



The Parent Leadership Project's *Parent Perspective*

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Early Intervention Information and Resources

November/December 2004

Families Finding Their Way: Tools for the Journey

The “Red Flags”: Recognizing and Dealing With Autism Spectrum Disorders, Vision Loss and Hearing Loss in Young Children

Are there aspects of your child’s development that are puzzling to you?

Parents, caregivers and Early Intervention providers should be aware of “red flags” in a child’s development that may indicate the presence of an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), vision loss or hearing loss. Early identification of these conditions and intervention by professionals who have specialized training may improve the developmental outcome for your child



This article is not intended for diagnostic purposes or as a substitute for a clinical evaluation. However, the information may be used as a starting point for a conversation with your Early Intervention service provider about your concerns.

Newly Created Office of Specialty Services:

The Office of Specialty Services at the Department of Pub-

lic Health is focused on ensuring that children with particular conditions are identified at a young age and then have access to appropriate intervention. Children who have a hearing loss, vision loss, deafblindness, or are on the Autism Spectrum are all part of this group. Although these children may not seem to share many traits, they are grouped together because they may need specialized services to address the particular needs of each of these diagnoses. The Office oversees policy development, standards and monitoring of specialty service providers, and provides technical assistance, training and consultation to program staff, families, community collaborators and other state agencies around specialty service issues.

Recognizing the “Red Flags” –Brochures Available:

A series of brochures has been developed to help alert parents and early care and education providers to the early signs suggestive of specialty service conditions. These include:

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Parent Participation Opportunity

Survey for Families in Early Intervention to be Piloted

Parents! Don’t miss your chance to improve the Early Intervention System.

Families whose children are currently enrolled in Early Intervention or “have graduated” within the last year have a unique opportunity to contribute to building a better Early Intervention System, both in Massachusetts and nationally.

Over November, December and January, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, lead agency for Early Intervention, will participate in piloting a Family Survey developed by the National Center for Special Education Accountability and Monitoring (NCSEAM). NCSEAM is partnering with only 10 states in this ef-

fort. Massachusetts families are being asked to complete a survey containing approximately 150 items relating to your Early Intervention experience. These surveys are completely anonymous and will not be used to provide feedback to your individual Early Intervention program, or to the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. However, they will be returned to NCSEAM, where staff will use them, and surveys from other states, to develop a large databank of survey items.

Within the next year, states such as Massachusetts that participated in the pilot, will be able to access technical assistance from NCSEAM to help them develop state-specific, shorter family satisfaction

surveys for Early Intervention.

Throughout the next few months, families participating in events throughout the state may be asked to complete the survey at focus groups, holiday parties or trainings. Participation is voluntary. No one is required to complete the survey. Any family interested in assisting the Department of Public Health in this work by completing a survey may contact the Parent Leadership Project at (877) 353-4757 and ask to complete a survey over the phone.

Thank you in advance for your help in this important effort

Resources

Support for Families Whose Children have Genetic Disorders

Velo-Cardio Facial Syndrome (VCFS), also known as 22q11 Deletion Syndrome or DiGeorge Syndrome is a widely undiagnosed genetic disorder most often associated with any of the following: cardiac anomalies, speech and language delays and learning disabilities to name a few. For more information on VCFS, including support group information, please visit www.VCFSEF.org. The web site is also translated into Spanish.

Isodicentric 15 (IDIC 15) is a rare chromosome abnormality in which a child is born with extra genetic material from chromosome 15. Children with IDIC 15 are frequently affected by developmental disabilities, including autism and seizure disorders. A group of parents started a non-profit organization for children with IDIC 15. They produce a newsletter, the MIRROR, have a Parent Match Program, and maintain a website at www.idic15.org, which is available in English, Spanish and Italian.

The 3rd International Conference on Isodicentric 15 and related disorders will be held on June 22-25, 2005 in Schaumburg, Illinois. For more information, please visit www.idic15.org.

Prader-Willi Syndrome (PWS) is a non-inherited genetic disorder which is most often associated with a random deletion of the 15th chromosome. Children with PWS may have cognitive impairment, difficult behaviors and breathing and swallowing abnormalities, among others. The Prader-Willi Syndrome Association of New England maintains a website at www.members.aol.com/pwsane. The Prader-Willi Syndrome national website is available in English and Spanish. Please visit www.pwsausa.org.

Nuevo--en Espanol!

Visite nuestro sitio Web, www.eiplp.org para otros recursos utiles para las familias en Espanol.



Early Education and Care Advisory Committee Public Hearing Notice Thursday, December 9th at 1:00 pm, State House Hearing Room B1, Boston

The Early Education and Care Advisory Committee will hold a public hearing on Thursday, December 9th at 1:00 pm at the State House Hearing Room B1 in Boston.

Background

The Early Education and Care Advisory Committee was formed to develop a comprehensive, high quality, accessible system of programs and services for young children through the age of 5 in collaboration with their families and communities. The Department of Public Health, the Department of Education and the Office of Child Care Services worked together to develop a plan to strengthen and coordinate the state's early and education and care programs. A series of public forums were held throughout the state to gather information and testimony from interested individuals. The report of the Early Education and Care Committee is available at www.qualitychildcare.org/pdf/EECRreport.pdf.

Testimony will be limited to three minutes per speaker in order for everyone to have the opportunity to testify. Written testimony will be accepted on and prior to Thursday, December 9, 2004

Please submit written testimony to the offices of:

Representative Patricia Haddad
State House, Room 167
Boston, MA 02133

Senator Robert Antonini
State House, Room 109E
Boston, MA 02133

Taking Good Care

Building a “Sensory Friendly” Play Room for Your Child on a Budget

by Edith Benisty, OTR/L and MaryBeth Jeans, OTR/L

At a workshop held over the summer for parents and staff at the Kennedy Donovan Center Early Intervention Program in Attleboro, Occupational Therapists Edith Benisty and Mary Beth Jeans presented a workshop called “How to Build a Sensory Playroom for Your Child on a Budget”

The goal of the presentation was to provide families with ideas and resources to help them look at their child’s play space and figure out how to make it more “sensory friendly”. The purpose was to help parents find ways to make their child’s environment more sensory rich, one area at a time. The type of sensory input a child receives and how it is presented to him can make a big difference in how they respond to daily life.

For various reasons, children with sensory processing problems have difficulty with part of or all of the process of understanding information. To assist with improving sensory processing skills, adults can help in three major ways: by structuring the children’s time, by structuring the environment, and by structuring interactions.

The focus of this article is structuring the space where a child plays and how it can make a difference in how they ATTEND,

TRANSITION and LEARN.

With help from Occupational Therapists, parents can learn how to read their child’s sensory needs. To figure out what sensory input helps your child to be at an optimal level of arousal, parents can observe:

1. what your child seeks out and how it impacts their level of arousal, and
2. what input your child avoids and how it impacts their level of arousal.

Parents should follow their instincts and seek out assistance to assess the changes over time.

Edith and MaryBeth made a model of a child’s play space and divided the room into zones based on sensory input. They provided detailed information on how to build and where to find equipment with a list of resources. Some activities that can be included are a sand table or rice bin. Vestibular movement can be achieved through the use of a swing. Bean bags, pillows or a crash pad provide proprioceptive input. Tabletop activities such as puzzles, play dough and shaving cream address the area of attention. A tunnel or tent can be used for quiet time.

One parent found that the most helpful

part of the workshop was “the review of different sensory area and signs to look for in their child.” Another parent stated that “seeing an actual playroom and getting ideas for each section” was most beneficial.



This workshop will be offered again at Kennedy Donovan Center Early Intervention Program in Attleboro, over the winter.

Edith Benisty and MaryBeth Jeans are Occupational Therapists at the Kennedy Donovan Early Intervention Program in Attleboro.

Related Resources:

For more information on Sensory Integration, many libraries have the following books:

“The Out-of-Sync Child: Recognizing and Coping with Sensory Integration Dysfunction” and “The Out-of-Sync Child has Fun” by Carol Stock Kranowitz. These books are family-friendly and present information about strategies to work with your children and many fun activities to do together.

*Parent Participation Opportunity***Parents invited to be Members of the Program Re-certification Team by Faith Piaggi**

Every Early Intervention program must be certified every year by the Department of Public Health to provide services to children and families. In this process, known as Focused Monitoring, Early Intervention Regional Specialists from the Department of Public Health and Parent Team members collect information through focus groups at Early Intervention programs, to make sure that EI programs are in compliance with Massachusetts Early Intervention Operational Standards and Federal law (Part C of IDEA).

Parents of children who have graduated from Early Intervention are invited to become part of the Program Re-Certification Team. After a one day required training, parents are asked to

commit up to 10 hours in one month for each program re-certification. Parent team members use their expertise as a family member of an EI graduate to provide parent-professional collaboration to promote family-centered care within the Massachusetts Early Intervention system. **Parents will receive a stipend for their participation in both training and the re-certification process.**

For more information, please contact Faith Piaggi, EI Program Re-Certification Parent Coordinator at (413) 663-3610 or toll-free at (877) 353-4757.

The "Red Flags": Recognizing and Dealing with Autism Spectrum Disorders, Hearing Loss and Vision Loss

(Continued from page 1)

- **Do You Think Your Child has a Vision Loss?**
- **How Well Does Your Child Hear?**
- **If You Think Your Child has Both a Vision and Hearing Loss?**
- **Is Your Child Developing in Ways that Puzzle You?**

The brochures detail the developmental milestones by age for hearing, vision and behavior patterns and discuss risk factors for some of these conditions. They are available online at the Early Intervention Parent Leadership Project web site at www.eiplp.org, click on Basic Information and also at www.eitrainingcenter.org. Click on "MA Department of Public Health Documents and scroll down to the "Low Incidence" section. The brochures are also available at Early Intervention programs.

What to Do Next

If you have questions or concerns about whether your child has

one of these conditions, talk to your Early Intervention Service Provider. Specialized evaluation may be warranted and can help in making a diagnosis. If a diagnosis is made, specialty service providers, Early Intervention staff, and family members work as a team to discuss treatment options and to implement specialized services as part of your child's Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP).

For more information, please contact Tracy Osbahr, Director of Specialty Services at the Department of Public Health at (413) 586-7525 or by email at Tracy.Osbahr@state.ma.us.

Additional Resources:

- **Autism Spectrum Disorders:** www.firstsigns.org
- **Massachusetts Commission for the Blind:** www.mass.gov/mcb
- **Massachusetts Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing:** www.mass.gov/mcdhh
- **The New England Center Deafblind Project:** www.necdbp.org

Free Workshop Opportunity

The Transition Process: A New Three-Part Series about Services beyond EI

By Peggie O'Hare

Have you ever wondered what will happen when your child leaves early intervention? What is the transition process like? What are the options available to you and your child in the community? Who will help you? What can you do to help yourself?

Throughout its 30-year history as a parent-advocacy organization, the Federation for Children with Special Needs has helped support families of young children as they transition out of early intervention and into other community settings and public school programs. The Federation has conducted parent education workshops across the state, counseled thousands of parents over the phone, and networked with community partners to help families and their children move from one service delivery system to another.

Now, through the collaboration of three of its programs, the Early Intervention Training Center, the Parent Training and Information Center, and Family TIES of Massachusetts, the Federation is pleased to offer three parent education workshops as a series for families whose children are leaving early intervention services and moving on to other programs.

These three workshops, *Continuing the Journey, Turning*

Three, and *Let's Get Organized*, help families learn about possible community options, what to expect during transition and methods to facilitate this process. The workshops are conducted by experienced parent trainers who have been through the transition process themselves. All three workshops distribute helpful written materials and resources to help support parents throughout the transition process. The workshops are **free** of charge and some are available in Spanish.

If you are interested in having these workshops conducted in your community, talk with your Early Intervention Program Director and ask if the program would be willing to host this series. Ask the director to contact Heather Tirrell at (617) 236-7210 x159 or htirrell@fcsn.org to learn more details about scheduling these workshops.

Through these workshops, parents will learn more about the transition process and how they can find support as they experience this important step in their children's and family's lives.



CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOPS

December 1 -**Basic Rights Workshop**, 7-9 pm, Wakefield High School library, Wakefield. The Federation for Children with Special Needs presents this course that covers basic information about state and federal laws to assist parents in planning, decision-making and monitoring of their child's special education services. For more information on location or to register, call (800) 331-0688 or online at register@fcsn.org. For other dates locations, please see the Federation Web site for full schedule at www.fcsn.org.

December 4— **Annual Trip to Bright Lights**, Forest Park, Springfield. Central Massachusetts Families Organizing for Change invites families to join in a fun filled evening. Connect with other families who have children with special needs in a relaxed, fun atmosphere. A bus leaves from the Holiday Inn at 500 Lincoln Street in Worcester and travels to Springfield for a beautiful holiday lights display. For the trip back to Worcester, families will enjoy a boxed dinner and a holiday movie. This trip is free of charge for all family members. Space is limited and registration is required. For more information, please email casey-black922@aol.com or call (508) 854-4877 ext.52

December 4— **Longwood Symphony Orchestra Concert to Benefit Consortium for Children with Special Health Needs**, New England Conservatory, Jordan Hall, Boston. Some of the concert sponsors have purchased tickets so that parents, youth and family members may attend at no charge. For more information, please contact Mary

Aten, Family TIES Director at (781) 774-6618 or mcaten@fcsn.org.

December 8- **Building a Community: An Orientation to Massachusetts Early Intervention**— Part 1, Stonehill College, Easton, 9:00 am-3:30 pm. Other date and location: January 4— Shrewsbury Public Library, Shrewsbury, 10:30-4:30. Learn about core values and the evolution of the EI system, operational standards, state and federal laws.

December 6— **An IEP for My Child**, 6:30-8:30, Children's Hospital Conference Room, 300 Longwood Avenue, Boston. This workshop is presented by the Federation for Children with Special Needs. Every child with a disability who receives special education services must have an Individual Education Program (IEP). The workshop takes parents through the development of the IEP, step by step, including how to articulate a vision, using evaluations to write annual measurable goals and how to measure their child's progress. Workshop materials are also available in Spanish. For more information or to register, call (800) 331-0688 or register online at register@fcsn.org. Other dates/locations: December 8— Brookside School, Lakeview Avenue, Dracut; January 24, Cunningham Hall, 75 Edge Hill Road, Milton.

December 7- **Building a Community: An Orientation to Massachusetts Early Intervention**— Part 2, North Shore ARC, Danvers. Other dates and locations: January 26— Department of Public Health Western Regional Office, Northampton (See description above)

Due Process Training- December 16th

Families have important rights that follow them throughout their involvement in the Early Intervention system. Procedural and Due Process safeguards are provided based on Federal law, the Massachusetts Early Intervention Operational Standards and Due Process Procedures for Early Intervention Programs.

Mary Dennehy-Colorusso, Procedural Safeguards and Due Process Coordinator for the Department of Public Health will present a Due Process Training on December 16th from 12:00-2:00 pm at the Children's Community Early Intervention Program, Martha Eliot Health Center, 75 Bickford Street in Jamaica Plain. The training provides an overview of the different procedural safeguards including:

- The right to privacy (confidentiality and release of information);
- The right to review/examine your child's record;
- the right to refuse some services and accept others;
- Prior written notice;
- Written and spoken communication in a parent's native language;
- Parental consent, and
- Timely resolution of disputes

The workshop features examples of how these safeguards are built into the EI system and how they relate to all aspects of family participation in EI services.

The workshop is free of charge. Registration is required as space is limited. Please call Mary Dennehy-Colorusso at (978) 851-7261 ext 4016 or email Mary.Dennehy-Colorusso@state.ma.us.

Save the date...Save the date...Save the date...Save the date...Save the date... **The Federation for Children with Special Needs Annual Conference** *Visions of Community, March 12, 2005*

The Federation's Annual Conference, *Visions of Community*, will be held on Saturday, March 12, 2005 at the World Trade Center in Boston.

The Conference will offer up to 30 workshops on issues important to families of children with special needs, as well as many exhibits and resource materials of interest to families. Workshops will include topics on special education, health, the No Child Left Behind Act, mental health, early childhood and more.

For more information, please visit www.fcsn.org or call (800) 331-0688.

WORKING TOGETHER

BOSTON NEWS

Children's Community Early Intervention Program (CCEIP) has a new Medical Director! Dr. Wanessa Risko, a pediatrician at the Children's Hospital Primary Care Center, will collaborate with the Early Intervention staff to provide consultation and training for children with special health care needs. In addition, EI staff will attend trainings with medical residents and residents will join the EI team on home visits.

In October, CCEIP held their "Group Kick-Off Breakfast" where families learned about CCEIP developmental playgroups, toddler separation issues, and even had the chance to make play dough to take home. CCEIP will hold its annual Holiday Celebration for families in December at the Patient Entertainment Center at Children's Hospital with music, crafts, and holiday treats for all!

The **Criterion-Mattapan Early Intervention Program (Criterion-Mattapan)** sponsored a family brunch on October 1. Roxanne Hoke-Chandler, Boston Region Coordinator for Family TIES of Massachusetts, also attended.

CENTRAL NEWS

Children and families at **Wachusett Early Intervention Program (Wachusett EIP)** enjoyed an interactive puppet show performed by the Kings Way Puppets. After the show, families enjoyed a great Ice Cream Bash! On October 25, **Wachusett EIP** sponsored a trip to the Red Apple Farm where the children enjoyed a hayride. Each child also received a pumpkin to take home.

Kennedy-Donovan Center-South Central Early Intervention Program (KDC-South Central) recently held a Fall Transition Night where parents learned about life after Early Intervention and the challenges of parenting preschoolers including information about the transition process. Childcare was provided by **KDC-South Central**.

Families at **KDC-South Central** will celebrate the season with refreshments and fun activities at the Winter Holiday Party on Thursday, December 16th from 3- 4:30 pm.

Criterion Valley Early Intervention Program (Criterion Valley EIP) recently held a Turning Three Workshop that was presented by the Federation for Children with Special Needs. **Criterion Valley EIP** offers Parent Information groups as part of their Parent/Child enrichment group.

METROWEST NEWS

Thom Charles River Early Intervention (Thom/Charles River) in Waltham has just completed a parent series at the Watertown Family Center. Topics included, "Your Child's Development", "How to Get a Good Night's Sleep", "Beyond Ma-Ma and Da-Da" and "Who's the Boss; Behavior Strategies". The final workshop will be "Parenting Multiples or Children Close in Age". A workshop on Special Education is planned after the holidays

Thom/Charles River EI will hold its annual Holiday Toy Drive in December. The **Thom/Charles River EI program** has been "adopted" by a nursery school in Sudbury and an elementary school in Brookline who provide presents every year!

Twenty families at **Jewish Family & Children's Service Early Intervention Program (J.F.&C.S. EIP)** enjoyed a beautiful fall morning of pumpkin picking and hayrides at Ward's Berry Farm in Sharon. Jenn

Kuzoian from the program photographed all of the fun!

The **J.F. & C.S.** annual holiday gift giving assistance program is underway, helping families to avoid some of the stress associated with holiday shopping

NORTHEAST NEWS

South Bay Early Intervention Program in Lowell (South Bay-Lowell) is pleased to welcome new Director Dianne Corbin! Diane is a licensed social worker with over eight years of experience working with children and their families and brings many new and exciting ideas to the program.

Families at **South Bay-Lowell** are invited to become part of a new Parent Council which will focus on connecting families through events, support groups and other activities. The Council will meet once a month at the center to discuss ways to strengthen services and enrich families experiences at **South Bay-Lowell**. The first meeting will be held on November 17th from 6-7:30 pm.

The **Criterion-Stoneham Early Intervention Program (Criterion-Stoneham EIP)** started Saturday morning Parent-Child groups. This program was developed to meet the needs of working parents and has been very well attended. Another popular program, Aquatics at the Reading "Burbank" YMCA is offered on Wednesdays.

Criterion-Stoneham EIP hosted a two-part series, "Turning Three" in November. The program is offered twice a year to parents whose children will transition from Early Intervention services to the local school system.

Criterion-Stoneham EIP recently participated in a workshop based on the book "Quirky Kids: Understanding and Helping the Child who Doesn't Fit In-When to Worry and When Not to Worry". Several parents from the program attended this event which was also open to the public.

Stoneham High School students are raising money to buy gifts for 15 to 20 families in need at **Criterion -Stoneham EIP**, as part of their annual community project for the holiday. The students participate in a variety of activities that include writing letters from Santa for \$1.00, baking and selling cookies, and they even have a student dressed as Santa who is collecting change in the cafeteria. Way to go!

The **Regional Consultation Program at the Professional Center for Child Development in Andover (PCCD)** recently hosted a CPR training for families and respite providers. The Regional Consultation Program at PCCD and Cerebral Palsy of Eastern Massachusetts co-sponsored two workshops: "Feeding and Swallowing Disorders- part 2" and "Positioning for Communication".

On November 18, PCCD will host its annual open house from 6:30 to 8:30 pm. Parents at PCCD can learn "What to Look For in a Pre-school." The workshop will cover staffing, environment, size and types of preschool and what to look for in a teacher. Please call Ellen at (978) 475-3806 for details and to register..

Service coordinators at **Family Support Early Intervention in Dan-**

FAMILY & EI PROGRAM COLLABORATION

vers (FSEI) recently distributed a parent questionnaire surveying parents interests in a variety of areas. Parents were asked about their interest in reestablishing a PAC, a list of social events and trainings was offered to gauge families interests, and families were asked for recommendations of places that they like to visit with their young children. The response was wonderful.

On October 24, FSEI staff and parents met with the Parent Leadership Project for an Essential Allies Training. PAC meetings have been scheduled. A list of "Fun Places to Take Toddlers" was published in the most recent newsletter and one parent is exploring ways to keep updated information available to families. Ideas are everywhere and we are looking forward to a busy winter.

FSEI continues to have evening and Saturday family events. Many families attended our Make A Shaker night and our Saturday Halloween Party and everyone seemed to have a good time. Our Holiday Party is scheduled for the first Saturday in December.

SOUTHEAST NEWS

Holiday spirit is in the air at **Greater Fall River Early Intervention Program (Greater Fall River EIP)**. Forty families will receive Thanksgiving baskets, made by volunteers at the program, filled with yummy goodies and delivered to them by their service coordinators! A fundraiser is also underway to raise money for holiday gift certificates for families. South Coast Credit Union will once again donate clothing and toys for twenty children at the program. **Greater Fall River EIP** families and staff will enjoy brunch and activities together at their Christmas Party on December 8th from 9:30 to 11:30am.

Infants and toddlers at the **Schwartz Center for Children Early Intervention Center (Schwartz Center for Children)** had lots of fun this summer in their "little swimmers" group in the community. This fall, the **Schwartz Center for Children** offered the "Bear Cub Club" at the local zoo. Each week, the children learned about a different part of the zoo and it's inhabitants. The staff at the Schwartz Center are busy planning "Harvest Night", a yearly event where children and their families enjoy refreshments, an evening of storytelling, a walk through a pumpkin patch and arts and crafts.

Associates for Human Services' Taunton Area Early Intervention Program (Taunton Area EIP) recently hosted a family Halloween Party. Over 70 children and their families attended where they enjoyed pumpkin shape sorters, ghost bowling, pinning leaves on a tree, finding bats in the spaghetti and Halloween playdoh. Lots of scary music was played on the guitar by Donna Kjellman while Colleen Dunn signed all the songs. Balloon animals were created by Tommy Legasse, Liv Gauthier and Andrea Cantin.

On December 4, the **Taunton Area EIP** will hold their family holiday party at the Dighton Elementary School, where Santa will arrive to pass out toys to all the boys and girls.

Taunton Area EIP just moved to a newly designed building at 68 Allison Avenue in Taunton and will hold an Open House on November 17th.

On November 3rd, **Kennedy Donovan Center-Attleboro Early Intervention Program (KDC-Attleboro EIP)** held a Transition Night presented by Tammy Cahill, MS, CCC-SLP, Transition Coordinator at

the program. Tammy discussed transition procedures, time lines and community resources for family support and advocacy. Representatives from each town's school system attended and were available for questions. Over 42 parents attended. Congratulations to Tammy Cahill who recently received the Leadership Award at the Staff Appreciation Night at **KDC-Attleboro!** The Parent Advisory Council (PAC) at **KDC-Attleboro** will meet on November 18 to discuss future parent workshops and social events.

WESTERN NEWS

The **Pediatric Development Center Early Intervention Program (PDC EIP)** is seeking interested individuals for a few hours each week, working in homes of families with young children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders. A free training opportunity is available from the PDC Team prior to supervised visits and support meetings for those interested in spending therapeutic time with children under three years of age in the Berkshire County region. For more information, please contact: Kim Bridgham, M.Ed., CEIS, SSP Coordinator at: (413) 499-4537 or email Kim at: pdcb@Berkshire.rr.com.

Valley Infant Development Service (Valley Infant Development) in Springfield recently participated in an Early Intervention Education Week for the pediatric residents at Baystate Medical Center. It's a week long program held during their lunch hour with a different topic each day. Of particular interest was "parent day" where four families who receive or have received EI services told their stories. The parents appreciated the opportunity to be heard and offer suggestions about bed side manners and increased sensitivity when delivering difficult messages to families.

The Western Region Regional Consultation Program (WRCP) held a series of sign language classes in Westfield for parents, EI staff and childcare providers and 50 people attended. The program was also presented in Pittsfield and Belchertown.

The Coalition for Respite Across the Lifespan Family Support Fair was well attended, with over 50 Exhibitor Tables providing information for families. The Coalition developed a "How To Guide" for recruiting and hiring respite workers. It is available through Karen Cassidy at (413) 783-5500.

Kudos to the Springfield college rehab group that raised \$800.00 last spring for the **WRCP** in a Cards for Kids benefit!

Westfield Infant Toddler Services (Westfield I-T Services) has recently begun an Autism Support group for parents. The group has become very popular and is a great support to families whose children have received this diagnosis. Several alumni parents are also participating in this group and have been a great source of information and support.



THE PARENT LEADERSHIP PROJECT

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

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www.eiplp.org

The Early Intervention Parent Leadership Project NEWS

The Early Intervention Parent Leadership Project is pleased to welcome Margaret Credle Thomas as the new Training Director.

Before becoming part of the PLP team, Margaret received a Masters Degree in Social Work from Simmons College. She worked for the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunities (METCO), as a social worker and Assistant METCO Director for Wayland and Lexington Public Schools for nine years. Currently, Margaret is a Professor at Framingham State and Urban Colleges where she teaches anti-racism workshops, Introduction to Human Services and Case Management.

Margaret has a three-year old son who has recently transitioned from the Early Intervention system. She looks forward to visiting EI programs in the Boston area to discuss ways to collaborate and strengthen regional networking opportunities for parents, as well as other opportunities for involvement.

TO RECEIVE THE PARENT PERSPECTIVE NEWSLETTER, a free publication, published six times a year by the Parent Leadership Project, **call us toll-free at (877) 353-4757 and ask to be added to the PLP mailing list or email eiplp@yahoo.com.**

NEXT DEADLINE: We welcome your input and suggestions for resources and articles. The next deadline is **January 8**. Please email the newsletter editor at Jocelyn.Woog@state.ma.us or call the Parent Leadership Project toll-free at (877) 35-EI-PLP.

The *Parent Perspective* newsletter is produced by the Early Intervention Parent Leadership Project, through funding from the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

Happy Holidays from the PLP Team!

