



RMU Trees Network April 2025 Newsletter

Summer Camps for Students with Disabilities Meeting

Monday, April 7, 2025 7 PM - 8 PM



Join us virtually on **Monday, April 7, 2025 from 7:00 pm - 8:00 pm** for our monthly parent and family support meeting. We have reached out to organizations and camps around the area to present on what students with disabilities will learn, benefit, and take away by attending their summer camps and programs. Some of these camps and programs can also be used as your child's Extended School Year (ESY) programming. We have representatives from The Woodlands (Wexford), Camp Spencer (Fombell), Evolve (Pittsburgh), PALS, AAC Summer Camp with ICAN Talk (Carnegie), and S.P.E.A.K. (Munhall) presenting and answering any questions you might have. Anyone interested in learning more can register for the meeting by contacting Vicki Donne at donne@rmu.edu or Deanna Hiltz at hiltzd@rmu.edu or registering at [Google Registration \(https://forms.gle/vischsKX98e1YsKH9\)](https://forms.gle/vischsKX98e1YsKH9) Upon registration, registrants will be sent a Google Meets calendar invitation.



SAVE THE DATE!

Parent and Family Meeting: Extended School Year (ESY)

Monday, May 5, 2025 7PM - 8PM

Join us virtually on **Monday, May 5, 2025 from 7:00 pm - 8:00 pm** for our monthly parent and family support meeting. Dr. Chris McCabe, TACT2 Master Trainer and Educational Consultant on the Training and Consulting

(TaC) Team from the Beaver Valley Intermediate Unit, will be presenting on Extended School Year (ESY). He will be sharing information on students who qualify for ESY, the benefits of ESY, and various options and availability of ESY programs. Please contact Vicki Donne at donne@rmu.edu or Deanna Hiltz at hiltzd@rmu.edu to register by email or register at [Google Registration \(https://forms.gle/fP7vq1i2uGBkwqNC9\)](https://forms.gle/fP7vq1i2uGBkwqNC9). Upon registration, registrants will be sent a Google Meets calendar invitation.

Individual IEP Meetings and/or Conferences



During the month of April, the RMU Trees Network has set aside hours from 9 AM - 3 PM on Wednesdays to virtually meet with individual parents who have Individualized Education Plan (IEP) related questions. We are not attorneys, but we do speak the language of special educators and are available to listen and help you navigate the language and process of special education. If you want to know more about what should be included specific to your child, timelines, how to read assessment data, goals, etc., we are here to help you. Please email Vicki Donne at donne@rmu.edu or Deanna Hiltz at hiltzd@rmu.edu to set up a conference time.

Trees AT Device Center - Open Lab Days



We maintain an Assistive Technology (AT) Device Center for use by students and families. AT is any item, piece of equipment, software or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities (IDEA, 2004). AT can range from low technology (such as a pencil grip) to high technology (speech recognition software). This spring, the AT Device Center will host Open Lab Days on Mondays from 9:00 am - 3:00 pm. The Device Center will be open to the public without an appointment. Visitors can explore a variety of assistive technology, including adapted computer equipment, communication devices, and switch-friendly apps and toys. Staff will be available to answer questions; however, individualized support is dependent on the number of participants. Appointments are also available. Come to RMU, Patrick Henry 333 and check out the various devices.

RMU Trees Network at the CEC Conference



On March 12, 2025, the RMU Network set out to Baltimore to attend this year's Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Conference. The experience was amazing! It confirmed what we are doing is evidence based and practical and also brought so many new ideas and insights to share with our future educators. Topics were vast and ranged from inclusion, co-teaching, strategies for teaching in all content areas, goal setting, IEPs, the future of education, and the list of potential workshops and sessions continued. All conference attendees were also provided with a free subscription to access all the conference presentations and handouts. To find out more about CEC and all the up-to-date topics, standards, advocacy and policies check them out here:

<https://exceptionalchildren.org/>

Attention Special Education Paraprofessionals in PA!

Your experience matters, and we'd love your input! Drs. Hansen and Donne are conducting research on how paraprofessionals in Pennsylvania support their students with disabilities in using classroom technology and assistive technology. Your input will help us to better understand current practices and find ways to better support educators and students. Please take a few minutes to participate and share this with your network:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ParaProfessionalPA> or this QR Code:



This study has been approved by RMU IRB (412-397-6227 or irb@rmu.edu). If you have any questions, you can contact the researchers at hansen@rmu.edu or donne@rmu.edu.

Featured Artificial Intelligence (AI)

We have seen a lot of information in the news about artificial intelligence. There are various software applications and websites that utilize artificial intelligence programming. Many of these applications have the potential to support individuals with disabilities. We thought it might be helpful if we highlighted one of these AI applications each month. This month we are highlighting AI for writing.

- **Ember.ly AI** (<https://ember.ly/app/home>) helps in the brainstorming or prewriting phase of writing. It creates a template graphic organizer based on your query or topic, i.e. for the topic 'assistive technology in an online environment' it generates a graphic organizer with six topics and subtopics. The program allows the user to add links or resources to support the topics/subtopics.
- **Grammarly AI** (<https://www.grammarly.com/>) is a commonly used writing assistant which checks a writing sample for grammar, spelling, etc.
- **AHREF** (<https://ahrefs.com/writing-tools>) is an AI tool for editing or revising content. It can enhance your writing by changing the writing style or tone, paraphrase, and check grammar and punctuation.

Upcoming Events Around the Area

The RMU Trees Network is a member of the Special Needs Consortium, a group of service providers in the Pittsburgh area. The consortium exists to provide a forum where all service providers can network and opportunities can be shared, promoted, and advocated for to increase awareness of resources available to the community. The following is a list of events found through our contacts and/or were shared by members of the consortium. For a full listing of member events, visit their [website](https://www.specialneedsconsortium.org/upcoming-events) (<https://www.specialneedsconsortium.org/upcoming-events>). We hope you will find something of interest to you.

April 1st 6:00PM - 8:30PM Band Together

[Live Autism Friendly Open Mic @ Franklin Regional High School](#)

Franklin Regional High School, 200 School Rd., Murrysville

April 2nd 7:00 PM Band Together

[Live Autism Friendly Open Mic – Mars Area Middle School](#)

1775 Three Degree Rd, Mars, PA

April 4th - 6th Adults ages 21 and above

April 11th - 13th Youth and Teen ages 6-21

FireFly Weekend Retreats held from 6PM Friday- 11:00AM on Sunday

Retreats are for individuals with spina bifida and related disabilities. At Camp FireFly participants can increase confidence, become more self-reliant, learn more about themselves and discover new activities. Located at Camp Guyasuta in Sharpsburg nestled in the woods. Each retreat costs \$683, with grant funding the out-of-pocket cost is \$200. Accept waiver funding and have camperships available assistance is needed. For more information or to register visit our website

<https://sbawp.org/firefly-camps-retreats/> or contact Sue Garver, 724-934-9600, sgarver@sbawp.org.

April 5th 8:30AM – 2:45PM

Freeport Autism Conference (Free!) – The Power of Understanding: Autism and Beyond

Buffalo Elementary School – 500 Sarver Road, Sarver PA. For more information contact Don Dell at dell@freeport.k12.pa.us

April 6th 2:00PM Band Together

[Experience Band Together Pittsburgh Live](#)

The Oaks Theater 310 Allegheny River Blvd, Oakmont, PA

April 9th 1:00PM – 3:30PM

LAMP/Library of Accessible Media for Pennsylvanians invites you to a free Accessible Movie Please join us for a described audio presentation of Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope (1977).

“The Imperial Forces — under orders from cruel Darth Vader — hold Princess Leia hostage, in their efforts to quell the rebellion against the Galactic Empire. Luke Skywalker and Han Solo, captain of the Millennium Falcon, work together with the companionable droid duo R2-D2 and C-3PO to rescue the beautiful princess, help the Rebel Alliance, and restore freedom and justice to the Galaxy.”

Popcorn and drinks will be provided. Registration is not required, but is suggested. You can RSVP or request more information by contacting the library at info@mylamp.org or 800-242-0586. The library is located at 4724 Baum Blvd., Pittsburgh, PA 15213 (Oakland). Visit <https://mylamp.org/accessible-movie-afternoon-6/> for details.

Saturday, April 12th from 1:00-5:00 PM Envision Blind Sports Swimming

Seneca Valley Aquatic Center, 124 Seneca School Rd. Harmony, PA 16037

Athletes of all ages and swimmers can be beginner, intermediate and advanced. Cost is \$20/participant and snacks and drinks will be provided. Email Jillian Stringfellow at jstringfellow@envisionblindsports.org or text/call at 251-610-3244

April 12th 4:00PM - 6:00PM Band Together

[YMCA of Laurel Highlands](#)

490 Bessemer Rd 490 Bessemer Rd, My Pleasant, PA

April 13th 2:00PM - 5:00PM Band Together

[Live Autism Friendly Open Mic @ Band Together Clubhouse](#)

378 Freeport Rd, Blawnox, PA (in Moondog's)

April 16th 12:00PM – 1:00PM PA ABLE and Social Security Disability Programs

Experts will discuss how PA ABLE Savings Program and Social Security Disability Programs work together. You'll hear from Diana Fishlock, outreach specialist for the PA ABLE Savings Program, and Frank Magni, Social Security Administration public affairs specialist. The PA ABLE Savings Program gives individuals with qualified disabilities a way to save for disability-related expenses while maintaining important benefits and supporting health, independence, and quality of life. The Social Security Administration's Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program pays benefits to adults and children who meet requirements for a qualifying disability and have limited income and resources.

The Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) program pays benefits to individuals and certain family members if the individual is “insured.” While these two programs are different, the medical requirements are the same. Traditionally people receiving such benefits could only save a small amount, but ABLE accounts change the landscape, allowing people receiving these benefits to save for a house, a car, and other everyday expenses. If you require accommodations to participate in this webinar, please contact us at info@paable.gov.

April 25th-27th starting at 5:30PM

Weekend Retreat at The Woodlands– Time Warp Weekend: Journey Through History with Retro-Themed Challenges and Games

From 5:30 PM on Friday to 11:00 AM on Sunday, these inclusive getaways for youth with disability and chronic illness are created for individuals ages 13-24! Whether they are a sports lover, singer, cook, or in touch with nature, the Woodlands covers it all! Each retreat offers a variety of activities that encourage social connections, health, and leadership skills. Activities encourage new experiences that spark creativity and self-discovery. Each retreat costs \$550. They accept out of pocket or private pay, ESY, and waiver funding. They also have a scholarship program called the “Wonderfund” to assist with cost, available upon request. To apply or for more information, contact Leia Patsilevas, 724-935-5470 or lpatsilevas@woodlandsfoundation.org www.mywoodlands.org

April 24th, 9:30AM - 2:30PM The PEAL Center #NextGen Pittsburgh Conference

#NextGen Pittsburgh Conference is a one-day event focusing on what young people with disabilities and their families can expect after graduation. Learn about transition services, plan a vision for the future and hear from a panel of self-advocates who will share their lived experiences with transition. Learn more about the event at: www.pealcenter.org/nextgen The event takes place at the ENERGY INNOVATION CENTER, 1435 BEDFORD AVE, PITTSBURGH. #NEXTGEN PITTSBURGH Speakers are Dr. Donavan McCargo and Dr. Andrew McCormick. Dr. McCargo is the Vice President for Campus Life and Dean of Students at Arcadia University. He strives to develop higher education practices that enable students to thrive. Dr. McCormick is an Associate Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine and Director of the Health Transitions Program for the Down Syndrome Center of Western PA. The conference will conclude with a panel of self-advocates sharing their lived experiences about transition to adult life. Lunch will be provided.

MAY 13TH 8:30AM SPECIAL NEEDS CONSORTIUM NETWORKING MEETING

ROBERT MORRIS UNIVERSITY TREES NETWORK

Patrick Henry & Elaine Boyd Library

6001 University Blvd., Moon Township, PA 15108

May 22nd Beaver Valley Intermediate Unit (I.U. #27), in coordination with the University of Pittsburgh, will be hosting a workshop on Communication Disorders.

What: Speech and Hearing Workshop

- Pitt professors will be presenting on:
 - *Advanced and Holistic Therapy Approaches for Children Who Stutter*
- Variety will also be in attendance and will be doing a short presentation to kick off the day.

- **ASHA Credits:** Five (5) ASHA hours (.5 credits) will be awarded for attending this event.
- **Act 48 Hours:** Five (5) Act 48 Hours will be awarded for attending this event (for non-ASHA members).

Who: All SLP's/Audiologists/ToD's; Open to college students as well.

Cost: \$25 (includes a light breakfast, a boxed lunch, and coffee/water throughout the day).

Agenda:

- 8:00-8:30- Registration, Refreshments, and Networking
- 8:30-9:00- Variety of Pittsburgh
- 9:00-12:00: Advanced and Holistic Therapy Approaches for Children who Stutter-Part 1
- 12:00-1:00- Lunch (provided)
- 1:00-3:00- Advanced and Holistic Therapy Approaches for Children who Stutter-Part 2

Click on this link to register: <https://forms.gle/iSvhBd4Kfy8aEeXTA>

July 28th – August 8th 10:00 AM - 3:30 PM Monday-Friday

Evolve Coaching - Future Camp

A two week, creative and performing arts summer camp for autistic and neurodivergent people ages 12+

Registration: <https://www.evolve-coaching.org/arts-programming>

Studio Forget-Me-Not!

Studio Forget-Me-Not! is to actively cultivate perspectives, both within ourselves and within our community, by fostering artistic expression and growth. They provide an inclusive art space where individuals with diverse abilities can engage in boundless artistic exploration through a wide array of classes. At Studio Forget-Me-Not!, they prioritize celebrating abilities over limitations, offering the necessary support for everyone to thrive. Dedicated to surpassing traditional artistic norms, we embark on vibrant and joyful explorations across various mediums, ensuring a dynamic and enriching experience for all. studioforgetmenot.org

OPEN UP FREE CLASSES

Open Up's mission is to teach mindfulness tools through movement practices and interactive arts while centering people living with disabilities. They want all people to be able to have ease of access in finding avenues for increasing their sense of overall well being. They believe that all people should be able to experience joy in community with others. They have inclusive movement classes at our studio and can be found in schools and community spaces around the city and beyond.

<https://www.open-up.org/>

Speech and Language Family Meeting Summary



On Monday, March 3, 2025, Linda Fiejdasz, Speech Language Pathologist from DePaul School for Hearing and Speech, presented to our Trees Network parents, families, and educators on the different options for early intervention and school-based speech therapy. She discussed carryover into general education classes, home, and during the extended school year. For more information resources, please see some useful links and websites below.

Resources for Parents and Educators

The Network provides resources for parents and teachers and these resources can be found at the [RMU Trees Network Website](https://donne94.wixsite.com/rmu-trees-network) (<https://donne94.wixsite.com/rmu-trees-network>). Information on the Network and the previous newsletters are posted on the RMU website <https://www.rmu.edu/academics/provost/trees>. In each newsletter we provide links to resources related to the topics discussed in our parent meetings and workshops as well as other information that may be helpful to families, schools, and the community. **Below are some links to resources related to Speech and Language.**



- **Difference between Public School Speech Therapy and Private Speech Therapy** - A visual chart outlining the differences of public school versus private speech therapy sessions and goals.
<https://pediatricspeech.net/post/what-is-the-difference-between-public-school-speech-language-therapy-and-private-therapy/>
- **Early Intervention Services** - Pennsylvania's Early Intervention program provides coaching support and services to families with children, from birth to five, with developmental delays and disabilities. Find out more about Pennsylvania's support and services and how to get a referral.
<https://www.pa.gov/agencies/dhs/resources/early-learning-child-care/early-intervention-services.html>
- **Speech and Language Services in Schools** - provides information on communication, speech, and language learning in schools.
https://www.asha.org/public/speech/development/speech-and-language-services-in-schools/?srsltid=AfmBOorCfXvKKYEoi2HY1NEzHjqLa7nKZI_mFpjNz4IsYzJ8e71Oln43

- **Things to Know about Speech Therapy with School Districts** - Here are 5 things put together for advice for parents.
<https://walkietalkiespeechtherapy.com/5-things-to-know-about-speech-therapy-through-public-school-districts/>
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[RMU Trees Website](https://donne94.wixsite.com/rmu-trees-network) (<https://donne94.wixsite.com/rmu-trees-network>)
[RMU Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/RMUtrees/) (<https://www.facebook.com/RMUtrees/>)

