



TREES NETWORK July 2026 Newsletter

Upcoming Special Education Conference

On Monday, October 12, 2026, the RMU Trees Network will be holding its annual Special Education Conference. This year the theme is **Unstoppable Potential: Elevating Every Learner**. It is being held virtually to allow for more participation from special educators, administrators, paraprofessionals, and related service staff looking for professional development on important topics in special education.

RMU Trees Network Special Education Conference

Unstoppable Potential: Elevating Every Learner

Monday, October 12, 2026

A free, virtual conference with sessions on:

- Emerging Technology
- Structured Literacy
- Specially Designed Instruction
- Hands-On Math Tools and Assistive Technology
- Trust and Repair in IEP Teams
- Connection in Trauma Informed Classrooms
- Inclusive Programming
- Instructional Prompting and Fading
- Executive Functioning

To register:

<https://forms.gle/fWfho1qq3cw5JDap7>



For additional information, contact:
donne@rmu.edu or hiltzd@rmu.edu

Upcoming Events Around the Area

The RMU Trees Network is a member of the Special Needs Consortium, a group of amazing 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. 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 some of these highlighted events of interest to you.

July 7th-16th 9:00am - 10:30am (Tuesday - Thursday each week)

AAC Adventures at Hilltop Horizons

AAC Adventures is a play-based, enrichment program designed for children who use Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) systems (e.g., speech-generating devices, communication boards). Led by Speech Therapist, Maureen O'Brien, MS, CCC-SLP, and integrating equine interactions and the outdoor environment, children participate in structured and semi-structured activities such as grooming, leading, barn routines, and collaborative games - all embedded with intentional communication opportunities. Open to ages 4 to 12 years old. [Learn more and register.](#)

July 8th - August 12th 11:00am-12:30pm (Wednesdays each week)

THRIVE for Teens at Hilltop Horizons

Guided by licensed occupational therapy practitioner and experienced equine specialist, Ainsley Dillon, PhD, OTR/L, HPCS, participants engage in ground-based experiences with horses - such as grooming, leading, observing herd behavior, and reflective exercises - that promote social emotional wellness by supporting mindfulness, emotional regulation, confidence, and communication skills, supporting positive routines and meaningful daily participation. Open to ages 13 to 17 years old. [Learn more and register.](#)

July 12th 12:15pm - Disability Pride Day at PNC Park

This event celebrates inclusion, community, and the contributions of individuals with disabilities across Pennsylvania. The Pirates have provided a ticket link specifically for OVR staff, participants, families, and community partners. Tickets can be purchased directly through the Pittsburgh Pirates using the link below. Please note that OVR is not purchasing, subsidizing, or coordinating ticket sales, and is not involved in the transaction process. Ticket Link: Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

<https://www.gofevo.com/event/Officevocationalrehabilitation0712>

Participation is completely voluntary. Any questions or issues related to ticket purchases should be directed to the Pittsburgh Pirates ticket office.

The Woodlands Teen/Young Adult Summer Camps

Occurring from 3:30PM on Sunday through 11:00AM on Friday, these inclusive camp experiences are designed for individuals ages 13–24. Participants are served dinner on Sunday, all three meals Monday through Thursday, and breakfast on Friday. All programs may also be attended as day-camp experiences, with daily check-in beginning at 9:45 AM and pick-up as late as 8:30 PM.

- **July 12-17:** Maker Camp: (where science, creativity, and teamwork come together)
- **August 2-7:** Camp Bloom: (Transition/life skills based camp)

The Woodlands accepts 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. PPS Students may utilize CCS Hours. Registration : mywoodlands.org

July 28th - July 31st - AAC Summer Camp

ICAN Talk AAC Summer Camp is a 3.5 day program of interactive, fun-filled activities designed specifically for children and adults who use alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) systems to communicate. Our program gives these individuals opportunities to communicate with other AAC users, develop their language skills, and use their AAC devices in new and exciting ways. The camp includes an AAC training seminar for parents, excursions to local attractions, and optional one-on-one consultations with clinical experts in AAC. For additional information, contact Christine at clepore@aacinstitute.org

Band Together upcoming events:

- **July 11th and 12th - Pittsburgh Music Festival**
Pittsburgh Brewing Company 150 Ferry Street
Join us for the Iron City Pittsburgh Music Festival, a two-day celebration of live music, community, and inclusion featuring an incredible lineup of local and regional artists. Held at Pittsburgh Brewing Company in Creighton, PA, this outdoor festival brings together music lovers for an unforgettable weekend of performances across multiple stages. <https://bandtogetherpgh.org/event/pittsburgh-music-festival/>
- **July 16th 6:00pm-7:00pm - Music Therapy @ Moondog's**
Band Together Clubhouse, 378 Freeport Rd, Blawnox
Register: <https://bandtogetherpgh.org/event/music-therapy-moondogs-12/>

DON'T FORGET TO THINK OF YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY FOR EVENTS

- **Allegheny Library Association Programs & Events**
(<https://aclalibraries.org/explore/library-programs-and-events/>)
- **Beaver County Library Systems**
(<https://www.beaverlibraries.org/system-wide-events>)
- **Butler County Federated Library Systems** (<https://www.bcfls.org/libraries>)
- **Washington County Library Systems** (<https://www.washlibs.org/>)
- **Westmoreland County Libraries** (<https://www.wclibraries.org/>)

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 for skill building and summer safety.**



- Summer is a time for fun and new experiences, but it can also bring unique safety challenges for children with special needs. Families can help keep their children safe by planning ahead and using simple strategies at home and in the community. Water safety is especially important, so children should always be closely supervised around pools, lakes, or even bathtubs, and practicing basic rules, like staying where an adult can see them, can make a big difference. The American Red Cross offers helpful guidance on water safety and emergency preparedness for families. <https://www.redcross.org>
- Summer activities like fireworks, festivals, and crowded events can sometimes be overwhelming for children with sensory sensitivities. Preparing in advance by using visual supports, bringing noise-canceling headphones, or having a calm-down plan can help children feel more comfortable. The Autism Speaks offers helpful toolkits for managing sensory needs during community events. <https://www.autismspeaks.org>

- Some children may be more likely to wander or may not recognize dangerous situations, so it is helpful to practice staying close in public places and identifying safe adults, such as police officers or store employees. Families may also consider using ID bracelets or tags for added safety. The National Autism Association provides valuable tools and resources to help prevent wandering and support families.
<https://nationalautismassociation.org>
- Fine motor fun stations are a great way to help children strengthen the small muscles in their hands, which are essential for skills like writing, cutting, and everyday tasks. Families can easily try these activities at home by incorporating playful, hands-on tasks such as using playdough to build and squeeze, practicing cutting with child-safe scissors, or stringing beads and tracing shapes. These activities not only build coordination and control but also keep children engaged through play. For additional ideas and guidance, families can explore Understood.org, which offers simple, hands-on activities designed to support fine motor development in children.
<https://www.understood.org/>
- Helping children understand their emotions is an important step in developing strong self-regulation skills. Families can support this at home by using a feelings chart to talk about different emotions and help children identify how they are feeling throughout the day. In addition, practicing simple calming strategies, such as deep breathing, taking a break, or spending quiet time in a calm space, can help children learn how to manage big emotions in a healthy way. For more support and ideas, families can explore CASEL, which provides helpful resources focused on social-emotional learning and emotional regulation. <https://casel.org>

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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/>)

