

FAMILY SUPPORT NEWS

May, 2009



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A private, non-profit corporation dedicated to enhancing the quality of life of individuals with developmental disabilities in Belmont, Waltham, Watertown, Brighton, Brookline & surrounding communities.



Join our Newsletter and Advocacy Bulletin Mailing List. Call or email us with your name and address!



How to Contact Elected Officials:

www.arcmass.org Click on State House Dome picture "Take Action Now" on Home Page. Enter your home zip code and you will get the names of your Congressional and MA State Legislature officials.

www.mass.gov/legis/memmenu.htm
Alphabetized list of State Senators and Representatives with mail & email addresses, phone numbers.

Spring is in the Air!!!

May, 2009

Dear Beaverbrook STEP family members,

Long awaited and genuinely welcomed, Spring has finally arrived at Beaverbrook STEP! One of the major concerns this year has been the economy and proposed cuts to DMR (DDS) funds for the FY 2010 state budget which begins on July 1, 2009. The budget process is well underway in the State Legislature and self-advocates, advocates, family members and staff have been very vocal in advocating for restoration of budget cuts. The House budget restores funds for Family Support, but cuts remain to Day, Employment and Transportation services. Unfortunately, today the state announced that April revenues had plummeted and that deeper cuts may need to be made. Governor Patrick is indicating that he may completely redraft his FY 2010 budget to better reflect the serious revenue shortages.

STEP along with other local service providers sponsored a Legislative Forum on April 29, 2009 in Waltham to dialogue with local Representatives and Senators about the devastating effect that budget cuts would have on services that support individuals with developmental disabilities and their family members. There were over 300 service recipients, family members and staff present at the forum, but unfortunately only Sen. Fargo and Rep. Hecht's aide were present, as the House was in the midst of their final debate before passing their budget version. Nonetheless, the evening was very informative, and those legislators present were committed to bringing our message back to their respective legislative body. ADDP executive director, Gary Blumenthal, was particularly effective in crystallizing the concerns and fears of the developmental disabilities constituents.

Advocates will hold another Rally on the steps of the State House on May 6, 2009 at 11 A.M. Self advocates, family members service professionals are encouraged to attend the rally and then visit with their respective State Senators in the afternoon to ask them to remain sensitive to the needs of those with developmental disabilities and to restore the remaining cuts to DMR services.

There is still a long way to go before the FY 2010 budget process is completed. We must remain vigilant, continuing our conversations with our state legislators in order to prevent DMR service cuts that could adversely affect as many as 11,000 individuals and families.

Beaverbrook STEP will remain a key force in this effort and welcomes your input and support during this critical time. Advocacy is still our most powerful tool, so let's continue to voice our concerns to our elected officials.

Remember to attend Beaverbrook STEP's Annual Meeting to be held on Tuesday evening, June 2nd, at 6 pm at the Hellenic Center in Watertown. We'll be square dancing after the dinner and a short business meeting. See you there for all the fun!

Sincerely,

Ginny Connolly, Executive Director

BIGGEST AUTISM STUDY IDENTIFIES GENE VARIATIONS BEHIND CONDITION

Common genetic variations that can contribute to autism have been reliably identified for the first time in research that promises to improve the diagnosis and understanding of the disorder. The DNA changes, which affect genes involved in early brain development, are together involved in up to 15 per cent of autism cases, the most extensive study of its kind yet conducted has found.

The findings significantly deepen scientific understanding of the genetic origins of autism, offering insights into the condition's underlying biology that could eventually lead to new treatments. While it has long been established that autism has a strong inherited component, previous research has failed to reveal any common DNA variants that were involved.

The new study has found a robust link between autism and six such variants. These do not invariably cause the condition, but they are about 20 per cent more common in children with autism than they are in those who are unaffected. The results are especially significant because the variants lie between two genes, called CDH9 and CDH10, which are known to play an important role in forming nerve connections in the brain.

Hakon Hakonarson, of the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia in the United States, who led the research, said: "Because other autism researchers have made intriguing suggestions that autism arises from abnormal connections among brain cells during early development, it is very compelling to find evidence that mutations in genes involved in brain interconnections increase a child's risk of autism."

(Excerpted from an article by Mark Henderson, Science Editor, published on April 29, 2009 in the N.Y. Times.)

Partners in Policymaking®

Twenty years ago, the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities created a ground-breaking, innovative training program called Partners in Policymaking® to teach parents and self-advocates the power of advocacy to change the way people with disabilities are supported, viewed, taught, live and work. During the past two decades, important issues have been confronted and dramatic changes have been made.

Since 1987, Partners programs have been implemented nationally and internationally. More than 15,000 Partners graduates are part of a growing national and international network of community leaders serving on policy making committees, commissions, and boards at all levels of government. We are also reaching thousands of people monthly through the online courses. These e-learning courses are available to everyone!



"Partners in Living" is a seven-hour self-directed e-learning course created to help people understand the important concepts of self-determination, family support, community living and assistive technology. Go to www.partnersinpolicymaking.com/living to review the course.

"Partners in Time" is an eight-hour self-directed e-learning course created to help people understand the history of society's treatment of people with disabilities from ancient times through the present. Go to www.partnersinpolicymaking.com/history to review the course.

"Making Your Case" is a three-hour self-directed course on how to communicate with public officials by effectively telling your personal story. Go to www.partnersinpolicymaking.com/makingyourcase to review the course.