

*This article appeared in
201 Family's Special
Parent 2016 Edition
(January, 2016).*



The Gifted Child Society helps the brightest children overcome social difficulties

BY JACQUELINE GOLDSCHNEIDER

The term "gifted child" might imply that a child with a high intelligence level would be assured of success, both academically and in daily life. In reality, to reach their full potential, gifted children (GC's) often need proactive nurturing to evolve their intellectual skills and emotional well-being at the same rate. When developmental needs are not addressed, GC's may struggle.

"GC's can have asynchronous development, where their mental capacity develops faster than their emotional and social abilities," says D'Arcy Natale, co-managing director of The Gifted Child Society (TGCS), a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing enrichment programming and other resources to gifted children and their families.

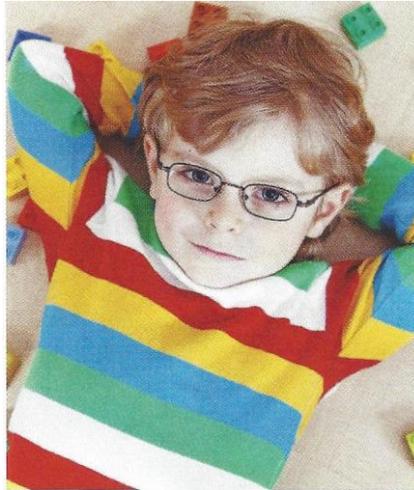
GC's, whom TGCS defines as those with an IQ of 130 or higher, "often can

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process information faster than their peers, identifying patterns and relationships almost instantly. They may latch onto a particular interest with a lot of energy, not always mindful of what else is going on around them," Natale says. "If a GC's passion to learn is not encouraged or is misunderstood, they might react emotionally by acting out or shutting down."

As Natale and co-managing director Bobbi Zientek explain, because GC's think in a different manner than their peers, relating to classmates is not always easy. "It can be difficult for GC's to present ideas to peers who may not understand as quickly as they do," Natale says. "And when they feel they aren't being understood, some may react strongly and get upset. Their peers might not understand a GC's intensity and why that child is getting excited over something their classmates may consider unimportant. It can be difficult for peers to relate to them because of these differences and, as they get older, it can cause more serious social issues. GC's need to learn how to interact with all their peers, like-minded or not."

These issues can also affect relationships with teachers. "GC's may explore topics in depth and take a discussion in many directions," Zientek says. "Public schools, to manage a diverse student body, may have limited time with a pre-set curriculum, so there may not be enough time to explore specifics. A GC's need for greater intellectual stimulation can lead to their being perceived as disruptive or disengaged. In reality, GC's can be very engaged and work to their full potential with the appropriate level of guidance."



This is where a facility like TGCS comes in. Through two enrichment programs, The Saturday Workshop and six-week Summer Super Stars camp, both operating in Allendale, the organization offers GC's in grades pre-K through eighth grade (with special introductory courses for 3 year olds) an opportunity to learn and socialize with like-minded peers.

The Saturday Workshop offers hands-on learning with instructors who know how to work with GC's. "We create a dynamic environment to allow each GC flexibility for growth," Natalie says. "There's differentiated instruction and a lot of one-on-one."

"In TGCS programs, if a child wishes to pursue a subject further during class time, instructors will initially discuss it then encourage the child to explore the topic in-depth at home, returning to the topic at a later time," Zientek says. "It's a different approach and the children are inspired by that. In teaching them the skills for >

responding productively and respectfully, TGCS hopes to assist these children in school and their other environments."

"We've observed GC's who set very high standards and put a lot of pressure on themselves, which can make them anxious about making mistakes," Natale says. "Some might shy away from trying something if they think they might fail. We teach them that they can make mistakes and the world keeps turning."

And the skills they develop at TGCS assist not only in public school, but also in everyday life. "In 20 years from now, these children will need to know how to navigate themselves through the world," Natale says, "and if they don't learn how to function well within the environment where they live and work, their chance of success is diminished."

The relationships students develop with one another are a major benefit of TGCS programs. "Our member children form very strong friendships here," Zientek says, "especially in our summer camp." Summer Super Stars camp offers academics in the morning and recreational activities, including theater, in the afternoon. "They are inspired by the experience and develop through each other's enthusiasm," Zientek says.

TGCS also offers guidance to parents for handling challenges in their child's classroom. "We don't go into the schools and get involved directly, but if asked, we may offer some advice and encourage parents to work collaboratively with the schools to come up with solutions," Natale says. TGCS is developing a seminar program to help parents deal with their children's social and emotional issues at school and on a daily basis.



For parents of GC's who cannot attend their programs, TGCS directs them to the National Association of Gifted Children (nagc.org), for which there is a New Jersey chapter, and Hoagiesgifted.org. "They are good online resources for information to help parents better understand the specific needs of their child," Natale says.

Self-education is a good first step for parents who think their child might be gifted. "Giftedness is a diagnosis. If you have noticed intensity or distraction in your child, among other signs, you may want to have your child IQ tested," says Zientek.

"It's not a bad thing to dig a little deeper to understand your child," Natale says. "We offer a unique, well-balanced learning environment with an extraordinary opportunity to nurture and encourage our future problem solvers and creative contributors of the world." ••

To learn more about TGCS and gifted children, visit gifted.org.