VISIONS OF COMMUNITY CONFERENCE
LIVE MARCH 6, 2021
REGISTER: FCSN.ORG/VOC
I still remember the day that I met her as if it were yesterday, it was August 7, 2014. A woman of unassuming, petite stature at first glance. I assumed that she was just a soft-spoken elderly woman, but boy, did I quickly find out that I was wrong! At the time I was the Coordinator of the Call Center of the Parent, Training and Information Center, and Phyllis would come into the call center to help answer the calls from parents seeking help with their special needs children. Every Wednesday, like clockwork, at 10:00 AM, Phyllis would arrive and take her place at the same desk. She would make herself some tea and settle into work. Her knowledge of special education regulations and the needs of parents were amazing. I can still hear her “You need to tell them that the law, is the law, is the law!” She was hardly demure, but when you got advice from Phyllis you know that you had the information that you needed to make a difference in your child’s life. She was someone that left a lasting impression with you. She could always make me laugh and her smile was infectious. Phyllis worked for the Federation from 1976 through 2017. What started as a mom fighting for her son’s rights to a public education, became a life of teach others to do the same for their own children. Phyllis passed away on Saturday, December 26, 2020. She was a gift to all of us. Her legacy still lives on to this day, every time that phone rings or email comes in. Phyllis you are miss, but not forgotten.

Peace!
By Mary-Beth Landy
Sr. Trainer of RTSC
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This was from a parent who attended a previous Visions of Community (VOC) conference. The conference was first launched in 1999 and has continued every year since. VOC uniquely brings together families, youth and professionals in Massachusetts who support and advocate for children with disabilities. It is an opportunity for families and youth to learn, to meet others, find new resources, and share experiences. It is a chance for our professionals to meet families and hear directly about their experiences and answer questions and concerns. As another parent said, “It helped me gain knowledge & feel more confident as a parent.”

This year’s conference is right around the corner and will take place March 2-6. Our all-day Saturday event is headlined by Dr. Rosemarie Allen, a national leader whose life’s work is centered on ensuring children have access to high-quality early childhood programs that are developmentally and culturally appropriate. She will lead our keynote discussion on “Ensuring your Child is Honored, Valued, and Connected.” Our two inspiring youth keynote speakers - Sophie Scrimgeour and Isadora Greene – will talk about their journeys.

We have workshop tracks on special education, health, early childhood, equality and disability, family engagement, and transition. Two youth tracks (self-advocacy and college navigator) are available for young people ages 14-26 and are co-led by our friends at EasterSeals of Massachusetts. Our virtual exhibitor hall will be open Thursday night and all-day Saturday and have lots of resources available.

We have listened to feedback and this year we are spreading our conference out over 5 days. While the main event is on Saturday the 6th, we will have workshops, networking opportunities, and resources available Tuesday-Friday afternoon and evening. One special event that will take place on Wednesday is our “Meet the Commissioners” night, an opportunity for families to meet the leaders of our state agencies who serve children with disabilities and families. Please join us for a chance to ask questions, share your experiences, and put faces to names.

I am a sibling of a child with special needs. While my brother is no longer with us, he continues to influence me every day. From him, I have learned how to respect and celebrate differences. I have learned what is truly meaningful. I have learned patience. I learned how to fix things. When I was growing up, my family did not have a network of other families with children with disabilities to talk to, to learn from, to celebrate with. The founders of the Federation recognized the fundamental importance of families supporting families. With VOC, we are creating new networks, possibilities, and new opportunities for families moving forward to know that you are not alone.

I hope to see you all at this year’s Visions of Community!
Yours, Pam
Here we are, 11 months into this COVID emergency, still quarantining, wearing masks, and staying safe. Vaccines are available and rolling out to priority groups. Do you know where you are on the list? Take the quick quiz to determine your eligibility. To find a vaccine location, you can check here on the official Massachusetts website. The state has worked hard to improve the website and access to information but there are other resources. An entrepreneurial woman created a website that only features open appointments. See https://www.macovidvaccines.com/

You can also consult with your primary health care provider to determine whether you and your adult family members are part of any risk group. MassHealth has approved parents/caregivers who have been caring for their children with special health care needs at home as a priority group. If your son/daughter qualifies for specific health care services such as Palliative Care, Care Coordination, Medical Review Team (MRT), or Catastrophic Relief Funding, you can be approved as an essential worker/unpaid home health care worker and be eligible for the vaccine now. Letter were sent to families the week of February 1.

The Department of Public Health (DPH) is running a campaign promoting the vaccine: Trust the Facts. Get the Vax. Videos and information are available to share information on vaccine safety. Watch, learn and stay safe.
HOW DO I PARTICIPATE IN THE VIRTUAL VOC CONFERENCE?

BY RENEE WILLIAMS

The Visions of Community Conference (VOC) is accessible on both a desktop or mobile device. Although this is a virtual event, it promises to be just as engaging as if we were in person! Following registration, you will receive a link to sign into the conference app. Start by completing your personal profile to better engage with other attendees. Within the platform, simply click on the Agenda to scroll through available sessions. The agenda can be filtered by topic or language. You can build a personal agenda and add it to your Outlook or Google calendar.

An important aspect of any conference is the ability to network and socialize with other attendees. Our virtual conference will continue to provide that experience. You can view the attendee list and engage with others by sending community or private messages. Find a topic in the Community Board that you are interested in joining, or start your own chat. You can also participate in Virtual Meets Ups for audio and video networking experience.

The exhibitor center will be just as engaging. Attendees will be able to connect with exhibitors and have access to resources and videos demonstrations. For more information on how to access these and many other conference features, watch this brief video: User Guide, or go to www.facebook.org/fcsnfb to watch our very own Mary Lewis-Pierce and Kristin LaRose discuss the ins and outs of the conference, how to navigate the platform and more. Feel free to contact us with any questions at voc@fcsn.org.

Don’t wait until March. You can register today and join the many attendees currently in the networking community, submit questions to presenters and visit exhibitors. We look forward to seeing you!
The Federation for Children for Special Needs is very excited to announce that Dr. Rosemarie Allen will be the keynote speaker for our Visions of Community Conference. Dr. Allen is a leader in early childhood education and passionate about working towards an education landscape that ensures that early childhood education is high quality, equitable and culturally responsive.

She is the founder and president of the non-profit Institute for Racial Equity & Excellence (IREE) which advocates for equitable educational practices. She is a respected keynote speaker and has used her platform to bring attention to the issues of discipline and suspension and the disproportionate impact of these practices on children of color particularly boys in the school system. She has produced webinars on creating anti-racist early childhood spaces and speaks frequently about Race, Bias and Equity. Her work is informed by her own early childhood experiences as a child who was frequently suspended from school.

Dr. Allen is an Associate Professor in the School of Education at the Metropolitan State University of Denver where she focuses her classes on issues of equity, power and privilege and how they impact teaching in the classroom. Her research focuses on the disproportionate number of children who are suspended and expelled in early childhood programs and the effect that has on their life-long learning.

Dr. Allen was the keynote speaker at this year’s National Parent Center conference where she spoke about engaging families using culturally responsive practices. FCSN executive director called Dr. Allen’s keynote, “extraordinarily powerful, insightful and relevant to our work.”

At VOC, Dr. Allen will be speaking on how parents can empower themselves to more fully engage with the schools. There will be a focus on social issues and barriers families face in achieving a safe space for their child to be seen.

We are deeply honored to have her as our keynote speaker. You can learn more about Dr. Allen on her website: https://www.rosemarieallen.com/home.html
Students and young adults (ages 14-26) have a unique opportunity to attend a statewide conference with sessions just for them! On Saturday March 6th, FCSN will host our 6th Youth Forum at the Visions of Community Conference with two different tracks. The Youth Self Advocacy track will focus on self-determination, health, creativity, and, most importantly, having fun and making new friends. The Self-Advocacy track will be open to any young person. The Youth College Navigator track is designed for students ages 14 to 22 who are on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) or 504 plans and plan to graduate with a high school diploma with the vision of going to college. We are so excited to partner with amazing staff from Easterseals of Massachusetts who will be bringing their best game and a few surprises on Saturday. Sign up today! Fcsn.org/VOC

VOC will be held virtually this year and youth have some exciting new choices of workshops and presentations to attend on Saturday:
Where do I begin, what should our focus be, what did I miss? Families of transition age students have a lot of questions, because there is so much to consider when planning for life after high school. It is easy to get overwhelmed. Our transition focused strand at VOC will help you along your journey. Look for the magenta colored tag “Transition (ages 14-22)” when going through our Event Schedule to find the following transition-related workshops:

- Turning 18: How Parents Legal Rights Change
- What is MRC and How Do I Get There? Transforming Services for Youth and Young Adults at the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission
- Parent Empowerment of the College-Bound Child
- Special Needs Trusts and ABLE: Working Together To Improve Life Quality and Facilitate Independence
- Transition Assessment, Services and IEP Development: What, When, and How

Families can also connect to other families to discuss transition-related topics on our virtual conference platform. It is a fun place to explore:

- Meet-Ups
- Add a Topic or Question - some speakers have already started a thread.

Find your community and get answers to your questions!
VOC is an annual highlight for the Federation and our many communities. This year will be no different, notwithstanding the pandemic. For example, are you interested in honing your advocacy knowledge and skills as a parent or professional? If so, we have a great lineup of presentations for you. In Beyond Basic Special Education Rights, Attorney Melanie Jarboe will help you learn how to navigate your options for dispute resolution at the Bureau of Special Education Appeals, Problem Resolution Systems, and the Office for Civil Rights. In Special Education and Stress: How to Keep Calm and Advocate On, Attorney Jaki Fishkin and Angela Currie, Ph.D. (NESCA) will help you learn how to reduce stress while advocating effectively at the Team meeting and in the special education process. In the last session of the day, Attorney Dan Heffernan will review the latest laws, regulations, BSEA and court rulings and keep you aware of the trends in Key Special Education Law Updates.

Some of the other great special education presentations include:

- Unlocking the Language in the Script: Empowering Communication through Echolalia
- Healthy Relationships and Sexuality Education for Students with I/DD and Autism
- Using Psychosocial Data to Improve Special Education Service Delivery
- Motivating Neurodiverse Learners to do the No-Fun, Boring and Tough Stuff: From Remote Learning to Household Chores, Helping Kids Get Started, Persist and Finish Tasks and
- Implicit Bias: A Closer Look at Special Education

We are unceasingly gratified by the many parents, professionals, and students from across the state attending our virtual workshops unimpeded by time, distance, and family responsibilities. We look forward to seeing you all virtually at VOC this year.
One the most meaningful opportunities at our annual Visions of Community conference is to network with other families! #VOC2021 will be no different! In this virtual platform, there will be multiple ways to connect with old friends and meet new ones. Once you are registered, you can select to attend any of the Networking Sessions on:

- Tuesday, March 2 from 4:00-5:00PM
- Thursday, March 4 from 4:00-5:00PM
- Friday, March 5 from 4:00-5:00PM
- Saturday, March 6 from 3:45-4:30PM

In addition to these specific times that will be facilitated by Federation staff, you can create your own opportunities to connect with families, or professionals, on a topic of mutual interest, i.e., disability of child, age, language spoken….there are endless possibilities! On the Whova platform, click on Community in the left margin and a number of options will be there. You can set up Meet-Ups & Virtual Meets!

The Federation will create a Meet-Up space, a virtual room, for anyone to stop in from 10:00AM-noon and 1:00PM-3:45PM on Saturday, March 6. We’ll be there to answer any questions, help connect you to other groups – whatever you need.

You can access a full list of attendees by clicking on Attendees in that left margin. You can also send a message to any participant or speaker by clicking on Messages. Come to VOC and get connected!!

We look forward to seeing you there!!
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A program of MAB Community Services and The Ivy Street School
Boston Children’s Hospital has partnered with SPARK, an online research study sponsored by the Simons Foundation Autism Research Initiative.

Join the largest study of autism ever!

What is SPARK?
We are a growing community of individuals, families, and researchers on a mission to speed up the understanding of autism. Our aims are to:

- Collect DNA and information through surveys from 50,000 people with autism and both of their parents.
- Share that data with qualified researchers.
- Make breakthroughs that were never possible before.
- Return our findings to you.

Why Join?
Your DNA could hold the answer that sparks the next genetic discovery for autism. The more families who join, the more that can be discovered. You will be able to:

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- Power future autism research for years to come.
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