



The Parent Leadership Project's *Parent Perspective*

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Early Intervention Information and Resources

March/April 2004

A Year of Family Participation in Early Intervention

Planning for Transition: Tips For Parents by Parents

Planning for your child's transition from the Early Intervention system to another service system is essential in ensuring the process is smooth and seamless. Whether moving to the special education system or to community-based services, such as childcare or pre-school, parents often feel apprehensive about the transition process. By providing information, helpful tips from parents and resources, the process of transition can be demystified and parents can be empowered to make decisions for their children.



The Parent Leadership Project gratefully acknowledges the generous contributions by parents and Early Intervention providers in the writing of this article. The response was so great that we will present the tips in two parts. Be sure to check the Calendar and Working Together section to read about upcoming programs on transition.

Tips on Transitioning from EI to the Special Education System

By Erin Ward

Since my three-year-old son just experienced the transition from Early Intervention to the Special Education system, I thought I would take some time to reflect on the process as a parent and offer helpful hints that aided our transition. My son William, besides being a happy, handsome three-year old, is a child who has complex medical and overall developmental needs. He received the array of therapies and services that the Early Intervention system has to offer with much success and the initial idea of having to leave the EI system we came to love was daunting. Yet time moves on, change is inevitable, and it is through this process that we have learned to embrace change and seek out the new educational opportunities that await our son. The following tips helped us create a smooth transition.

Parent-Centered Tips for Transition

- Attend a "Turning Three" Workshop:

This workshop sponsored by the Federation for Children with Special Needs (FCSN) is a great starting point to learn the basics about the transition of services from Early Intervention to the Special Education System or other community resources based on your child's needs.

- Start Early & Make a Personal First Impression:

When your child is 2 ½, and it is anticipated that he or she will qualify for special education services, your EI service coordinator will make a referral to your local school district's Special Education Department. We asked to be directly involved by including a personalized introduction letter. We felt that from the start this helped make the school district aware that we would be active participants in our child's educational planning.

- Request a Pre-Evaluation Meeting:

A pre-evaluation meeting is a great opportunity to meet members of the school community that will be working to determine eligibility and develop your child's IEP. It is an initial meeting where anticipated concerns and priorities can be discussed.

- Stay Organized:

Keep track of all paperwork in one place and stay on top of deadline dates. We created an educational binder and put

pictures on the front to help put a face to the name.

- Be Prepared for the Eligibility/IEP/Placement Meetings:

You know your child best and are a valuable resource in this process. Take some time to put your vision, hopes, and goals for your child in writing before the school meeting. Gather any helpful paperwork to support your educational and healthcare vision; past evaluations, medical records, letter from physician, etc. The "Basic Rights" and "IEP" workshops sponsored by the FCSN can educate you about your child's educational rights.

- Visit Possible Placement Options:

Just as this is a time for the school to evaluate and get to know your child, this is also a time for you to evaluate and get to know the school system. Visit the classrooms, ask questions, and go with

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Resources

“Must See” Resources on Transition

1. The Massachusetts Department of Education: www.doe.mass.edu. Click on special communities to access the link for special education for information on Family Rights (available in 17 languages), the “Guide to IEPs” and other forms.

2. The Federation for Children with Special Needs: The Federation offers many workshops throughout Massachusetts on topics including “Turning 3”, “Basic Rights”, “IEP Development”. Selected workshops are available in Spanish and Portuguese. Download a copy of “A Parent’s Guide to Special Education”, a joint publication by the Federation and the Department of Education. The Federation also maintains a list of advocates. For workshop schedule or for more information, visit the Federation website at www.fcsn.org or call (800) 331-0688.

3. Family TIES of Massachusetts: Family TIES offers “Next Steps”, a series of skill-building workshops for parents on getting records organized, as parents get ready to move beyond Early Intervention services. They also produce a Directory of Resources, which is available on their website at www.massfamilyties.org or by calling (800) 905-TIES.

4. MASSPAC: www.masspac.org. The Massachusetts Association of Special Education Parent Advisory Councils operates this website which contains great information on resources, laws and regulations, and a list of special education advocates.

5. Wrightslaw books, seminars and trainings: www.wrightslaw.com. Attorney Peter Wright and his wife, Psychologist Pamela Wright have written several books on the topic of

special education including “Wrightslaw: Special Education Law.” The website contains information on their publications, as well as seminar and trainings.

6. MASSTART: This program of the Department of Public Health can assist with children who utilize medical technology in the school setting. Email division.shn@state.ma.us

7. www.nectac.org– The National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center website contains information on IDEA, Section 619 (pre-school) and many publications, also available in Spanish.

8. <http://paidos.rediris.es/needirectorio/>– Necesidades Educativas Especiales en Internet is an all Spanish website that provides information on special education and links to other disability websites written in Spanish.

The “Parent Connection” for families with deaf and hard of hearing children

Parents of deaf and hard of hearing children are invited to connect with others through the *Parent Connection*. An organization which supports parents and encourages a positive outlook on family interaction, mainstream education and auditory oral/verbal communication, the *Parent Connection* produces a quarterly newsletter with articles about topics of interest, research and resources. The group also organizes several informative parent meetings and family gatherings each year.

On March 28th from 2:00 to 4:30 pm, the *Parent Connection* will feature a Round Table Discussion for Parents at the Four Points Sheraton Hotel in Revere. Topics will include Learning Disabilities - discuss-

ing learning differences and challenges in coping with deafness and learning disabilities, IEPs-discussing goals, vision, parent concerns and accommodation, FM systems-including trouble-shooting and other ideas, Social and Emotional well-being in and outside the classroom, and Behavioral/ADHD issues. Parents will have the opportunity to choose three topics, rotating tables every thirty minutes. There is no charge for this meeting although donations are welcome. To register, please contact Nancy Williams at (781) 334-6828 or email wills0930@comcast.net.

For more information about the *Parent Connection*, call Joanne Travers at (978) 887-2157 or email traversjo@comcast.net.

Research Study Opportunity-NIH Autism Research Center of Excellence at Boston University Seeking Toddlers with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Asperger Syndrome

Do you have a child with an autism spectrum disorder? Do you want to learn more about your child? The Child and Family Project is looking for families with toddlers who have autism spectrum disorders to participate in an exciting new research project at Boston University. The Child and Family Project is a five-year ongoing study funded by the National Institutes of Health at the Boston University School of Medicine.

Children ages 18- to 33-months diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder, including autism, PDD-NOS or Asperger syndrome are invited to participate. Families will receive diagnostic and developmental reports on their children each year. Children will receive a small gift. The goals of this project include:



- Investigating the development of young children with autism spectrum disorders
- Exploring the impact of having a child with autism on families
-

For more information contact Gretchen Shuman at 617-414-2358 or gshuman@bu.edu. Visit www.bu.edu/autism.

Parent Leadership in the Spotlight

The Story of Beth Pond... in her own words

Life was busy for our family, having three boys in three years. And life became even more complicated when two of our sons were diagnosed with a rare genetic disorder - Hypohydrotic Ectodermal Dysplasia (HED). Children with HED are born without sweat glands. HED also affects dental development. Philip and Nolan only have four teeth, which caused problems and delays with their speech development. We first learned about Early Intervention (EI) from our pediatrician. Ultimately, we found our way to the Wachusett EI program.

Finding the Parent Leadership Project

During their first year in Early Intervention, I was too busy to get involved with any other activities. After we settled into a routine with Philip and Nolan, and our oldest son, Dylan began pre-school, I began to explore the flyers that were posted in the parents room of our EI program and information that was in *Parent Perspective* newsletters. In time, I knew that it would be necessary for me to advocate for my boys in many situations, so it was time to educate myself for life beyond EI. I found the Parent Leadership Project. It had actually been looking for me too! The *Parent Perspective* newsletter and the flyers probably had been there for the last year, but I never noticed them because I was too busy coming to terms with my boys' disability, and our immediate needs.

Around that same time, our Parent Liaison from our EI program came for a home visit. I told her that I wanted to get more involved and asked how I could be more connected with other parents and also help our EI program. She told me that the current Parent Contact for the program was graduating and that would be a good way for me to get more connected. As Parent Contact for the next year, I had an opportunity to attend the annual Massachusetts Early Intervention Consortium conference (MEIC) with all expenses paid. I also applied for and received a Hausslein Early Intervention Parent Leadership award, which funded a two-part parenting workshop. Training in EI Program Re-certification followed and I became part of the team that re-certifies Early Intervention programs. I also became a parent co-presenter for the Family TIES "Next Step" series, which are skill-building workshops for families with children who have special needs.

Overcoming New Challenges

My boys are doing great. But we've had a few bumps along the way. Dylan, my oldest, had been diagnosed with a learning disability a few years ago; Philip was diagnosed with the same disability this year. It prompted me to take the Special Education Consultation Training offered by the Federation for Children with Special Needs— another journey! The boys are doing well in school and have many friends. Nolan has been playing hockey for four years. It's a great sport to play when you don't have sweat glands! Philip plays soccer – not the best sport for his lack of sweat glands but perfect for his energy. They both

play baseball. The only sports they're not allowed to play are football – too much hot-and-heavy equipment. Baseball and soccer season start off cool then move into warmer days. I bring a big cooler filled with bottled water, wet hats and shirts, spray bottles, squirt bottles, and always an umbrella and fan. The team loves us – we share everything with them! Everyone wants to be on the boys' team and in the same classroom at school because they have air conditioning.

Taking it to the State House - the Senate Bill

About four years ago, I decided to take action against my insurance company, which refused to pay for my sons' dental visits claiming the services were cosmetic in nature. Children with HED have many dental problems. When a child has only four teeth, dentures and implants are not cosmetic. It is a matter of survival. I did the math and estimated that, by the time they were both 18, my out-of-pocket dental expenses would total \$100,000 – maybe more. I approached my state senator for help and we lobbied. The Bill would mandate HMOs in Massachusetts to cover restorative dental work for kids with HED because the dental needs are a direct result of a birth defect. I have testified three times on Beacon Hill. The bill has died twice. Currently, it's stuck in the Joint Committee on Insurance. There are only 70 families affected by this disorder in Massachusetts, and only about five of them are helping in the cause. It may take years to accomplish this goal, but I want my children to get the care they need. The fight is to the finish.

Lessons Learned --the Importance of Being Involved

I think that getting involved with the Parent Leadership Project (PLP) was very important. It was my first link to becoming a parent leader. To get connected to other parents, workshops and groups made it so much easier to be connected to my community and state resources. Being with other parents created an opportunity to help start a special needs support group. Workshops allowed me to learn about my children's needs. I developed my advocacy skills with Parent Leadership Project opportunities and have built on them ever since. I have gone on to become a parent leader for the Federation for Children with Special Needs and Family Ties of Massachusetts. I was a parent leader for Massachusetts Family Voices. It has empowered me to go to the Statehouse and speak up for my children's rights. No one can speak for children better than their parents. However, we need to learn advocacy skills in order to make our voices heard. The skills I learned (and continue to learn) came from my involvement with the PLP and the Federation and are invaluable.

(Continued from page 1)
 your gut instincts as a parent.

- **Be Resourceful:**
 Ask for assistance through this process. Your EI therapists and service coordinators are great supports. Ask for names and numbers of parents within your local school district who have already gone through this transition. When needed, seek out an educational advocate who is experienced with this process.
- **Healthcare Advocates:**
 For children with complex medical needs, it important to consult with professionals who are experienced with integrating health care needs into the school system. Request that your child's physician write a letter that includes the child's needs and physician recommendations. Contact MASSSTART. Our regional coordinator from MASSSTART was instrumental in communicating our son's healthcare needs to the school system and ensuring implementation of a comprehensive healthcare plan.
- **Be Open to the Process:**
 This transition can be very intense and stressful because as a parent you want to ensure the very best for your child. Be open to the process. Developing a positive working relationship with the school will allow open communication to navigate your way. Be open to the idea of disagreement, but be committed as a team to work towards resolution.

Child-centered Tips for Transition:

- **Expose your child to group experiences:**
 Our son had the opportunity to participate in a playgroup experience through the EI program at the Professional Center for Child Development. It was a great opportunity for him to be introduced to peer play, learn class routines, de-sensitize to group sounds, and experience detachment from parents for short periods of time. It was also a wonderful way for us as parents to evaluate and explore his potential and pos-

sible educational needs and goals.

- **Visit the new classroom and teacher:**
 Arrange to visit the new classroom and spend some time with the teacher before the start date.
- **Talk about Pre-School:**
 Children, even at three, notice change. Talk with them about their new experiences to come and even look for books about starting "school" to share with them.
- **Introduce your child to the class:**
 We wanted to help introduce Will to his new class by creating a book about him to be shared his first day at school. We included pictures and personal information about typical things he likes to do, as well as medical equipment with which other children may be unfamiliar.
- **Celebrate your child's EI experience:**
 As you look forward to new experiences, take some time to find special ways of saying thanks to your EI Therapists & service coordinators. This helps to bring a sense of closure. Celebrate the success and experiences EI has brought your child.



Remember that as a parent you can be the number one advocate for your child. The more you learn about the transition process the better equipped you will be to anticipate the upcoming changes and to be an active participant in the planning. Turning three is the beginning of your family's experience with the special education system. Resolve to yourself that it will be an ever-changing and evolving process throughout your child's educational career. Through it all, by keeping your child at the center of all decisions, the outcome will be a success.

William received EI services at the Professional Center for Child Development in Andover, where Erin served as Parent Contact for two years.

What's New with Family TIES by Mary Castro Aten

Spring will be a busy season for the staff of Family TIES of Massachusetts, gearing up for presentations of the **Next Steps: Let's Get Organized** series of workshops. Family TIES has added four associates to meet the demand for workshops: Beth Pond, Anne Ferioli, Sandra Fee, and Sara Diaz. Sessions are scheduled in Boston, Chatham, and at the Perkins School for the Blind Parent's Group in late March. In April, workshops are scheduled in Danvers and Milford, as well as in Worcester in May. If you would like details or to support an offering at your local EI program or in your community, please contact your Family TIES regional coordinator or the program director.

Family TIES staff is also pleased to support upcoming Spring health fairs, in Mattapan and in the Western Region with the Consortium for Children with Special Needs, both on April 15th, as well as Sickle Cell Education

Day at Children's Hospital in Boston on May 15th.

Hot off the presses...Family TIES will release the 7th Edition of its Resource Directory for Families of Children with Special Needs. Many new resource programs have been added. The Directory is also available on our website -- www.massfamilyties.org. To provide the most current information, we will update the electronic version monthly. Please contact us if you have a new resource to share.

The Parent-to-Parent program continues to match families who are seeking a personal connection with an experienced parent whose child has similar concerns. To date, those matches have involved a wide variety of medical diagnoses. We plan to host a Support Parent Training Program later this Spring. If you would like to know more about

becoming a Support Parent, or if you would like to be matched with an experienced parent, please contact Joanne at (800) 905-TIES or (781) 774-6740, or via e-mail: Joanne.spencer@state.ma.us.

Family TIES Regional Coordinators:

- Boston: Roxanne Hoke-Chandler (617) 541-2875
- Southeast: Mary Castro Aten, Director (781) 774-6736
- Metrowest: Lisa Mayer (781) 774-6602
- Central: Barbara Donati (508) 792-7880 Ext. 2337
- Northeast: Kathy Morin (978) 851-7261 Ext. 4018
- Western: Mary Castro Aten, Director (781) 774-6736
- Toll-free: (800) 905-TIES

CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOPS

March 31- **Boardmaker for Beginners**, 9:00 am-noon, Easter Seals, 484 Main Street, Worcester. This workshop features a comprehensive presentation of *Boardmaker* software. For more information, call Thao Duong at (800) 922-8290 x 328 or visit www.EasterSealsMA.org. Note: Advanced Boardmaker class will be held from 1:00-4:00 pm.

March 31-**Basic Rights Workshop**, 6:30-8:30 pm, Chicopee. The Federation for Children with Special Needs presents this course that covers basic information about state and federal laws to assist parents in planning, decision-making and monitoring of their child's special education services. For more information on location or to register, call (800) 331-0688 or online at register@fcsn.org. Other dates/locations: 4/1- Millis, 7:00-9:00 pm; 4/2- Worcester; 4/5-Sherborn, 9:00-11:00; 4/5-Northampton, 6:30-8:30 pm. See the Federation website for full schedule.

April 1-3, **The 2004 UCP Annual Conference, "Exploring Revolutionary Ideas"**, Westin Copley Place Hotel Boston. For more information about the annual conference for United Cerebral Palsy, visit www.ucp.org.

April 5-**Turning 3 Workshop**, Kennedy-Donovan Center-New Bedford. The Federation for Children with Special Needs presents this free workshop that addresses the issue of transition from Early Intervention to the Special Education system when a child turns three. For more information call (800) 331-0688 or visit www.fcsn.org.

April 7th & 14, "**Say it with Pictures! Using Visual Strategies to Enhance Communication**", EMARC, 20 Gould Street, Reading. This presentation will include information about how to enhance children's communication skills through the use of environmental cues, pictures and programs. For more information, contact Kerry Mahoney at (781) 942-4888 ext. 4015.

April 8-Building a Community: An Orientation to Massachusetts Early Intervention—Part 1, Taunton Area Early Intervention Program, 9:30 am-3:30 pm. Other dates and locations: March 4- McCormack Building, One Ashburton Place, 21st floor, Boston. Learn

about core values and the evolution of the EI system, operational standards, state and federal laws. Parents attend for free and a stipend is available for parent participants. For more information call (800) 331-0688 or visit www.eitrainingcenter.org. Other dates/locations: May 6, Department of Public Health, West Boylston

April 27th - "**An Evening with Stephen Shore & Stephanie Sachs**", 7:00 pm, The Holiday Inn-Mansfield/Foxborough. The National Alliance for Autism Research presents Mr. Shore and Ms. Sachs, two adults living with and discussing their collective experiences on the Autism Spectrum. For more information, please call (888) 627-NAAR (6227) or email Sammi L. Robertson at sammirobertson@comcast.net or Kim Channin Karvelas at kkarvelas@comcast.net. Visit NAAR's website at www.autism.org for information about other upcoming events.

April 28th- "**How to Work with the Medical Department in your Child's School**", 7:00 – 9:30 pm, Courtyard Marriott, 10 Campanelli Drive, Andover. Family Partnerships of the Northeast presents Stephanie Porter, MSN, RN, from the MASSTART Program about how to generate a Health Care Plan which addresses your child's medical needs while attending school. For more information, contact Eileen Lee at (978) 738-0070 or email FFE3@aol.com.

April 29-May 1, **AUTISM UPDATE 2004**, Sturbridge Host Hotel, Sturbridge. Sponsored by the Doug Flutie, Jr. Foundation for Autism and Children Making Strides, the focus of this year's conference is educating children with autism spectrum disorders. Workshop topics range from developing speech and social skills to vision therapy and addressing the MCAS dilemma. Parent scholarships are available to any parent of an autistic child (one per family), and are limited, based on early registration. For more information call Children Making Strides at (508) 759-6754.

May 7- **Positive Connections: Communication Among Medically Complex Children and their Families, and Those Who Care for Them**, 8:00 am – 4:00 pm, Simmons College, Boston, MA. The Second Annual Conference for CarePoints, a parent/professional partnership that works to improve and maxi-

mize care for medically complex children and their families. Parents and professional will present workshops to exchange ideas on a range of communication challenges and opportunities. Parents attend for free if registered before April 22nd; afterwards, registration is \$80. For more information visit www.carepoints.org

May 14- **AUTISM 2004**, 8:00 am-4:30 pm, Four Points Sheraton, 420 Totten Pond Road, Waltham. Parents of Autistic Children (POAC) presents this conference which features a presentation by Margaret Bauman, MD on Recent Trends in Autism Research, among other workshops. For more information, email donna@poac.net

...Save the date...Save the date...

TAKING CARE OF OUR CHILDREN ...TAKING CARE OF OURSELVES

21st Annual
New England Regional Seminar



Parents • Professionals • Children

May 1, 2004
8:15 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

At The Perkins School for the Blind
175 North Beacon Street
Watertown, MA 02472

Presented by:
The New England Regional Seminar for
Families of Children with Visual Impairments
Ages 0-7

with funding provided by
The Edna L. Alizio Fund for
Parent Conferences
and
The Hilton/Perkins Program
For more information, contact Tom Miller
at 617-972-7331 or by email at
preschoolservices@perkins.org

For on-going support group information in your area call Family TIES at (800) 905-TIES

WORKING TOGETHER

BOSTON NEWS by Hyacinth Irving

Thom/Boston Metro Early Intervention Program (Boston Metro EIP) recently sponsored two workshops on transition-one on "Turning 3" and the other on the "IEP Process". Roxanne Chandler of Family TIES co-presented the workshops which were attended by twenty parents. Child care was provided by the **Boston Metro**.

Now that spring is in the air, **Boston Metro EIP** will start an aquatic parent-child motor group, known as the "tadpoles". The group will meet at a local pool beginning in mid-April. The "tadpoles" will be swimming in style, dressed in tiny wet suits that were purchased through a grant received by the program.

Bay Cove Early Intervention Program (Bay Cove EIP) will present a "Turning 3" Workshop presented by Carolyn Kain on April 14th. Carolyn is a former **Bay Cove** parent who completed the Federation for Children with Special Needs Parent Consultants training. She is pleased to return to **Bay Cove** as a presenter of this workshop to help other families.

METROWEST NEWS by Jocelyn Woog

Jewish Family & Children Services Early Intervention Program (JF&CS EIP) in collaboration with **Riverside Early Intervention Programs (Riverside EIPs)** will offer families from the 14 towns they serve, an opportunity to have lunch with special education personnel from their towns. 14 different dates have been selected for each of the towns and invitations have been mailed to families who have children who are turning three during the next year. The luncheons and childcare are funded through a Hausslein Early Intervention Parent Leadership Award which was awarded to **JF&CS EIP**.

The Thom/Charles River Early Intervention Program (Thom/Charles River EIP) will offer their semi-annual Chapter 766 Training-Special Education Training on March 16th. Clinical Coordinator Judy Sleeper is arranging Morning Coffee at the town pre-schools in the communities served by **Thom/Charles River EIP**. Parents will have the opportunity to tour the program and meet key staff.

Cambridge-Somerville Early Intervention Program (CSEI EIP) is pleased to welcome new parent contact Gina Hahn! The PAC is excited to announce that a six-session Yoga for Children with Special Needs class will begin on March 20th. Four of the sessions will focus on teaching parents yoga techniques and the final two will bring parents and children together to develop a practice that they can continue at home.

NORTHEAST NEWS by Wendy Lemire

The Pentucket Area Early Intervention Program will present a three part Training on Special Education Regulations. All sessions will meet from 7:00 to 8:30 at 320 Main Street in West

Newbury. On March 24th the topic is Special Education: A discussion of the law, your rights and the process. The Individual Education Plan (IEP) is the topic on March 31 and on April 7th, parents will have the opportunity to meet a local school representative who will present an overview of the school's role during transition, as well as the role of the Parent Advisory Council and parent involvement in the Special Education system. For more information or to register, please call (978) 363-5553.

Welcome to new Parent Contact, Carla Johnson at the **Thom/Ann Sullivan Early Program in Lowell**.

The Criterion-Medford Early Intervention program (Criterion-Medford, formally Boston-Regional-Medford) has started a new play group with the Medford Family Network this winter. The "Tumbling Tots" group focuses on movement and is facilitated by a physical therapist. Criterion-Medford will also host a "Spring Fling" party for families on March 19th at the Grace Episcopal Church in Medford to welcome the spring season!

SOUTHEAST NEWS by Timothy Pelletier

The Taunton Area Early Intervention Program (Taunton Area EIP) is co-sponsoring a Transition Resource Night at Barnum School in Taunton. This is a collaboration among the eight area school districts that are served by **Taunton Area EIP**, Early Head Start, Head Start and the Young Parents Program. Families will have the opportunity to meet with the Special Education representatives from their town. There will also be resources for parents who are not transitioning to special education services, such as Head Start, Parent Child Home Program, and child care, among others.

The Cape & Islands Early Intervention Program (Cape & Islands EIP) sponsored a parent and staff training with Philip Schweigert, M.Ed. from the Oregon Health and Science University on March 9th. The workshop, "Communication Strategies for Children with Severe and Multiple Disabilities," focused on Pre-Symbolic Communication and Tangible Symbol Systems. The workshop included participants from other EI programs, Head Start and local agencies in addition to the **Cape & Islands** parents and staff. Mr. Schweigert has done research in homes and schools for over 20 years in assessment, instruction and monitoring strategies for communication by children with severe and multiple disabilities. He and his associate, Charity Rowland, PhD have had their work published and made done presentations throughout the United States. Five EI staff members are participating in a grant-funded internship with Mr. Schweigert, along with three families who have agreed to incorporate the strategies into their routines.

Kennedy-Donovan Center- New Bedford Early Intervention Program (KDC-New Bedford EIP) participated in the Wareham Community Partnerships for Children's celebration of Dr.

FAMILY & EI PROGRAM COLLABORATION

Seuss's 100th birthday on March 2. **KDC-New Bedford** provided an activity related to the book, *Mr. Brown Can Moo, Can You?* Over 240 children attended with their parents.

KDC-New Bedford will also be participating in the Tri-Town Early Childhood Fair at Sippican School in Marion on March 27 from 10 a.m. to noon. The theme of the day is "Look What We Can Do!" and the activity will be planting flower seeds. On March 24, the program will be participating in the PACE Head Start Health and Family Resource Fair at the Head Start building on Madison Street in New Bedford from 10am to 2pm.

In January, the **Kennedy-Donovan Early Intervention Program-Attleboro (KDC-Attleboro)** held a Red Cross CPR certification class for families at the Center, presented by a local Red Cross instructor. On March 18th, the program and PAC have scheduled a workshop on the topics SSI, financial planning, legal planning including wills and trusts, guardianship and more to be presented by Rich Harwood, CLU. In April, the **KDC-Attleboro** will hold its' 16th Annual Spaghetti Dinner, hosted by the North Attleboro Knights of Columbus. The Knights prepare and serve dinner and a local musician performs for the children after dinner all for the benefit for **KDC-Attleboro**. Families always have a wonderful time at this annual event.

On April 14, **KDC-Attleboro** will present "Transition Night" for families whose children are two-and-a-half years old and older, who will transition into the public school system. Tammy Cahill, MS, CCC-SLP, early intervention transition coordinator, will present this event. Tammy will discuss the transition process and procedures, timelines, and community resources for family support and advocacy. School representatives are also invited.

The **Greater Fall River Early Intervention Program (Greater Fall River EIP)** is pleased to announce that the recent Valentine's Day Dance, held in collaboration with the local Knight's of Columbus, was a great success. The program raised about \$1,000, which will be used for specialized equipment and program supplies. Special thanks go out to the Knights of Columbus and to all who attended.

The PAC will be meeting in March, April and on May 26. A CPR certification class will be featured (space is limited). Please contact the program at (508) 675-5778 for information and details.

The Parent-to-Parent Down Syndrome Support Group meets the second Wednesday of the month at the **Greater Fall River EIP** from 9:00 –10:30 am. Families with children of all ages are welcome. Please call Kelly at (508) 636-2712, for more information. At the May meeting, Lisa Chew of the **Greater Fall River EIP** will discuss communication issues for children with Down Syndrome, including a basic course in sign lan-

guage.

WESTERN NEWS by Faith Piaggi

The **Pediatric Development Center in Pittsfield (PDC)** held a two day training for the newly hired SSP Home Program Therapists recently. A former **PDC** parent, Jennie, presented to the staff about her experiences with raising her son with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder. Jennie was able to share her perspective as a parent using **PDC** therapists in her home on a regular basis. She created a wonderful visual tool, a large poster entitled: "Love, Laughter & Learning!" which displayed many photographs of her son working with his therapists in the home and at the **PDC STAR** group he attended before he turned three. Jennie also shared the importance of home therapists working closely and cooperatively with each family. It was an inspiring and sensitive presentation, thanks to Jennie's positive energy and knowledge.

The **Springfield Infant Toddler Early Intervention program (Springfield Infant Toddler EIP)** held a workshop in January about biting issues in toddlers called "Reality Bites". Over 100 people attended including EI providers, staff and families.

On April 14, 28 and May 5, the **Springfield Infant Toddler EIP** will present sign language classes for parents of children in EI. The classes are funded through a Hausslein Early Intervention Parent Leadership Award. In addition to the sign language training, parents will receive a board book for their children, a pocket dictionary of sign and a three tape series on sign language.

The Coalition for Respite Across the Lifespan presented a workshop in March about the needs of families for respite care. A panel of parents including EI graduates told about their struggles in finding adequate care for their children with special health needs.

Save the dates for these two upcoming events... On June 4th, the Annual Western Regional EI Conference entitled "Good Grief" will be held. The statewide Regional Consultation Program (RCP) conference is scheduled on June 5th. For more information on both of these events, contact Karen Cassidy at (413) 783-5500 ext. 16.

Spring has Sprung!



THE PARENT LEADERSHIP PROJECT

The Parent Leadership Project was created to support parents whose children receive early intervention services. The Project's main goal is to promote lifetime advocacy, leadership skills and the development of an informed parent constituency, which will encourage early intervention services to be increasingly family centered. The Project is a parent driven endeavor, which continually seeks family involvement and input regarding the needs of families enrolled in Early Intervention and is implemented by parents whose own children have received EI services. The Project staff consists of a statewide director, a communications specialist, an EI program re-certification parent coordinator and six regional coordinators. Please feel free to contact any of them with your thoughts, suggestions, and concerns.

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The Early Intervention Parent Leadership Project NEWS

Opportunity Knocks

"Grow Your Skills" at the MEIC Conference, May 12 & 13

Parent Contacts ...it's time to *spring* into action! The Parent Leadership Project will sponsor one Parent Contact from each Early Intervention program to attend the 25th annual Massachusetts Early Intervention Consortium Conference (MEIC), "Resiliency: Children Families and Early Intervention", on May 12 and 13th at the Best Western Hotel, Marlborough, Massachusetts.

The MEIC conference is a great opportunity to "grow your skills" - learn about early childhood issues and resources and cultivate your knowledge about the many opportunities for parent participation in the Early Intervention system. Through generous funding by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Parent Contacts can attend this conference for free. This includes the conference registration fee, overnight hotel accommodation (double occupancy only), daily continental breakfast and lunch. The Parent Leadership Project will also host a Parent Networking Dinner on the first night of the conference so that parents will have the opportunity to meet and share information.

Robert Brooks, PhD. will deliver the keynote presentation entitled "Nurturing Resilience in our Children and Ourselves: The Power of Mindsets". To mark the silver anniversary of the Consortium, there will be a special presentation of the play "The Giving Tree" by the New England Theater for the Deaf.

Reap the benefits of this wonderful parent participation opportunity. Call the Parent Leadership Project at (877) 35-EI-PLP to learn if your program has a Parent Contact.

Help us grow...if you enjoyed the *Parent Perspective Newsletter*, share it with a friend so that we can reach more parents.

NEXT DEADLINE: We welcome your input and suggestions for resources and articles. The next deadline is **May 20th**. Please contact your regional coordinator or the email the newsletter editor at Jocelyn.Woog@state.ma.us.

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