

Getting Involved in Education

Seven years ago, my daughter, the older of my two children, began school at William Mason Elementary. I put her on the bus, went to work, and never thought twice about her education. It was all quite simple and straightforward. Life was good and I became nothing more than your typical apathetic parent in a school system. I didn't realize it then, but I took education largely for granted.

Soon, my son Jacob, a child with multiple disabilities, entered the special education system. I quickly had to read lots of paperwork, sign off on evaluations I did not understand, and was handed a blue book that was over 110 pages long. The book outlined the Individuals with Disability Education Act, which was

difficult at best to understand without going to law school. Eventually, I was given an Individual Education Plan (IEP) that was a contractual agreement with the district. This

IEP was over 40 pages long and attempted to outline the special modifications and services my son needed to obtain an appropriate education. Negotiating a peace

treaty with Mars or getting a mortgage would have been easier to understand. I was overwhelmed and became totally lost in the process, to say the least. Unfortunately, my days

of being an apathetic parent came to a very abrupt end as I realized I had to become an educated consumer about my son's services. If my son was to ever succeed — much less read or write — I had to become his best and most knowledgeable advocate.

Today, at almost 11 years of age, despite his disabilities, Jacob has accomplished what many thought impossible. He is now reading at a second grade level. He can write, use a computer, and has begun to move from addition and subtraction to learning his multiplication tables. There is no question that Jacob has progressed and benefited tremendously from special education services. That is why laws such as the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act exist. However, the law is nothing more than words on paper if people do not know how to appropriately apply it. Special education is also expensive, but the cost of not following the law and appro-

priately educating children with disabilities is even more costly if, after 13-16 years in the educational system, they reach adulthood unemployed and dependent on society. Unemployment and/or underemployment are a national crisis for the disabled population. This is not only true of children with multiple disabilities but even those with a single disability such as reading. Special education is an investment that must be expected to produce outcomes, and parents are an integral part of the process. It is about making sure the diploma your child receives translates into life after graduation from high school. It does not happen by osmosis, closing your eyes, or hoping the process will work.

I encourage every parent having a child with special needs to know how to build an appropriate IEP for your child, and to become an involved and knowledgeable advocate. Being a parent of a child with disabilities has not always been easy, but I consider myself fortunate to have had Jacob and been a part of the special education process. I am no longer an apathetic parent nor will I ever take education for granted again. Education is something everyone should work to ensure all children have access to and derive benefit from. With the new school year upon us, get involved in your schools and the education of our community's children. Education is about the future of our children, and its success depends on everyone getting involved.

—Melinda Jennis,
President, Pathways

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Save the Date!
Pathways is holding a workshop
on November 15, 2008:

Making Sense of the IEP Process

Guest Speakers:

- Dr. Roberta Wohle, Director – NJ Office of Special Education Programs
- Ms. Sheralyn Gottlieb, Director of Pupil Services – Rockaway Township
- Ms. Nathanya G. Simon, Esq – SEC&K Attorneys at Law
- Ms. Melinda Jennis, President – Pathways for Exceptional Children

Children with special needs will begin to achieve positive outcomes only when parents learn the fine art of advocacy and become more knowledgeable in applying special education law and using a more common-sense approach to building IEPs. Workshop topics include: Moving Beyond Compliance to Outcomes; Creating Collaboration within the IEP Process; Building Outcomes into IEPs; and When to File a Complaint versus a Mediation/Due Process. Seating is limited. Visit our website for details and registration information.

9:00am–2:30pm, Morris County Cultural Center, 300 Mendham Rd., Morristown, NJ

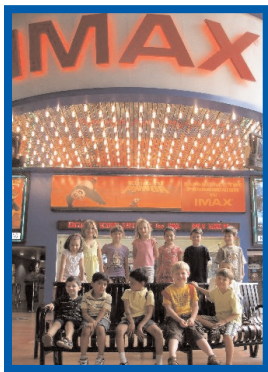
Project Win-Win is off to a great start!

The Henry H. Kessler and Starbucks Foundations have graciously granted funding to help us to get this exciting new program underway. Our goal is to prepare children with special needs starting at the age of 14 for employment and to hire our mentors ages 16 and older to work with them as job coaches. This "children teaching children" model once again met with tremendous success. Pathways also believes that children with disabilities should be given access to careers of their choice, but are often pigeonholed into whatever experiences businesses will provide for them.



Project Win-Win allows the children to choose their own careers, and it is up to us to find ways to make it happen. Over the summer, the kids chose to step into the music industry by spending six weeks learning about becoming a disc jockey with professional DJ, Eli Kababa. They learned many facets of the business and how to run the equipment and mix music. By the end of the six weeks they were ready to take their show on the road, and invited our friends from The Chelsea to a

1950's dance. Pathways will be helping these kids to continue to practice this profession. The kids will be performing with Eli Kababa again at a fund raiser in Summit, NJ on October 3, 2008. Our next 6-week session will begin on September 16th and will explore other professions the kids have chosen, such as landscaping and masonry work. Check our website for details: www.montvillepec.org



A Summer filled with the Magic of Safari.

Pathways for Exceptional Children began its first 4-week summer camp in June, 2008.

This camp was partially funded by a grant from the Department of Consumer Affairs. It was based on a SAFARI theme, linking science-



based literature to reading instruction and providing a springboard to field trips to enhance the learning. Daily crafts directly related to the vocabulary and concepts taught. The camp was such a success that Pathways plans

to expand it next summer to 6 weeks with a new theme, available to all children ages 4-10. Thank you to Debi Jarvie and her staff for making



this program a success that provided the children not only with the opportunity to improve on their skills, but also with many wonderful summer experiences to remember.



Pathways opens a new office in Morristown, NJ!

Pathways for Exceptional Children has been growing at a rapid pace over the past six years. While we continue to be based out of Montville Township, our borders are expanding. To better meet the needs and be more accessible to all communities in New Jersey, we have begun to rent office space in Morristown across from Morristown Memorial Hospital. We would like to continue to express our appreciation to Montville Township for helping Pathways to develop model programs in our own town that have helped so many people in other locations across the state. We invite you to visit our additional site!!

Morristown Office:

55 Madison Avenue, Suite 400
Morristown, NJ 07960
(973) 856-9587

Montville Township Office:

4 Cherokee Court
Montville, NJ 07045
(973) 334-9240

Recreation Programs: Upcoming programs are posted on our website at the beginning of each month. You can visit www.montvillepec.org and click on "Children's Programs," or the Recreation Department's website: www.montvillenj.org.



What a child needs to be exceptional.