Do’s and Don’ts for Teacher-Advocates (Part Two)

By Robert K. Crabtree, Esquire

Teachers are expected to know their students; to collect and organize data; and to communicate with parents and professionals about each student’s needs. Caring teachers who perform these tasks with integrity, objectivity, and respect will not only teach well but also advocate effectively for students without risking their job.

I asked several excellent teachers and consultants to suggest do’s and don’ts for teachers who want to act in students’ best interests amidst the pressures of underfunded school systems, defensive administrators, and parents who worry their students are not receiving all the services they need. Their suggestions appear below.

1) **Always maintain a professional demeanor**, even when provoked by an administrator, parent or child. In the winter 2011 issue of Newsline (http://fcsn.org/newsline/v31n3/teacher_advocates.php), I noted that even if a teacher believes he was dismissed for an invalid reason, such as advocating for a student with special needs, the district can claim a permissible reason for the dismissal the teacher loses. As one teacher stated: “passion yes; emotion no.”

Visions of Community 2011

On Saturday, March 12, 2011, the Federation for Children with Special Needs hosted its annual **Visions of Community** conference at the Seaport World Trade Center in Boston. All three levels of the Center were humming with activity, as more than 800 parents, professionals, presenters, state agency partners, exhibitors, children and their childcare attendants, and the Federation staff and Board of Directors enjoyed this day-long event. 

Exhibitor Jessica Vohs with keynote speaker and author of Knowing Jesse, Marianne Leone

**Visions of Community 2011**

**Do’s and Don’ts for Teacher-Advocates**

**e-Newsline**


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**Federation Staff Updates…**

*The PTI Welcomes New Director Julie Sinclair*

On April 4, 2011, Julie Sinclair began work as the Director of the Federation’s Parent Training and Information (PTI) Project. The Federation is pleased to have Julie on board in this capacity. While this is a new position for her, she is very familiar with the work of the PTI. For the previous 11 years, Julie has directed the Western Massachusetts PTI. In that capacity, she enhanced and extended the Federation’s services to that region of the state. She has also functioned as the statewide training director and more recently was appointed as the Federation’s designee to the State Advisory Council on Special Education at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. In all these ways and more, Julie has demonstrated her leadership skills, commitment to the Federation, and her passion for families. She is looking forward to her new leadership role.

As PTI Director, Julie will work to support families throughout the Commonwealth by enhancing their knowledge of special education law and process, and by expanding and revitalizing the PTI’s relationships with state and national education stakeholder organizations. She looks forward to listening to and learning from families, and to helping them build collaboration to get the best education possible for children with special needs, because as Marian Wright Edelman reminds us, “If we don’t stand up for children, then we don’t stand for much.”

Julie is the parent of three young adults, one of whom has special needs; she continues to teach and surprise her each day. The holder of a dual degree in Special Education and Regular Education from Seattle Pacific University, for over thirty years Julie has taught school and worked with various agencies that support individuals with developmental differences. Contact Julie by phone at 617-236-7210 or e-mail Sinclair@fcsn.org. Learn more about the PTI at www.fcsn.org/pti.

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*MassCARE Welcomes New Project Coordinator Corin Landrum*

The MassCARE program at the Federation serves women and families infected/affected with HIV/AIDS at five sites across the state. Each MassCARE clinical site provides medical and case management services. The MassCare teams include a peer mentor who is responsive to the needs of consumers in their community. The MassCARE Coordinator at the Federation is responsible for providing support and training for the peer mentors, providing support and education to consumers, and for promoting a peer network. The Coordinator also implements statewide education programs and events on topics chosen by consumers.

The Federation is delighted to announce that Corin Landrum is the new MassCARE Coordinator for Women and Families. Corin has extensive experience working with the HIV/AIDS community. Most recently, she provided case management services to individuals and families with HIV/AIDS at Roxbury Comprehensive Services. Prior to that, she worked in New York City as a case manager for individuals with HIV/AIDS, before becoming an administrative site supervisor.

Corin has experience providing training and education on topics of interest to women with HIV and their families, including stigma and disclosure of HIV. She is on the Healing Our Community Collaborative and is a member of their Women, Health Education, and Leadership team. In addition, she is a member of the Planning Council for Ryan White at the Boston Public Health Commission.

For more information about the MassCARE project, contact Corin at 800-331-0688, ext. 311, e-mail clandrum@fcsn.org, or visit http://fcsn.org/masscare.php.
In the last Newsline, I spoke about the urgent need to maintain state funding for Special Education. The Federation, along with other key organizations including advocacy organizations, private special education schools, school committees, superintendents and administrators of special education associations formed a coalition for this very purpose. The Coalition spoke at a briefing at the State House about the importance of providing a high quality education for all students, including those with special needs. We requested that the Legislature restore the funding for Special Education to the same level as the budget in 2009. I am pleased to tell you that the House has recommended an increase of $80 million, nearly a full restoration of funding, to ensure students with special needs receive appropriate school services.

We are not the only state facing this type of financial shortfall. Several other states chose not to restore previous funding levels for students with special needs. Instead, they sought waivers from the Federal government to allow them to underfund their programs next year. The Federal law, IDEA, requires states to observe the “Maintenance of Effort” requirement, which essentially ensures that state funding cannot be reduced below the previous year’s level. However, another provision allows states to receive a waiver if there is a “precipitous” reduction in revenue. Clearly the impact of the recession caused this to occur for many states. Fortunately, Massachusetts is restoring significant funding to offset these costs under the “Circuit Breaker” program.

The budget now goes to the Senate. We are hopeful they will follow the lead of their legislative counterparts and restore all of the $230 million. We have a proud tradition in Massachusetts as pioneers in serving students with special needs. We want to thank our state leaders for ensuring that all our students are well served. Congratulate your legislators for doing the right thing!

Best wishes,

Rich Robison
Executive Director

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Do’s and Don’ts for Teacher-Advocates (Part Two) (continued from page 1)

2) **Know your student.**

   a. Read the student’s IEP. (Federal regulations indicate: “The child’s IEP [must be] accessible to each regular education teacher, special education teacher, related services provider, and any other service provider who is responsible for its implementation.” 34 C.F.R. § 300.323(d).)

   b. Educate yourself about the student’s disability-related needs and effective ways to address them. IDEA requires the use of teaching approaches that are, to the extent practicable, based on peer-reviewed research.

   c. Monitor the student’s social/ emotional/behavioral performance, which is one component of effective progress under Massachusetts’ special education regulations. Early services for students with such needs can be critical. Also, MA anti-bullying laws require IEP Teams to address the needs of students who are vulnerable to bullying because of their disabilities.

   d. Don’t try to diagnose a student yourself. Seek evaluations whenever a serious question arises. Don’t proclaim, for example, that a child has ADHD; instead, keep objective records of distracting or distracted behavior and refer the student for evaluation.

3) **DOCUMENT!** Keep a journal of meetings—who participated, what was said, what was agreed. Note that a teacher’s personal notes are not “student records” which can be obtained on parental request (603 CMR 23.04), but they may be discoverable during litigation.

   a. Be objective; avoid inflammatory comments in your notes. Write honest progress reports; don’t bend facts or ignore problems, regardless of pressure from administrators or a wish to sugar-coat the truth.

   b. List the key areas of a student’s performance and use objective data to record progress. Keep a portfolio of dated work samples and, if relevant, examples of behavior and social skill development. This type of approach, which a “Response to Intervention (RTI)” protocol requires for certain literacy skills, could document many areas of a student’s performance.

4) **Teach by the book!** Don’t modify a student’s assignments or your assessments of his work unless it’s stated on the IEP. Reducing workloads or giving unearned grades merely masks the effects of a disability and may deny the student the help he needs.

5) **Communicate directly and honestly.** Describe what you see. Avoid broad opinions. Be specific about objectively verifiable behaviors: “Suzy listens well during oral reading of a story, but only completes independent work successfully 1-2 times per week,” rather than, “Suzy’s not literate.”

   a. If the time of day or day of the week significantly affects the student’s performance, record it. With experience, as an educator you can and should state your opinions regarding what approaches seem to work. (Stay current in the field and look for peer-reviewed research-based approaches, as IDEA requires.)

   b. With parents, be direct and factual. Solicit information about the student’s homework completion and behavior at home. Don’t give parents any reason to distrust you.

   c. No comment is really “off the record.” If you say that a student needs more services than she can receive within the school district, assume that you will be quoted, even if the parent would like to protect you. When a dispute is brewing, state your opinions clearly to school administrators and attorneys. The attorney needs to assess the case based on the testimony of key witnesses like teachers.

   d. Don’t surprise your Team Chairperson with your opinions and facts at a Team meeting; let her know in advance and, perhaps, invite her to observe the student.

   e. Don’t withhold a recommendation because you think that the district lacks resources. Cost is not a permissible consideration under IDEA; rather, the Team must determine what a student needs to make meaningful progress.

6) **Team up with similarly minded professionals.** Share information about a student with your colleagues and join in building a record that will make a difference. A district is far more likely to provide services when a group of professionals speaks as one than when a single teacher speaks alone.

7) **When working with administrators assume a common goal** - the best interests of the student. If you meet resistance, remain courteous and document your conversations. If an administrator admonishes you for advocating services, you might ask him to write a note for your personnel file to assist with your professional development. You will likely never see any such note and that will be the end of the discussion.

8) **Be understanding about anxious parents!** Realize that they may distrust the school because of prior interactions with administrators and may not understand that teachers can be their greatest allies in support of their child.

Finally, keep faith with your highest professional goals and with the kids. With a little luck, you will make a huge difference for the students who most need you!

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Bob Crabtree is a partner at Kotin, Crabtree, and Strong, LLP, a general practice law firm in Boston, MA. He concentrates in special education and disability law.
“It takes a village...” For many families today, this statement is more meaningful than ever. Recession and high unemployment have forced families, businesses, non-profits, and government organizations to tighten their belts. Nonetheless, many communities boast a surprising array of resources that can offer a valuable helping hand in hard times. This article suggests some steps for finding and taking advantage of those resources.

Before you start your search, think about your specific needs
It is always easier to find things when you have a clear picture of what you are looking for. Think about what you want for your family and yourself, and what you need in order to provide it. Needs can be related to any aspect of your life, and may include health, education, housing, childcare, finances, and employment. Identifying needs can be challenging; don’t get discouraged. Make a list, ask for feedback from family and friends, and try to be as specific as possible. Once you have your list of needs, you are ready to begin the search.

Begin your search close to home
Learning about resources in your community is a good place to start. Communities offer a wealth of knowledge, talent, and supportive networks. Here are some places to begin.

- **Bulletin boards** are one of the best ways to find resources close to home. Common places where you can find bulletin boards include bus stops, train stations, laundromats, bodegas, supermarkets, senior centers, town halls, post offices, art centers, schools, libraries, local businesses, doctors’ offices, non-profit organizations, and social services agencies.

- **Community-based organizations (CBOs)** are non-profit organizations. Some are faith-based, such as churches, synagogues, and mosques; others are secular. Whether or not they have a religious affiliation, many CBOs offer information and resources not only to their members, but also to the community as a whole. Services offered by CBOs include transportation, household help, care giving, free food and clothing, counseling, advocacy, education, and more. And, if you have time and want to get more involved, CBOs are always looking for volunteers. Even if it’s only for a few hours a month, you’ll be amazed at how many people you’ll meet and how much you’ll learn.

- **Local newspapers and community cable networks** can help you learn about community resources in your own and neighboring areas. Community newspapers, usually distributed free of charge, often include sections devoted to community resources.

**Network, network, network**
It can be difficult to share your needs with others, but the people you see every day are some of the best resources you have. Talk to your friends and family; they can be your strongest advocates. Talk to professionals you encounter in daily life like teachers, health care providers, religious leaders, and social workers.

Check statewide services
- **Mass 2-1-1** is a free phone service that connects Massachusetts residents to a wide range of services. Dial 211 from your residential phone, or 877-211-MASS (6277) from your work or cell phone. Interpreter services are available for most languages. For online access, visit www.mass211help.org.

- **MassResources.org** is a free online resource for Massachusetts residents in need of housing, food, health care, and other basic services. Information is available in Spanish and Portuguese. Learn more at www.massresources.org.

- **www.mass.gov** is the official web site of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. It provides links to many services and resources in every city and town in the state.

Don’t forget the Federation
If you’re reading this newsletter you probably already know something about the Federation for Children with Special Needs. But, do you know the extent of the information and resources staff provides to families and professionals? The Parent Training and Information Center provides information about special education, Family TIES of Massachusetts can match your family with another family whose child has a similar diagnosis, the Family-to-Family Health Information Center helps families access health care, and the MassPIRC provides assistance about family/provider partnerships to ensure children’s success in school. Once you’ve identified your needs, visit the Federation’s Web site at www.fcsn.org to see if there’s a project that can help you meet those needs, or call 617-236-7210 to be directed to the project that can help.

Mass PIRC is a Federation project devoted to helping parents of all children participate as equal partners with educators in their children’s education. For more information, call 877-471-0980 or visit www.masspirc.org.

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Mass PIRC honored for “Commitment to Massachusetts Children”

The Federation is proud to announce that on April 5, 2011, in a ceremony at the State House, the Massachusetts PTA awarded its third annual Commitment to Massachusetts Children Award to the Massachusetts Parent Information and Resource Center (Mass PIRC). Asserting the essential role of parents in any effort to improve our schools, Massachusetts PTA President Mary Ann Stewart presented the award to Mass PIRC Director Margaret O’Hare. The award honors Mass PIRC’s “dedication and commitment to the education of the children of Massachusetts.”

Previous recipients include State Secretary of Education Paul Reville and State Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education Mitchell Chester. The Federation congratulates MassPIRC for its extraordinary work!
FEDERATION FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Maximizing MassHealth Benefits for Your Child
By Beth Dworetzky, MA Family-to-Family Health Information Center

MassHealth is the name of the Massachusetts Medicaid program. There are many different types of MassHealth coverage. This article highlights the MassHealth Family Assistance coverage type.

MassHealth Family Assistance is the MassHealth coverage type for children without disabilities whose family income is more than 150% Federal Poverty Level (FPL), but less than 300% FPL, for example, between $33,528 and $67,056 for a family of 4. In general, if the family has access to employer-sponsored health insurance, the plan covers certain health services, and the employer pays at least 50% of the premiums, the family may be eligible to receive some premium assistance to help pay their portion of their employer’s health insurance premiums.

If the family does not have access to employer-sponsored health insurance, MassHealth Family Assistance may provide health services for the children through a Managed Care Organization. There is a monthly premium for this type of MassHealth. The maximum amount is $28 per eligible child, per month.

Review the chart of MassHealth covered services by program type at http://bit.ly/ap6nDs. In addition to these services, the Children’s Behavioral Health Initiative (CHBI) has six additional behavioral health services for MassHealth-eligible children, birth – 21, with Serious Emotional Disorder (SED). Read the descriptions of these six services at http://bit.ly/9xDVc.

Note: Children with SED who have MassHealth Family Assistance can only receive two of the behavioral health services: Mobile Crisis Intervention and In-Home Therapy. If your child has mental, behavioral, and emotional health needs, and needs additional behavioral health services, your child will need MassHealth CommonHealth in order to receive all six behavioral health services.

To see if your child qualifies for CommonHealth:
1. Read the childhood listings for mental disorders at www.ssa.gov/disability/professionals/bluebook/112.00-MentalDisorders-Childhood.htm.
2. If one or more categories describe your child mentally, behaviorally, or emotionally, complete a MassHealth Child Disability Supplement. Find this form at www.mass.gov/Eeohhs2/docs/masshealth/appforms/mads_child.pdf.
4. Gather clinical documentation from your child’s health providers that documents your child’s mental, behavioral, and emotional health needs.
5. Write a letter that states your child has MassHealth Family Assistance, and you think your child has a disability that qualifies for MassHealth CommonHealth. Include your name and address, your child’s name, date of birth, social security number, and MassHealth Member ID number. Request a disability determination.
6. Make a copy of everything and mail it to the MassHealth Enrollment Center (MEC) that serves your city or town. If you need help identifying your MEC, or have questions about how to ensure your child has the most comprehensive MassHealth coverage to which he is entitled, call the Family-to-Family Health Information Center at the number below.

The Massachusetts Family-to-Family Health Information Center provides free, confidential assistance to families raising children and youth with special health care needs. Knowledgeable staff will help you understand MassHealth eligibility and provide step-by-step instruction with the application. Call 800-331-0688, ext. 301.

Social Security and Health Benefits for Young People with Disabilities Who Work
By Melanie Jordan, Institute for Community Inclusion, UMass Boston

Do you wonder what happens to the Social Security or health benefits young people with disabilities receive when they go to work? Social Security and MassHealth have programs that provide incentives for individuals with disabilities who want to try to work. Going to Work: A Guide to Social Security Benefits and Employment for Young People with Disabilities (2011 edition) is an easy-to-read, family friendly booklet that explains how these public benefits are affected by paid employment. This booklet is available free of charge. Download a copy in English or Spanish, or order a copy that will be mailed to you at www.communityinclusion.org/article.php?article_id=211&type=topic&id=15. You can also call Melanie at 617-287-4327 or e-mail her at melanie.jordan@umb.edu to request a copy.

This publication is sponsored by Work Without Limits, a Massachusetts Disability Employment Initiative funded by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CFDA No. 93.768) and managed through a partnership by UMass Medical School Center for Health Policy and Research, UMass Boston Institute for Community Inclusion, and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services. Learn more about Work Without Limits at www.workwithoutlimits.org.
Making the Most of Summer

By Mary Castro Summers, Program Director, Family TIES of Massachusetts

Summer is that special time of year that gets us through the long, cold months of winter. It’s the season when parents think back to the lazy, hazy days of their youth and wonder how to recreate those fond memories for their own family. The economy may make it difficult to make these wishes a reality.

In many families, one or more adults are out of work, or face cutbacks in hours and salaries. Other families are working more hours to ensure they can meet their financial responsibilities. Parents of children with special needs, in addition to dealing with the financial challenges that all families face, must also deal with logistical challenges. They must address their children’s medical, developmental, and emotional needs in order to ensure they can participate in, what for most children are simple activities, such as a walk by the ocean.

Remember that necessity is the mother of invention, and that the needs of your child are shared by the needs of many children. If you are planning an afternoon outing, day trip, or longer vacation, and are concerned about how to include and accommodate your child with special needs, there are many people to consult for help.

- Consult your child’s medical team. Ask if they can recommend a specialist in the area where you will be, in case your child has an emergency.
- Ask teachers and other school staff who know your child well for ideas about how they accommodate your child in different activities.
- Network with parents in your Special Education Parent Advisory Council, support groups, and listservs. Note: the Mass Family Voices listserv is a great place to ask these types of questions (learn more at www.massfamilyvoices.org/Listserv_Info.html).
- Call your Family TIES Regional Coordinator (contact information below).

Parents who have met similar challenges are resourceful and happy to share what has worked for their children and families. They provide a community of support that can offer assistance as you think about a picnic at a playground, a trip to the local zoo or amusement park, an overnight at a local campground (or under the dining room table for practice), or a movie night with your child’s friends in your own living room. Careful planning can make all the difference in how you look at this year’s summer vacation. Summer fun doesn’t have to be extravagant or expensive – just memorable. Contact your Family TIES Regional Coordinator (phone numbers available on our Web site at www.massfamilyvoices.org or call 800-905-TIES (8437). Enjoy your summer!

MassPAC Update

By Leslie M. Leslie, MassPAC Coordinator

Before I became the Coordinator of the MassPAC project at the Federation in February of this year, I had strong ties to the project through the MassPAC listserv, a Yahoo group I have belonged to since my son was diagnosed with a learning disability in 2004. The listserv has been my constant companion through diagnosis and testing, the IEP process, and issues about challenging a school’s decision about my son’s education. The parents on the list became friendly voices in a long and difficult journey, even though I had never met them face-to-face. They were on their own journeys and together we grew to become effective advocates for our children.

MassPAC training and the listserv helped me organize parents, get ideas about speakers and workshops, and gave me a framework for building connections between the school district and the Special Education Parent Advisory Council (PAC).

PACs are celebrating their 25th anniversary in 2011 (the legislation mandating each school district have a PAC was enacted in 1986). Along the way, MassPAC was born as a statewide organization. Today, as a project at the Federation, MassPAC takes advantage of the Federation’s wealth of leadership experience, providing information, training, and networking opportunities to parent leaders and the professionals who collaborate with them.

In my new role, I envision a greater role for PACs, helping parents meet the challenges of navigating the school system in increasingly hard economic times. I hope to increase our online presence, encourage community leaders to reach beyond their town borders to work regionally and boost participation, and to make PACs more available to working parents and to those who face language barriers. Please join me in these efforts.

For more information about MassPAC, call Leslie at 617-399-8307, e-mail lieslie@fcsn.org, or visit www.masspac.org.
Opening Session

Dr. Richard Robison, Executive Director at the Federation, began the day stating it was, “A privilege to welcome everyone,” and promised a day with, “a lot of content, information, fun, and opportunities to connect.” He also expressed gratitude for the effort attendees made to attend the conference. Citing Anne T. Henderson, who said, “When families are involved at home and at school, children do better in school and schools get better,” Dr. Robison remarked that family attendance at this conference was an opportunity to learn ways to foster family involvement, because, “What families do matters.” He noted all the Federation projects help support families, and that “the families we serve are our joy. Without families, there would be no Federation. You are what we are.”

Keynote Presentations

Dr. Robison introduced the two keynote speakers. Dr. Mitchell Chester, the Commissioner of the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), and Marianne Leone, actor, screenwriter, and author of Knowing Jesse – A Mother’s Story of Grief, Grace, and Everyday Bliss.

Dr. Chester began his keynote presentation stating he was, “Glad to have the opportunity to share information.” He spoke about the Race to the Top award that Massachusetts received to help ensure the curriculum provided by MA schools will prepare all students for success after high school. Another aspect of the Race to the Top initiative is to identify underperforming schools and develop plans of action to improve them. The DESE is also upgrading the regulations for two core subjects: English Language Arts and Math, and working to make the curriculum frameworks Web site more family-friendly. Lastly, he highlighted the DESE’s participation in a multi-state consortium that is working to create new assessments and tasks students will have to complete before they graduate high school to ensure readiness for college and career. Dr. Chester concluded his presentation by sharing that, as a parent of students with special needs, his family, “relies on information and support from the Federation to understand options and make decisions for their children.” He also acknowledged the dedicated, committed, and caring educators who work hard on behalf of their students, and pledged, “commitment to supporting all students with high quality, effective services in a difficult fiscal climate,” and that this process relies on the, “active involvement of families.”

Marianne Leone began her presentation by sharing a video montage of her son Jesse, who was born 10 weeks premature. Complications after his birth caused cerebral palsy; he could not use his arms or legs, was non-verbal, and experienced daily, uncontrollable seizures. He died in his sleep at the age of 17.

After the video, Marianne noted her favorite photo – Jesse’s 6th grade class picture. This photo represented Jesse’s dream of going to school with other children his age and learning the same things they were learning. Alternately relating family stories and reading selections from her book, Knowing Jesse, Marianne shared her family’s experiences working with the school system to create an inclusive educational opportunity for their son. Doctors and teachers gave her family many predictions about what Jesse would not accomplish. Marianne and her husband learned to focus on what he could accomplish, and as far as they were concerned, with the right services and supports, he could accomplish anything he wanted to. Jesse was a straight A student, and a poet. He loved to travel, swim, windsurf, and make friends. Marianne encouraged parents to be strong advocates for their children, to ask doctors, therapists, and educators to “presume competence” in a child’s abilities, and to have high expectations.

State Agency Partners

As in past years, the Federation was honored to have state agency representatives in attendance. Elin Howe, Commissioner of the MA Department of Developmental Services (DDS), Commissioner Heidi Reed from the MA Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH), and Commissioner Jane Tewksbury from the MA Department of Youth Services (DYS) all thanked the Federation for their commitment to family/professional partnerships and to ensuring families were connected with services and supports.
Community Partnership Awards
Dr. William Henderson, Federation Board Member Emeritus, and Dr. Robison presented Community Partnership Awards to the following individuals in recognition of their “ground level” contributions in our communities and whose, “daily words and actions affect change for individuals with disabilities.”

Community Outreach Award
Presented to Bedel A. Omar, Somali Development Center, Springfield, MA. Mr. Omar started the Somali Development Center so families would have a place to connect, get resources to help their families, and learn about their children’s rights to educational opportunities.

Inclusive Recreation Award
Presented to Carrie McGee, Whole Children, Hadley, MA. The goal of Whole Children is to create a truly welcoming community, where all individuals are recognized and valued as they are, but at the same time, they are offered opportunities to grow and learn.

Inclusive Recreation Award
Presented to Gail Steele, Director of Theatre, Theatre at the Mount, Mount Wachusett Community College, Gardner MA. Gail created educational opportunities for children, teens, and adults of all backgrounds and abilities to learn about all aspects of theatre and to develop their talents.

Inclusive Special Education Teacher Award
Presented to Christopher Geiling, Leverett Elementary School, Leverett, MA. Mr. Geiling became a special education teacher so he could use his family experience to make a difference and offer support to all families of children with special needs.

Parent Advocacy Award
Presented to Garrett Colson, East Boston, MA. Garrett has helped countless families in difficult financial and family circumstances in Boston, Brockton, Lowell, Springfield, Winchendon, and surrounding towns, all at no charge to the parents.

Parent Leadership Award
Presented to Tere Ramos, Wellesley, MA for her work as a member of the Wellesley Parent Advisory Council (PAC). Under Tere’s leadership, the Wellesley PAC created a strong working relationship with the school administration.

If you were unable to attend Visions of Community, video of the Opening Session, as well as a complete bio of each Community Partnership Award winner is available at fcsn.org.

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- **Kennedy Hope Academy**
  A year-round residential school, providing state-of-the-art treatment to students, ages 5 to 21, who have challenging behaviors, autism spectrum and other developmental disorders, often combined with medical, psychiatric and/or neurological disorders.

- **Pathways Academy**
  A comprehensive, year-round day school for children, teens and young adults with neurodevelopmental disorders.

Mental Health Services

A wide range of mental health and substance abuse services are available for children and adolescents.
On March 15, 2011, recent updates to the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) became effective. I read with great interest the Title III regulations that reference service animals, as my daughter Olivia recently received a skilled companion dog from Canine Companions for Independence. These changes mainly focus on classification, training requirements, and access rights.

Updates to the ADA have narrowed the definition of a service animal so that dogs are the only species to qualify. Though no longer considered a service animal, miniature horses are still allowed some access privileges as they provide unique guidance work and are highly trainable animals that can meet the required obedience standards. The ADA and U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) have established two training requirements in order for a dog to meet the definition of service animal:

1) The service animal must be individually trained to perform tasks or work for the benefit of an individual with a disability.

2) The service animal must be trained to behave properly in places of public accommodation.

According to the ADA’s definition, an animal that has not been individually trained to perform disability-mitigating tasks does not qualify as a service animal. 

New ADA Regulations Redefine Service Animals
By Bonnie Thompson, MA Family-to-Family Health Information Center

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Aproveitando o Máximo do Verão
Por Mary Castro Summers, Diretora do Programa, Family TIES de Massachusetts

O verão é uma época especial do ano que nos leva a atravessar os meses longos e frios do inverno. É a estação quando os pais voltam os seus pensamentos para os dias preguiçosos, indefinidos de sua juventude e imaginam como recriar aquelas lembranças carinhosas para as suas próprias famílias. A economia pode fazer com que estes desejos sejam difíceis de se tornar realidade. Em muitas famílias, um ou mais dos adultos estão fora de casa trabalhando, ou estão enfrentando cortes em horas de trabalho e salários. Outras famílias estão trabalhando mais horas para assegurar que vão conseguir manter suas responsabilidades financeiras. Os pais das crianças com necessidades especiais, em acréscimo a terem que lidar com os desafios financeiros que todas as famílias enfrentam, têm também que lidar com os desafios logísticos. Eles têm que tratar das necessidades médicas, de desenvolvimento, e emocionais de suas crianças para poder assegurar que poderão participar, no que para a maioria das crianças são atividades simples como andar na beira do oceano.

Lembre-se que a necessidade é a mãe da invenção, e que as necessidades de seu filho são compartilhadas com as necessidades de muitas crianças. Se estiver planejando uma saída à tarde, um passeio durante todo o dia, ou férias longas, e estiver preocupado em como incluir e acomodar o seu filho com necessidades especiais, existem muitas pessoas que você pode consultar para obter ajuda.

- Consulte a equipe médica de seu filho. Pergunte se pode recomendar um especialista na área onde você estiver, no caso de que seu filho venha a ter uma emergência.
- Pergunte aos professores e aos outros funcionários da escola que conhecem bem o seu filho para dar-lhe ideias em como acomodar o seu filho nas diferentes atividades.
- Mantenha uma rede de contato com os pais no seu Conselho de Assessoramento de Educação Especial para os Pais, Special Education Parent Advisory Council, grupos de apoio, e listas de correio eletrônico. Nota: a lista de correio eletrônico do Vozes das Famílias de Mass, Mass Family Voices, é um grande local para se fazer estes tipos de perguntas (aprenda mais no website www.massfamilyvoices.org/Listserv_Info.html).
- Telefone para o Coordenador Regional do LIGAÇÕES de Família, Family TIES Regional Coordinator (informação para contato abaixo).

Os pais que se encontraram diante de desafios semelhantes são habilidosos e felizes em compartilhar o que deu certo para seus filhos e famílias. Eles fornecem uma comunidade de apoio que pode oferecer assistência se você estiver pensando em fazer um piquenique em um parque, um passeio ao jardim zoológico local ou a um parque de diversões, passar uma noite em um acampamento local (ou embaixo de uma mesa da sala de jantar como prática), ou uma ida à noite ao cinema com os amigos de seu filho em sua própria sala de visita. Um planejamento cuidadoso pode fazer muita diferença em como você vai encarar estas férias de verão. A diversão do verão não precisa ser extravagant ou cara – somente memorável.

Entre em contato com o seu Coordenador Regional do LIGAÇÕES de Família (números de telefone disponíveis no nosso website www.massfamilyvoices.org) ou telefone para 800-905-TIES (8437). Aproveite o seu verão!

O Family TIES de Massachusetts é um projeto estadual de informação e apoio de pais para pais, para as famílias de crianças com necessidades especiais e doenças crônicas. O Family TIES é um projeto da Federação para Crianças com Necessidades Especiais, recebendo financiamento e em colaboração com o Departamento de Saúde Pública de Massachusetts. O programa é administrado por pais coordenadores, encontrados em cada Escritório Regional do Departamento de Saúde Pública de Massachusetts, Regional Offices of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

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Assistive Technology Corner...
Tackling the Summer Reading List with a Little AT Help

By Randi Sargent

All too soon, schools will send home Summer Reading Lists. For younger readers, the list may be general, but as kids get older, the list gets more specific. Perhaps you are lucky enough to have a motivated reader who spends every minute with his nose in a book. For those of us whose kids are not so motivated, the Summer Reading List hangs over our heads, and our children’s, like a proverbial anvil. Here are some free and low cost assistive technologies to help reluctant or struggling readers tackle their summer reading.

Start Early and Involve your Child
On a hot day, early in summer, make a special trip to the air-conditioned bookstore or library with your child and book list in hand. If your child does not already have a library card, this is a good time to get one. Having a library card helps children take responsibility for their books. Start with books that interest your child, as these will be the most motivating. Take books with you everywhere you go - the beach, park, and in the car. Here are some reading tools to help mix it up and make it fun.

Using Technology to Encourage Reluctant Readers
Perhaps your reader needs some enticement to sit and read, like my active daughter. In addition to reading books together, consider alternative media that offer more exciting visuals and interactivity such as computer-based e-books. Interactive Web sites such as Starfall (www.starfall.com) and PBSKids (www.pbskids.org) are free and motivating to younger readers.

Technology to the Rescue for Struggling Readers
As kids get older, readings list are often tied to projects and reports that will take place in the upcoming school year. For readers that need help with comprehension and vocabulary, listening to books along with reading it can increase understanding. You can download accessible books in digital mpg format and many are free. Kids can listen on iPods, iPads, and other portable devices. Sources for digital books include:

- Learning Ally (www.learningally.org), formerly Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic, offers unlimited access to human-read textbooks and literature (K-12), free with a family or individual membership; the reader must have a print disability.
- Bookshare (www.bookshare.org) digital books are free for all U.S. students with qualifying disabilities.
- Overdrive (www.overdrive.com) offers e-books and audio books free through public libraries.
- Purchase and download thousands of digital and audio books from Amazon (www.amazon.com), Audible (www.audible.com), or iTunes (http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/ibooks/id364709193?mt=8)

The key to continuing reading over the summer is to mix it up. Try different media and different locations. Encourage reading during the day as well as reading together at night. Just because your children can read independently doesn’t mean you need to stop reading to them. It’s a great way to share special time together. Take turns and read alternating pages or assign characters and read their dialogue. Your child will get good practice and you’ll get some snuggle time. The only AT you may need here is your glasses!

Additional Resources
Reading Rockets: www.readingrockets.org/article/23428
Adolescent Literacy: www.adlit.org/article/36
LD online www.ldonline.org/article/15904
Teaching Learners with Multiple Special Needs: http://teachinglearnerswithmultipleneeds.blogspot.com/2010/05/summer-reading-programs-for-special.html.

Randi is the parent of a child with cerebral palsy who relies on assistive technology for mobility, communication, and daily living. Randi is also a member of the Federation’s Board of Directors, and the MassMATCH AT Advisory Committee. Learn more about MassMATCH at www.massmatch.org.

It's the Thought that Counts... So Put Your Thoughts in Writing

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Cómo aprovechar el verano al máximo
Por Mary Castro Summers, Directora del programa Family TIES de Massachusetts

La cercanía del verano, ese momento tan especial del año, es lo que nos ayuda a tolerar los fríos y largos meses de invierno. Es la época en que los padres recuerdan esos días de tranquilidad y sosiego de su juventud y se preguntan cómo recrearlo con su propia familia. La economía tal vez dificulte convertir muchos planes en realidad. En muchas familias, uno o más adultos están sin empleo o deben lidiar con recortes salariales y de horarios. Otras familias deben trabajar horas extras para poder cumplir con sus responsabilidades financieras. Los padres de niños con necesidades especiales, además de enfrentar las mismas dificultades económicas que las demás familias, tienen que resolver problemas logísticos. Deben responder a las necesidades médicas, emocionales y del desarrollo de sus hijos para asegurar que puedan participar en actividades que para la mayoría de los niños son sencillas, como dar un paseo por la playa.

Recuerde que “la necesidad es la madre de la invención” y que hay muchos niños con necesidades similares a las de su hija o hijo. Si está planeando una salida por la tarde, una excursión de un día entero o vacaciones más largas, y está preocupado por cómo incluirá y acomodará a su niño con necesidades especiales, pregúntele a un especialista en la región que visitarán, pregunte al equipo médico de su hijo. Averigüe si pueden recomendarle a un especialista en la región que visitarán, en caso de que su niño tenga una emergencia.

- Pregunte al equipo médico de su hijo. Averigüe si pueden recomendarle a un especialista en la región que visitarán, en caso de que su niño tenga una emergencia.
- Pida a los maestros y al otro personal escolar que conoce bien a su hija o hijo, sugerencias sobre adaptaciones para las diferentes actividades.

- Conéctese con otros padres de su Consejo Asesor de Educación Especial, grupos de apoyo y foros de debate (“listservs”). Nota: el foro Voces de las familias de Massachusetts (Mass Family Voices listserv) es un gran sitio para tratar este tipo de preguntas (para más información, visite el sitio www.massfamilyvoices.org/Listserv_Info.html).
- Llame a su Coordinador Regional de Family TIES (ver información de contacto a continuación).

Otros padres que han enfrentado retos similares conocen muchos recursos y con gusto compartirán información sobre lo que les ha dado resultado para sus hijos y sus familias. Representan una comunidad de apoyo que puede ayudarle a planear un picnic en el parque, un viaje al zoológico o el parque de atracciones, una noche de campamento (a la intemperie o debajo de la mesa del comedor, para practicar) o un “viaje” al cine con los amigos de su niño en su propia sala de estar. Una planificación cuidadosa puede marcar una gran diferencia en estas vacaciones. La diversión durante el verano no tiene que ser extravagante ni cara, solamente memorable.

Comuníquese con su Coordinador Regional de Family TIES. Busque los números de teléfono en nuestro sitio Web en www.massfamilyvoices.org o llame al 800-905-TIES (8437). ¡Disfrute del verano!

El Seguro Social y los Beneficios de Salud para los Jóvenes con Discapacidades que Trabajan
por Melanie Jordan, Instituto para la Inclusión de la Comunidad, Universidad de Massachusetts Boston

¿Se pregunta qué sucede con el seguro social o beneficios de salud que reciben los jóvenes con discapacidades cuando trabajan? El seguro social y MassHealth tienen programas que ofrecen incentivos para las personas con discapacidades que desean trabajar. Ir a Trabajar: Una Guía para Beneficios de Seguro Social y Empleo para Jóvenes con Discapacidades (edición 2011) es un folleto fácil de leer, que les explica cómo estos beneficios públicos son afectados por el trabajo. Este folleto es gratuito. Puede bajar una copia en Inglés o español en su computadora, o solicitar una copia que será enviada por correo, vaya al www.communityinclusion.org/article.php?article_id=211&typetopicid=15. También puede llamar a Melanie al 617-287-4327 o enviarle un email a melanie.jordan@umb.edu para solicitar una copia.

Esta publicación esta patrocinada por Work Without Limits, una Iniciativa del Massachusetts Disability Employment financiada por los Centros para Servicios de Medicare y Medicaid (CFDA N 93.768) y administrada a través de una asociación por la Universidad de Massachusetts la Escuela de Medicina del Centro de Polizas de Salud y la Investigación, Universidad de Massachusetts Boston Instituto para la Inclusión, en la Comunidad y la Oficina Ejecutiva de Massachusetts de Salud y Servicios Humanos. Obtenga más información sobre el Work Without Limits (el Trabajo sin Limites) en www.workwithoutlimits.org.
New ADA Regulations Redefine Service Animals (continued from page 11)

Despite a label of “companion animal,” “emotional support animal,” or “therapy animal,” if a dog or miniature horse does not have a high level of task training directly related to alleviating the handler’s disability, they are not classified as a service animal; thus, their handlers do not legally qualify for public access rights.

Of particular interest to our family, the new rules specifically allow “triad teams” where the dog’s handler is someone other than the person with the disability, as long as the person with the disability is also present. To insure compliance with this new rule, Canine Companions for Independence prohibits children under age 18 from handling the assistance animal on their own in public. As is the case with my young daughter, Olivia is the recipient of her assistance dog Arnold, but the adults in the triad team (her parents) have the responsibility of handling him when they are out in public. The ADA is clear that when the assistance animal is working in public areas it must be under the handler’s control at all times.

Regarding access to public areas, individuals with assistance animals are permitted in all areas of public accommodation—all the places the general public is allowed to go, with minimal exceptions. In situations where it is not apparent that the dog is a service animal, a public accommodation, for example a business, may ask only two questions:

1) Is the animal required because of a disability; and

2) What work or task has the animal been trained to perform?

No other inquiries about an individual’s disability or the dog are permitted. Businesses cannot require proof of certification or medical documentation as a condition for entry.

At this time the DOJ has not updated its “general public” ADA publications to reflect the recent changes, but guidance is available. Go to www.ada.gov/regs2010/titleIII_2010/titleIII_2010_withbold.htm and scroll down to U.S.C. 36.302 (c), or contact the ADA assistance line at 800-514-0301 (voice) or 800-514-0383 (TTY).

Learn more about Canine Companions for Independence at www.caninecompanions.org.
Visions of Community 2011

Singer, Songwriter Randall Kromm performed at lunch

Attendees from the Somali Development Center in Western Mass.

FCSN staff member Roxanne Hoke-Chandler & Academy Award winning actor Chris Cooper

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Conference attendees Cora & Leo True-Frost