Behind the Scenes: Rob Catalano

The Developmental Observer relies on many individuals for each issue that goes into production. To launch this feature I would like to introduce Rob Catalano, the Graphic Designer for the Developmental Observer. I put some questions to Rob to learn more about the man and his experiences as part of our team.

Kaye Spence (KS). Can you tell us a little about yourself?
Rob Catalano (RC). I am a graphic designer and I live with my wife and two sons in Lexington Massachusetts. I graduated many years ago from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst with a fine arts degree in sculpture and a minor in graphic design. I've had some adventurous jobs over the years (building bicycles, lobster fishing…) but it's been graphic design that has stayed with me, keeping me grounded.

In the past, I have worked for newspapers, magazines and design agencies but have been on my own now, for over 25 years. I do a lot of print design work; newsletters, annual reports and branding, mainly working with Adobe InDesign, Photoshop and Illustrator. Over the past 5 plus years I have been doing more web design.

KS. What would you say is most important to you?
RC. What's most important to me is certainly my family and friends. My wife and I will be celebrating our 30th wedding anniversary this coming year, and our two sons are now both in college. All together we have a large extended family and many friends. I'm grateful for the life I have, and the people in it.

KS. Do you have a favorite article/feature in the DO?
RC. It's hard not to feel emotional when you read the Family Voices pieces. They are written by families who have experienced intense, life changing experiences related to childbirth, with some of those experiences having happy endings, and some not. But they all praise the care and guidance they received from their NIDCAP teams. Those testimonials are strong endorsements of the great work being done.

KS. How do you see the DO advancing in our technological world?
RC. I've already witnessed the technological progression of much of the work I do. Sandra Kosta and I used to go on "press runs" to sign off on the two-color printing of the first editions as they came off the printing press, ink still wet. Now the newsletter is distributed digitally and accompanies the website and social media pages. Also, every article now has a Digital Object Identifier (DOI) so it can be easily found on the web.

KS. What do you like most about being a creative designer?
RC. I can't picture my life NOT doing creative things. Being a graphic designer satisfies my need to be creative while also providing a source of income, which is important. As they say “do what you love, love what you do”.

What I enjoy most about work is the collaboration with clients; working on an idea or project that they aren't quite able to express themselves. Collaborating with them and bringing it to fruition, together, gives me great satisfaction. It's also very gratifying seeing your work out there in the world.

KS. How did you first become involved with the Developmental Observer?
RC. It was back in the Spring of 2007 and NIDCAP was looking for someone to come up with a new, professional look for their newsletter. I believe Sandra Kosta had initially reached out to some friends of mine, but they were too busy to take on new work and referred her to me. I had already been doing work for Boston Children's and Mass General Hospitals at the time. I showed her some ideas for a design and we proceeded to lay out Vol. 1 No.1. We've been working together since!

KS. We are now up to Volume 17. What do you see as the changes that have occurred over the years?
RC. Most of the changes I have seen over the years are to NIDCAP itself, as an organization. When I started work on the newsletter, I think there were 15 training centers in 5 countries. Now there are about 30 training centers in 18 countries. NIDCAP training and practices seem to have grown from a niche approach to becoming much more mainstream, practiced at hospitals worldwide. All this has been reflected in the writing and contents of the newsletter. It all keeps growing.

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After completing our NICU journey, my focus shifted toward understanding the impact of leadership on shaping organizational culture. My personal experience as both a patient and a parent of a premature baby deepened my connection with NICU practitioners and heightened my interest in the dynamics of these relationships. Long before the crisis of burnout in healthcare providers was as prevalent as it is today, my redefined purpose in life was to deeply care for NICU practitioners. The idea that a NICU parent could provide credible, professional leadership as an equal to physicians, nurses, occupational therapists, and technicians had yet to exist.

Intuition became my second pillar of leadership. In 2012, I began graduate school with the vision of a NICU Parent Leader reshaping health systems. Though an unsubstantiated notion, my commitment to NICU practitioners, coupled with intuition learned from my NICU nurses, evolved over two years during my career transition. Early exploration of the NICU Parent Leader role led to identifying crucial workforce skills, reinforcing the idea that NICU parents could apply pre-NICU experiences to serve maternal-infant health. I had a notion to empower NICU parents with transferable skills, fostering economic self-sufficiency beyond the NICU.

At 14 years old, Giovanni is 5’6” and 125 lbs (170 cm and 56.7 kg). He loves caring for others, a reflection of his own evolving recognition of his lived experience. Giovanni has an extraordinary sense of humor and aspires to become a YouTube star and professional video gamer. He attends an arts academy charter school that cultivates creative thinkers in visual and performing arts with a focus on career and technical education.

As a Ph.D. Candidate in Leadership Studies at Gonzaga University my dissertation explores the credibility of the NICU Parent Leader. As the Founder and Principal Consultant of Courageous Steps, I aspire to exemplify profound listening skills cultivated during my NICU journey, offering valuable insights into this shared pain.

At the heart of our collective journey through the NICU is the commitment of our NICU provider’s practice of listening. NIDCAP trained staff impact babies and families. It was our NICU nurses’ training in NIDCAP that led to my healing and courageous journey. The NIDCAP approach to observing and listening to babies and the parent’s skills and developmental training extends beyond the NICU. For those of us who accept the invitation to serve as a Patient Leader and improve the way neonatal care is delivered, we have an incredible opportunity to pay NIDCAP forward for generations.

References

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It’s easier and faster to reach a greater audience now, and that’s a good thing, but sometimes I miss the tactile experience of seeing and hearing the printing presses running, and holding the finished product.

KS. What have you learned about NIDCAP during your years with the DO?

RC. Everyone I have worked with at NIDCAP over the years has been wonderful, and they are a very caring group.

As we rely more and more on technology, we lose some personal connectiveness and touch. What I have learned about NIDCAP is the practice of medicine, though rooted in science and technology (i.e. all the technology in a neonatal intensive care unit), can be practiced un-scientifically. After laying out many newsletters filled with many abstracts and research articles, I have no doubt the NIDCAP teachings are heavily rooted in science, but what I enjoy seeing is the touching/caring/bonding, the un-scientific things that unite these parents and their children. And they all seem very grateful to have had the experience.

KS. Thank you, Rob, for sharing these insights. I have learned a lot about you and look forward to working with you as the Developmental Observer continues to grow and to hear more about your creative ideas.