

IPAC Meeting  
Nov. 17, 2014

Those in attendance included: Amy Houghton, Connie Berry, Kate DeVane, Marit Bezahler, Kim Leaird, director of Student Support Services Phil Campbell, school nurse Nicole Barlett, Lori Scanlon, Valerie Turner Polishook, Rod Welles, Janet Sylvia, Laura Silber, Kevin McGrath, Patricia Dooley and special guest from Martha's Vineyard Community Services Family Support Program Kathi Hackett.

Amy Houghton welcomed the group. Kate DeVane discussed her new role on the Up-Island School Committee. Representative from Up-Island school (West Tisbury) and that she can no longer serve as a Representative from West Tisbury (Up-Island) school. Expressed need to have another parent step in to the role

Co-chair Amy Houghton discussed the goal of having IPAC parent involved in the search for a new school superintendent. Co-chair Marit Bezahler will represent the IPAC during the search process.

Next meeting, Dec. 17, will feature Leslie Leslie from the Federation for Children with Special Needs. She is an advocate who can explain the legal aspects of special education and other issues that parents face.

Another autism-friendly movie was planned by the Family Support arm of Community Services. Parents recommended taking children with autism to this event.

Amy Houghton discussed a new Special Olympics program, Project Unity, where special needs students compete alongside typical students. She said the program will begin at the high school and would feature track and field events to begin with, later possibly expanding to include other events. She said the goal was to have eight or nine teams across the Cape and Islands who could then compete. Kim Leaird asked who was organizing the program and Amy said that the athletic director from the high school, herself, and two folks from the Vineyard had met with others who are involved in the program off the Island. She said grants for equipment could come from the Special Olympics. She said the program could make a difference for students at the high school who feel marginalized and who do not have opportunities to participate in sporting events, as well as those with special needs.

Guest speaker Kathi Hackett was introduced. She has been serving families on Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket for 26 years.

Kathi Hackett explained her program, the Family Support Center at Community Services. She works with young families helping to support them as they deal with the challenges surrounding a family member with a disability. Her support varies from family to family, depending upon their needs. She can help set up early intervention services, help with referrals to agencies that provide support, she works with Island schools and school nurses. She supports families as their children grow into adulthood. She helps families apply for DDS and other agencies, allowing them to become eligible for more services. After a family member is determined eligible, she can meet with the family to determine what their needs and

wants are for their family member. She said she has a small amount of funds available to families, a stipend of \$300 or \$400, to provide some assistance.

Ms. Hackett explained that she is involved in several agencies and boards, which helps to make sure she is a pipeline of relevant information for families. She described her connection with Mass. Families Organizing for Change and its Family Leadership Series. It is a grassroots parents' advocacy organization that is all about families being the best support for their family member with a disability. She spoke about Housing Connection Projects and current legislation surrounding Medicaid waiver on what its definition of "home" is and how it may change.

She said transition services are very important for young people leaving school system after completing high school.

There was then discussion about a special event to be held hopefully this spring that will bring together people from Mass. Rehab, DDS, DMH and other agencies who can talk about supports available for those transitioning with disabilities.

Phil Campbell said each eighth grade should have a lead person and in late winter, a team should start discussions on preparing families and students who will transition to high school.

Ms. Hackett said there will be a transitioning expo in March on the Cape and she will work on transporting families from the Vineyard (from the boat) to the exposition. She said that it would perhaps take place at Cape Cod Community College. Phil Campbell said he may be able to arrange transportation because the school district has a vehicle at Woods Hole.

Ms. Hackett then explained more of what her office provides. She can accompany parents to and from appointments off and on Island, serving as an extra set of hands or ears during appointments.

She said our legislators, Tim Madden and Dan Wolf, are fabulous and have worked for years to get funding in the budget for Island families, helping them to get to and from appointments off-Island, transportation to specialized medical appointments, those with disabilities or those with cancer treatments or other health issues. She said the funding was approved and Community Services has been chosen to administer the funds. They are exploring what transportation is available and the new program has not been rolled out yet. Amy Houghton said Community Services is determining the best way to disseminate the funds, and that we need to be sure to use the funds to ensure the funding continues.

Laura Silber shared a story about taking her child for off-Island appointments and said that Mass Health no longer reimburses for such trips. Kate DeVane added that it posed a phenomenal expense for families to travel with their family member off-Island for therapies, doctor's appointments and other services. She said her son struggles with traveling on the boat and the amount of noise and commotion. Her family is more successful if they take their own vehicle so that he can stay inside the car during the trip. Discussion continued with Amy Houghton suggesting people contact her with their ideas and their needs surrounding travel. She can be reached at [ahoughton@mvcommunityservices.com](mailto:ahoughton@mvcommunityservices.com).

Kathi Hackett told parents to save their travel receipts from July 1, 2014 to present for possible reimbursement through the new program. Ms. Hackett shared handouts with the group and the meeting adjourned shortly after.