



Official Newsletter of the Illinois Subdivision of the Division for
Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children

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Message from the IDEC President...

Robin Miller Young



Westin-Lombard
October 7-9, 2009

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The *IDEC Newsletter* is a quarterly publication of the Illinois Division for Early Childhood. Please send inquiries, comments, and article submissions to:

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Dear IDEC Members . . .

Please join me, your IDEC colleagues, and other professionals and parents on October 7th, 8th, and 9th at the Westin Hotel in Lombard, IL for the 11th Illinois Statewide Collaborative Early Childhood Conference known as ***Sharing A Vision*** (SAV). This year's theme is "*Endless Possibilities*." This phrase was chosen as it describes our vision of the future for ALL young children across Illinois; it also describes the opportunities embedded within the SAV experience for all the attendees to prepare to engage in "shared leadership" that will ensure that this vision is brought to fruition.

"Shared leadership" requires each of us to act in two ways; first, we must use our new skills and knowledge to take the lead in shaping the field. That is the easy part! At this year's SAV conference, we have "endless possibilities" to gain new professional tools, so we simply have to use those tools.

Acting on the second shared leadership component may be a little more challenging . . . we need to find ways to support another colleague's or family member's desires and talents to shape the field. For example, do you know of a parent of a child with a disability who

can tell a story of a successful parenting strategy? Offer to co-write it with them and submit it to the IDEC newsletter.

Are you waiting for the right moment to work with policy makers from other organizations and to meet your legislators? Now is the time to ask an administrator, a parent, a colleague, or a policy maker from another organization to go talk with your representatives about your concerns and interests regarding services to children and families.

Is your knowledge of other service delivery systems limited? Work with staff members in another service delivery system (EI, preschool, elementary, private, public, low-incidence, etc.) to develop a "seamless continuum" of services for the children and families from one system to another.

Is your program engaging in innovative practices that seem to be benefitting children and families? Link up with college and university staff to engage in a program evaluation effort, then share your findings.

Do the families in your area know of the free and/or low-cost resources that are available to them? Coordinate a

cross-agency effort to bring those resources to the attention of potential consumers. The list goes on and on of ways to engage in “shared leadership.”

To quote Mahatma Gandhi, “*The difference between what we are doing and what we’re capable of doing would solve most of the world’s problems.*” Let us each find our own voice, help a colleague to find

his/her voice, and raise up our voices loudly in unison so that at the 2011 Sharing A Vision 20th Anniversary Conference we can talk about the Endless Possibilities children and families have achieved!

Warmest regards,
Robin



Sharing A Vision Preconference Workshops - October 7, 2009 **Westin Yorktown Center, Lombard, IL**

Research, Resources and Recommendations: Quality Tools for Supporting Professional Development and Inclusion - Camille Catlett and Johnna Darragh 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM
sponsored by Illinois STARNET

For registration information contact STARNET Region IV, 1000 South Illinois St., Belleville, IL 62220; 618-825-3966, <http://roe.stclair.k12.il.us/starnet>

Designing Inclusive Lives from the Start - Early CHOICES - 9:00 AM - 3:00 PM

sponsored by Early CHOICES and Project CHOICES - for registration information see Project CHOICES website, www.projectchoices.org

Lunch Plans for Thursday at Sharing a Vision? **Join Your IDEC Friends for Dessert and Conversation**

We plan to discuss answers to these questions...

- *How will the Early Childhood Outcomes (ECO) data be used to make programs more effective?*
- *What are programs doing in terms of Response to Intervention (RtI)?*
- *How are Pre-K/Preschool for All programs meeting children's needs in uncertain financial times?*
- *Is an IDEA reauthorization underway?*
- *What are we doing to develop the next generation of leaders in our field?*
- *What types of advocacy efforts should we plan?*

Bring your lunch and we will provide dessert

See p. 5 for details



What Special Olympics Means To Me

by Maureen Lowry-Fritz

"Like Michael Phelps, for example...?"
When my children were born, I looked into their eyes
and wondered about what their lives would be like.
What was in store for them?
*Love? Family? College? Job? Sports? Faith?
Fulfillment?*

I remember holding my newborn daughter, Tess, and
looking into her eyes. I envisioned a long, happy, and
fulfilling life. I imagined first days of school, piano
recitals, camps, middle school, high school, report
cards, sports, Homecoming, student council, a first
date, final exams, Prom, college, a first job,
marriage, and children of her own.

*I have to admit, I didn't imagine her participating in
the Special Olympics.* But, as her first years of life
came and went, my husband and I learned that Tess
faced some challenges in life.

Tess learned to crawl, walk and talk later than "the
books" predicted. At 15-months old, Tess began
having seizures. As it turns out, Tess has
epilepsy. Over the years, we learned that Tess also
has some neurological impairments that affect her
cognitive abilities. These impairments affect almost
every aspect of her life -- making many seemingly
"simple" tasks into extremely challenging hurdles for
her.

But Tess is a very lucky girl. With hard work, Tess
can accomplish almost anything. Given the right
supports, there is very little she cannot do.

In Kindergarten, Tess' school physical therapist
suggested we get Tess involved in swimming. She

thought that the sport would be very beneficial for
Tess' strength, stamina and muscle tone. She also
suggested that a Swim Team would be great for Tess'
social development.

Admittedly, I was terrified to put my daughter with
epilepsy into a pool. However, after doing some
research, I found an arrangement I was comfortable
with. We put Tess in private swim lessons, with a
coach who would remain in the water at all times.
After several years of private weekly lessons, Tess
mastered all four competitive swim strokes. She was
so proud of herself, and we were in awe of her
diligence and enthusiasm.

Then, Tess had some seizures which seemed to
"erase" her memory of how to swim. We watched -
awestruck at her tenacity - as she re-learned all four
strokes. It took months. Finally, she re-mastered
them.

Tess was ready to join a swim team!

That fall, we decided to try a private swim club for
winter swim team. Tess enjoyed it. However, it just
wasn't the "right fit." These swimmers were among
the best in the state. We felt we were (figuratively)
"in over our head." Despite her best efforts, Tess just
couldn't keep up. I would sit in the observation area
with knots in my stomach, and I think Tess felt the
same way. She didn't talk to anyone in the pool. She
barely looked at the coach. After practice, she would
tell me that she felt bad that she was always last to
"touch the wall."

I felt very sad. *Where did my Tess "fit in?"* She could
swim, and she wanted to compete. But it seemed
there was no appropriate place for her to compete.
Thankfully, a friend of mine told me about her son's
involvement in Special Olympics basketball. She
suggested that I look into the Special Olympics
Swim Team.

I considered it. I just wasn't sure if it was the right
path. I wasn't sure if that was where Tess belonged.
I talked with my husband about it. I talked with my
parents and sister about it. I researched it. I prayed
about it. I finally decided to enroll Tess in a special
recreation association swim clinic. If it worked out
well, I thought, we would consider the Special
Olympics.

We went to the first Saturday swim clinic. Tess got
into the water, and proceeded to follow the coaches'
instructions. I watched from the bleachers. I never
took my eyes off of her. She was more comfortable
and more at ease than I had ever seen her. She

spotted me in the bleachers and shouted out, "Hi Mom!" and waved to me. Another parent said to me, "Is that your daughter? She's an awesome swimmer!"

I cried. No one had ever said that to me about my daughter before. I continued to stare at my Tess. I heard the coach tell the other swimmers, "Watch how Tess does it, and try to do it like her." I cried some more. No one had ever said that about my daughter before.

I breathed. No knots in my stomach. No knots in Tess' stomach. *We found the place where we "fit in."*

She grew so much through that clinic. She made a friend. She learned to laugh and joke with the coach and other swimmers.

We decided to let her participate in the Special Olympics Swim Team. She competed in the qualifying Regional Swim Meet in March 2009. She earned two gold medals, and secured the opportunity to compete in the Summer Games.

She was thrilled. She took her medals to school to show them to her teacher, the assistant principal and the office administrative assistants. They hung pictures of her in the main office. Her classmates congratulated her. She felt like a superstar.

On June 12, 2009, my family loaded up the minivan and drove down to Southern Illinois University in Bloomington-Normal. My beautiful daughter, Tess, was on her way to the 2009 Illinois Special Olympics Summer Games.

Her brothers, Nolan (10), Danny (7) and Ike (5), had decorated the car with car paint as a surprise for her. We had a celebratory "cookie cake" and a dozen roses in a cooler in the trunk.



My mom and dad had designed "Team Fritz" t-shirts for us to wear (in Tess' favorite color red). They also made a big sign which read, "Just Keep Swimming, Tess!" Remember Dorie the Fish in Disney's "Finding Nemo"? Tess is our little Dorie, and "Just Keep Swimming" has become her mantra.

We were ready for a great weekend!

As we drove down, Tess asked, "What if I get a gold medal?" I explained that that would mean she was the fastest Special Olympic swimmer in Illinois, in that specific event.

She thought for a moment. Then in her hesitant Tess-like way, she wondered aloud: *"...like Michael Phelps, for example...?"* In the rear view mirror, I made eye contact with Tess' twin brother Nolan. "Just like Michael Phelps, Tess.", he said.

Tess sat quietly smiling, thinking happy swimming thoughts in her head.

We checked in to our hotel rooms and had some dinner. Early to bed, because the next day was The Big Day! On Saturday morning, we put on our Team Fritz t-shirts, and headed out. We got to Southern Illinois University campus early.

We couldn't believe our eyes. Thousands of people - athletes, families, volunteers, local supporters, fans. Everyone was there to support people with intellectual disabilities. I had never seen anything like it. Strangers came up to Tess and wished her luck. She felt like a rock star.

We sat in the pool bleachers, waiting for Tess to come in and swim her events. She was competing in the 25-meter backstroke and 50-meter freestyle. I was nervous. Not just about the swimming. I wondered if Tess would be okay, walking independently to the pool, from the fieldhouse waiting area. When we saw her walk into the pool, I felt she already won a gold medal!

Tess swam her heart out in both events. She won gold and silver medals. We sat in the stands and cried. Tess accepted her medals and clutched the roses her brothers gave her. After her final event, we asked her how she felt. She replied, "I'll remember the roses for the rest of my life."

Her brothers crowded around her to see her medals and give her hugs. My mom and dad, my husband and I wiped away our tears and hugged each other.

We were in awe of our little Tess. And we were in awe of this amazing event called the Special Olympics.

When the days events were over, we went to the Victory Dance. The entire football field was packed with athletes, dancing to celebrate their accomplishments. Tess wore her medals the whole time, and people would stop and congratulate her.

As we drove home, one of Tess' younger brothers asked her to win again next year, so we could come back. She replied, "Of course I will!"

Today, Tess' medals hang in her room. I know that she re-lives that weekend over and over again in her thoughts and dreams.

The Special Olympics makes the world aware of the tremendous abilities of people with intellectual disabilities. We have Eunice Kennedy Shriver to thank for that.

The Special Olympics also makes the athletes themselves aware of their tremendous abilities. In a world where they face challenge after challenge, the Special Olympics gives them the opportunity to shine. And we have Eunice Kennedy Shriver to thank for that, as well.

So, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mrs. Shriver for all that she has done to improve the lives of people with cognitive disabilities.

And I would like to thank her for making my Tess feel like Michael Phelps.



Besides being Tess' mother, **Maureen Lowry-Fritz, J.D., M.A.** is a special education lawyer who provides law information to both families and schools. She helps IEP teams develop and foster cooperative and professional relationships between parents and educators. Her website is www.onthesameteam.org



Plan to Attend IDEC Meeting at SAV for Dessert and Conversation



WHEN AND WHERE IS THE MEETING?

- Thursday, October 8, 2009
- 11:45 am – 1:00 pm
- Westin Hotel, Lombard, Site of the 2009 SAV Conference

WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

- All SharingAVision conference attendees who want to hear up-dates and participate in discussions on the latest state and national "hot topics".
- Current IDEC and DEC members and prospective members.

WHO WILL SHARE BRIEF UP-DATES & FACILITATE DISCUSSIONS?

- Susan Fowler, Past President, Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)
- Amy Santos, President Elect, Division for Early Childhood (DEC)
- Betsy Murphy, President, Illinois Council for Exceptional Children (ICEC)
- Pam Reising Rechner, ISBE Principal ECSE Consultant
- Current IDEC Governing Board Members

WHY SHOULD YOU ATTEND?

- Learn more about national and state service delivery initiatives and activities that impact children and families in Illinois and all over the country
- Find out how you can participate in many of these efforts
- Network with colleagues

WHAT ELSE WILL BE GOING ON?

- Desserts will be provided so just bring your lunch
- We will also raffle off **Gift Cards to Exhibit Hall vendors to IDEC members**, so please attend this important meeting! **Coupon on p. 8**

**This meeting is sponsored by the
Illinois Division for Early Childhood (IDEC)**

**Developing Education Leaders across Illinois:
A Summary of the Illinois Council of Exceptional Children's (ICEC)
Annual Spring Leadership Conference 2009**

Submitted by: Robin Miller Young, Ed.D., Illinois DEC President Elect, Student Services Coordinator at Prairie Children Preschool, Indian Prairie School District # 204, Aurora, IL.

The purpose of the ICEC Spring Leadership Conference 2009 was to provide skill-building sessions on the effective leadership models and strategies being implemented by ICEC members and colleagues from across the state to enhance the learning outcomes of all children at all levels of our service delivery systems. Superb presentations by several speakers may be of special interest to IDEC members and those are summarized below:

1. **Maureen Lowry-Fritz** (our own IDEC Family Participation Committee Chairperson), conducted back-to-back sessions on "IEP: Involve Every Parent." It was a great skill-building session to help parents and school staff members work collaboratively to develop effective IEP teams. Maureen provided numerous specific examples of strategies to help family members of a young child with a disability and the professional staff who are working with that family to articulate a child's strengths and areas of concern, and then move through the IEP development process so that all parties feel ownership of the process and the child receives an appropriate educational experience. You can reach Maureen at maureen@onthesameteam.org. If you have not heard Maureen speak, you are really missing a valuable resource we have right here in Illinois to improve the collaborative teaming style of parents and professionals!
2. **Patti Palagi**, Principal of Winfield School District # 34's Preschool, Elementary and Middle Schools; one woman who does it all! She shared many effective leadership strategies she has employed over the last four year to achieve "consensus-building" with the staff, to bring about high levels of student engagement and learning across an integrated and cohesive service delivery system for preschoolers through middle schoolers. Patti described elements of their process to adopt a new curriculum in their early childhood program, to monitor children's progress in the curriculum and to make data-based decisions, with parents as partners, for individual children and groups of children. She also coordinates her district's curricular and instructional program with staff members of her high school district so her students move onto successful high school experiences, creating a "seamless continuum" from Pre-K through secondary-level programming for Winfield students. You can reach Patti at ppalagi@winfield34.org.
3. **Michelle Shinn**, Principal at Cherokee Elementary School, described the ways she is leading her staff through a change process to initiate a multi-tier service delivery model and strategies for maximizing school fiscal and personnel resources to ensure the success of all students. Michelle worked with the staff to rearrange their organization structures and capably articulated a new set of expectations for the staff, resulting in a more effective and efficient schooling experience for the students. She provided a terrific "story" on strategies for working with staff to get "group agreement" and shifting the parent involvement culture of their program, with demonstrable increases in student achievement. Emphasis was placed on ensuring that young learners experience a strong core curriculum, that those who struggle are identified early, and that more intensive, strategic support is provided as soon as the need for that support is evident. Progress monitoring throughout the instructional process was also highlighted to lead to data-based decision-making about meeting student needs. For more information, contact Michelle at mmshinn@me.com.
4. **Mike Raczak**, former President of TASH (The Association for the Severely Handicapped) has served for 20 years as a principal in District # 204 schools; most recently, he has served as Principal of May Watts Elementary School. He described ways to improve schooling and instructional practices for all students by empowering teachers in a school-wide "Instructional Leadership Team (ILT)." Ideas include judicious choice of team members, how and when to meet, how to use team members' time to focus on specific tasks that will

positively impact student academic outcomes, and then methods for evaluating the ILT process. He also shared great ideas for creating a building climate and culture that supports successful movement through a school-wide change process that are applicable to elementary and middle school settings as well as early childhood settings. Mike's e-mail address is Mike_Raczak@ipsd.org.

5. **Mike Volpe** of the School Association for Special Education in Dupage County (SASED) discussed the pros and cons of special education administration preparation programs, what challenges new administrators can expect and how to meet them, and how to promote institutionalization of effective service delivery systems. He emphasized developing an understanding of the political processes at work in systems so you can maximize your ability to create targeted and sustainable change. Additionally, Mike described dynamic, practical strategies for aspiring and veteran leaders alike, with applications for those currently serving in leadership positions in early intervention and early childhood programs as well as those who are moving into leadership roles in these programs. You can reach Mike at mvolpe@sased.org.
6. **Iris Kerbis Cantor**, member of the CEC Executive Board who works in Niles Township HS, conducted the keynote, titled "Teachers ARE Leaders!" She described the leadership qualities demonstrated by young adults who are mentored into teacher education programs. She emphasized that these same young adults need continued support and mentoring as they move into leadership positions in school systems and in political and service organizations, such as ICEC, to ensure that the instructional needs of children everywhere are identified and met.

Identifying the next set of leaders in the early intervention and early childhood fields, which would include cultivating an aspiration for leadership as well as supporting those who have already started to step forward, is a priority for those of us already in leadership positions. Our next step is to find additional ways to support the leadership skill development of these up-and-coming leaders, to engage them in opportunities to hone their skills in coaching and/or mentoring situations, and to help them transition into roles where they will have the skills, knowledge, and political alliances to continue our work in creating powerful programming for all children.

What steps are you taking to raise up the next generation of leaders in the early intervention and early childhood fields at the local, state, and national levels?



Illinois Council for Exceptional Children

Fall Convention 2009

November 6th and 7th

Wyndham-Lisle Hotel and Executive Meeting Center

Lisle, Illinois

For more information, visit the website, www.illinoiscec.org

Proposed IDEC By-Laws Changes

To: Illinois Division of Early Childhood (IDEC Members)
From: Robin Miller Young, IDEC President
Re: Proposed By-Laws Changes

In the Governing Board meeting held in Aurora, IL on Tuesday, 7-21-09, the Board developed the following proposed additions to the IDEC By-laws. These changes are being published so that IDEC members can ask questions and make comments regarding these changes. Following a 30-day question and comment period by the membership, the Board will vote on whether to make these changes.

Proposed By-law Addition # 1:

Article III, Section 6

Add the following:

I. Annually renew the articles of incorporation for 501(c)3 status.

Rationale: This would clarify that the IDEC Treasurer would be responsible for ensuring that we keep our “not-for-profit” status current with the state of Illinois.

Proposed By-law Addition # 2:

Article IV, Section 6

Add the following:

E. IDEC will pay the CEC/DEC membership dues for the Family Participation Committee Chairperson, provided that funds are available.

Rationale: This addition clarifies the intent of the constitution to support and honor the contributions of the Family Participation Committee Chairperson.

Please direct all comments and questions to Robin Miller Young at 630-375-1118 or at her e-mail address Robin_MillerYoung@ipsd.org, or fax them to her at 630-375-3029.

Bring this Coupon to	
	
IDEC Meeting	
Sharing a Vision Conference October 8, 2009	
11:45 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.	
for a chance to win Gift Card to an Exhibit Hall Vendor or other prize	
Name _____	
must be present to win	
★ ★ ★	

Find us on the web

at

<http://illinois-dec.org/>

Illinois Resources for Advocacy

During a recent IDEC Board meeting Mary Wonderlick, an Early Childhood and Early Childhood Special Education Consultant and IDEC Board member, offered to compile a list of advocacy resources based on the recommendations of board members. The following are statewide advocacy sites which were recommended. Future issues will include other state and national resources.

Illinois Action for Children - www.actforchildren.org

an alliance of individuals and groups dedicated to empowering and supporting parents, child care providers, and family service providers in order to provide access to resources, community, and advocacy.

Voices for Illinois Children - www.voices4kids.org

statewide network of community leaders and people who care passionately about children which works with families, communities, and policymakers on all issues to help children grow up healthy, happy, safe, loved, and well educated.

Ounce of Prevention Fund - www.ounceofprevention.org

based in Chicago, this group provides direct services for children, birth to 5 who are at risk and their families; trains professionals across the state who work with infants and toddlers; and advocates for sound public policies that support early childhood.

Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD) - www.chadd.org

a national non-profit organization serving individuals with AD/HD and their families through information clearinghouse, an annual conference, a bi-monthly publication and local chapter services.

Special Ed Advocate - Wrightslaw - www.wrightslaw.com

source of accurate, reliable information about special education, law, education law, and advocacy for families and educators of children with disabilities.

All Our Kids - Early Childhood Networks - www.aoknetworks.org

collaborative network sponsored by Department of Human Services, Illinois State Board of Education, health departments, and other local agencies.

On the Same Team - www.onthesameteam.org

organization founded by Maureen Lowry Fritz, a special education lawyer and mother of a child with special needs, which provides services and consultation to families and educators to help build collaborative education relationships between home and school.

Illinois Alliance of Administrators of Special Education - www.iaase.org

non-profit organization which promotes quality education for all students and provides structure through which students with disabilities are represented at a local, state, and national level.

Conference Updates

Assistive Technology Industry Association Conference

Schaumburg, IL October 29-31, 2009 www.atia.org

National Association for the Education of Young Children Conference

Washington, D.C. November 18-21, 2009 www.naeyc.org

GRADUATE PROGRAMS AT ELMHURST

Master of Education in

Early Childhood Special Education



The only program of its kind in the metro Chicago area.

- Learn first-hand how to support children with special needs
- Establish strong, collaborative relationships with families
- Complete challenging hands-on field experiences
- Earn your Illinois Type 04 certification (optional)
- Prepare to make a remarkable difference in young lives
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