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## 'They're like anyone else; they just have special needs'

### Family members talk about caring for the mentally retarded

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**BY SAMANTHA ZARATE - VICTORIA ADVOCATE**

Isaac Garza can't talk like most people, but he can communicate in sign language.

He recently learned to write his name and is working to learn to write other words that most people take for granted.

Garza, 48, is mentally retarded and is cared for by his sister Olimpia and her husband, Fred Sauseda.

He and his sister have always been close, but now the bond is closer.

"He's like my little partner," said Sauseda of her brother.

Their parents raised and cared for him until their deaths. Their mother died in 1994 and their father in 2005. About 18 months before their father died, Garza moved in with Olimpia and Fred.

Garza is among the many special needs and mentally retarded people who are cared for by their families or who live in one of the four group homes operated by Gulf Bend Mental Health and Mental Retardation Center in Victoria and Calhoun counties.

"The group homes are like any other type of housing, and we like them to be private," said Richard Wright with Gulf Bend.

Sauseda and her brother have a daily routine. They attend Mass at Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic Church at 7 a.m. Then it is off to Gulf Bend where he is learning to write and to use flash cards to understand what things look like.

After that they either run errands or go home.

When they get home, he rests for a while, plays basketball and does puzzles with the family.

At times he walks around the block or Town Plaza Mall with his sister to get some exercise.

The walking is especially good because he had knee replacement surgery, which slowed him down, she said.

He also helps his sister with dinner, like warming up the tortillas in the pan and cutting cucumbers for the salad. He also sweeps the floor and takes out the trash.

Sauseda has no regrets about her brother. He doesn't speak verbally, but communicates through sign language and reads Braille.

If he wants something, he'll point to it or if it's too noisy for him he'll cover his ears or close the door to his room. He loves to get and give hugs and kisses on the forehead.

"My mom taught us never to be ashamed of Isaac. She never wanted any of us to baby him. She wanted us to treat him like everyone else," Sauseda said. "You have to have a heart to deal with it."

### GROUP OUTING

Recently Sauseda and Garza took part in the Victoria Association for Citizens With Disabilities end-of-year outing at the Texas Zoo.

From September through May, members participate in bowling, basketball, out-of-town trips and anything else that they can do with their friends.

VACD is a program for people with mental retardation to go out on the town and have fun. And they keep their calendars full. They have a dance on Halloween complete with a costume contest, for Valentine's Day they nominate a queen and a king, and every November they have a party for everyone to celebrate their birthdays with their friends.

From October through December, they bowl, and in January they have an awards banquet where everyone gets an award. They go to the YMCA for a basketball free-throw competition, and they all get medals.

"The members of the program really do appreciate it, and they all enjoy themselves," Sauseda said. "They're like anyone else. They just have special needs," she said.

### **Jason Foster**

During the outing Jason Foster walked with his grandmother Joyce Tipton through the zoo looking at all the animals. Foster's parents, too, have cared for him throughout his life.

At birth, he didn't receive enough oxygen, which damaged his speech. He also had seizures that lead to brain problems.

"You just have a lot of patience with them. Sometimes it's hard," said his mother, Vickie Foster.

While he needs a lot of attention, there are some activities that he does alone including playing with his dog, Rock, and watching wrestling and his favorite wrestler John Cena on television. Cena's photos decorate the walls of his room.

Foster does chores around the house, and likes going to the movies and shopping at Wal-Mart.

He also has a part time job at G & A Electronic Services. For the past five or six years, he has worked on Saturdays taking out trash, helping pick up things and clean up around the shop. He was introduced to the job through a program at Gulf Bend.

One of Foster's biggest pet peeves is people not putting an X on the calendar to mark the previous day. Recently he returned to work after a two-week vacation to find the days had not been Xed off and got upset. So the days got marked off, said his boss, Grey Smith.

"If I have a bad week, forget about it. I look forward to having him, he lightens up my day," Smith said.

### **Chinky Cantu**

Exiquiel "Chinky" Cantu enjoyed his chicken at the recent picnic. Like millions of other people, he loves Elvis. He said he visited Graceland two years ago and, as he touched Elvis' grave, he told him, "I got all your records."

He doesn't have a girlfriend, he said. "They are too much trouble."

Isha McNary, one of the direct care worker from the Wheeler Group Home, said the members really enjoy the outings.

"They can do anything we can do, probably better," McNary said.

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