High Quality Education for All
All students in the United States have a right to a high quality education. Federal and state laws recognize the importance of educating children with special needs in classrooms with their peers. This practice is commonly referred to as “inclusion.” The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) cites more than 30 years of research that shows that students with disabilities who participate in general education classrooms— with proper special education supports, language supports, and accommodations—dramatically improve their performance. Therefore, inclusion has become part of what it means to have a “high-quality” education.

What is Inclusion?
Inclusion not only means being educated in regular education classes. It also refers to a sense of belonging to a school community as an equally valued member. Students who are “included”:

- Participate in age-appropriate general education classes with access to the physical environments and routines of the school.
- Have opportunities for social interactions and relationships with their peers.
- Participate meaningfully in the general education curriculum to the maximum extent possible with the supports and services they need to make progress.
- Are held to the same high academic standards that Massachusetts has set for all children.

Continues on page 5

*Editor’s note: Janet Vohs worked at the Federation for Children with Special Needs for over 30 years. She passed away in December 2016 after a long struggle with breast cancer. This article was one of her best and is a wonderful example of her passion, commitment and advocacy for all children and families. She shared with us her extraordinary gift of making complex concepts understandable and meaningful for all.
FCSN Tet Celebration Draws a Crowd

By Erin Anguish

On February 4, the Federation for Children with Special Needs and Vòng Tay Cha Me Việt (the Circle of Vietnamese Parents) hosted a festive Vietnamese New Year (Tet) celebration at the Dorchester House Multi-Service Center. Open to the public and well-attended by families of children with special needs, the fun-filled afternoon featured inclusive games, activities, and dancing. Attendees were also treated to a Lion Dance and a “fashion show” where children were invited to walk the red carpet in their elegant traditional attire. Mr. Than Vinh Bao Toan, the president of the Vietnamese community, and Boston Mayor Martin J. Walsh were also in attendance, with Mayor Walsh sharing a few words before joining the celebration to hand out “li xi” (lucky money for Tet).

Many Vietnamese families of children and youth with disabilities do not have the opportunity to attend public social events due to social stigma within the community. The Circle of Vietnamese Parents, a support group formed by our Federation staff member Oanh Bui, is a place where Vietnamese parents feel comfortable to come together in support one another. The group also helps caregivers in navigating the special education system, locating the right services for their loved ones, and coping with the challenges one encounters when caring for a child with special needs.

Oanh’s tireless efforts were critical to the organization of this community celebration, from the decorations on the walls to the media outlets that covered the event. We are grateful for her work to ensure that Vietnamese children with special needs were met with an inclusive, non-judgmental environment in which to celebrate the holiday. Many thanks as well to the Dorchester House, Mayor Walsh’s office, and all those who were able to join us on this special day.

Annual Appeal

We are so pleased to announce that giving for our Annual Appeal totaled over $70,000, exceeding our goal! Your generous support makes it possible for us to assist families across Massachusetts who struggle to find educational, health, and community resources for their children with special needs.

Thank you for making this year’s Appeal a success!

Would you like to help the Federation all year long? Join our monthly Sustainer program! Consider a monthly gift of $5, $10, $20, or more to provide ongoing support throughout the year.

We are a public charity, and donations to us are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Thank you for your support!
From the Executive Director:
There is still power in telling our story!

I’m writing these thoughts as I sit at the National Disability Policy Seminar in Washington DC. It is the day before the anniversary of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), and, ironically, the day Congress is contemplating its repeal. While here I have heard many stories from individuals with disabilities who, with the assistance of high-quality health care and long-term supports, are living full and meaningful lives while maintaining their independence. During the seminar, we heard from a 26-year-old man with Autism who described his journey from being non-verbal and deeply depressed to someone who is now inspiring groups across the country. He was quick to state that, while he takes pride in his accomplishments, he is not “cured”. This man was very clear that he still struggles with disability symptoms and depressive episodes. The supports provided by the ACA are critical to his ability to function fully each and every day.

It strikes me that there may be an expectation from some people that disability is “acceptable” only if or when a person can overcome it. Another speaker, a mid-career lawyer who also leads a non-profit organization, described how he and his family had been in an auto accident when he was ten years old. He subsequently lost both of his lower legs. When I first saw him standing at the podium, speaking clearly, without hesitation, I had no idea that he was standing on prosthesis. In the decades following the accident he has “worn out” multiple sets of legs, and still struggles every day to live life fully. However, with the right supports he lives a life that positively impacts so many.

It seems as though many of our country’s basic assumptions are being questioned: how to educate our children, how to make gainful employment universally accessible, how to provide healthcare that empowers people of all abilities to live meaningful, productive lives. Over the last 40-50 years, great strides have been made toward realizing a dream of an inclusive culture that accepts individuals with disabilities and those without as equally meaningful to society. We have learned that having varied abilities and perspectives enriches our world, if we are open to the possibilities and not ashamed of our differences.

In this turbulent time, we need to tell our stories – about our families and our children with disabilities, special health needs, or chronic illness. We need to tell our neighbors who might be unaware, as well as our leaders in government and places of worship. The world needs to be made aware of our successes and to understand the importance of living inclusively, with appropriate medical and social supports in place. We need to do this not only for ourselves, but for all who may someday struggle to gain acceptance, access to high-quality long term care, or the encouragement needed to live fully. As the political debates rage, let us boldly tell our stories to make a difference.

Warmly,

Rich Robison

Consider telling your story to your elected officials. It is easy to do. Go to: www.wheredoivotema.com type in your address and the email contacts for all of your elected officials will come up. Send them your story or consider requesting a visit.

There are many ways to give to the Federation—and every gift counts!

The Federation gratefully accepts gifts in the form of a bequest.

A bequest is a gift made at death through your will. A bequest is a practical way to ensure the Federation’s future. By naming the Federation as a beneficiary in your will, you ensure that families of children with special needs will continue to be offered support, training and information for many years to come.

To leave a gift in your will, simply ask your attorney or financial planner to include the following sentence: “I bequeath $____ or ______% of my estate to the Federation for Children with Special Needs, The Schrafft Center, 529 Main Street, Suite 1M3, Charlestown, MA 02129.”

For assistance with this, or any other planned giving questions, please contact the Development Office at 617-236-7210, ext. 374.
Inclusion of English Language Learners (ELL) with Disabilities (continued from page 1)

Challenges ELL Students with Disabilities Face
In updating IDEA in 2004, Congress found that the education of students with disabilities had been impeded by “low expectations.” These low expectations occurred because students with disabilities were often placed into separate classrooms where they did not have the opportunity to learn the same academic content that all other students were learning. Today, ELL students with disabilities continue to face low expectations, segregation, and insufficient opportunities to learn academic content.

Families of ELL students with disabilities confront extraordinary challenges in their efforts to ensure their children receive a high quality, inclusive education. They may not be familiar with U.S. schools or proficient in English. Schools with proven records of success in educating ELL students with disabilities provide an environment of belonging and academic support where all students can learn.

One particularly difficult issue is the misidentification of ELL students. According to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, misidentification of ELL students results in both under-identification and over-identification of ELL students as disabled. For example, a student who needs special education may not get it because that student’s school district may not have the specific specialist needed, such as a psychologist, in the child’s native language. Students in another district may need help learning English, but if the district does not have resources to help, that student may be referred to special education. ELL students with poor school achievement may also be mistakenly identified as needing special education because their language and cultural differences are interpreted as a disability. Once a student is identified as being an ELL with a disability, the main issue often becomes access to grade-level academic content. Without access to the regular education classroom, access to the general curriculum is difficult. A balance must be achieved between learning English and learning academic subjects. Often, the best place to create that balance is in the regular classroom.

Parents are Crucial
Parents play a vital role in their children’s education. This is especially true of parents of children who are English language learners and who have a disability. Families provide important information about their children’s cultural and language issues, as well as explain their child’s learning strengths and needs. Parents need to ask schools for the language support they need to stay in touch with the teachers and to participate in IEP team meetings. Schools should provide translators as necessary to support families’ communication needs. Families can advocate for their children who are ELL and who have disabilities to be included in regular education classrooms with appropriate supports and services so that their children can share the same learning activities and instruction as their peers. By working together, families and teachers can ensure that all children receive a high quality, inclusive education that meets each child’s individual needs.

La inclusión de los estudiantes con discapacidades que están aprendiendo inglés
Por Janet Vohs

Educación de alta calidad para todos
En los Estados Unidos, todos los estudiantes tienen derecho a recibir una educación de alta calidad. Las leyes federales y estatales reconocen la importancia de educar a los niños con necesidades especiales en las mismas aulas que sus compañeros. Esta práctica se conoce comúnmente como “inclusión”. La Ley Federal de Educación para Personas con Discapacidades (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act o IDEA) cita las conclusiones de más de 30 años de investigación que muestran que los estudiantes con discapacidades que participan en las aulas de educación general —con apoyos apropiados de educación especial, idioma y adaptaciones— mejoran su rendimiento de manera considerable. Por esto, la inclusión se ha convertido en sinónimo de una educación “de alta calidad”.

¿Qué es la inclusión?
Inclusión significa no sólo aprender en las aulas de educación general. También se refiere a la sensación de pertenecer a una comunidad escolar y de ser valorado igual que los demás. Los estudiantes “incluidos”:

- Participan en clases de educación general apropiadas para su edad, con acceso a los ambientes físicos y las rutinas de la escuela.
- Tienen oportunidades de interacción social y de formar relaciones con sus compañeros.
- Participan de forma significativa en el plan general de estudios en todo lo posible, con los apoyos y servicios que necesitan para progresar.

Nota del editor: Janet Vohs trabajó en la Federación para Niños con Necesidades Especiales por más de 30 años. Falleció en diciembre de 2016 después de una larga lucha contra el cáncer de seno. Este fue uno de sus mejores artículos y es un ejemplo maravilloso de su pasión, su compromiso y su trabajo a favor de todos los niños y las familias. Compartió con nosotros su extraordinario talento de convertir conceptos complejos en ideas comprensibles y significativas para todos.
The Federation for Children with Special Needs is excited to continue expanding our services for transition age students with the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) Student & Family Support Project. A collaboration between FCSN and the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC), the WIOA Student & Family Support Project provides pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities aged 16-22 and their families. The project is in line with the WIOA’s emphasis on the importance of competitive, integrated employment for individuals with disabilities. WIOA promotes the coordination of services to facilitate the transition of these young adults from school settings to successful postsecondary employment outcomes.

This statewide project focuses on three main goals:

• Partnership with the 24 MRC offices to offer transition workshops for families and professionals

• Providing transition resources to the public through websites and webinars, as well as in-person workshops, printed materials, and phone calls

• Referral-based, face-to-face transition support for students who meet eligibility requirements for vocational rehabilitation

The WIOA Student & Family Support Project aligns with the objectives of the Federation in supporting families and young adults to achieve their visions for life after high school. The Federation has set high goals for this project, aspiring to connect with 2,500 individuals per year. This will be achieved through the LINK Center website, call center, and the three statewide Transition Family Support Specialists and Outreach Team.

In mid-March the project became fully staffed with the hiring of Jennifer Balzanelli. Jennifer will be working with the MRC offices, students, families, and Pre-ETS vendors in the central part of the state. Ingrid Arvidson will be covering the very western part of Massachusetts. Last but not least, Joseph Katz will be working out of the Federation office in Boston and will be covering the entire eastern part of the state from as far north as Lawrence down to the Cape and Islands.

Transition Family Support Specialists will use a menu of workshops to help clarify the complexities of transition services to audiences ranging from MRC offices and Pre-Employment Transition Services vendors to professionals, families, and students. Workshops will include: “Introduction to Transition”, “Creating a Postsecondary Vision”, and “Next Steps: Connecting to Supports and Services as a Young Adult”. Our team will also create new workshops that address the transition from an Individual Education Plan (IEP) to an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) and cultural competencies to be considered within the transition process.

In addition to the workshops, the Transition Family Support Specialists will facilitate 250 face-to-face meetings with students and families across the state. Students receiving this individualized service must be referred by MRC and must meet their eligibility requirements for vocational rehabilitation. Face to face meeting may include:

• Person-centered planning

• Goal-setting Support

• Connecting to resources

• Increasing knowledge around planning a life after high school

• More to be determined!

This project is an incredible opportunity for the Federation to be a leader and educator in the field of transition services. We are excited for this project to start rolling out to students and families across the state. For more information about the LINK Center and the WIOA Student and Family Support Project visit fcsn.org/linkcenter or email wioa@fcsn.org.
Major Supreme Court decision on IDEA: Endrew F. v. Douglas County School System

By Elizabeth Topaz

On January, a major case on the IDEA was argued before the US Supreme Court. Today, Chief Justice Roberts issued the decision in the case on behalf of a unanimous court. You may read the decision in full here: www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/16pdf/15-827_0pm1.pdf. The ruling is significant: it holds that a child with disabilities is entitled to an education that confers more than a minimal educational benefit.

The case involved a child from Colorado on the autism spectrum who was making minimal progress in the substantially separate program developed by the public school. The parents followed the IDEA procedures in unilaterally outplacing the child in a private school, at which the child made substantial gains. The parents then sought reimbursement and placement under the IDEA at the private school.

Endrew’s family lost the case in the lower courts, which ruled that, since the child had made some progress on the IEP goals, the school district’s program had given the student some (minimal) educational benefit and had fulfilled its duties under the IDEA. The parents appealed to the Supreme Court, arguing that the IDEA requires an education that “aims to provide a child with a disability opportunities to achieve academic success, attain self-sufficiency, and contribute to society that are substantially equal to the opportunities afforded children without disabilities.”

In its ruling, the Court relied on the last major IDEA case, Rowley (from 1982), which “concerned a young girl who was progressing smoothly through the regular curriculum. If that is not a reasonable prospect for a child, his IEP need not aim for grade level advancement. But his educational program must be appropriately ambitious in light of his circumstances, just as advancement from grade to grade is appropriately ambitious for most children in the regular classroom. The goals may differ, but every child should have the chance to meet challenging objectives.” The Court added: “[i]t cannot be the case that the Act typically aims for grade level advancement for children with disabilities who can be educated in the regular classroom, but is satisfied with barely more than de minimis progress for those who cannot.”

Although the Court rejected the position argued by the school, it refused to announce a specific, high standard for FAPE as argued by the parents. In rejecting a “bright line test,” it acknowledged the expertise of educators, and recognized the role of educators and parents to work as a Team to develop an IEP. “[T]he courts …[should not] substitute their own notions of sound educational policy for those of the school authorities which they review…. A reviewing court may fairly expect those authorities to be able to offer a cogent and responsive explanation for their decisions that shows the IEP is reasonably calculated to enable the child to make progress appropriate in light of his circumstances.”

Robert Crabtree Receives National Award for Educational Advocacy

Friend of the Federation Robert Crabtree has been named as 2017’s recipient of the Diane Lipton Award for Outstanding Educational Advocacy on Behalf of Children with Disabilities award, which is given during the annual conference of the Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (COPAA) to an individual or group of individuals who have made a particularly exceptional contribution to secure high-quality educational services for children with disabilities. COPAA is an independent, nonprofit organization of attorneys, advocates, parents and related professionals who work to protect the legal and civil rights of students with disabilities at the national, state and local levels.

Bob, a founding partner of the firm Kotin, Crabtree & Strong and graduate of the Northeastern University School of Law, specializes in cases dealing with Special Education & Disability Rights. In 1972, along with his law partner Lawrence Kotin, he authored and advocated for Chapter 766, a lynchpin of Massachusetts special education law and the first such legislation in the United States. Chapter 766 then became the model for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

In addition to his private practice, Bob offers pro bono work to the Massachusetts Advocates for Children (MAC), testifying on proposed legislation, advising on legislative language, and strategizing around difficult individual cases. He also serves as the lead trainer for our own Parent Training and

Continues next page
La inclusión de los estudiantes con discapacidades que están aprendiendo inglés (continúa desde la página 4)

- Deben cumplir las mismas normas académicas rigurosas que Massachusetts ha establecido para todos los niños.

Los desafíos de los estudiantes con discapacidades que están aprendiendo inglés
Al actualizar la ley IDEA en 2004, el Congreso notó que la educación de los estudiantes con discapacidades había sido frenada por las “bajas expectativas” que ocurren porque a menudo se los colocaba en aulas separadas, donde no tenían la oportunidad de aprender el mismo material que sus compañeros. Actualmente, las expectativas para los estudiantes con discapacidades que están aprendiendo inglés siguen siendo bajas y, además, se los segregan y se les ofrecen pocas oportunidades para aprender el contenido académico.

Las familias de los estudiantes que además de tener discapacidades están aprendiendo inglés afrontan retos formidables para asegurar que sus niños reciban una educación inclusiva y de alta calidad. Generalmente no conocen bien el sistema escolar estadounidense o no dominan el inglés. Las escuelas con antecedentes comprobados de éxito en la educación de estudiantes discapacitados que están aprendiendo inglés, ofrecen un ambiente de pertenencia y apoyo académico en el que todos pueden aprender.

Un problema especialmente difícil es la identificación incorrecta de estos alumnos. Según el Departamento de Educación Primaria y Secundaria de Massachusetts, esta falla tiene dos caras, o bien las discapacidades pasan desapercibidas, o se interpreta que como los niños no dominan el idioma, están discapacitados. Por ejemplo, puede haber estudiantes que necesitan educación especial y no la consiguen porque su distrito escolar no cuenta con el especialista necesario en el idioma del niño, por ejemplo, un psicólogo. O puede haber niños que necesitan ayuda para aprender inglés, pero el distrito no tiene los recursos y se los envía a recibir educación especial. Los alumnos que están aprendiendo inglés y tienen un rendimiento escolar pobre también pueden ser identificados erróneamente como candidatos para la educación especial porque su idioma y sus diferencias culturales se interpretan como una discapacidad. Una vez que se ha determinado que un estudiante está aprendiendo inglés y tiene una discapacidad, la dificultad principal suele ser el acceso al contenido académico al nivel de su grado. Al no estar en el mismo aula que los demás estudiantes, es difícil que tengan acceso al plan general de estudios. Se debe lograr un equilibrio entre el aprendizaje de inglés y de las diferentes materias académicas. Generalmente, el mejor lugar para crear ese equilibrio es el salón de clases de educación general.

Los padres juegan un papel fundamental
Los padres desempeñan una función vital en la educación de sus hijos. Esto es especialmente cierto si sus hijos están aprendiendo inglés y además tienen una discapacidad. Las familias aportan información importante sobre la cultura y los problemas de idioma del niño, y pueden explicar los puntos fuertes y débiles de sus hijos en lo relacionado con el aprendizaje. Los padres tienen que pedirle a la escuela el apoyo que necesitan con el idioma para mantenerse en contacto con los maestros y participar en las reuniones del equipo del plan educativo individualizado (IEP). Las escuelas deben ofrecer intérpretes cuando sea necesario para satisfacer las necesidades de comunicación de las familias. Las familias pueden abogar para que se incluya a sus hijos que están aprendiendo inglés o tienen discapacidades en las aulas de educación general, con los apoyos y servicios apropiados para que participen en las mismas actividades y reciban la misma instrucción que sus compañeros. Al colaborar, las familias y los maestros pueden asegurar que todos reciban una educación inclusiva y de alta calidad que satisfaga las necesidades de todos los alumnos.

Para mayor información sobre la educación inclusiva y los servicios de educación especial para sus hijos, alientamos a las familias a que hablen con los maestros. Si tienen preguntas, también pueden comunicarse con la Federación para Niños con Necesidades Especiales, www.fcsn.org.

Robert Crabtree Receives National Award for Educational Advocacy
(continued from previous page)

Information Center (PTIC), which gives parents the tools they need to advocate successfully for their children. With Bob’s help, PTIC has trained thousands of parent advocates across Massachusetts.

The award is given in memory of Diane Lipton, a tireless advocate for children with disabilities more than twenty years. Like many champions for individuals with special needs, Diane entered the world of advocacy on behalf of her daughter, Chloe. In 1979, Chloe, affected by cerebral palsy and developmental delays, was being educated in a segregated school for youth with disabilities. When Chloe’s services were reduced, Diane joined other parents who insisted that the school system of Richmond, California provide an inclusive setting for their children’s education. She went on to become an attorney for the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF), defending the civil rights of children with disabilities, even advising President Clinton on special education issues. In so doing, she helped shape federal policy to prohibit schools from segregating children with disabilities.

We are pleased to congratulate Bob on this wonderful honor, and thankful for his assistance over the years. He is an indispensable asset to our work.
As Americans, we take pride in the fact that we are a nation of givers, and, as the economy improves, charitable giving is on the rise. In fact, according to the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, 2015’s total charitable giving from U.S. individuals, corporations, foundations, and bequests exceeded $370 billion.

There are several ways to support your favorite charity without worrying about the impact it could have on your budget. How? By naming that charity as a beneficiary to your 401(k) plan or IRA, making a gift of life insurance, or including the charity in your will. Here are just a few ways you can use these methods to contribute money to your favorite causes:

- Donate an existing life insurance policy: If you have a life insurance policy and no longer need the death benefit, you can irrevocably transfer ownership of the policy to your desired charity. While the charity will be responsible for any remaining premium payments, it will also receive the full death benefit when you die.

- List the charity as a beneficiary to your life insurance policy, 401(k), or IRA: As the owner, you remain in control of your policy and can leave money to as many beneficiaries as you like: children, grandchildren—even multiple charities. Or you can name a single charity the sole beneficiary, and it will receive the entire amount. The same applies to your 401(k) or IRA.

- Leave a Bequest: You can leave assets, such as real estate, stocks, or bonds, to your desired charity through your will. This can be done either as a specific asset or a specific dollar amount.

- Create a Charitable Remainder Trust: While this planned-giving tool is designed to shelter assets such as stocks and real estate, you can also incorporate life insurance if it’s set up correctly. Be sure to consult a trust attorney before pursuing this approach.

Giving life insurance or retirement assets can be a lasting way to support a worthy cause. Depending on the method you choose, it may also offer a variety of tax benefits. If you are interested in supporting a non-profit via planned giving, talk with your financial advisor to determine the best option for your needs.
Remembering Janet Vohs
October 20, 1944 - December 26, 2016

There are people you meet who leave an indelible impression, Janet Vohs was one such person. Janet fought like a tiger to give her daughter, Jessica, a life of inclusion, despite her severe disabilities. This fight brought her to the Federation for Children with Special Needs. Janet’s time at the Federation provided a platform to advance the causes she was most passionate about. She was a gifted writer, an artist with the written word.

For over 30 years she wrote numerous articles for professional publications and newsletters, and also wrote and edited resource guides for parents of students with special needs and offered advice about parent empowerment. Her ability to bring together cogent reasoning, elegant prose, and a touch of “why not?” to her work gave so many families permission to have big dreams for their children, dreams that they would go on to achieve. Janet’s work at both state and national levels altered the lives of countless children, families, and systems. She will be missed.

Visions of Community 2017 At-a-Glance

FCSN Executive Director Rich Robison greets an exhibitor in the conference Exhibit Hall.

Free children’s books are always a hit at the conference.

Jean Willoughby introduces the Recruitment and Training Support Center (RTSC) at the Federation to a potential volunteer.

This year the Federation welcomed members of the Arabic community to their own presentation strand at the conference.

Young adults enjoyed our 2nd Annual Youth Leadership Forum at the conference.

Our community of Vietnamese participants continues to grow.
Spotlight on the Local Education Agency (LEA) Initiative

By Jean Willoughby, Outreach and Recruitment Specialist, Recruitment, Training & Support Center

My role in the Federation’s Recruitment, Training & Support Center is to recruit volunteers to serve as Special Education Surrogate Parents (SESPs) for children in the custody of the Department of Children and Families (DCF). Volunteers are trained to become educational decision-makers for these students.

The Local Education Agency (LEA) Recruitment Program is a new initiative established with School Districts and Collaborative Programs across the state. This program was designed as a partnership between RTSC and MA school districts to identify individuals willing to serve as IEP team members for at-risk students. This important initiative offers an opportunity for local schools to be involved in ensuring that eligible children receive the support of a caring adult and the representation they need to reach their scholastic potential. Identifying prospective volunteers through the public school districts will help ensure more timely appointments and has the potential to streamline the IEP process.

Under the LEA Recruitment Program, districts will distribute RTSC brochures, promote the need for volunteers on their websites, and submit the names of individuals who may be able to help. Training includes a full day of professional development on complex childhood trauma and its impact on academic performance. For participating districts, the training will count as Continuing Education Units (CEUs).

In January 2017, the Bi-County Collaborative in Franklin, MA invited RTSC to their operating meeting to present this program to their districts. Imagine my surprise when Adele Sands, Director of Student Services for Tri-County Regional Vocational High School, revealed that she was, in fact, an SESP representing students outside her district! In her words:

“I am a Special Education Surrogate Parent and have been one for five years. It is extremely gratifying. I know it sounds crazy that this is my volunteer work given that my work is in special education, but it is completely different [being an SESP] ... I’m happy to do it, because I am probably one of the few people in [my student’s] life other than school personnel whose entire focus is on her education.”

As the RTSC program continues to grow, it is these moments that drive us to reach our goal of giving every eligible child a voice through the SESP Program.

I am happy to announce that all the Bi-County Collaborative districts (17 in the 495 corridor) signed up to participate in the LEA Recruitment Program and will work to identify interested parents and professionals willing to make sound decisions on behalf of these state-involved students. It is a win-win for everyone, especially the children we are serving! The student is linked with a caring adult who can focus on their education and advocate on their behalf, the school has an informed point person for the child, and together they make each other more successful! Better grades, happier children and teachers, and a path to success for everyone!

Thank you Adele Sands for your testimonial and thank you Bi-County Collaborative schools for your participation in helping to find SESP in your districts. For more information about the Special Education Surrogate Parent Program, visit us at www.fcsn.org/rtsc
Finding Inspiration and Inclusion in Art

By Leslie M. Leslie, MassPAC Project Director

Art is about appreciation. Art carries no stigma, interpretation is left to the artist and viewer; it is an opportunity to individually reflect. People with disabilities sometimes encounter barriers to participating in our society, but, in the City of Worcester, at least one barrier has been broken down. This past winter, under a new partnership, program participants from the Seven Hills Foundation were invited to stage a multi-media exhibit at the Worcester Art Museum, allowing artists to present their paintings, metal etchings, and sculpture in a public forum. The pieces resonated with life and expression. It was wonderful to see one series of paintings was chosen to be interpreted by a floral artist as part of the Museum’s Art in Bloom celebration. The staging of this unique exhibit was appropriate, next to the museum’s classroom studios, but the statement made by including these artists with disabilities was inclusive and inspiring. The exhibit sent the message that ability comes in all forms and should be allowed to speak for itself.

Call for Artists! The Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD) is pleased to announce that they are accepting submissions for their 2017 Call for Art and juried art exhibition. The Call for Art is open to Massachusetts residents of all abilities ages 18 and over. Submissions must be original two-dimensional works of visual art (including photography) depicting the theme of “Breaking Barriers.” A central purpose in holding this exhibition is to showcase the talent of Massachusetts residents and to present works to the public that will raise awareness of and challenge the barriers and stigma that persons with disabilities encounter. Submissions will be accepted through August 1, 2017. For more information visit: www.mass.gov/mod/art.
Expanding to Serve You Better...

Sr. Management Team

Jennetta Hyatt, Director of Human Resources (HR)

Welcome to our newest senior management team member and Director of Human Resources (HR), Jennetta Hyatt. Jennetta received her B.S. degree in Community Services Management from UMass Boston. She brings to the Federation vast HR experience in a variety of sectors; including more than 25 years’ experience in the nonprofit sector as part of executive leadership and HR management teams or, as a consultant, designing and implementing all spectrums of HR practices. In her role as Director of Human Resources (HR) at the Federation, she will ensure that its human resources programs and policies align with its’ mission and that practices such as; hiring and onboarding, compensation and benefits, professional development, performance management, and employee relations comply with all employment laws and regulations.

Project Leadership Team

Nancy Mader, Director of Transition Projects

We welcome Nancy Mader as our Director of Transition Projects and a member of the Federation’s Project Leadership Team (PLT). Nancy earned a B.S. in Business Management from the University of Wyoming and a M.A. in Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of Northern Colorado. She came to us after working for Easter Seals and has over 15 years of experience working in disability services. As the Director of Transition Projects, Nancy will continue to manage the rollout of the WIOA Student and Family Support Project. Collaborating with the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, this project is designed to serve transition age students and their families. Nancy also assists with running our LINK Center project that serves transition age students and their families.

Laura Noble, Family TIES Project Director

Welcome to Laura Noble. Laura is an experienced professional, as well as, a parent of a young adult with special needs. Laura has many years of experience working as a Family Partner, Parental Advisor for families and their children with special health care needs and, most recently, a Health Analyst. As a result, she possesses a wealth of knowledge on services for youth and children with special health care needs, peer support, community resources and health policy. As our Family TIES Project Director and a member of the Federation’s Project Leadership Team (PLT), Laura will work with DPH to oversee the functions of the statewide program that brings together parents facing similar challenges in raising their children with special needs. In this role, Laura will also supervise our regional coordinators and, will supervise a Parent-to-Parent Coordinator, who oversees the day to day activities of the statewide program.

Carrie Noseworthy, Project Coordinator, MFV/MA Family-to-Family Health Info

Welcome to Carrie Noseworthy. Carrie actually joined the Federation on the day of our 2017 VOC as our Project Coordinator for MFV/MA Family to Family Health Information Center. Her professional experience includes creating mental health equity for individuals on the autism spectrum and, working with caregivers to build their skill sets in order to navigate systems of care for their children. As a parent of 2 children with special needs, Carrie will bring to the position her personal knowledge and professional expertise! In her role, Carrie will serve as a member of the Project Leadership Team (PLT) will coordinate the day to day operations of the MA Family to Family Health Information Center for it to provide family support, information, technical assistance and training to parents of children with special needs, students with disabilities and their professional partners.

Other FCSN Staff

Erin Anguish, Communications Coordinator

Erin joins both our Development and Technology departments as the Federations’ Communications Coordinator. In her role, Erin generates content to enhance the agency’s presence in a variety of media and she coordinates the development of Federations’ annual and long-term communication plan. Erin also assists with organizing and publicizing agency-wide events and assists with the production and maintenance of agency publications, websites and social media.

Jennifer Balzaneli, Information Specialist - Central MA, WIOA

Jennifer also joins our WIOA Student and Family Support Project as a Transition Family Support Specialist. In her role, as a Transition Family Support Specialist, Jennifer will be based out of Central, MA. She will coordinate with Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) area offices to support families and provide transition related trainings across the state. Jennifer will also provide family support, information, technical assistance, and training to parents of young adults with disabilities and their partners.
Nota do editor: Janet Vohs trabalhou na Federação de Alunos com Necessidades Especiais (Federation for Children with Special Needs) durante mais de 30 anos. Ela faleceu em dezembro de 2016 após uma longa batalha com câncer da mama. Este artigo é um dos melhores que ela escreveu e um ótimo exemplo de sua paixão, empenho e defesa em prol de todos os alunos e famílias. Ela compartilhou conosco seu dom extraordinário de transformar conceitos complexos em algo compreensível e pertinente para todos.

A inclusão de aprendizes da língua inglesa (ELL) portadores de deficiência

Por Janet Vohs

Educação de alta qualidade para todos
Todos os alunos nos Estados Unidos têm o direito de receber uma educação de alta qualidade. As leis federais e estaduais reconhecem a importância de educar alunos com necessidades especiais em salas de aula junto com os outros colegas. Essa prática é geralmente chamada de “inclusão”. A Lei de Educação para Portadores de Deficiência (IDEA, sigla em inglês) cita mais de 30 anos de pesquisa que demonstra que os alunos portadores de deficiência educados em salas de aula de educação geral—com a devida assistência de educação especial e de linguagem e as devidas adaptações—têm um desempenho bem mais elevado. Portanto, a inclusão se tornou parte do que chamamos de uma educação “de alta qualidade”.

O que é a inclusão?
Inclusão significa mais do que ser educado em aulas regulares. Significa também que o aluno sente que é uma parte integral de uma comunidade escolar, de igual valor. Os alunos “incluídos”:

- Participam de aulas de educação geral, apropriadas para sua faixa etária, com acesso aos ambientes físicos e às rotinas da escola.

continua na próxima página
A inclusão de aprendizes da língua inglesa (ELL) portadores de deficiência
(continuação da página anterior)

- Têm oportunidades de socializar e formar relacionamentos com seus colegas.
- Participam de forma significativa do currículo de educação geral, até o máximo possível, com a assistência e os serviços necessários para progredirem.
- Precisam atender aos mesmos padrões acadêmicos rigorosos que o estado de Massachusetts estabeleceu para todos os alunos.

Desafios dos alunos ELL portadores de deficiência
Ao atualizar a lei IDEA em 2004, o congresso dos EUA descobriu que a educação de alunos portadores de deficiência havia sido limitada por “expectativas baixas”. Essas expectativas baixas ocorreram porque os alunos portadores de deficiência eram muitas vezes colocados em salas de aula separadas, onde não tinham a oportunidade de aprender o mesmo conteúdo acadêmico que todos os outros alunos estavam aprendendo. Atualmente, os alunos ELL portadores de deficiência continuam a enfrentar expectativas baixas, segregação e falta de oportunidade para aprender conteúdo acadêmico.

As famílias de alunos ELL portadores de deficiência enfrentam desafios enormes ao tentar garantir que seus filhos recebam uma educação de alta qualidade e inclusiva. Muitas vezes não têm familiaridade com as escolas dos EUA ou proficiência em inglês. As escolas que educam alunos ELL portadores de deficiência com sucesso fornecem um ambiente de inclusão e apoio acadêmico onde todos os alunos podem aprender.

Uma questão bem difícil é a identificação errônea de alunos ELL. De acordo com o Departamento de Ensino Fundamental e Médio de Massachusetts, a identificação errônea de alunos ELL resulta na identificação excessiva e diminuída desses alunos ELL como sendo portadores de deficiência. Por exemplo, um aluno que precisa de educação especial pode não recebê-la porque seu distrito escolar não tem o especialista necessário, como um psicólogo, que fale a língua do aluno. Os alunos de outros distritos podem precisar de ajuda para aprender inglês, mas se o distrito não tem os recursos para ajudar, tais alunos podem ser referidos à educação especial. Os alunos ELL que têm um desempenho escolar baixo são às vezes identificados como precisando de educação especial porque suas diferenças linguísticas e culturais são interpretadas como uma deficiência. Uma vez que o aluno ELL é identificado como sendo portador de deficiência, a maior questão é geralmente o acesso a conteúdo acadêmico apropriado para seu nível escolar. Sem acesso à sala de aula regular, o acesso ao currículo geral torna-se difícil. Precisa haver um equilíbrio entre o aprendizado do inglês e o de disciplinas acadêmicas. Muitas vezes o melhor lugar para criar tal equilíbrio é na sala de aula regular.

Os pais são essenciais
Os pais desempenham um papel fundamental na educação dos filhos. Isso aplica-se ainda mais para pais cujos filhos sejam aprendizes da língua inglesa e também portadores de deficiência. As famílias fornecem informações importantes sobre as questões linguísticas e culturais de seus filhos e explicam os pontos fortes e necessidades na aprendizagem de seus filhos. Os pais precisam pedir às escolas para fornecer o apoio linguístico que precisarem para manter-se em contato com os professores e participar das reuniões da equipe de Programa Individualizado de Ensino (IEP, sigla em inglês). As escolas precisam fornecer tradutores, conforme necessário, para atender às necessidades de comunicação dos pais. As famílias podem lutar em favor dos filhos ELL portadores de deficiência para que sejam incluídos em salas de aula regulares com assistência e os serviços necessários para que seus filhos possam se beneficiar das mesmas atividades de aprendizagem e instrução que seus colegas. Ao trabalharem juntos, as famílias e os professores garantirão que todos os alunos recebam uma educação de alta qualidade e inclusiva que atende às necessidades individuais de cada aluno.

Para saber mais sobre a educação inclusiva e os serviços de educação especial para seus filhos, recomendamos que as famílias conversem com os professores de seus filhos. As famílias também podem ligar para a Federação de Alunos com Necessidades Especiais www.fcsn.org para obter mais respostas.
Catastrophic Illness in Children Relief Fund

By Cathy Hickey

“...the Fund has supported us through several financial obligations that parents never expect or plan on when a child is born...The Fund has lessened our stress around providing our son the care he needs...With our handicapped van, ramp, and more appropriate bathroom, we can keep him safe and maintain our ability to be his caregivers!”

- Recipient Family

Established in 2000, the Catastrophic Illness in Children Relief Fund (CICRF) is a program of the Department of Public Health (DPH). It was created to help families manage the financial burdens associated with caring for children with special health care needs and disabilities, expenses that are often not covered by insurance.

The applicant must be:

- a Massachusetts resident
- age 21 or younger
- under the care of a healthcare provider with staff privileges at a hospital providing pediatric or neonatal care

To be eligible for reimbursement, expenses must exceed 10% of the family’s annual income up to $100,000 (and 15% of any portion over $100,000) in a 12-month period. For example, if a family has an annual gross income of $33,000, the out-of-pocket medically-related expenses must be over $3,500.

Home modifications to improve accessibility, transportation expenses to/from hospitals, modified vans, and copayments/deductibles are just some of the expenses that may be reimbursable. CICRF considers expenses within two years of the date the application is received.

Applications are opened in the order received. DPH staff works with parents/guardians to complete paperwork that verifies annual income and provides proof of payment for expenses or insurance denial. The more information submitted with the application, the faster CICRF can determine if a family is eligible for financial assistance.

To request an application or for more information on eligible expenses, please visit www.mass.gov/cicrf or call 1-800-882-1435.

ABLE Accounts coming to Massachusetts Spring 2017

There are significant costs of living with a disability (or raising a child with a disability), ranging from finding accessible housing and transportation to obtaining personal assistance services, assistive technology, and specialized health care. Many of these expenses are not covered by insurance, Medicaid, or Medicare, making many individuals with disabilities and their families dependent on a wide variety of public benefits. Eligibility requirements for these public benefits (SSI, SNAP, Medicaid) make them available only to those with very limited assets.

The Stephen Beck, Jr. Achieving a Better Life Experience Act of 2014, better known as the ABLE Act, offers individuals with disabilities and their families a new way to plan for future disability-related expenses.

Established under section 529A of the Internal Revenue Code, the ABLE Act allows families or individuals the option of opening a tax-favored account to cover qualified disability-related living expenses, such as education, housing, and transportation. Several key features of ABLE accounts could make them a preferred vehicle for savings. For example:

- Funds up to $100,000, as well as qualified distributions other than housing expenses, will be disregarded for purposes of SSI benefits
- Funds in the accounts will have no impact on Medicaid benefits
- No federal or state taxes will be imposed on qualified distributions

These accounts were first made available nationally in 2016, and Massachusetts anticipates launching its own program within the coming months. The Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority (MEFA - www.mefa.org) has been designated as the entity to manage the ABLE program statewide, while Fidelity Investments will serve as the ABLE Program Manager.

ABLE accounts will be available to individuals that can certify receipt of benefits under Title II or Title XVI of the Social Security Act (SSA). A physician’s letter stating that an individual meets SSA disability requirements can also be used for certification. In either case, the disability must be present before age 26. The Annual Contribution Limit for 2017 will be capped at $14,000.

Starting in the Spring of 2017 eligible individuals and their families will be allowed to establish an ABLE account with the Massachusetts Educational Financing Authority (MEFA). Visit mefa.org for more information about the program launch.

Questions about the Massachusetts ABLE program may be directed to Tom Graf, MEFA’s Executive Director or Elizabeth Fontaine, MEFA’s Deputy Executive Director by calling (800) 449-MEFA or by emailing info@mefa.org. David D’Arcangelo of the Massachusetts Office on Disability (617) 727-7440, Ext. 27317) can serve as a resource for accessibility and disability related questions.
Join us this Fall for
Walk, Roll, Shobble*, Stroll
for our 5th Annual Fundraising Walk!

""When a shuffle meets a hobble" (Definition by Chelsey Kendig, self-advocate)