

## The Significance of Mentoring

PATHWAYS FOR Exceptional Children developed the mentoring program about five years ago. There have been many things that have made us a successful organization, but the mentoring program has increased what we do from being *successful* to having *significance*. I never recognized the difference between these two words until Pathways began to work with so many kids from every facet of life all over New Jersey. We had raised money to support our programs and received awards to recognize our leadership, but there has never been anything that could compare to the difference our mentors have made in helping children with disabilities become a part of their community.

Equally, the children with disabilities have made their mentors feel significant by giving them purpose and meaning and showing them the benefits of looking beyond their own busy lives to volunteering their time to others. Success is valuable, but helping someone else feel they belong and can contribute is priceless...it goes beyond achieving personal success to creating significance and leaving a mark that will never be forgotten in that person's lifetime.

This newsletter is a tribute to our mentors and their many hours of devotion, the special projects they have undertaken, the programs they have created, and the friendship they have given. Thank you for your dedication. It is *you* who have helped Pathways to set our sights beyond achieving just success and challenged us to raise the bar to creating significance and leaving a footprint for the future.

—Melinda Jennis, President  
Pathways for Exceptional Children



### Joe Verga, 14-year-old Morris Plains student, sets out to prove mentoring hypotheses

In January 2007, I began my ROGATE independent research project. My topic was mentoring and its effect on children with special needs. I decided to conduct my research on mentors and children involved in Pathways for Exceptional Children's mentor program in Montville Township. In April 2007, I signed up for a Pathways mentor bowling program. We met once a week for five weeks. I hypothesized that over the course of the five-week program, the children with special needs would show significant improvement with their social skills and mastery of bowling.

After the first session, I handed out a survey to the mentors and parents of all the children. That survey consisted of rating scales of the kids. One part of the survey measured the social skills of the child being mentored. Some of the categories in that section included eye contact, listening skills, communication, interaction, and self-control. The other part of the survey gauged the bowling skills of the child such as holding the ball properly, releasing the ball, waiting patiently for his or her turn, and understanding the purpose of the game.

After the fifth and final session of the bowling program, I handed out the same survey to the mentors and parents. Almost every child made significant improvement from the first week to the last in both categories. These areas showed improvement levels of 54% in holding the ball properly, 41% in listening and eye contact with their mentor, and 43% in interacting with other children. The areas showing least improvement were participation, enjoyment, and comfort in the environment. These areas started at high levels of 80-90% and gained between 5-20%. It was clear all the children enjoyed and were motivated from the beginning to participate in the activity with the mentors. Overall, the total average improvement for all the skills was 29%.

The results proved my hypothesis correct. The mentors did have a significant effect on the children with special needs. After collecting my results, I interviewed Melinda Jennis, President of Pathways. She explained that the biggest problem for mentor programs in New Jersey is the high demand and the difficulty in training enough mentors to fill that demand. However, she also said that Pathways' mentor programs have made significant progress over the last six years. A long term goal for Pathways is to move to different counties and communities across the state. —Joe Verga

ROGATE (Resources Offered for Gifted And Talented Education) was created by the National Talent Network, the gifted and talented service of the Educational Information and Resource Center (EIRC). Their website is [www.eirc.org](http://www.eirc.org).

# Pequannock Township Team Wins Basketball Challenge!

On February 21, 2009, the Harlem Wizards returned to Montville Township to play against the Pathways Basketball Team, which consisted of high school players and coaches from Boonton, Montville Township, Parsippany, Mountain Lakes, and Pequannock Township. The night was one to remember as all of these young adults volunteered their time to play on behalf of children with special needs. The Pequannock Township team collectively scored the most points and took home the first place trophy and \$1,000 grant given to their school district



*The Harlem Wizards surround the winning players from Pequannock Township High School, from left: Kyle White, Joe Coffaro, and Alex Brown*

Special Education Department. We would like to thank each of the players for their efforts and our sponsors, Model A Fitness, Mark and Kim Smith, Affinity Credit Union, Sneakers Unlimited, Coastal Financial, Santangelo Medical Center of Montville, Injury Packs, and Lakeland Hills Family YMCA. Thank you again to the players who made this all possible.

## Pathways Receives New Jersey Recreation and Parks Association Award



This month, Pathways for Exceptional Children was invited to speak at the New Jersey Recreation and Parks Association

(NJRPA) statewide conference in Atlantic City, New Jersey. In addition, Pathways was honored to receive the "Excellence in Programming Award" from the NJRPA for our efforts in creating recreation and mentor programs in both Summit and Montville Township. Pathways' officers from Montville Township and Summit, Lead Mentors, Directors of Recreation from Montville Township, Maryann Witty, and Summit, Judith Leblein Josephs, were all present to receive this prestigious award at a dinner ceremony held at the Taj Mahal on March 3, 2009. Pathways gave credit for their success to the mentors who have been so instrumental in helping to include and befriend children with disabilities and their families.

***Pathways 2009 Hand-in-Hand Walkathon will take place on Saturday, May 16, 10am – 12pm. Watch for flyers coming soon!***

## Autism Speaks Grant Helps Many Communities

One year ago, Autism Speaks awarded Pathways a grant to kick-start additional mentor programs. Not only did this grant provide funding for mentor trainings in Mount Olive, Summit, Cranford, Morristown, and Morris Plains, but it also proved to be an invaluable investment for these communities. Each of them are well on their way to running programs for children with disabilities and most are self-sustaining. Summit also received funding to begin recreation programs that exceeded expectations, increasing the number of programs the grant provided funding for from five to nine. One of these was a Learning Through Life program that gave children with disabilities and their mentors the opportunity to create a diner, learn about food service,



shop and cook. Pictured here are students visiting a diner on a field trip. Again, none of this would be possible without the help of grants and especially our mentors and their devotion to our children.

***Recreation Programs:*** Upcoming programs are posted on our website at the beginning of each month. You can visit [www.montvillepec.org](http://www.montvillepec.org) and click on "Children's Programs," or the Recreation Department's website: [www.montvillenj.org](http://www.montvillenj.org), Click on Municipal Services, then Parks & Recreation, then Forms & Flyers.



**What a child needs to be exceptional.**