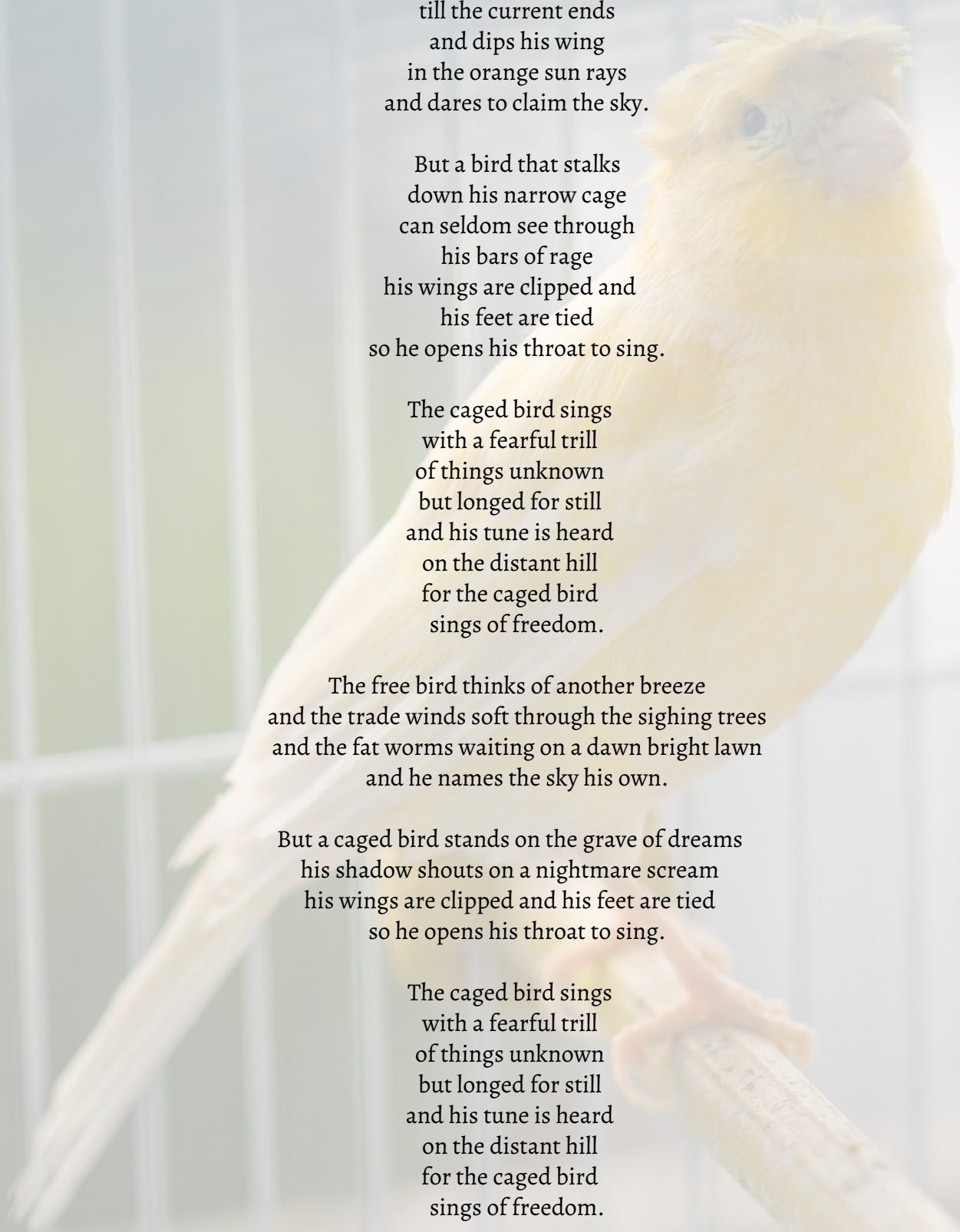
But a bird that stalks
down his narrow cage
can seldom see through
his bars of rage
his wings are clipped and
his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright lawn
and he names the sky his own.

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.



Dugnad: Community Work

with Frank, Linda, Steve, Valerie and Audrey

Audrey's group, Frank, Linda, Steve, and Valerie, are learning together about simple traditions from other countries that help people feel calm, safe, and balanced. They are learning about ways to feel better, connect with others, and take care of their mind and body. In January's Magazine, we learned about *fika* which involves taking a break and connecting over coffee. Now the group is learning about and experiencing *dugnad*.

Dugnad, a Norwegian tradition

In many places, "volunteering" is something you choose when you have time. In Norway, the idea of dugnad conveys shared responsibility. People in the group/community show up, pitch in, and help the community function. In Norway, these responsibilities are also expectations, habits, and social glue.

What It Means

Dugnad refers to unpaid work done by a group for mutual benefit. It might look simple on the surface, but, in Norway, it carries real cultural weight.

For example:

- Neighbors cleaning shared areas, such as sweeping hallways or dumping out the trash cans in communal areas.
- Residents helping to take care of the gardens—we have gardens at both Enterprise and Life College.
- At CH&S, after art, cooking, or group activities, the whole group cleans up together.



Dugnad

What Makes It Unique

In Norway, dugnad sits in a gray area between voluntary and expected. No one forces you to join, but opting out is noticeable. So people tend to pitch in and do their part.

How do you do your part?

Key Characteristics of Dugnad:

- Participation is voluntary, but socially expected.
- No one is paid.
- Everyone contributes equally, regardless of status.
- The focus is on shared responsibility.

When it comes down to it, the precise practice and meaning of dugnad is kind of hard to translate for non-Norwegians. It blends work, morality, and belonging into a single idea. When people show up, they are not just completing tasks. They are reinforcing trust and equality within the group.

After working together to complete communal tasks we can sit down and relax with good friends!



Happy January Birthday!

4/20 - Zachary

4/23 - Josh



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April 2026 Connection Magazine

April 30 is National Tie-Dye Day!

