

# Family Connections Center

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Employment Blueprint in Tune with Governor's Employment First Policy?.....1

## **FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

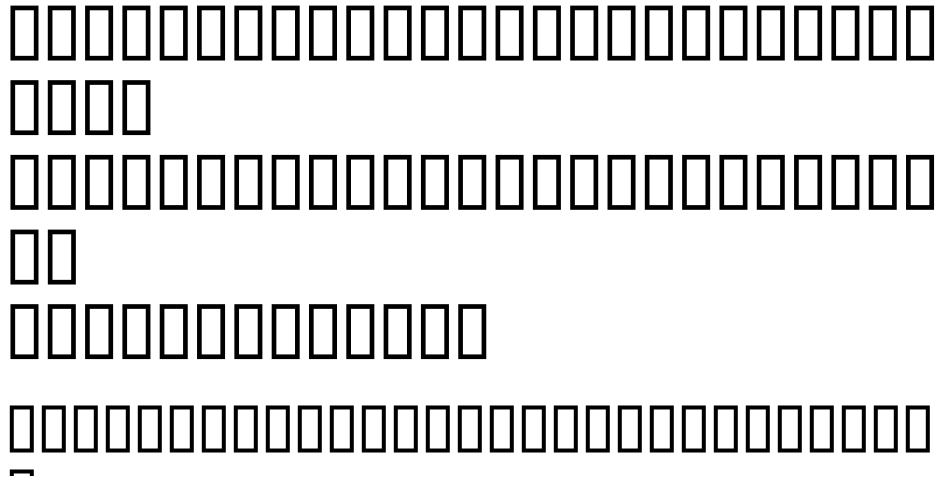
- Environment, Environment, Environment.....2-3

## **AVAILABLE RESOURCES**

- Free Webinars. ....4
- Inclusive Education Webinar Series: Moving from Vision to Action.....5

## **INFORMATION TO SHARE**

- Family Connections Center 2014 Sibshop Schedule.....6
- Dance Fit / Movement Class.....7
- New England Eye Opens New Vision Clinic.....8
- A Full Life Ahead Workshop Series 2014 Schedule.....9
- Family Connections Center Sibshop Panel.....9
- Save the Date: The Nemasket Group 5K Walk/Run.....10



Soon after sworn into office, Governor Patrick renewed a commitment by signing an executive order for Massachusetts to serve as a model employer of people with disabilities. This was a refreshing promise of Governor Patrick's that meant more people with disabilities would have the opportunity to work in state governments.

Now, advocates wait to learn if Governor Patrick will fulfill his commitment to increase full participation of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) in inclusive employment settings outside of state government.



Advocates are on the edge of their seats waiting for Governor Patrick's release of his FY' 15 House Two budget later this month to see if he supports an employment plan for adults with I/DD – with similar goals as his model employer initiative – to move individuals with I/DD out of segregated work settings into the community.

# Food for *Thought*

## **Environment, Environment, Environment**

Revolutionary Common Sense by Kathie Snow

[www.disabilityisnatural.com](http://www.disabilityisnatural.com)

In real estate, the mantra regarding the most desirable home is, "Location, location, location!" To ensure the most desirable outcomes for individuals with disability labels, we might consider adopting a similar mantra: "Environment, environment, environment!"

Many of us are familiar with the conventional wisdom about the impact of the environment. For example, children raised by parents who have addictions are thought to be more likely to develop their own addictions. Children who are raised in stable, loving homes are thought to have a better chance of becoming stable, loving adults. As an employee, you might develop certain behaviors or characteristics that reflect the culture of your workplace. Inmates often leave prison with an increase (instead of decrease) of "criminal behavior," as a result of the influence of the people and situations that exist in that environment. We are all products of our environment – good or bad. (And environment isn't just the physical setting, but also the people and characteristics of that setting.)

There are always exceptions to the rule, however. Some kids who grow up in great families become demons; others who grow up in demonic families turn out great. But, in general, the apple doesn't fall too far from the tree. We also know that the amount of time one spends in certain environments can have a significant impact on a person's life: once children enter the public school system and they're with others more than their own families, the influence of others competes with familial influence. Environment does have a profound – maybe the most profound – influence on our lives. So let's consider the environments common to many individuals who have developmental disabilities.

Many preschoolers with disabilities are enrolled in special ed preschools, surrounded by other children who have developmental delays, and professionals (teachers, therapists, etc.) who are often focused on remediating the effects of the disability. What do

children learn in this environment? Yes, some probably do learn many new and helpful things (which could have been learned at home with mom or in a "regular" neighborhood preschool/daycare). But what can happen when, for example, a child who hasn't yet acquired speech is surrounded by other children who also haven't acquired speech? If we want a child to learn to speak, doesn't it make more sense to ensure he's in an environment where other children are speaking so he can learn from others and model their speech? Some parents have recognized the awful truth: when a child with autism, for example, is surrounded by other children with autism, he often learns how to have more autism!

Think about a school clique, a gang, or even your office, and consider that the only way to survive, much less succeed, in many environments is to model or adopt the behaviors of others in that environment. The only other alternative is to get out! There is little or no gray area. Ditto with moving beyond addictions: it's almost impossible, for example, for a teenager to move beyond drug or alcohol addiction if he still hangs out in the same environment or with the same kids. Environment is everything!

Our view of the world is heavily influenced by the environment. When my son, Benjamin, was young, I made sure he was included and not segregated, by enrolling him in a typical community preschool instead of a special ed preschool. Still, from the age of four months, he spent hours each week at a clinic, receiving physical and occupational therapies. When Benjamin was a four-year-old, and using a pediatric walker for mobility, he asked me if his same-aged cousin, Colin, still walked with a walker. I didn't know what he meant, so we talked about this. Much to my dismay, I learned that Benjamin believed every child learned to walk using a walker! And why not? That's what he'd grown up seeing within the confines of a therapeutic clinic!

Think about the person with a disability in your life: what is she learning from the environments she's in?

School-aged children with disabilities, from elementary to the high school grades, are often placed in "life-skills," "resource," or other "special" (segregated) classrooms. Again, these students are surrounded by other students with delays, and by educators whose focus is primarily addressing the consequences of the disability, instead of focusing on the whole child. These students may be learning whatever is being taught, but what are they learning from this environment? How to have "more" of a disability, by adopting the mannerisms or behaviors of others? That they don't belong with "normal kids?" Or that they're incompetent to learn real academics (with or without accommodations and / or curriculum modifications, per special ed law)? Sadly, what parents have learned is that, under these circumstances, their child doesn't have friends and doesn't participate in typical school activities, and worse, their child's future is dim.

But this doesn't have to be the case. In inclusive schools, students with disabilities learn alongside classmates who don't have disabilities, in general ed classrooms. They have friends, participate in school activities, get invited to birthday parties, and their futures are bright!

Many adults with disabilities spend their days in sheltered workshops, day programs, or other segregated settings, and their nights in congregate living facilities. What do they learn from these environments? Again, they may learn what they're taught (but they could have learned these things and more, in inclusive settings in the community), but what are they learning from being in these environments? For many, the lessons learned as children in special ed settings (previously described) are reinforced, day in and day out. Hopelessness, low self-esteem, and the gritty feeling of, "Is this all there is," are common. In addition, many may learn to mimic or adopt the unusual characteristics of others (including staff)!

"Separate" environments are unnatural, aberrant settings. People in these environments usually learn unnatural, aberrant lessons and acquire unnatural, aberrant behaviors and characteristics.

From personal conversations with educators, service providers, job coaches, and others who work in "special" environments, I know they have the best of intentions – but are good intentions enough? I've asked

professionals: "Would you consent to being in the position of the people you serve?" Never has even one answered in the affirmative. Does it seem odd and disturbing that professionals in certain fields (educators, service providers, therapists, job coaches, etc.) can spend their days (or nights) in environments which most would probably never choose for themselves if they were the "recipients" of services, instead of the providers?

A retail employee would probably consent to being a shopper; a computer technician would probably consent to being a computer user; and a cook would probably consent to being a diner. But most prison guards probably wouldn't consent to being a prisoner – and most people who service individuals with disabilities wouldn't consider trading places with those they serve.

Unfortunately, environments often give birth to self-fulfilling prophecies. In other words, seldom would a special ed teacher, for example, look at a child in her classroom and say, "Tommy doesn't belong here – he should be in a fifth grade classroom." Ditto most professionals in adult services when looking at an adult in a day program or a congregate living facility. The fact that a person is in a given environment seems to be automatic validation that that's where he belongs!

All of us – individuals with disabilities, parents, educators, and human services employees – can move toward positive and long-term change if we put ENVIRONMENT at the top of our list, regardless of a person's age, disability, or anything else. We can be guided by the common sense of our heads (which means, in part, discarding the disability diagnosis as an indicator of what environment is appropriate for a person). We can also be guided by what's in our hearts.

We can ask, "Where would this person be if she didn't have a disability?" Wherever that is, that's where the person should be! We can do what it takes to ensure the person has the accommodations, assistive technology, or other supports she needs to be successful in those natural environments. We can consider what the person wants or needs to achieve (based on his preferences), and recognize that the environment will have a profound influence on whether or not those needs and wants will be successfully achieved. Finally, we can ask ourselves, "What would I want if it were me?"

### Things to Consider

1. Environment
2. Environment
3. Environment
- 4.
- 5.

# Available *Resources*

## Free Webinars



**Amy Weinstock is offering several free webinars in 2014.**

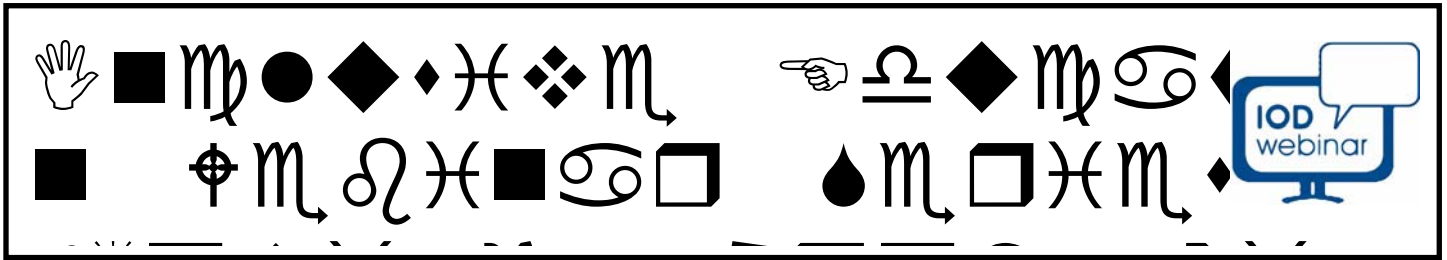
She provides great information about how a family of an individual with autism may be able to access insurance for a variety of needed services. Please see below for information about the webinar schedule and the Autism Insurance Resource Center!

Kelley Challen, EdM, CAS  
Director of Transition Services  
NESCA  
55 Chapel Street, 2nd Floor  
Newton, M.A. 02458  
[kchallen@nescanewton.com](mailto:kchallen@nescanewton.com)  
617-658-9800  
ARICA Webinar Schedule for 2014

If you would like to attend any of these webinars, please send an email to [info@disabilityinfo.org](mailto:info@disabilityinfo.org) . If you need accommodations, please let us know at least 1 week prior to the date the webinar is scheduled.

- \* Wednesday, January 15, 2014, 10am - 11:30am
- \* Wednesday, March 12, 2014, Noon - 1:30pm
- \* Wednesday, May 21, 2014, Noon - 1:30pm
- \* Wednesday, July 16, 2014, Noon - 1:30pm
- \* Wednesday, September 17, 2014, Noon - 1:30pm
- \* Wednesday, November 19, 2014, Noon - 1:30pm





*Presented by the University of New Hampshire Institute on Disability*

**Time:** 3:30pm – 4:30pm EST | **Registration Fee:** \$59 each\*

*\*Register for all 7 and get one free!*

**Webinar Instructor:** Cheryl Jorgensen, Ph.D.

**Registration Deadline:** 12:00pm ET, one business day prior to each webinar

*Sponsored by the National Center on Inclusive Education (NCIE)*

#### **Series Description:**

This live webinar series is designed to support parents and educators who want a road map to guide the membership, participation, and learning of students with more significant disabilities in general education classrooms and other inclusive settings. During each webinar, examples will be given for elementary, middle, and high school, with the last session focusing on supporting students to go on to post-secondary education. Although all the sessions in the series build on the ones before it, the information in each can “stand alone.” We encourage teams to participate in the series together as each session has information targeted to both parents and educators, as well as related service providers.

#### **Dates and Topics\*\*:**

**January 28, 2014** – Establishing and Communicating a Vision for Inclusive Education

**February 12, 2014** – Best Practices in Inclusive Education: How to Know It When You See It

**March 4, 2014** – Creating Inclusive Individualized Education Programs

**March 25, 2014** – “What Do I Do Monday Morning?” Translating the Vision for Inclusive Education into the Classroom

**April 15, 2014** – Integrating Related Services into General Education Instruction and Typical Activities

**May 13, 2014** – Maximizing Social Relationships at School and at Home

**May 27, 2014** – Think College! Planning for Post-Secondary Education

*\*\*For complete session descriptions, please visit [www.iod.unh.edu/events](http://www.iod.unh.edu/events)*

**Who Should Attend:** Educators, parents, paraprofessionals, school administrators, guidance counselors, related services providers, psychologists, university students, educational teams including families, and others interested in creating more inclusive opportunities for students with disabilities are encouraged to attend.

**Technical Requirements:** This training is accessed from your computer via a high speed Internet connection and includes visual and audio components. Please see the Webinar FAQs online for full details.

**Register Online at [www.iod.unh.edu/events](http://www.iod.unh.edu/events)**

# Information to *Share*



Sibshops are workshops that provide opportunity for brothers and sisters of children with medical and developmental needs to obtain peer support and education within a highly recreational context. Organizers and families appreciate that the workshops take a wellness approach and the siblings who attend them appreciate that they are fun and engaging. Siblings are often the family member to have the longest relationship with the brother/sister with special needs and although they are not therapy, Sibshops prove to be therapeutic for some children.

Our Sibshop program now has two different age ranges. On the days listed below, we have a young sib group from 4:30-6:00 for 6-9 year olds and a group from 6:00-7:30 for our 10-14 year old sibs.



## 2014 Schedule:

February 24<sup>th</sup>

April 28<sup>th</sup>

June 30<sup>th</sup>

**Young Sibs meet from 4:30-6:00pm**  
**Sibs Ages 10-14 meet 6:00-7:30pm**

Sibshops are held at the Nemasket Group  
56 Bridge Street  
Fairhaven, MA 02719

**\*\*entrance through Front Door \*\***

For more information and to sign up

Contact: 508-999-4436

Kathleen Amaral x133 –or- Jennifer Newcomer x118

**\*Space is Limited\***

**\*Registration is Required\***





**Massachusetts  
Department of  
Developmental Services**



**Shriver Clinical  
Services**



**New England Eye  
Southeastern Massachusetts**

**450 Pleasant Street  
East Bridgewater, MA**

**Office: 617-680-8447**

## **New Vision Clinic Opens**

New England Eye Southeastern Massachusetts is now open to all individuals served by the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services (DDS). Individuals living throughout the Commonwealth are welcome to schedule an appointment. The Clinic is open each Wednesday from 9am to 5pm.

## **Eye Care**

Eye examinations at the Clinic are provided to determine a person's eye health, to better understand how each person uses his or her vision, and to maximize visual function. Each appointment is scheduled for one hour, allowing time for the exam, and to ensure all questions are answered.

Because we are a teaching Clinic, Christine Sacco, OD and an optometry intern will work together to provide the eye exam. During the visit, eyeglasses and/or vision aids may be prescribed; appropriate therapies developed, and/or advice offered on rehabilitation or educational considerations. In addition, recommendations/referrals may be made to other specialists for in-depth testing of visual field, to ophthalmologists as needed; and/or to opticians for the selection and fitting of eyeglasses. Before leaving, any needed paperwork will be filled out. A full eye report will be written and mailed to each person at home.

## **About Christine Sacco, OD**

Dr. Christine Sacco received her optometry degree from NECO and completed a residency at the Veterans Administration Medical Center in Brockton, MA. An attending optometrist at NEE, she has clinical experience in providing primary eye care to diverse populations, including as a consultant with a multidisciplinary group caring for people in long term and assisted care facilities. Dr. Sacco has a special interest in providing optometric services to individuals with cognitive and/or physical impairments.

## **Insurance Information is Required to Schedule an Exam**

- **Referrals:** MassHealth and Medicare do not require referrals for eye care appointments. If a referral is needed, we will contact you.
- **Co-Pays:** Any needed co-payments will be billed to you after your appointment.

## **To Schedule an Appointment**

Please call: 617-680-8447 or email: JonesS@neco.edu



the  
nemasket  
group



Massachusetts Families  
Organizing For Change

A network in support of  
individuals with disabilities  
and their families



## A Full Life Ahead ~ Workshop Series

Massachusetts Families Organizing for Change (MFOFC) in partnership with Building Futures and the Family Connections Center of the Nemasket Group is sponsoring “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 is 6 – 8 PM at the Nemasket Group, 56 Bridge St., Fairhaven, MA 02719

### ***Special Needs Trusts & Legal Concerns -- February 26, 2014***

Learn how to plan for and preserve the government benefits that are essential to the long term services and supports of your family member; what is a special needs trust; what is guardianship and what are the different types of guardianship.

### ***The Alphabet Soup of Resources: SSI, SSDI, PCA -- March 19, 2014***

Come learn about Social Security programs; who is eligible, how and when to apply and general rules. Speakers will also explain the Personal Care Attendant (PCA) program – eligibility criteria and how hours are allotted based on need and the Section 8 program.

**Family Connections Center** is looking for a few young adult siblings to speak to our SIBSHOP about the good and the not so good about being a sibling to someone who has medical or developmental needs.

Contact Jen or Kathleen in Family Connections Center if



# the nemasket group

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ORGANIZATION  
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PERMIT NO. 651

## 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



## THE NEMASKET GROUP 5K WALK/RUN

SATURDAY, MAY 17, 2014  
AT THE NEMASKET GROUP  
56 BRIDGE ST., FAIRHAVEN, MA

REGISTRATION 8:00 AM  
TIMED RUN STARTS AT 9:15 AM  
WALK STARTS AT 9:20 AM

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: [WalkRun@NemasketGroup.org](mailto:WalkRun@NemasketGroup.org)