

PACESETTER

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Support for parents of children with mental health needs

Parenting is generally stressful, and parenting a child with mental health needs is even more so. Experts say that the best way to cope with this stress is for parents to actively engage in self-care.

“Self-care is important so that parents are healthy enough to function well, which includes being able to care for their child,” said Renelle Nelson, who coordinates PACER’s Mental Health and Emotional or Behavioral Disorders project. “Research has shown that people who practice self-care are healthier, more effective, more decisive, and more resilient. Making self-care a priority is a good way to manage stress.”

Renelle said that the stress parents experience may be exacerbated by a lack of understanding for mental health issues. “You can’t ‘see’ mental illness,” she said. “Children with mental health issues don’t look any different than their peers. Anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder can’t be seen, but they are very real. One in six children have a mental health disorder serious enough that it impairs their ability to function at home, school, or in the community.”

Renelle offers parents the following self-care tips:

Understand and educate yourself about your child’s disorder and care and treatment options. “Knowledge really is empowering,” Renelle said. She advises parents to learn about their child’s

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The Motown Sound at PACER’s Annual Benefit



Smokey Robinson, whose chart-topping hits helped launch Motown Records, will headline PACER’s Annual Benefit on Saturday, April 25, at the Minneapolis Convention Center.

Smokey Robinson’s spectacular career spans more than four decades. Born and raised in Detroit, he was still in high school when he founded the Miracles. In addition to performing, he wrote the Miracles’ greatest hits, including, “You’ve Really Got a Hold on Me,” “Shop Around,” “Tracks of My Tears,” and many, many more. He also wrote and produced hits such as, “The Way You Do the Things You Do,” “My Girl,” and “Get Ready” for other Motown greats including The Temptations, Mary Wells, Marvin Gaye, and many others.

“We are just thrilled that Smokey Robinson will bring Motown to Minneapolis,” said PACER Center Executive Director Paula Goldberg. “When people hear who this year’s entertainer is, they are so excited! I really think our audience will be dancing in the aisles during this once-in-a-lifetime show.”

Smokey Robinson is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Grammy Living Legend Award, National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences Achievement Award, Kennedy Center Honors, and the National Medal of Arts Award from the President of the United States.

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disorder. “Knowing the signs and triggers of the disorder and familiarizing yourself with care and treatment options will help you feel more confident. PACER advocates can help. In addition, PACER publications and workshops offer valuable information.”

Be honest with your child about their mental health disorder so they can be aware of how and when to get help. “Mental health professionals can advise parents about how to discuss their child’s mental health with them in age-appropriate language,” Renelle said. “Being transparent about mental health also helps end the stigma that secrecy invites.”

Activity can be a good antidote to the impact stress can have on a parent’s physical health. Take a walk, go for a run, exercise at the gym, or practice yoga. Physical activity helps release endorphins, a type of neurochemical that supports mental health, well-being, relaxation, and even sleep. The Mayo Clinic refers to exercise as “meditation in motion.”

Ask for help. “Tap into or build a support network,” Renelle said. She encourages parents to consider seeking out a mental health counselor or a support group. “Classes and PACER workshops can help,” she said. “Knowing that others are experiencing the same things helps you feel you aren’t alone.”

“Be willing to let others help you,” Renelle said. Sometimes good friends and family want to help but may not know how. The gift of time can be invaluable. “It can be difficult to find someone to care for your child when you need time to yourself. Ask those you’re closest to if they can help by watching your child if you need a night off or by having your child visit them if you’d like alone time at home,” Renelle suggested. In addition, summer camps and programs for children with mental health issues can be fun for your child and provide you with a needed break.



Let go of your guilt about what is happening to your child. “No one wants to have a mental disorder, and it’s no one’s fault,” Renelle said. “Shame and guilt get in the way and take up emotional energy you could use for other things.”

Don’t overprotect your child. “When you have a child with a mental health, emotional, or behavioral issue, it can be hard to let them grow,” Renelle said. “Find ways to encourage them and their efforts.”

Embrace your child’s strengths. “Remind yourself of what your child can do, not what they cannot do. Every child has abilities, interests, and talents,” Renelle said. “Your child is a unique and special individual who also has a mental health disorder. That disorder does not have to define them.”

“Every parent wants to take pride in their child. Celebrate your child’s strengths and successes and let them know you are proud of them.”

For more information about PACER’s Children’s Mental Health and Emotional or Behavioral Disorders Project, go to PACER.org/cmh. To speak to an advocate, call (952) 838-9000. ■

'Benefit' continued from page 1

He has also been inducted into the Rock ‘n’ Roll Hall of Fame and the Songwriters’ Hall of Fame.

PACER’s Annual Benefit includes an extensive silent auction. You can bid on packages ranging in value from \$50 items to priceless, once-in-a-lifetime experiences. Be sure to check out our sneak peek preview of all the items, which will be available two weeks prior to the event at PACER.org/benefit.

Bidding opens online on Thursday, April 23, and will remain open until 8:15 p.m. on the night of the Benefit. All are able to bid on the silent auction items, even those not able to attend the Benefit. With mobile bidding, you’ll be able to bid early and often and keep track of the most in-demand packages. Be sure to bring your charged mobile phone to the event! ■

Reserve your tickets now! See page 16 for ordering info.

PACER Advisory Board Member Charlie Weaver: ‘It’s all about equity’

Charlie Weaver is passionate about the rights of people with disabilities. “How we treat people with disabilities and other challenges is a core part of who we are,” he said. “It’s a good reflection of us as a society.”

Charlie turned that passion into action as a longtime PACER volunteer; he joined PACER’s Advisory Board in 1996 while he was a member of the Minnesota Legislature. “I was serving on the (Minnesota) House Education Committee, and disability issues came before the committee. That’s where I first met Paula Goldberg, and she invited me to be on the advisory board. I thought I could be somewhat helpful around the legislature, providing an insider’s view of what’s going on, as well as advocating,” Charlie said.

“Every legislator wants to do the right thing by the disability community,” he said. “Every legislator has people with disabilities in their district. People with disabilities touch everyone’s life. But the legislature is a different planet. What happens is not always about logic. There are personalities, the economy, and what state agencies want. It’s how you couch the argument through messaging and advocacy that is so important. Paula is very good at that: she’s a gifted communicator. PACER has great stories, and legislators need to hear those stories — and also hear them from parents of children with disabilities.”

Charlie is one of those parents. “My oldest child has Down syndrome,” Charlie said. “Charles is 27, and he’s sassy, funny, unique, and smart. We used to call him Chaz, but he wants to be called Charles now that he’s working for Anoka County.” He holds not one but two part-time jobs. “He works for the Anoka County Attorney’s office, doing clerical work, and with Anoka County Human Services through Achieve Services,” Charlie said. “He loves going to work and he loves his work.” Achieve Services is a day training and habilitation



Charlie Weaver and his son Charles

program for adults with developmental disabilities.

In addition to Charles, Charlie has three other young adult children. Sam is in a Ph.D. program at the University of Minnesota, Maren is a mergers and acquisition specialist at United Health Care, and Jack is a student at Villanova University.

Charlie left the Minnesota Legislature in 1999 after serving for 10 years. He continued his public service as Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Public Safety and then as Chief of Staff to former Governor Tim Pawlenty. He then became Executive Director of the Minnesota Business Partnership, a position he holds today. The

Minnesota Business Partnership works with over 100 CEOs and top executives from Minnesota’s largest employers on public policy issues to strengthen the state economy and improve the quality of life for Minnesotans.

When asked about his long-term commitment to PACER, Charlie said, “Jobs are nice and policy is nice, but some things are more important than the job.”

Looking forward, Charlie said, “PACER is more important than ever as we learn more about disabilities. Thanks to PACER, we’ve come a long way. It’s important that PACER continues to advocate for families as education guides and champions for children with disabilities. And PACER is going to be even more important in the future. In our current climate, bullying prevention is more important, not less. Both sides of the political aisle are less and less tolerant of differing opinions. That climate leads to bullying.”

Reflecting on the rights of people with disabilities, Charlie said, “It’s not about charity or purity. It’s about equity. All we want for our children is fair treatment. No pity, no special favors: just the same opportunity to be successful as every other citizen has.” ■

PACER partners with Planet Fitness on bullying prevention

Planet Fitness, one of the fastest-growing global fitness center franchisors and operators, has teamed up with PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center on two exciting new projects that include resources for educators and a contest for students.

Bullying Prevention 101 is a free, downloadable curriculum designed to give educators what they need to help elementary, middle, and high school students build the skills necessary to prevent bullying and stand up for kindness.

"Bullying Prevention 101 is a comprehensive educational resource that is available to teachers, counselors, and other educators at no charge," said Julie Hertzog, Director of PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center. "Resources include a classroom guidebook with detailed instructions, a PowerPoint presentation, handouts, activities, and videos." Topics include:

- Things you should know about bullying: How to define who is involved and the impact
- Advocacy and self-advocacy: What you can do if you experience or witness bullying
- Creating a Judgement Free Generation: Ways to promote kindness, acceptance, and inclusion

Dineen Boyle, Planet Fitness' corporate social responsibility manager, said her company felt that PACER was a great fit for their "Judgement Free Zone" philosophy. "PACER Center is the preeminent expert on the topic of bullying prevention," said Dineen. "We wanted to partner with PACER to empower youth to create a kinder world. This aligns with our core mission of being the home of the 'Judgement Free Zone.'"



Entries from last fall's Students with Solutions contest. Students from elementary, middle, and high schools across the U.S. shared their creative ideas on how to prevent bullying.



"Our partnership with PACER is part of our 'Judgement Free Generation' initiative. We thought, what if we could expand our philosophy beyond the walls of our gyms, into our communities? We see every day the amazing things that are possible when people feel included, accepted, and like they belong," Dineen said.

The second PACER and Planet Fitness project is a two-part "Students with Solutions" contest that offers awards, prizes, and recognition to students of all ages. "Students can use art, writing, graphics, or video to express how to be intentional with acts of kindness, acceptance, and inclusion," Julie said. "We have received fantastic, imaginative entries!"

The winners of last fall's Students with Solutions contest will be announced in February. The next contest will launch in February and run through April. "We can hardly wait to see the new entries," Julie said.

Planet Fitness has been a natural fit for PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center.

"It's really serendipity, how our approaches and philosophy align. This has been a mutually collaborative partnership," Julie said.

Dineen added, "We have really appreciated Julie's perspective and knowledge about bullying prevention, and the work PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center does to empower youth to share kinder cultures."

Bullying Prevention 101 is available at PACER.org/bullying/classroom/planet-fitness. The upcoming "Students with Solutions" contest information is at PACER.org/bullying/getinvolved/students-with-solutions.asp. ■

Rosario Fuentes: 'PACER not only helped; they listened'

Several years ago, Rosario Fuentes attended a PACER workshop to learn more about how she could support the education of her son Joseph, who has developmental delays and autism. "I wanted to know all about IEPs (Individualized Education Programs), and just to educate myself," she said. "When I saw a workshop by PACER was in Spanish, I wanted to go because my family is Spanish-speaking, and I wanted to be able to share information with them about how to support Joseph."

"Mr. Jesús (PACER multicultural advocate Jesús Villaseñor) not only gave me the information I needed, he listened to me. He helped me understand what I could ask for, what my rights were. He shared about his family, too. The biggest thing was, he talked about having high expectations for my son, along with accommodations and how we could support him in the classroom. He was so warm and really listened."

During their conversation, Jesús shared with Rosario that there was a shortage of special education teachers, especially bilingual. At the time, Rosario's job was at home, caring for Joseph when he wasn't in school. A graduate of the University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management, she was an accountant by training, but at age 50, she was thinking of making a career change. She mentioned this to Jesús, and, she said, "He was so supportive! He gave me his card. I still have it."

Rosario was so impressed that she started to use more PACER services. "I came to so many workshops! We used the Simon Technology Center. I appreciated the website in Spanish. Because of the information I learned from PACER, we changed Joseph's school to one that was a better fit for him. Joseph is now 10 and doing well in a small school. Meanwhile, I kept thinking about what Mr. Jesús had said about the shortage of bilingual special education teachers."

Three years later Jesús walked into an IEP meeting at El



Rosario and her family

Colegio, a bilingual charter school, for an IEP meeting with parents, youth, and staff. "I have to be honest, I did not recognize Rosario," he said ruefully. After all, it had been three years, and they had only met once, under very different circumstances. Back then, Rosario had been a parent seeking help for her son. This time, she was a special education teacher.

"I said afterward, 'You know, Mr. Villaseñor, we met awhile ago,'" Rosario recalled. "Jesús Villaseñor and PACER Center changed my life. It is because of them that I went back to school and, at age 50, I have a new career as a special education teacher. I work with students in the classroom on transition planning. It is so rewarding! It feeds my soul, and it doesn't feel like work."

"I believe in partnerships and strong relationships. Getting to know students is most important. I want to provide instruction at their level and have strong partnerships with parents. I talk to them about PACER. I want them to know about PACER's workshops and classes."

Rosario is not the only member of her family to be involved with PACER; her adult daughter, Jesenia Eduarte, is a member of PACER's Young Professional Advisory Board.

"My family has benefitted from PACER, so has our whole community. All the information I learned from PACER for my family, I can use with other families."

"I feel that my relationship with PACER has come full circle." ■

“**Jesús Villaseñor
and PACER Center
changed my life.**
– Rosario Fuentes”

Early intervention for young children leads to brighter futures

Karen is concerned because her toddler isn't talking yet. Darryl and Jasmine have noticed that their youngest child isn't reaching the milestones her siblings did at the same age. Sofia is wondering about services for her six-month-old with Down syndrome.

PACER early childhood advocates receive calls like these every day, and they often refer parents to early intervention services. Early intervention is a system of coordinated services that promotes the child's growth and development and supports families during the critical early years. Early intervention services for eligible children ages birth to three and their families are federally mandated through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In Minnesota, these services are coordinated by and provided through the child's school district.

"PACER advocates, workshops, and publications support parents and give them the confidence, knowledge, and skills they need to help their children obtain the education, health care, and other services they deserve," said Judy Swett, PACER's Early Childhood program coordinator. "When families contact PACER for help, they speak to a staff parent advocate who can guide them through the process of accessing early intervention services. We want parents to understand the process and the rights they have so that they can fully participate and advocate for their child."

The early intervention process can sometimes seem complex. PACER is here to help — and that help is just a phone call or email away. PACER can shepherd parents through the process, help them learn their rights, and teach them how to advocate for their child.

Once the school district determines that a child younger than three is eligible for services, parents and early intervention staff meet to write the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). An IFSP is a document that is based on an assessment of the child's needs as well as the needs and concerns of the family. The term "IFSP" also refers to the process of determining what services a young child with developmental delays or disabilities needs. This process provides an opportunity for sharing between families and staff so that families can make informed choices about the early intervention services they want for their child and themselves.



Early intervention services for children and families are based on providing support to families to empower them to support their child's development and learning. "The early intervention process is designed to be family centered and family driven," Judy said.

Families may find the focus on the family, rather than the child, confusing. "PACER can help parents understand the importance of their role as their child's first teacher and what to expect from their early intervention providers," Judy explained.

Early intervention service providers act as mentors or coaches to teach the family new skills or enhance the skills they already have in order to support their child's development. These new skills are then reinforced at ongoing home visits. Parents or other caregivers are taught how to use every day routines and activities to teach their child new skills. Research has shown that this is the best way for a child to develop these skills.

"Having a young child with disabilities or developmental delays can be challenging," Judy said. "Fortunately, early intervention services are family centered and can give you the supports and services you need to help your child grow, learn, and develop. PACER is here to answer your questions and support you in the process."

Parents can contact an early childhood advocate at (952) 838-9000 or at jswett@PACER.org. ■

Simon Technology Center matches needs with tech tools

When parents hear “assistive technology” (AT), they often think of high-tech devices and gadgets. While AT can be as high tech as a robot, it can also be as low tech as a pencil grip. AT is any tool that helps a person do a task or skill more efficiently and independently. “The term ‘AT’ can seem overwhelming because it refers to such a broad range of items,” said Terri Rosen, Director of PACER’s Simon Technology Center (STC).

That’s where the STC comes in. Assistive technology (AT) consultations are one of STC’s core services, designed to help families learn about and consider the right AT for their child. This wonderful, free service is a “person-centered process,” Terri explained. Rather than trying to fit the tool or item to the individual, a consultation is an in-depth process that considers the individual’s needs and strengths and then presents AT that may be a fit. The youngest person to receive a consultation was a toddler.

Tiffany Tully is the mom of two young children with communication disabilities, both of whom had AT consultations this past fall. “I really love this part of PACER!” she said. “I love all parts of PACER, and the consultations were really helpful because it showed me what was available. Being able to see and try AT, hands on, helped me choose what was best for my children.”

The three-part process begins with a parent or individual completing an online application, which includes information about areas to explore during the consultation (everything from reading and math to communication and living skills), the individual’s strengths and needs, their likes and dislikes, and more.

Next, a phone call takes place between the individual or parent and one of PACER’s AT specialists. “Specialists are assigned based on the individual’s age and needs,” Terri said. “During the phone call, we go beyond the application questions to get a more complete understanding of their needs so we can select relevant technology for them to consider during the consultation.”

Finally, the child or youth, often with a parent or a member of their care or educational team, comes into PACER for a hands-on consultation to see and try out items the AT specialist has identified as potentially appropriate and helpful.



A child using AT at PACER’s Simon Technology Center

Tiffany appreciates the person-centered process. “My daughter can be overwhelmed easily,” she said. “Elizabeth asked questions to make it easy and comfortable, and we followed my daughter’s lead. During my son’s consultation, he caught on quickly and started using the apps. It was so helpful that they were able to show us the apps and devices and model how to use them.”

Tiffany also gave high marks to the follow up. “They printed out everything and sent us emails. It was very helpful because there was a lot of information, and I didn’t need to worry about writing everything down and maybe missing something.”

The purpose of the consultation is to present relevant technology that will help families to make their own informed decisions, Terri said, not to recommend the purchase of specific AT, though the STC shares information about where items of interest may be purchased. Some items are available to try through PACER’s Lending Library.

After their consultations, Tiffany’s family joined the Lending Library. “It is so exciting for me to see all of the things to use to make my children’s and my life easier! It’s a really positive experience. There is only so much you can see online. It really opens up so many more options if you can see things in person and experience them hands on.”

For more information about AT consultations, the Lending Library, and everything else the Simon Technology Center has to offer, go to PACER.org/stc or call (952) 838-9000. Although the consultation is provided free of charge to Minnesota families, a \$50 refundable deposit must be received by the STC prior to scheduling an appointment. A consultation fee is charged to families who would like an assistive technology consultation but live outside of Minnesota. ■

Save the date! 2020 PACER Events

PACER's Annual Benefit featuring Smokey Robinson, April 25

Don't miss this spectacular event featuring the legendary Smokey Robinson! Tickets to the Benefit include the performance and the silent and live auctions. Visit PACER.org/Benefit or call (952) 838-9000 to purchase your tickets today.

PACER's Unity Awards, May 27

Celebrate those creating a world without bullying! The Unity Awards are presented by The Faces of Change — The Youth Advisory Boards of PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center. To learn more, visit PACER.org/Bullying.

EX.I.T.E. Camp for Girls, July-August

Middle school girls with disabilities can apply now for this fun math, science, and technology camp at PACER Center. To learn more, visit PACER.org/STC.

The 15th Annual National Symposium About Children & Young Adults with Mental Health and Learning Disabilities, August 12

The Symposium is designed to help parents, educators, administrators, and professionals better identify and address mental health and learning disabilities in children and youth. Registration opens in mid-May, and details will be available soon at PACER.org/symposium.

National Bullying Prevention Month, October

Founded by PACER in 2006, National Bullying Prevention Month is a campaign that unites communities nationwide and around the world in a campaign to keep all youth safe from bullying by educating and raising awareness of bullying prevention.

Unity Day, October 21

The signature event of National Bullying Prevention Month is celebrated worldwide by students, educators, corporations, and communities, spreading a huge orange message of support for bullying prevention. To learn more, visit PACER.org/Bullying.



PACER expands its global reach

PACER's scope of influence has always extended far beyond Minnesota and even the boundaries of the United States. Whether it's the PACER puppets who now make their homes in Kuwait, Japan, Trinidad, and England, or assistance provided to organizations in India, Macedonia, Malaysia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, PACER is known across the globe.

PACER often welcomes international visitors interested in learning how they can replicate PACER's work in their countries. "In the past few years, we've had visitors from Japan, Armenia, China, the Philippines, France, Turkey, the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, Bhutan, and two groups each from Serbia and Russia," said PACER Executive Director Paula Goldberg. "We've also had an intern from India and a Fulbright fellow from Romania who worked at PACER as part of her Master's degree program at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs."

International educators, professionals, and parents visit PACER for a variety of reasons, such as learning more about parent advocacy or inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms. There are sometimes very specific issues that visitors want to learn about. A group from Serbia was interested in parent leadership, two professors from a Turkish university wanted to discuss online training for parents of children with disabilities, and a group from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland was particularly interested in PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center and Tech for Teens programs.

The group from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland was in the U.S. under the auspices of the Emerging Leaders Exchange program, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. As part of the program, PACER Center was invited to participate in the exchange. PACER Associate Director Gretchen Godfrey was selected to travel to the two countries in December 2019.



A group from the Emerging Leaders Exchange Program from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland tour PACER.



PACER assistive technology specialist Tina Hanson (far right) shows visitors from Bhutan how to use a telepresence robot.

"In addition to learning how services are delivered in Ireland and Northern Ireland, I gave a presentation on PACER, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and a very brief overview of the Americans with Disabilities Act," Gretchen said.

International visitors are often impressed by the size of PACER's staff, programs, and the scope of services, but one of the most important things visitors take away from their time at PACER is an understanding of the value of parents as advocates. "PACER staff share our 'parents helping parents' philosophy with our international visitors to inspire families around the world to be involved in their child's education," Gretchen said. "That's the core of PACER." ■

PACER staff share our 'parents helping parents' philosophy with our international visitors to inspire families around the world to be involved in their child's education. That's the core of PACER.

-Gretchen Godfrey

PACER's Los Angeles office launches puppet program

"As soon as I saw my first PACER puppet show I wanted to have them in Los Angeles," said Judy French, coordinator of PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center's L.A. office. "I was so moved by the puppets — they are magic!"

PACER's puppet program began in 1979 with the "Count Me In" puppets, featuring six endearing, child-size, multicultural puppets that portray children with disabilities. These puppets communicate the message of understanding and acceptance, helping to dispel fears, myths, and misconceptions about persons with disabilities.

The "Kids Against Bullying" puppet program was developed in response to requests from parents and teachers who were familiar with Count Me In and wanted a puppet presentation focusing on bullying prevention. PACER puppet shows have reached more than 350,000 children and adults.

The L.A. puppet program launched with the hiring of puppet program coordinator Tara Ricasa in late September 2019. "Tara is a puppeteer and teaching artist," Judy said. "She came to PACER in Minnesota to work with PACER puppet staff Lynn Dennis and Katie Kaufmann, and started rehearsing in December. She has recruited other puppeteers, and we already have more requests for shows than we can handle! It's very exciting to see the level of interest from schools."

Initially, the program will focus on the Van Nuys area, with plans to expand to the rest of Los Angeles County and into Ventura County.

Judy said, "Our goal is to have something for younger elementary kids so they can understand bullying prevention and how bullying begins. Kids Against Bullying performances allow young children to grasp the concepts of kindness, acceptance, and inclusion, and understand what they can do for themselves and others." ■



(L to R) Volunteer Mara Palma with PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center staff Judy French and Tara Ricasa

Bring the puppets to your school or organization!

With engaging and interactive stories, PACER's endearing, life-size puppets have a special way of capturing children's attention and addressing sensitive subjects. Bring the puppets to your school today to educate, entertain, and inspire! Puppet shows can be scheduled in the Minnesota Twin Cities and Los Angeles metro areas.

To book a show or learn more about this affordable program, email puppets@PACER.org or visit PACER.org/Puppets.



Paving new career pathways for rural youth with disabilities

PACER and its partners, the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) and three CareerForce development sites that serve 41 Minnesota counties, are in the last stages of a 39-month long pilot project that assists rural youth with disabilities with career planning and development. The youths with disabilities who participate in the Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) are culturally diverse, low income, homeless, involved with the juvenile justice system, or teen parents.

According to PACER transition specialist Deborah Leuchovius, who coordinates the project for PACER, “DEI’s focus is building on individual youth’s interests and talents, matching them to career paths that link their strengths to the needs of rural employers. A young person will start with a career goal, and through DEED funding, the CareerForce Centers support the youth’s education and training to reach their goals,” Deborah explained.

An example of this is a young African American woman from southern Minnesota diagnosed with an emotional/behavioral disorder. She told a CareerForce counselor of her dream to one day own a restaurant. The CareerForce center placed her in a funded part-time job in a dietary department of a long-term care facility. The employer coached and mentored the youth. The trial period of the job was a success, and she was hired full time. The youth’s plans included working on her basic skills to prepare for attending college. She hopes to start with an online associate’s degree, with the potential to transfer to a four-year program.

With several months left to go on the DEI project, more than 400 rural youth have been served, far exceeding the initial goal of reaching 300 youth. According to Kay Tracy, DEED’s Director of Youth services, PACER’s involvement has been an important part of the project’s success.

DEED was interested in having PACER as a partner in part because of PACER’s status as a national expert of the Guideposts for Success, a compilation of research-based best practices of what all youth need to be successful after



high school. Using tools initially designed by PACER, the Guideposts were incorporated into the DEI assessment and planning process for each youth to ensure that all of youth’s needs, not only those relating to career development, were considered. PACER also authored an award-winning guide on how to use the Guideposts for Success in Minnesota’s Personal Learning Plan process, which requires that all youth develop and work on a career plan while they are in high school.

PACER has provided professional development training for CareerForce center staff on a variety of topics including assistive technology, transition planning for youth with mental health conditions, postsecondary education, and new ABLE Act savings opportunities (tax-advantaged savings programs for eligible individuals with disabilities).

PACER conducted parent training in three regions of the state as well as via online streaming to reach families of youth with disabilities in the three pilot areas and beyond. Topics addressed transition to employment, Social Security and work incentives, vocational rehabilitation services, career pathways, and ABLE Act savings opportunities.

PACER developed a video for parents on career pathways, as well as written material on the services available to youth with disabilities through Minnesota’s CareerForce locations. PACER staff also worked with CareerForce development sites on culturally appropriate delivery of services.

For more information about the DEI project, contact Deborah Leuchovius at (952) 838-9000 or dleuchovius@PACER.org. ■

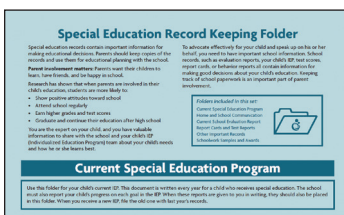
Resources

To see the full list of PACER publications and to order, go to PACER.org/Publications. You may also order by calling (952) 838-9000.

Special Education Record Keeping Folders

Special education records contain important information for making educational decisions. This set of six folders helps parents organize school paperwork to help them make good decisions about their children's education. Also available in Spanish, Hmong, and Somali.

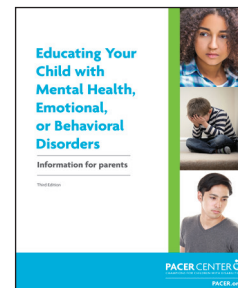
\$10 | 11+ copies, \$8 each | PHP-a5



Educating Your Child with Mental Health, Emotional, or Behavioral Disorders: Information for Parents

This guide helps parents of children with mental health, emotional, or behavioral disorders participate effectively in special education planning, including school discipline policies, placement options, and behavioral and emotional support needs. Updated 2018.

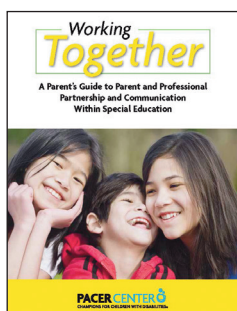
\$5 | 10+ copies, \$4 each | PHP-a21



Working Together: A Parent's Guide to Parent and Professional Partnership and Communication Within Special Education

This book helps parents effectively communicate with special education professionals as they develop their child's educational program.

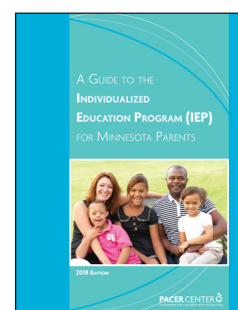
\$6 | 10+ copies, \$5 each | PHP-a19



A Guide to the Individualized Education Program (IEP) for Minnesota Parents

This booklet helps parents work with schools to address each child's special needs through understanding the required components of the IEP. Includes examples from an example IEP form. Updated 2018.

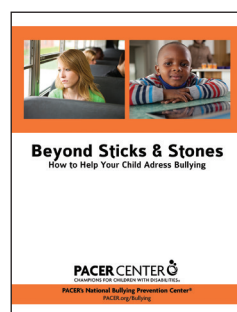
\$3 | 10+ copies, \$2 each | PHP-a12



Beyond Sticks & Stones: How to Help Your Child Address Bullying

This book offers bullying prevention strategies for children at home, in school, and online. It is filled with information and practical tools that can help parents and others take action against bullying. A special section of the book provides specific tips for parents of children with disabilities.

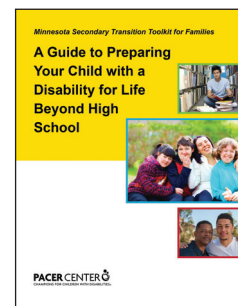
\$5 | BP-7



Minnesota Secondary Transition Toolkit for Families: A Guide to Preparing Your Child with a Disability for Life Beyond High School

Helps make transition planning easier. Topics include health care, benefits planning, postsecondary education, housing, and more.

\$9 | ST-41



PACESETTER

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(Alternate format is available upon request)

PACER Center enhances the quality of life and expands opportunities for children, youth, and young adults with all disabilities and their families so each person can reach his or her highest potential. PACER operates on the principles of parents helping parents, supporting families, promoting a safe environment for all children, and working in collaboration with others. PACER is also the National Bullying Prevention Center, offering innovative resources for students, parents, educators, and others.

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Teaching empathy: PACER's Pat Lang brings the parent perspective to professionals

Pat Lang's first contact with PACER was as a participant in a PACER program called PART (Parents and Residents Together) that brings resident doctors into the homes of families of children with disabilities. Pat's youngest child Madigan, now 22, has a rare progressive genetic disease that renders her fully dependent on her mother for support and care. Because of the complexity of Madigan's health situation, a large team of medical professionals offer treatment and care for her. The Lang home is like a mini-hospital, and Madigan has round-the-clock care when available.

"Residents who participated in the program told us that it was life-changing for them to see how families of children with disabilities care for and support their children," Pat said. "Parents of children with special needs and disabilities did not choose this life, but they love their children and will do anything for them."

Pat wanted to advocate for families by carrying that life-changing message forward, and when she joined PACER's staff as coordinator of the PACER's Health Information Center, she began to present to groups about what life is like for parents of children with disabilities. Today, she speaks to medical students, nurses, doctors, public health professionals, and community partners. Her message is simple: she asks them to put themselves in the family's shoes. "In order to put yourself in someone else's shoes, that means taking your own off," she said. "You need to let go of your opinions and preconceptions in order to truly hear what a parent is saying."

PACER's Health Information Center (HIC) — staffed by Pat and Linda Goldman Cherwitz, coordinator of



Pat Lang

“Parents of children with special needs and disabilities did not choose this life, but they love their children and will do anything for them.”

-Pat Lang

the PART program — provides support, advocacy, and information about the health care system to families of children and young adults with special health care needs and disabilities. The HIC promotes family-centered care and family and professional collaboration at all levels of health care, and has a strong commitment to promote and support the needs of families from racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse communities.

Whether she is speaking to a group of doctors or helping a parent, Pat believes in treating others as they want to be treated. "I'm glad to be able to spread that empathy."

For more information about the services provided by PACER's Health Information Center, call (952) 838-9000 or go to PACER.org/health. ■

And the survey says... Support PACER with SurveyMonkey

Helping PACER is now as easy as taking simple online surveys. PACER supporters can sign up on SurveyMonkey Contribute to receive short surveys from SurveyMonkey customers who need opinions on a variety of topics. For every survey completed, SurveyMonkey makes a donation to PACER, and participants have the opportunity to win \$100 in an instant win game. Participants' identities and information remain confidential. Sign up at contribute.surveymonkey.com/charity/PACER.

Workshops

PACER Center workshops are FREE to Minnesota parents. For information and to register, call (952) 838-9000 or toll free at (800) 537-2237, or visit PACER.org/workshops.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH, EMOTIONAL/BEHAVIORAL

Getting It Right: Mental Health, Special Education, and 504 Plans

This workshop provides information on the challenges students with anxiety, depression, ADHD, and PTSD may experience in school and offer tips and strategies on providing instruction and support at school.

- **March 25, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. (St. Cloud)**

EARLY CHILDHOOD

What Inclusion Means for My Child

This workshop is an introduction to Least Restrictive Environment and the principles of inclusion for parents of children ages three to five. A parent panel discussion on their experiences with preschool inclusion follows.

- **Feb. 11, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Online streaming option available

Being an Active Participant in Your Child's Transition from Early Childhood Special Education to Kindergarten

Kindergarten is a big step in any child's life. In this workshop, parents of young children with disabilities receive information to plan for this transition and learn strategies to help their child be successful.

- **March 5, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Online streaming option available

Advocating for My Child and Family

Parents learn to use the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) process to discuss their concerns and priorities and write outcomes that will result in services and supports to meet their child's and family's identified needs.

- **March 9, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Online streaming option available

Early Childhood Parent Leadership Training

Parents of young children ages birth to seven with developmental delays or disabilities participate in an interactive, one-day training to learn how to make their voices heard, learn about the early childhood special education process, and build leadership skills. Please contact Judy Swett for additional information: jswett@PACER.org

- **March 28, 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. (PACER)**

Working with Culturally or Linguistically Diverse Families in Early Childhood Settings

Multicultural liaisons and language interpreters will increase their capacity to provide assistance and enhance families' understanding at Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings for children ages birth to five.

- **April 17, 9:00 to 11:30 a.m. (PACER)**
Online streaming option available

HOUSING

Housing: Starting the Journey, Three-part workshop series

Step 1 — How do we start?

Help your son or daughter with their vision for community living, housing, and services. An overview of housing and services options will be provided.

- **Feb. 18, 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. (PACER)**

Step 2 — How is it paid for?

The "big picture" view of how housing is funded through federal, state, and county resources. Learn how your daughter or son can become eligible and access funding for housing. Topics include income supplements and budgets.

- **March 2, 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. (PACER)**

Step 3 — What are the options?

A more detailed explanation of some individualized housing and services options will be provided by a panel of parents, young adults, and housing providers as they share their journeys through the process.

- **March 16, 6:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. (PACER)**

PARENT TRAINING

Special Education: What Do I Need to Know

Parents gain an understanding of special education, how to resolve disagreements, and discover the role they can play in the process.

- **Feb. 11, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. (Lino Lakes)**

The ABC's of the IEP: Making the Individualized Education Program (IEP) work for your child

Parents learn to use the IEP to benefit their child, including how each required part of the IEP can be developed to meet their child's needs.

- **Feb. 24, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. (Grand Marais)**

- **Feb. 25, 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. (Duluth)**
- **Feb. 27, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**
- **March 31, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. (Marshall)**

Hot Tips on the Individualized Education Program: Is Your Child's IEP Individualized and Appropriate?

Parents learn to use their child's special education evaluation report to determine how well the IEP addresses their child's needs. Parents must bring the child's most current school evaluation and IEP.

- **Feb. 29, 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. (PACER)**

Planning for Educational Inclusion: A Viewing of "Including Samuel"

Please join us for a screening of "Including Samuel," a documentary by filmmaker Dan Habib about educational inclusion. Q & A with a PACER advocate will occur before and after the film.

- **March 3, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. (Richfield)**
- **March 30, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. (Mankato)**

ABC's of the IEP for Transition-age Students and Their Parents

Parents and students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) in eighth grade and above learn to use the IEP to support the transition to adulthood. Students can register separately to attend a student workshop.

- **March 17, 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. (Eyota)**
- **April 7, 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. (Detroit Lakes)**

Special Education and the Important Role You Play for Your Child

Parents learn to use their rights and abilities to advocate for their child and work effectively with the school. This workshop also provides valuable information for surrogate parents, foster parents, and the professionals who work with them on behalf of children.

- **April 27, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Online streaming option available

SIMON TECHNOLOGY CENTER

An Exploration of Augmentative and Alternative Communication Devices and Tools

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) tools can help individuals express their thoughts, wants, needs, and more. This workshop introduces and explores the range of AAC tools available.

- **Feb. 18, 2:00 to 3:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Online streaming option available

Appy Hour: Apps that Support Independence for Vision Loss

This workshop provides an overview of apps that support independence for individuals who are blind or low vision. Apps will address accessing text, daily living, and navigation for school, work, or home.

- **Feb. 19, 3:00 to 4:00 p.m. (PACER)**
Online streaming option available

Executing the Plan — Time and Focus

This presentation includes strategies and technology tools for managing time and attention for middle, high school, and beyond. Time Timer, MultiTimer, and others are explored in-depth and hands-on for in-person participants.

- **Feb. 20, 4:30 to 6:00 p.m.**
Online streaming option available

Assistive Technology to Support Social-Emotional Development for Young Children

This workshop is designed for parents and professionals to learn about the wide range of assistive technology available to help support the social-emotional development of young children.

- **March 3, 2:00 to 3:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Online streaming option available

Appy Hour: Apps that Support Wellness for All Ages

This workshop features tools to support wellness for all ages, including apps to practice calm breathing, experiment with guided meditation and yoga, track moods, practice coping strategies, and support mental health.

- **March 11, 2:00 to 3:00 p.m. (PACER)**
Online streaming option available

Strategies for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Implementation

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) tools can help individuals communicate with others, but implementing them can be a challenge. This workshop explores strategies to implement AAC in an individual's routines and environments.

- **March 17, 2:00 to 3:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Online streaming option available

Assistive Technology to Increase Independence for Young Adults with Disabilities

This workshop explores tools for independence, including devices and apps for time management, tasks, medications, finances, meals, transportation, and communication. Features that support those with vision loss will also be addressed.

- **April 8, 2:00 to 3:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Online streaming option available

AT and Play in the Natural Environment

Young children with disabilities often experience barriers to play. This workshop explores tools and strategies to make play more accessible for young children with disabilities in their natural routines and environments.

- **April 14, 2:00 to 3:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Online streaming option available

Educational Apps for Young Children

Apps have become a large part of learning. This presentation explores apps and their appropriate use for young children with disabilities.

- **May 7, 2:00 to 3:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Online streaming option available

Executive Function for K-12

Students of all ages with a range of disabilities struggle with executive function skills. This workshop explores a variety of tools and strategies to support the needs of K-12 students.

- **May 12, 2:00 to 3:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Online streaming option available

TECH FOR GIRLS CLUB

Roll up your sleeves and get messy while having fun with science, technology, engineering, and math! Girls with disabilities, ages 11-18, of all skill levels are welcome.

Virtual Reality: Exploring Volcanoes

Girls will learn about volcanoes through Google Expeditions, a virtual reality tool. They will also create their own volcano and watch it explode!

- **March 28, 10:00 to 11:30 a.m. (PACER)**

TECH FOR TEENS CLUB

Teens are invited to join an exciting club to learn about technology! This FREE club is open to teens ages 11 to 19 with disabilities. Students of all abilities are encouraged to attend.

3D Printing Basics

Teens are invited to watch a 3D printer in action and experiment with 3D design software to create their own computer-generated models.

- **March 7, 10:00 to 11:30 a.m. (PACER)**

Intro to Coding and Video Games

An introduction to the fundamentals of coding. Teens create interactive games and stories while developing basic programming skills. This workshop is designed for teens with all levels of coding experience.

- **April 4, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (PACER)**

Building Websites

An introduction to the basics of coding for the internet. Teens create their own unique website and publish it online. This workshop is designed for all levels of coding experience.

- **May 2, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (PACER)**

TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

Introduction to Customized Employment

This workshop provides information on how youth with disabilities can benefit from customized employment services. Parents will gain knowledge about how to prepare their youth for employment, focusing on his or her strengths and interests.

- **Feb. 25, 12:00 to 1:00 p.m. (PACER)**
Online streaming option available

Supplemental Security Income: The Bridge to Work

Parents of youth with disabilities will learn how to navigate the system during times of transition, get connected to resources, manage programs and benefits, and explore post-secondary training and employment options.

- **March 3, 12:00 to 1:00 p.m. (PACER)**
Online streaming option available

Supplemental Security Income (SSI): First Steps

Learn how your youth can apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) to help meet his or her postsecondary education, training, employment, and independent living goals.

- **April 20, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. (Waseca)**

Life Planning for People with Disabilities

Participants learn about guardianship-conservatorship laws, power of attorney, trusts, and other life planning issues. Plan to attend both sessions as they cover different information.

- **April 21, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. (Guardianship) (PACER)**
- **May 5, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. (Trusts) (PACER)**

Transition to Employment: Tools to Help You Find a Job

We will explore tools to support you during the job search process, including tools for writing resumes and letters, and preparing for an interview. Staying organized, reading with text-to-speech, and writing with dictation will also be featured.

- **May 13, 2:00 to 3:30 p.m. (PACER)**
Online streaming option available

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SMOKEY ROBINSON

Live at PACER's Annual Benefit!
Saturday, April 25, 2020

Minneapolis Convention Center

To reserve your tickets for the 2020 PACER Benefit on April 25, featuring Smokey Robinson, please complete the form below and mail with check payment to PACER Center. **Reservations can also be made via credit card at PACER.org or by calling (952) 838-9000.**

Benefit Tickets (Please indicate number of each and include first and last names of attendees)

____ \$75 Friend ____ \$100 Supporter ____ \$150 Patron* ____ \$225 Benefactor* ____ \$300 Sponsor*
____ \$600 Champion* Total amount: \$____ Names: _____

* Includes post-performance patron champagne and dessert party

Your email: _____ Mobile: _____

I need: ☐ Wheelchair seating (# of spaces____) ☐ Sign language interpretation ☐ Assistive listening device

Other Contributions/Volunteer Opportunities

Please contact me about: ☐ Donating to the Silent Auction ☐ Being a Corporate Sponsor (includes ticket package and ad)
☐ Advertising in the Benefit Playbill ☐ Volunteering on a Benefit committee

Please mail to: PACER Center, 8161 Normandale Blvd., Minneapolis, MN 55437-1044 | Email: PACER@PACER.org