

# THE SPARK

*creating connections - creating community*

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## From the President ...

I started working with the Chicago Gifted Community Center in the Fall of 2012. My children and I were looking for a community where our experience of living through the ups and downs of a gifted children household was not uncommon. I also wanted my kids to take part in classes at Chicago area museums, as a supplement to homeschooling. I contacted the CGCC, and they helped me get a few classes set up. Not only were these classes rewarding for my kids, but it was a huge relief to be amongst others who understood the struggles parents have when their kids' needs are not met. I loved seeing my kids take part in quality educational experiences, and they loved being around kids that held some of the same interests.

Two years later and now serving as CGCC President, I am happy to be part of another great year of growth for the Chicago Gifted Community Center. The CGCC board and parent volunteers help us all make creative and intellectual connections for our kids. This year children continue to find their community while having fun and learning together at the NEIU Gifted Kids' Club. The Chicago Museum Series has continued with additional classes. We have added an Origami Club, and started a Book and Social Club this year for Chicago area kids to share their love of books with like-minded peers. We've expanded our Parenting Series to two locations (Hinsdale and Chicago) to help parents learn more about the issues they face with their gifted kids while creating a community of parents who share similar concerns.

The CGCC wants to be there to help support you through the process of understanding and parenting your gifted children. We understand the importance of creativity in finding ways to meet your children's individual needs. We have grown a lot as an organization since our inception, but we do need your help. Do you have an idea of a program you would like to see, like making a connection to a museum (like I did), starting a Minecraft group or setting up a Lego Club? We have the experience and the tools to help you get started, and we would love to help your ideas come to fruition. We also have many opportunities for parent volunteers to help. Even in the smallest ways, we could use help from parent chaperones at museum classes, or by assisting other CGCC program organizers in setting up rooms for events. If you have an idea or would like to participate in running an event, please contact me at [tamaragrady@chicagogiftedcommunity.org](mailto:tamaragrady@chicagogiftedcommunity.org).

Tamara Grady

### [ DO YOU HAVE IDEAS? ]

Do you have an idea for an activity or event? We have the experience and tools to help you get started.

### [ HOW CAN YOU HELP? ]

We have many opportunities for parents to volunteer, including event set up and chaperones.

### [ LET'S HEAR FROM YOU! ]

We would love to hear your ideas, or tell you more about ways you can help CGCC.

[tamaragrady@chicagogiftedcommunity.org](mailto:tamaragrady@chicagogiftedcommunity.org)



# Tips for Supporting Young Gifted Children

Catherine Gruener, MA., M.A., LCPC, NCC  
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## CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUNG GIFTED

While some gifted children go unnoticed until formal testing has taken place in the school system, there are gifted children that evidence characteristics from birth, characteristics that often last throughout their lifetimes. If I had to use only 2 words to label these characteristics, I would call them intensity and purpose.

The examples below are not all inclusive and are not tests of gifted, merely examples of descriptors offered by parents of later identified gifted children from Deborah Ruf's 5 Levels of Gifted (2009), and from anecdotes from other parents of identified gifted children.

*In infancy:* makes eye contact soon after birth or within the first month; very alert (others make comments on this); early awareness when caregivers are out of the room (so much so that it causes immediate distress); shows purpose with toys; says first word within first 6 months (like boots or gorilla); seems to listen and follow directions (like understanding what is next in the routine); attends to activities that caregivers do (like watching TV or looking at books that caregivers are watching or reading).

*In Toddlerhood:* long attention spans; self-driven interest in letters, numbers, talking; uses puzzles and games that are beyond "age level;" counts, organizes colors, knows the alphabet, may spontaneously read; is tenacious in doing his own thing and not wanting to stop; has an advanced sense of humor; attends to the feeling of others or is easily affected by the feelings of others.

*In the Pre-School Years:* catches mistakes and holds adults to their words (promises and changes in plans); becomes completely engrossed in a task (for play or purpose); prefers older children and adults; is tenacious in doing tasks her way or when completing an undertaken task; becomes highly competitive or conversely withdrawn from others; becomes very talkative and inquisitive; loves to debate, reason and argue; tends to think ahead or make predictions which can lead to anxiety or fears; can become annoyed with others who don't understand the rules; is very creative (which can seem like manipulation); can become very focused when performing a task

Catherine  
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Gruener Consulting LLC.

She has presented on various topics regarding parenting gifted children at local and national gifted organizations.

She holds a Master's degree in neuropsychology as well as a Master's degree in counseling from the Adler School of Professional Psychology.

She is a licensed clinical professional counselor, a national certified counselor, and holds certifications to teach Positive Discipline to parents and educators.

She founded Gruener Consulting in order to positively affect the health and well-being of children. Through Gruener Consulting LLC, Catherine offers counseling and therapy, individual and organizational consultations, parent education, and presentations on parenting, gifted children, and Positive Discipline.

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and can voice concerns about own skill (throwing crayons and destroying work because his drawing doesn't look like the drawing either in their mind or in the picture).

*In Kindergarten:* others make comments about child's skills (if not before); takes information in very quickly; has a huge vocabulary; reads simple books or chapter books because of self-interest; shows interest in more mature subjects (death, natural disasters, meaning of life); has a huge memory for facts, events, and information; conceptualizes and theorizes; does complex puzzles or games that are very advanced; displays a need to engage others in meaningful ways or conversations that interest her (that are often way beyond age level).

## CHARACTERISTICS: BLESSINGS AND CURSES

Saunders and Espeland (1986) in Bringing out the Best (1986) describe the gifted child as the "child of extremes-in talents and abilities, mood shifts, demands, and delights," (pg. 37). Often, the very characteristic that is prized can turn out to become problematic, either in the here and now, or in later development. Where high verbal proficiency makes for great conversations and a huge vocabulary, once in a school setting children can seem like they talk too much or talk above the level of their peers. Long attention spans are great for wrapping oneself up in an area of interest and finding that flow, but in extremes can result in tunnel vision, a resistance to move onto a new task, or overextension of one's energies. Quick understanding and exceptional memories can turn, at the extreme, into frustration with multi-step issues or a propensity to believe that everything in life should or will come so quickly. Divergent thinking and creativity, the intricate worlds, stories, and imagination are wonderful

cont. page 9

# • Making sense of vision therapy

Dr. Daniel Press, O.D., FCOVD

Modern Optometric Vision Therapy (OVT) stems from the practice of orthoptics – literally, straightening of the eyes – which was pioneered in the second half of the 19th century by the French ophthalmologist, Louis Émile Javal. Widely considered to be the founding father of orthoptics, Javal sought more effective treatment modalities for strabismus, the medical term for an eye-turn, after he became dissatisfied with the outcome of invasive surgery which was the only available therapy at the time.

The intent of orthoptics was to establish a non-invasive form of treatment for strabismus, the most obvious condition in which vision is askew. As modern medicine advanced in the 20th century, eye surgeons abandoned the concept of vision therapy as an alternative treatment to surgical intervention because of value judgments about the time, intensity, resources, and commitment involved in delivering the service. However, as knowledge about the visual system advanced in the mid-20th century it became obvious that OVT can be utilized to treat forms of visual dysfunction beyond overt eye turns.

When the medical field abandoned educating medical students on the benefits of vision therapy, the optometric field became heavily involved in education and research in this area of eye care, which holds true to this day. According to ophthalmologist, Dr. Robert Abel, in his book *The Eyecare Revolution*: "Vision therapy is taught at optometry schools; ophthalmologists know very little about it ... It can change people's lives, as it has for President Lyndon Baines Johnson's daughter, Lucy, whose dyslexia was helped greatly by vision therapy."

OVT is defined by the College of Optometrists in Vision Development (COVD) as a progressive program of vision procedures that is performed under doctor supervision and individualized to fit the visual needs of each patient. OVT is performed to help patients develop or improve fundamental visual skills and abilities, improve visual comfort, ease, and efficiency and to change how a patient processes or interprets visual information.

OVT is used to treat specific visual dysfunctions diagnosed through the use of normative testing performed during an optometric evaluation. A

common point of confusion is what is defined as "normal vision." Most lay-people and even certain eye care providers would equate vision with clarity of eye sight. The truth is that vision is a process that is much more elaborate than seeing a small object 20 feet away. Seeing 20/20 tells you little to nothing about how a person functions when reading or doing close work. Additional visual functions that comprise the visual process are: tracking, focusing, eye-teaming, visual perception, and visual integration. If these areas are not probed, then the status of the visual system has not been fully assessed.

Unfortunately most children do not volunteer this information because they feel the way they process information is normal. Vision is a learned process. As a child develops, so does the visual system. If there is a visual dysfunction identified along the way, OVT has the ability retrain the brain to use the visual process more efficiently which lessens symptoms and creates an opportunity for a better learning experience. OVT is applied visual neuroscience, utilizing the principles of neurology research to affect change in the visual system.

*cont. page 4*

# Symptoms

Signs that a visual dysfunction is present:

- An unexplained gap between performance and potential
- A discrepancy between intelligence and academic performance
- Language skills seem superior to reading skills
- Performance when completing near work starts out strong and then suffers with time

If the visual system is not functioning efficiently then certain symptoms are common, including:

Fatigue	Instability of print	Intermittent blurred vision	Eye strain	Headaches
Difficulty concentrating when reading		Double vision	Avoidance of sustained reading	

*cont. from page 3*

So what are other medical doctors saying about OVT? Brock Eide, M.D., M.A. and Fernette Eide, M.D., leading clinicians and writers on learning disabilities particularly involving gifted children, state, "In spite of the very positive research findings validating the role vision plays in learning, some are still claiming visual dysfunction plays little or no role in the reading challenges that dyslexics face. This is a shame. When we look specifically at the results of studies performed to address specific visual issues, the evidence supporting visual therapy is quite strong." Ophthalmologist, Dr. Bruce Sumlin, writes, "Optometric vision therapy makes sense. It is very similar to other kinds of treatment and therapies we provide in the medical disciplines which help to develop neural connections in the brain."

There are multiple clinical trials that support the effectiveness of OVT. One of the most highly regarded studies done in any

therapy field was published in 2008 in Archives of Ophthalmology. The National Institute of Health-sponsored research is titled "Randomized Clinical Trial of Treatments for Symptomatic Convergence Insufficiency in Children." This elaborate study included children diagnosed with symptomatic convergence insufficiency split into multiple groups. The treatment options included pencil pushups, home based computer therapy in addition to pencil pushups, office based OVT with home reinforcement, and placebo office based OVT. The results of the study show that office based OVT results in a significantly greater improvement in symptoms and clinical signs than the other treatment options.

The bottom line is that visual problems, which are not uncommon in struggling students, are amenable to therapy. Eye doctors vary in their expertise in the field of vision development. The first step to determining if a child has a visual problem is to

have an evaluation completed by a qualified developmental optometrist. For additional information, or to find a doctor knowledgeable in vision development, visit [www.covd.org](http://www.covd.org) or [www.visionhelp.org](http://www.visionhelp.org).

To learn more, register for Dr. Press' "Making Sense of Vision Therapy" lecture:

<http://chicagogiftedcommunity.org/Default.aspx?pagelid=1852703>

Dr. Daniel Press is the clinical director of pediatrics, binocular vision and vision therapy at North Suburban Vision Consultants located in Park Ridge and Deerfield, IL. He is board certified in vision development and vision therapy by the College of Optometrists in Vision Development (COVD). He serves on the board of directors for COVD and enjoys writing and speaking on all topics related to vision.

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# PRESIDENTIAL v o l u n t e e r *Service Awards*

CGCC is proud to announce it is now a certifying organization for the President's Volunteer Service Awards.

Our Youth Advisory Board expressed an interest in volunteer service work, and we thought this would be a great way to acknowledge them and other youth who are making a difference.

We invite you and your family members, ages 5 and up, to log your volunteer hours and register to receive a president's award in recognition for your service work. You can read more about the program on our site registration page. By using our organization code you can log your hours online, or just keep a log offline including date, location, activity, and hours, and submit it to us by email.

## Ellie

I am working on a year-long community service project with nine classmates at Science & Arts Academy. We call ourselves "Project SWAG", which stands for Students Working against Gangs. We initially decided that we wanted to find a way to help reduce gun violence in Chicago. After we learned through our research that almost half of all gun violence in Chicago is related to gang membership, we decided to focus on reducing gun violence by raising awareness about the dangers of gangs. We met with the head of the Albany Park Community Center Violence Prevention Program and representatives of an organization called Ceasefire. They gave us information on gang violence and told us that the best approach to getting our message out to the world is public advocacy. For the project, we are making a video that will inform kids and their parents about what gangs are, why they are dangerous, and how to avoid them.

If a youth in your family already does service work, please consider letting us know so that we can feature them in an upcoming newsletter. Let's be proud to use our gifts to make a positive difference in the community.



## Julien

This year I focused my volunteer work in mathematical enrichment. For instance, I started a LaTeX support group for math students at a local university. This has been an extremely gratifying experience for me because it gives me the opportunity to help people by sharing my knowledge with them. Last fall I helped co-organize the CGCC Math Club, a colloquium-style meetup designed for students to have an opportunity to present and explore mathematical ideas with their peers.

CGCC is incredibly proud of the work our youth are doing in the community. The experiences of three of our young volunteers are highlighted on this page.

Consider finding your own ways to make a difference in the community, and earn hours towards the President's Volunteer Service Award. If you'd like to work with the CGCC for volunteer hours, please email [info@chicagogiftedcommunity.org](mailto:info@chicagogiftedcommunity.org) to find out about available volunteer opportunities. In addition, many great volunteer opportunities for kids and families can be found through [www.volunteermatch.org](http://www.volunteermatch.org).

## Eloïse

This spring I have been helping plan and organize activities with the Mindstorms EV3 for the CGCC Saturday Kids Club. This has been an excellent experience because not only did I have the opportunity to guide other young people who are also interested in robotics, but I also learned a lot and was able to socialize at the same time.

<http://chicagogiftedcommunity.org/Default.aspx?pageld=1474371&eventId=876292&EventViewMode=EventDetails>

# Parental Self-Care

S H E R Y L   S T O L L E R

explains that great giftedness is accompanied by a great need for parental self-care.

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Ever wonder why your child often seems to make parenting harder for you than it is for other parents? Perhaps it is because your child is gifted. It's not your imagination. It is harder. As it turns out, gifted children, while diverse, are often not only extreme in their gifts, they also tend to be extreme in how they process all of life. Many brain pathways are exceptionally quick, strong and complex, while others are slow, weak and simple, especially by comparison. It is no wonder that many sensitivities, triggers, emotions, and behaviors defy easy rewiring. The negative, short-fused reactions and behaviors make it all the harder for parents to focus on the child's unique perspective, and harder still to feel compassion and be clear-headed in the on-going moments of life.

And that is only a small part of what is required to be a parent to these children. The gifts do not exist in isolation. They affect the whole person, and how that person processes life, 24/7. They also affect the parents and other people around the gifted person, 24/7. Making sure a gifted child has ready access to the depth and breadth of stimulation that is well suited to him/her is a full time job in and of itself. Add to that the child's extreme need for explicit training in areas he or she doesn't want to deal with — because of not being as quick or facile in those areas as in the gifted arena(s) — and the enor-

mity of the parent's job comes into sharper focus. We begin to see that the responsibility of being the parent of a gifted child is extreme, even without considering any 2E/deficits in the child's abilities or sensibilities, and even without accounting for the huge responsibility to society borne by these parents to make sure the child's potential is actualized.

To complicate matters, parents of gifted are often gifted themselves, facing their own struggles with their respective gifts. Everything is intensified and heightened in such a family.

My hope is that by recognizing and understanding the multifaceted and pervasively impactful nature of being, living with and raising a gifted child, you, the parent, will come to accept that you are in the midst of an intense marathon. I hope that with this realization, you commit to giving yourself the sustenance — the self-care —

required to get through this marathon well.

My goal is to insure that you give yourself what you need to flourish as you nurture your gifted child to flourish. Your gifted child needs you to take care of you so you can go the distance on this marathon with him/her. You need and deserve to take care of you so you can enjoy your life beyond life as a parent of your gifted children.

*cont. page 8*



Start by embracing the paradox that honoring “self” enables you to be there for others.

Self-nurturing enhances relationships with others:

- Being authentic in expressing your need for self-care to someone enhances the sense of connection with that person and the authenticity of that relationship.

Neglecting your own needs for the needs of your children makes it worse for them:

- Leads to parent's moodiness/short-tempered reactions and resentment.
- Relationships sour and decay.
- Decisions become compromised by the need to sneak in self-care.
- It models/teaches that you expect your children to put others' (peers') needs before their own.

By doing and giving less you can do and give more:

- Letting go leaves time and space for others (children, spouses, partners, others) to step forward, show up, and grow up.
- Accepting that you cannot be a part of every step in a process frees you.
- Taking time and energy for yourself models the same for your children to emulate.
- Optimizes your ability to refuel and function well.

Now that you are convinced, you can start your new life-style of on-going self-care and self-nurturance.

Ask yourself:

**“What’s draining me?”**

- List.
- Put the list aside and continue...

**“What makes me feel good – even great?”**

- Do a comprehensive inventory.

Think through options for how to get those pieces of self-care met under various scenarios of time/energy.

For example: I have a heightened sense of wonder at visual patterns and of touch. If I'm grumpy, and have virtually no time, I pick up a shell, hold it, look at its patterns, take a deep breath and transport myself to the ocean.

**Use the template on page 9 to create your own self-care plan.**

Check in with myself:

- Preferably early and often, at least once a day.
- “Have I had a little piece of each area today, even if I only intentionally savored it for 1 second?”

What are my priorities?

- List them. Read. Redo the list.
- Consider:
  - “Which priorities do I like attending to?”  
**Attend to those.**
  - “Which priorities are things that drain me?”  
**Refer to list generated earlier.**
  - Which of the ones that drain you are also ones that someone else could do without the world coming to an end?  
**Hire, Swap, or Drop those.**

This part of the process is especially hard given that with gifted children there are unique criteria to meet when hiring, swapping and dropping. Be gentle with yourself and consider outside resources.

What is going to sustain me to continue these self-care habits?

**Celebrate tiny accomplishments.**

How will I ensure that I have an ongoing supply of what I need?

**Keep practicing consistent self-care, find a good parent coach, and reach out to other parents running the parents-of-gifted marathon.**

What internal and external resources can I draw upon that will benefit me, short-term and long?

**You know yourself well — trust yourself, reach out to CGCC and other outside resources for help, use what is available so as to not waste precious energy reinventing the wheel.**

Remind yourself

**“As abilities, sensibilities and behaviors go beyond expectations, so does the need for self-care.”**

**“Be gentle with myself.”**

**“By putting myself on my priority list, taking care of me benefits everyone.”**

*cont. page 9*

Sheryl provides engaging and inspiring customized coaching, workshops and presentations. She equips parents to effectively teach their children life-skills that enable them to choose wisely for themselves. Sample topics covered include: cultivating emotional intelligence among children with overexcitabilities and/or areas of giftedness; getting and staying calm for effective communication; optimizing differences in parenting styles to accommodate children's learning styles, temperaments and level of reactivity; and addressing life challenges such as technology use, staying on task and being organized for routines and homework, social interactions, and emotional regulation. Sheryl draws on her own parenting journey as well as her professional training and experience. To learn more about Sheryl and her local, state and national experience, she encourages you to visit her website and to contact her to explore how she can best serve your needs.

Her contact information:

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Beyond Expectations: A resource for parents when children's abilities, sensibilities and behaviors go beyond

	Options for ways to get that for myself given amount of time/energy available is			
WHAT MAKES ME FEEL GOOD - EVEN GREAT -	Virtually None	A Little	Medium	A Large Chunk
PHYSICALLY				
EMOTIONALLY				
SOCIALLY				
COGNITIVELY				
SPIRITUALLY				
SENSORILY				
ENVIRONMENTALLY				



# Tips for Supporting Young Gifted Children

*continued from page 2*

for viewing the complex layers of the world, but in extremes can lead to rejection of the norm, escape into fantasy or a resistance to the simple.

What seems like blessings in any child can become problematic in the "extreme" gifted child. Many parents of gifted children state that they feel "different" from the rest of the population, and are faced with unique challenges (Saunders & Espeland, 1986). The following are helpful tips for parents of young gifted.

## TIPS FOR PARENTS OF YOUNG GIFTED

Your child is your child, not a label. Parents' reactions to the label of gifted can range from panic and fear to outright refusal of the term. No matter where you fall within the spectrum, always remember that your child is a unique being with strengths and weaknesses, that you don't need to know everything to be their parent, and that connection and encouragement are the most important aspects of all that you will do with your children.

Take parenting one step at a time. It can be overwhelming to parent a high needs, intense, "extreme" child. Take time to take care of yourself and your adult relationships. Use humor. If you find yourself reacting to things rather than being proactive, it is a sign that you need to take some time to regroup, rest, reassess, or plan a new way of approaching this job of parenting.

Seek out others. Being different, an outlier, can create feelings of isolation or of being alone on your parenting journey. Join parent groups, go to seminars specifically directed for gifted children, join online groups,

connect with parents at enrichment classes, or connect with other parents at your local gifted PTA or organization (if your school has one). Resources like these can be found through CGCC.

It's OK to be different. Gifted children can feel isolated and alone too. They can sense that they are different and that others don't get them. Help them develop a sense of belonging. We all need to feel as though we belong in our communities. Our first community is family. Support them in finding belonging and significance at home (helping with chores, reading together, scheduling family fun time each week). Then find them at least one or two more children who share similar interests (look to enrichment courses, parent clubs, private gifted schools, local special interest classes). If you can't find a club that meets your child's need, talk with CGCC and see if they can help you organize one.

Seek out support. Gifted children have special needs. Often these needs are in educational settings, but sometimes in social and spiritual areas as well. If your child or your family is struggling, consider seeking help from a pediatrician, a child psychiatrist, or mental health professional familiar with the issues of gifted children. Lists of professionals familiar with gifted children can be found through IAGC and SENG, but do not be deterred from asking local professionals for help in specific areas that you need. Call the providers and ask if they have had experience with the issues that you are struggling with, and then ask if they have experience or knowledge of gifted children.

# announcements



## HEARTBLEED SECURITY BUG

The Heartbleed Security Bug affects code that protects the privacy of sensitive information- like passwords - on secure sites.

The Chicago Gifted Community Center is not affected by Heartbleed, and we can assure you that your personal information, including usernames, passwords, and contacts remain secure. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact Linda Zanieski: [lindazanieski@chicagogiftedcommunity.org](mailto:lindazanieski@chicagogiftedcommunity.org)

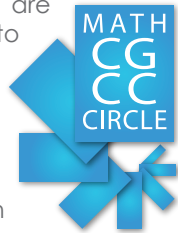
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## MATH CIRCLE FORMING

The Chicago Gifted Community Center is looking to form a new Math Circle beginning this fall which will serve our members in the surrounding suburbs.

A Math Circle is a great way for kids to be exposed to topics in mathematics which are typically not taught in a traditional school curriculum. It is also an opportunity for kids to learn from mathematics professionals from the community and to socialize with other kids who share similar interests. To learn more about Math Circles, please visit the National Association of Math Circles at <https://www.mathcircles.org>.

Do you have a child who might be interested? Would you like to become a parent volunteer, or are you interested in teaching? Please contact Miriam de Castelneau with any thoughts or suggestions: [miriamdecastelneau@chicagogiftedcommunity.org](mailto:miriamdecastelneau@chicagogiftedcommunity.org)



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## MAY ACTIVITIES

In addition to the CGCC sponsored events, our calendar features many community events around Chicagoland. Most of these programs are free or low cost. Here is a sampling of community events in May, see the calendar for complete details:



Astronomy Programs  
CAFamily Saturday Studio  
Chicago Northside Mini Maker Faire  
Civil War Days  
GECO Parenting Book Discussion  
Gem, Mineral & Fossil Show  
International Migratory Bird Celebrations  
Museum Day in Elmhurst  
Readings with popular author Jon Scieszka & illustrator Timothy Ering, both as part of the Chicago Humanities Festival  
Scratch Day  
The Wonder of Salamanders Class

For more events, please visit our calendar:  
<http://chicagogiftedcommunity.org/Default.aspx?pagelid=1194452>