#### THE NEMASKET GROUP

**SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2014** 

**NEWSLETTER #73** 

# Family Center Connections Center

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# Hard Work Pays Off

Through sheer will, a determination to never give up and a skilled effort to listen to others and negotiate in good faith, the 2014 Legislative Session will go down in history as one of the most successful for people with cognitive and intellectual disabilities.

## Real Lives Bill Empowers Individuals & Personal Empowerment

The Arc of Massachusetts, led by Executive Director Leo Sarkissian, was successful in securing the enactment of a bill, long sought by self advocates, and families embracing the concept of self-determination and self direction.

The Real Lives Bill expands the ability of people to decide where and with whom they want to live and work by allowing them to self-direct their DDS (Dept. of Developmental Services) service dollars. The bill places into statute a number of person-centered policies and procedures implemented by DDS under the concept of self-determination. The individual or family can use public funds more flexibly within certain guidelines and can be assisted by facilitators and/or fiscal intermediaries to develop services.

The original legislative leader on the Real Lives bill is Rep. Tom Sannicandro. The amended bill, S2331, was negotiated with Sen. Michael Barrett who made many adjustments to the original language, and worked closely with the disability community in developing a compromise bill. Sen. Karen Spilka, The Senate President's office and the Senate Ways and Means Committee also played a significant role in the passage of this legislation.

....continued on page 2

#### Background Bill Ensures Best Qualified Workforce

The National Down Syndrome Congress working closely with ADDP's General Counsel **Tara Hopper Zeltner**, and The Arc's Governmental Affairs Director Barbara L'Italien worked diligently with the Judiciary Committee to pass former **Rep**.(now Boston Mayor) **Marty Walsh**'s final legislative bill.

The National Criminal Background bill requires that anyone who has the potential for unsupervised contact with a client of DDS, including but not limited to all current and prospective employees, interns, sub-contractors and volunteers, or any DDS contracted agency vendor program, all household members or individuals "regularly on the premises" age 15 years or older, are required to submit their fingerprints to be checked against a national criminal database.

Currently, DDS and vendor agencies are required to conduct statewide CORI checks, but no national background check is conducted, which means that an applicant's criminal record outside of MA may not be identified. The bill now comports with federal regulations and is patterned after a similar law passed to protect students up to age 22. The disability bill would use the same statewide infrastructure and nationally accredited vendor that is in place for the similar DESE law that is currently being implemented.

#### Autism Omnibus Bill Will Touch Thousands of Lives

Years of work by families of individuals with autism, and the Governor's Autism Commission, led by former State**Rep. Barbara L'Italien**, finally resulted this year to the passage of the Autism Omnibus Bill, filed by Representative Garrett Bradley and Senator Jennifer Flanagan.

#### Bill highlights include:

- The definition for DDS eligibility has expanded the definition of developmental disability to
  people on the autism spectrum and to those with smith-magenis syndrome and Prader-Willi
  syndrome. This is a significant change as it will assist many whose functional needs are not
  reflected by their IQ score and who are now denied access to DDS services.
- Health insurance coverage for medically necessary treatments to Mass Health recipients for ABA behavior therapy and both dedicated and non-dedicated augmentative communication devices will now be funded for those through age 21 years.
- A tax-free savings account will be established -- patterned after the federal ABLE ACT
  legislation -- to allow all disabled families to save in a 529-style plan for expenses including
  education, housing, and any other needed supports and services. However, it is important to
  recognize that this section will not take effect immediately due to its need for federal
  participation in the program.
- Reestablishes the Autism Commission as a permanent and autonomous entity, staff included
- Public school special education teachers will have the option to attain an "Autism Endorsement" certification - a concentration in autism coursework and training to be leaders within their school communities.

Two specific areas directed to study - the long-term needs for housing and employment - in addition to the areas of study and recommendations previously covered by the commission.



From the www.disabilityisnatural.com

E-Newsletter by Kathie Snow

conditions we call disabilities?

look better (exaggerate just a bit). Maximizing the

it works to ensure our success in employment, at

any different for individuals who happen to have

school, in relationships, and more. Why should it be

positives, and minimizing the negatives is the norm, and

Quickly now! Think of three wonderful things about a person with a disability in your life! Most people – parents, teachers, service providers, therapists - can't do it. I know; I ask when meeting participants at conferences. Most can, however reel off a person's diagnosis (one or many), along with a laundry list of the

person's "problems/deficits."

Hmmm – it doesn't take a genius IQ to figure out why so many children and adults with disabilities aren't as successful as they could be. If you were known primarily by our perceived problems and your medical diagnoses, you wouldn't be very successful either. Really, this is not rocket science, is it?

For those who may still be skeptical, perform your own "research" for a couple of days. When a coworker,

friend, or family member asks, "How are you," respond by sharing your medical diagnoses, as well as a list of everything you don't do well – your "problems." What impact does this have on the person you're speaking to, and on yourself? Does the other person want to run away from you as quickly as possible? Or maybe he feels sorry for you and treats you as a poor, pitiful creature. On the other hand, the person might decide

to help you "solve your problems," whether you've asked for help or not. And how do you see yourself? Are any of these good outcomes? Here's one more example; in a job interview, share all the negative things about yourself. Yeah, that's the ticket to success!

In reality, during a job interview or other situation, you keep your medical diagnosis and/or your "problems" private (lie by omission), and you share only positive information. You may also embellish to make yourself

If human beings are perceived as potentials rather than problems, as possessing strengths instead of weaknesses, as unlimited rather than dull and unresponsive, then they thrive and grow to their capabilities.

Robert Conklin

Ahhhh, but it's even more important for them. Because of societal ignorance about disabilities, focusing on the strengths of a person can help minimize or eliminate the knee-jerk prejudice normally associated with disability. A focus on a person's strengths can also help others recognize that people with disabilities are more like people without disabilities than

Perhaps the scenario described in the first paragraph shouldn't be surprising for service providers, teachers, therapists, or others who can't immediately bring to mind one particular person because they work with many people with disabilities. In addition, professionals usually are focused on a person's "problems/deficits" - not on their strengths as part of their jobs. (More about changing this in a moment.)

difference.

The scenario, however, is alarming when a parent is unable to immediately share three wonderful things about her child with a disability. If a parent is not able to tout her child's strengths, who will?

As the parent of a child with a disability, I know how this happens. Sadly, the majority of what we hear from professionals is a laundry list of our child's

"problems/deficits." Seldom are our children's strengths identified, much less discussed. But things

Those who believe in our ability do more than stimulate us. They create for us an atmosphere in which it becomes easier to succeed.

John Lancaster Spalding

don't have to be this way. We can all make the choice to focus on a person's strengths.

First, let's think about how we "define" strengths. They're not limited to functional or "normal" abilities. If I list my strengths, I don't include things like, "I can walk and talk." A strength can be (1) what a person does well (has great people-skills, is organized, is

good at math); (2) what a person enjoys doing (loves to read, enjoys scrapbooking, is a rabid football fan, loves his pirate toys); and (3) what a person wants to do and/or learn to do (go to a baseball game, fly on a plane, learn to read, visit Presidential museums).

Many strengths may not be "observable," nor will they be found in traditional assessments. The only way to discover them is by talking to the person and his family and friends, and by observation – how does the person choose to spend his free time?

"Mary" was a professor at a university who was unable to see any strengths in her 19-year-old son, "Dan." She said Dan was "totally blind and functioned at the level of a six-year-old." When I asked about the possibility of Dan taking a class at the university where she worked (he could audit the class), she said that was ridiculous. I asked her how Dan liked to spend his time at home – what was his favorite thing to do? "Take a bath," she said. "He'd spend all his day in the tub if he could." Then why not get him involved in a swimming

activity at the university where he could do what he enjoys and be with other young adults in an inclusive setting? That was an "ah-ha" moment for her – until that instant, Mary had never seen that Dan's love of being in the water was a strength that could be built on and that could lead to positive outcomes.

When my son, Benjamin, was in kindergarten, he couldn't keep up during counting lessons as the teacher recited, "One bean, two beans, three beans..." The other children could pick up the small beans in time to the teacher's chant, but by the time Benjamin got two fingers around his first bean, the teacher was on five! So I sent his set of 12 toy pirates to school. He could easily pick them up with his whole hand, and other boys wanted to be his math partner. His love of

those two-inch pirates was a strength that led to many outcomes.

A list of strengths can include a person's abilities, interests, desires, hopes and dreams, similarities to others without disabilities, and more. Many people – the person with a disability, parents/family members, friends, classmates, co-

workers, and others who know the person well – should contribute their ideas.

Once those strengths have been identified, they need to be at the forefront of our thinking. At Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings in schools, or planning

meetings for adults, let's start the meeting with the person's strengths, instead of spending so much time on problems, deficits, weaknesses, etc. If we start with strengths, we might begin seeing a new person, as well as new strategies and new opportunities. Imagine the possibilities when the person is defined by strengths, instead of perceived deficits, and the impact on goals, activities, friendships, employment, and more. How might this make a difference in how we see the person, how others see the person, and most importantly, how the person sees herself? Make your list of strengths long and add to it on a regular basis (individuals grow and change).

Professionals: spend as much time on sharing a person's strengths with the person, family, and others,

as you spend on delays, problems, etc. (Note: as parents, we know that "deficiencies/delays" represent the eligibility criteria for services, but most of us already know what our children cannot do; we really don't need professionals to tell us these things!)

Parents/family members:

memorize as least three wonderful, affirmative characteristics that you'll now use to describe your loved one. And when a mother is bombarded with all the "negatives" about her precious child, those three positive things can provide a powerful shield of armor as protection from those barbed arrows.

Let's start with strengths. Doing so makes sense, it creates a more accurate picture of the whole person, it opens the door to new perceptions and possibilities, and it's the right thing to do!

It requires building on strengths to make weaknesses

Everybody is a genius.

But if you judge a fish by

its ability to climb a tree,

it will live its whole life

believing that it is stupid.

Albert Einstein

Peter F. Drucker

irrelevant.

# Available Resources

**SMEC** Southeastern Massachusetts Educational Collaborative

Transity Connections

nemasket group

Lifelong Planning for Persons with Special Needs Ensuring a good life for your family member with a disability



#### Theresa M. Varnet

#### Wednesday, September 17, 2014

5:30 Registration

6-9PM Presentation

Seaport Inn & Marina,

110 Middle Street, Fairhaven, MA 02719

#### About the presenter:

Theresa M. Varnet has been an advocate for persons with disabilities for over 40 years. In addition to being a lawyer, she is a certified teacher, licensed social worker and the parent of a disabled adult daughter. She has served as Social Services Director in a residential school for children with multiple disabilities, Coordinator for a Special Education Cooperative, and as a Citizen Advocacy/Disability Rights Coordinator. While living in the Sultanate of Oman, she assisted the Omani Ministry of Social Affairs in developing the first preschool program for children with handicapping conditions. Her experience includes extensive work in the area of inservice training with families, special educators, social workers and other professionals. A frequent speaker for volunteer and professional groups, she presents numerous seminars on special needs planning and advocacy across the U.S. She divides her time between her Chicago-based practice at Spain, Spain & Varnet and the Massachusetts offices of Fletcher Tilton PC.

RSVP: by Sept. 10th to Sherri Tetrault at 508-998-5599 ext. 19

## Understanding Social Devaluation A Two-Day Workshop

This two-day training session consists of presentations, reflective writing, discussion and exercises to accomplish the goal of assisting family members to:

- Appreciate the importance of valued social roles for living a typical life as a valued member of society
- Understand the role they can play in making this happen in the lives of their family member

PRESENTER: Jo Massarelli, Director of the SRV Implementation Project

The Social Role Valorization (SRV) Implementation Project is a human service training, evaluation and consultation effort aimed at addressing the social devaluation of impaired and other vulnerable people in contemporary society.

WHEN: Tuesday, September 16, 2014 and Wednesday, September 17, 2014

Begins at 9:00 AM Ends at 4:00 PM (both days)

WHERE: Century House

107 South Main Street, Acushnet, MA

**INTENDED AUDIENCE:** Family members and other voluntary care-givers as well as Human service support personnel and other representatives of support providing services, including residential service staff and administrators, day service staff and administrators, visiting nurses, hospice workers, home health aides, respite workers, personal care assistants.

The cost for this training is \$60 per person, which includes meals Family Members wishing to attend can request a scholarship

To register and to request a scholarship,

please call Amy Cornell (The Nemasket Group) 508-999-4436

Sponsored by the Department of Developmental Services-Regional Training Council and The Nemasket Group



# A Full Life Ahead Workshop Series

#### **SAVE THE DATES!!!**

Massachusetts Families Organizing for Change (MFOFC) in partnership with Building Futures and the Family Connections Center of the Nemasket Group is sponsoring its 2<sup>nd</sup> "A Full Life Ahead" ~ a series of monthly workshops for parents and guardians of young adults with a disability. The series focuses on transition, employment, housing, friendships and other topics that will lead to interdependent, full lives in the community for young people with disabilities.

All training are 6 – 8 PM at the Nemasket Group, 56 Bridge St., Fairhaven, MA 02719 **EXCEPT** for the first training listed below.

#### **Workshop Schedule:**

**September 17, 2014 Lifelong Planning for Persons with Special Needs -** Ensuring a good life for

your family member with a disability – planning for the future.

Seaport Inn & Marina 6-9 PM

October 22, 2014 Person Centered Planning - Vision shapes Reality when it is based on dreams,

shared with others and accompanied by concrete action plans. Learn how Person Centered Planning is an effective tool to help your loved one identify and create a full and rich life. Speakers will give examples of how this process

has worked for them.

#### Descriptions & details for these workshops to follow:

November 19, 2014 Planning for Life after Special Education in Massachusetts

January 28, 2015 Employment – Let's Get to Work February 25, 2015 Going to College – Why Not?

March 25, 2015 Friendships

April 29, 2015 The Alphabet Soup of Resources: SSI, SSDI, PCA

May 27, 2015 Creating a Home for Your Loved One–Combining Personal Resources &

**Government Benefits** 

June 17, 2015 Life After Turning 22 – Parent Panel Discussion











Massachusetts Families Organizing for Change (MFOFC) in partnership with The Nemasket Group, the Family Connections Center and the Building Futures Project

A Full Life Ahead is a series of monthly workshops for parents and guardians of young adults with a disability. The series focuses on transition, employment, friendships, housing and other topics that will lead to interdependent, full lives in the community for young people with disabilities.

Please join us... October 22, 2014

"Person Centered Planning – Imagine Better"

6 - 8 PM

The Nemasket Group 56 Bridge St. Fairhaven, MA 02719

Vision shapes Reality when it is based on dreams, shared with others and made concrete. Learn how Person Centered Planning is an effective tool to help your loved one identify and create a full and rich life. Speakers will give examples of how this process has worked for them.

Please RSVP by October 20 to:

Amy Cornell @ amycornell@nemasketgroup.org or 508-999-4436

www.mfofc.org

www.nemasketgroup.org



#### **Massachusetts Families Organizing for Change – SE Region**

A statewide, grassroots coalition dedicated to individual and family support

#### SE MASSACHUSETTS FAMILY LEADERSHIP SERIES 23

The 23rd Family Leadership Series is about to begin! The Series focuses on supporting families and individuals to live in their communities as naturally and typically as desired. Applications from families with children or adult family members of any age who are Department of Developmental Services eligible are encouraged.

The **Family Leadership Series** has a twofold purpose. The first is to offer information about "best practices" for people with disabilities. The second is to assist families in creating a vision for their family member and a process to achieve the vision through leadership and advocacy. The dates of the **SE Family Leadership Series 23** are: **November 7 & 8, 2014, January 23 & 24, March 6 & 7, and April 17 & 18, 2015.** Each session is two days in length. Participants are required to attend all four sessions.

#### **The Series:**

**Initiative and Leadership** – family members are given information on the background of the family support movement, leadership, advocacy and the significance of self-advocacy, how to effectively advocate for change and ways to influence funding and delivery systems.

**Creative, Progressive and Innovative Ways to Provide Support** – how to help our family members and our families to live quality lives. A number of presenters offer their perspectives on a broad range of topics: Inclusion in schools; supported employment; positive practices; community living and family support.

**Creating A Vision** – families are supported to "imagine better" and to create a vision, with and for their family members, that guides their leadership and advocacy. What advocacy is necessary to ensure the visions that are developed and what is effective advocacy?

**Policy Making at the Local, State and Federal Level** – family members receive information on how to develop networks with professionals and families, how to access and control resources that affect family stress and satisfaction and how to use legislative change to procure resources.

Food and overnight lodging for each family at the Holiday Inn in Mansfield is paid for by the Department of **Developmental Services.** Respite/child care/nursing for family members is also funded.

Families who have completed the Series have had a tremendous impact on systems change for families and individuals with disabilities in Massachusetts. Family members have been active in policy and decision making locally, regionally and statewide and some have decided to do legislative advocacy work. Some families have been involved in community organizing and advocacy on a local level. Others have used their talents and skills to create change for their child with a disability and/or their families.

For an application, please feel free to call or email Emily Murgo Nisenbaum at The Nemasket Group, 508-999-4436, email: <a href="mailto:emilynisenbaum@nemasketgroup.org">emilynisenbaum@nemasketgroup.org</a> or Dianne Huggon at 508-823-3529, email: <a href="mailto:mfofc@mfofc.org">mfofc@mfofc.org</a>.

"The Leadership Series not only educated me, it made me think differently. It was great to leave with our visions — I am convinced that there will be a better future!" ~ FLS Graduate





#### 11th Hearts & Hands Walk for Autism

The Hearts & Hands Walk has a new home at the beautiful Francis Farm in Rehoboth, MA! The 11th Annual Hearts & Hands Walk for Autism will be held on Saturday, September 20, 2014 from 9:30AM-1:30PM. For all of you who have attended in the past, you can expect the same great Family Fun Activities, in a safe, fun and beautiful environment!

Firstgiving is up and running! Please go to www.community-autism-resources.com and visit <u>FirstGiving</u> to register and/or create your fundraising page by clicking "Join Now". For those of you who aren't familiar with Firstgiving, it is a safe and secure FREE online fundraising tool that we have been using for quite a few years as a safe and easy way, for individuals and teams to register and raise funds for the walk!

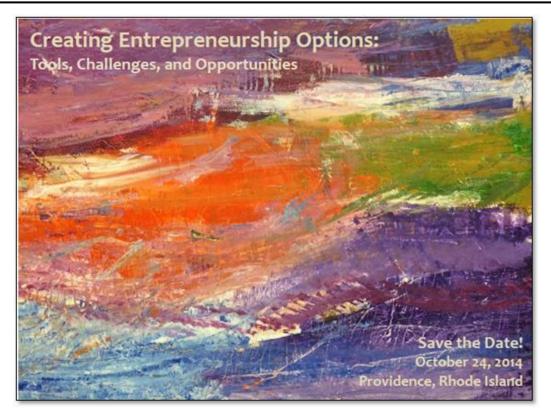
The Hearts & Hands Walk for Autism and Family Fun Day is our SIGNATURE fundraiser! Although CAR is partially funded by DDS, we depend on our annual walk to raise funds to continue to provide the FREE and vital services & supports to children, adults and their families, as they face the everyday challenges of living with Autism Spectrum Disorders. All games, activities, prizes, & refreshments are FREE as a thank you to all for their efforts in helping to take action and raise money for this event!

There will be some new and exciting activities this year! Stay tuned and check our Firstgiving Page and the CAR website, frequently, for the most up to date walk details, as they unfold!

For more information, go to: www.community-autism-resources.com



Sunday, October 19th 10am-4pm Dartmouth High School, 555 Bakerville Road, Dartmouth





Northeast Region X 77<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference Presents

#### Creating Entrepreneurship Options: Tools, Challenges and Opportunities

The Providence Biltmore
11 Dorrance Street • Providence RI
Friday, October 24, 2014
9 am - 3 pm

This conference will provide the nuts and bolts about entrepreneurship opportunities. Conference participants will learn how to:

- Develop strategies and learn practical solutions.
- Use lessons learned from successful and challenging ventures.
- Identify funding options.

For further information on registration or exhibitor opportunities, Please contact Don Miller at <a href="mailto:donmiller@kualumni.org">donmiller@kualumni.org</a> or 860-233-0175

Invite created by Art Connection Studio Artwork created by Dan Fiorentino & Krystin Laferriere



#### **Statewide Transition Conference for Parents**

**September 20, 2014** 

8:00am – 8:45am Registration, Networking and Resources

9:00am - 4:00pm Program

Hogan Center at Holy Cross College | 1 College Street, Worcester, MA 01610

Registration is \$75.00 per person (fee includes continental breakfast and lunch)

Hosted by The Arc of Massachusetts with gratitude to The Arc of the United States and the Walmart Foundation

This full-day statewide Transition conference has been specifically planned for parents of children with disabilities between the ages of 14 and 22 who are transitioning from school into the adult world.

#### The Conference program will include:

- An opportunity to learn about state-of-the-art, best practices around transition, covering topics focused upon creating seamless, successful transitions into the adult world.
- ➤ Keynote presentation by JoAnn Simons, President/CEO, Cardinal Cushing Centers of Massachusetts. Ms. Simons is the author of "The Down Syndrome Transition Handbook" and the chapter author in several books regarding legal, planning and transition issues. Ms. Simons has an adult son with an intellectual disability.
- Lunchtime presentation by Maria Paiewonsky, Ed. D., Transition Specialist, Institute for Community Inclusion and Director of the Massachusetts Transition Leadership Initiative, a personnel preparation program that prepares Master's Level Transition Specialists at the University of Massachusetts, Boston.
- ➤ 25 workshops, offering 7 in each session. It is important to select your workshop preference for each session when you register. See the workshop description link below.
- A "Technology Playground" which will be available all day staffed by experts who will share their knowledge about IPAD's, IPOD's, tablets and appropriate APP's for preparation for adult life and independence.

To register: http://tinyurl.com/TransConfParents

### Build a Home Conference

Learn the planning steps, what tools are available, how to build a budget and where to find financial resources so that your loved one with a disability can live, work, volunteer and enjoy a meaningful life in their community. This housing conference will offer 15 informative workshops that will provide valuable information to help in the planning for the future housing needs of your loved one with a disability.

Saturday, September 27, 2014 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 DCU Center 50 Foster St, Worcester, MA

- Keynote –
"A Home Built on Lifestyle"
Michael Kendrick, PhD

Kendrick Consulting International where "imagining better" gets very practical

#### REGISTER NOW at wwww.mfofc.org

Bring a friend -or Two-Divide up to get the most this conference has to offer!!



#### Some of the workshops available:

- Engaging the Community using practical strategies
- Government benefits and how they apply to long term care
- Shared Living
- Use of DDS funding--Self-directed or traditional services?
- Section 8 housing voucher program and other affordable housing options
- Financing the plan-practical strategies
- Best practices to sustain the model of choice
- Creative collaborating & partnering successes
- Parent panels Experiences in finding and/or creating what works
- Housing Connections-a tool used to meet and connect with other family members

and so much more. NETWORKING !!!

## nemasket group

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#### **Family Connections Center**

Joint Project of The Nemasket Group and DDS (Greater New Bedford Department of Developmental Services) 56 Bridge Street

Fairhaven, MA 02719 Phone: 508-999-0077 Fax: 508-997-9239



Creating a network of family support for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families

