

ProActive Caring e-News



August 2021

School & Home Transition Exchange to resume on Aug. 26

The ProActive Caring *School & Home Transition Exchange* will return at 7 p.m. on Thursday, Aug. 26, via Zoom and will continue every other Thursday evening through the fall semester. The topic will be "A return to learning in a stress-free, mindful way."

To participate, please register in advance by clicking the button below. If you have registered for a previous *School & Home Transition Exchange* program, you need not register again. Those who have registered will receive a link for that evening's program and reminders for future programs. All are welcome, and the programs are free of charge.

About the School & Home Transition Exchange

The School & Home Transition Exchange is a forum for family members and educators to discuss how to support students with intellectual and developmental disabilities as they prepare to live as adults.

The Exchange is moderated by Lawrence Force, Ph.D., LCSW-R, and facilitated by parent/advocate Lisa Nathan and school psychologist/advocate Peggy Pisano. Each of the biweekly videocasts focuses on a different topic and generally runs for 45 minutes, including discussion with participants.

[Click here to register](#)

"The [*School & Home Transition*] Exchange is a blessing. It's so positive. I can't wait to join you again. There's not one neurotypical parent who can understand my neurodivergent world." — *A recent program participant*

***Mindfulness Family Stress Reduction* series offers opportunity to practice stress-reduction skills**

The *Mindfulness Family Stress Reduction* series offered by Parent Network of Western New York (PNWNY) will alternate with the *School & Home Transition Exchange* through mid-October. The series is a biweekly opportunity for families to get together to learn and practice mindfulness-based stress reduction techniques, share and explore stressors and solutions, and connect with each other.

Youth with disabilities may participate fully on-screen or simply be in the room while their parents participate. The goal is for families to learn and practice stress reduction together, with some parents learning how to introduce strategies to their children at a later time.

All are welcome to attend upcoming (virtual) programs, and there are no fees to participate. Each session will begin at 7 p.m. and last for 45 minutes:

Aug. 5: REACHing for Forgiveness and Using Positive Self-Talk.

Aug. 19: An introduction to positive emotions and a formula for happiness.

To register for the *Mindfulness Family Stress Reduction* sessions or to obtain more information, visit <https://parentnetworkwny.org/events>. If you prefer, you may call PNWNY at 716.332.4170 or email info@parentnetworkwny.org.

“Thank you for hosting the mindfulness group. My son sincerely enjoys it and finds peace with the group in a way that we rarely see. It is a much-needed activity for our whole family.” — *A recent group participant*

Program seeks input from parents, school staff

The ProActive Caring Program will hold two statewide focus groups in September to gather information from parents and educators about their experiences and concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic. The discussion will focus on preparing young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities for their lives as adults, and about resources parents and teachers have found helpful. The groups will provide guidance for the *School and Home Transition Exchange* this fall, as well for a mindfulness-based *Guide to Transitions* to be published later this year.

The groups will be small, with 8-12 people in each, and they will meet for one hour via Zoom. The first will begin at 7 p.m. on **Tuesday, Sept. 21**, and the second at 6 p.m. on **Wednesday, Sept. 29**.

If you would like to participate, please email Elaine Sproat, Director of the ProActive Caring Project, at esproat.proactivecaring@gmail.com, by Aug. 15.

Be sure to include: 1. Your name 2. Your role (parent, other family member, teacher, school psychologist, etc.) 3. Your hometown 4. What date you are available (or if either is good) and 5. A sentence or two about why you would like to take part or about the perspective you would bring to the group.

All responders will be notified of their status before the end of the month.

Thank you!

N.Y. extends services for students with disabilities facing educational setbacks due to COVID-19

In the ProActive Caring [April 2021 newsletter](#), we shared information about legislation that had been introduced to require school districts to provide educational and support services to students with disabilities whose educational progress had been impeded due to the COVID-19 pandemic until such students turned 23 years of age. This extension of eligibility for services would benefit students affected by the disruption of educational services during the pandemic who graduated in 2019-2020 or 2020-2021 or who will graduate in 2021-2022.

We're happy to report that the bill, sponsored in the New York State Assembly by Assemblyman Tom Abinanti and in the New York State Senate by Senator Pete Harckham, was passed in the New York State legislature and signed into law by Gov. Andrew Cuomo on June 29. Please note that the new law will not automatically extend eligibility for services; parents who wish their children to benefit from the extension of eligibility for services need to contact their school districts to set up an evaluation.

Teamwork key to achieving goals for young adults with special needs

In May, the ProActive Caring "School & Home Transition Exchange" was privileged to have Lisa Currao as a guest speaker. Currao is a seasoned special education professional who works with a pilot program providing Transition services on the SUNY Rockland campus. She is also the parent of two young adults with special needs.

During the program Currao shared her top 10 list for “managing the IEP (Individualized Education Plan) process during the later years in a stress-free way.” One of her top 10 tips was to cultivate relationships. She encouraged parents to engage with teachers and school staff, to help identify their child’s strengths and challenges, and to share their goals for their child — not as adversaries, but as partners. Even more important, Currao spoke about the value of connecting with other parents of children with special needs, giving a hand to families behind you while learning from those who have walked the same road ahead of you, and cultivating a sense of belonging.



The Thunderbolts, a group providing athletic opportunities to young people with and without intellectual disabilities, was formed as a result of making such connections, and it illustrates the power of cultivating relationships. The group started in 2014 when Currao expressed the desire, during an annual review meeting for her son’s IEP, that her son have the opportunity to participate in track and field. His school district welcomed the idea of allowing athletes from across the county who did not have a Special Olympics team in their home district to begin training at their facilities, and the Thunderbolts team was born. The group later expanded to include teams in swimming, basketball, power weightlifting, and bowling.



Eric Orzell, a member of the Thunderbolts swim team, with his older brother Jason, who volunteers as one of the coaches for the team.



Thunderbolts are New York State Certified Special Olympics teams that are unified, welcoming siblings and volunteers. This model welcomes whole families. Thanks to community collaboration with the Autism Move-A-Thon of Orange County (AMOC) and the Warwick Valley Central School District (WVCSD), athletes train weekly. This district hosts athlete practices, unified basketball, coach trainings, parent workshops, and the annual Thunderbolt Awards/Sports Banquet. Other training centers

include the Goshen Aquatic Center, Pat Tarsio Lanes, and HV Tribe CrossFit. Currao inspired Holly Borzacchiello and Stacey Orzell to become Certified Coaches. Together they train just over 150 athletes. In 2020, the partnership between Thunderbolts and the WVCSD was recognized with the Mental Health Association in Orange County Community Service Award of the Year!

In talking about the Thunderbolts, Currao consistently used the metaphor of team building. She encouraged parents to make time to focus on their child's strengths and to find family or community opportunities for skill building. In the Thunderbolts, for instance, Currao and her family now have a community that lets parents know they're not alone while empowering families to foster friendships and share community resources.



Parent Network of WNY provides education and resources for families of individuals with special needs.

Parent Network is committed to providing parents and caregivers with a rich skillset of information and tools including mindfulness.

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