



TREES NETWORK



As we welcome a new year, the RMU Trees Network wishes all of you a happy, healthy new year!



Parent/Family Meeting

Monday, January 5, 2026 7 PM - 8 PM

Supports Coordination

Join us virtually on **Monday, January 5, 2026 from 7:00 pm - 8:00 pm**. Let's talk about Supports Coordination (SC). SCs

provide case management to eligible people in PA with intellectual disabilities, autism, developmental disabilities, and medically complex conditions. We will learn more about their function, the importance of building a relationship, and planning an Individual Support Plan (ISP). 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 \(https://forms.gle/CHQXqB5FSLioE3np8\)](https://forms.gle/CHQXqB5FSLioE3np8) Upon registration, registrants will be sent a Google Meets calendar invitation.

Parent and Family Meeting

Monday, February 2, 2026 7PM - 8PM

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

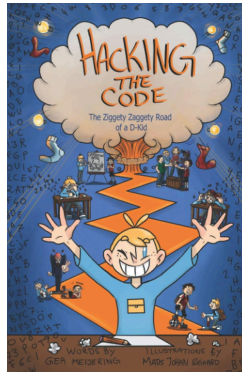
Mark your calendars for **Monday, February 2, 2026 from 7PM-8PM** for our monthly parent and family support meeting.

Christine Lepore, Board certified specialist in AAC and Clinical Director of ICAN Talk Clinic at the AAC Institute will be discussing Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). We will get valuable information on AAC and its use, purpose, incorporating into the world, raising awareness of, and a whole lot more with time for questions! Please contact contact Vicki Donne at donne@rmu.edu or Deanna Hiltz at hiltzd@rmu.edu to register by email or register at [Google Registration \(https://forms.gle/e1yFx3x58kvMSTWSA\)](https://forms.gle/e1yFx3x58kvMSTWSA) Upon registration, registrants will be sent a Google Meets calendar invitation.



Virtual Book Club for Kids

Starting February 2026



We picked the book **Hacking the Code: The Ziggety Zaggety Road of a D-Kid** by Gea Meijering for our next book club. **Hacking the Code** highlights the journey of Kees, a child with dyslexia whose perseverance, creativity, and friendships help him discover his own strengths. Kees is good at science experiments, fixing things, making friends, and especially pulling clever pranks. However, due to his dyslexia, his spelling and writing aren't his strengths. One prank goes too far and Kees finds himself punished with the worst assignment ever - writing an essay about the hardest thing he's ever done. Kees must figure out how to tell his story and discover why his way of thinking is something to be proud of. Join us to read about Kees as he navigates school, activities, and friendships. This book is recommended for children ages 8-12 but is a great read for all ages. We will meet for four weeks **virtually Tuesdays from 6:00 - 7:00 pm. Let us know if you'd like to join us by Friday, January 16.**

Sign up by emailing Deanna Hiltz at hiltzd@rmu.edu

Parent and Family Support Meeting Survey



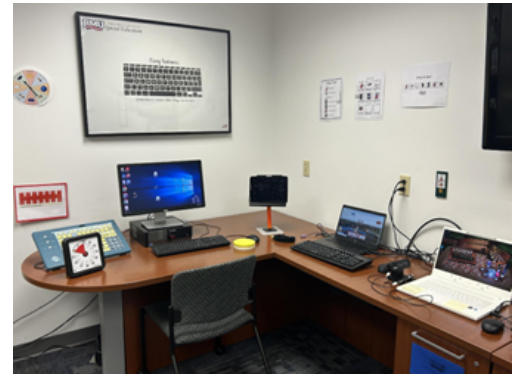
Your experience matters, and we'd love your input! 2025 was a successful year of parent and family support meetings. We are planning for all future 2026 meetings and your feedback is essential. Please take a few minutes to complete the survey and share your suggestions and recommendations for future support meetings. To give feedback, please complete the survey here: <https://forms.gle/G5jHVzbeQ6diCAPt8> Thank you for helping us continue to grow and better support our parents, families, community, and educators.

Individual IEP Collaborations and/or Conferences

It is common for parents and guardians of students with disabilities to feel overwhelmed when reading through their child's Individualized Education Program (IEP). The RMU Trees Network has set aside hours to virtually meet with individual parents and guardians who have IEP related questions. Let us have an open conversation to help you make sense of your child's IEP and feel more confident in the process. Your questions will guide the discussion and no question is too big or too small. Whether you are new to special education or have been through several IEP meetings, we offer a safe and supportive space to learn and get clarity. Email Vicki at donne@rmu.edu or Deanna at hiltzd@rmu.edu to set up a conference.

Trees Assistive Technology Device Center Open Lab Days

The Trees Network maintains 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). The AT Device Center hosts 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 AT, 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. **Please note that the AT Lab will be closed during RMU's winter break from December 15th, 2025 - January 19th, 2026.**

Featured Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is becoming an integral part of education, transforming how students learn and how teachers teach. One of its most powerful uses is in creating personalized experiences. The following AI tools are designed to help students.

- <https://www.khanmigo.ai/> - **Khanmigo**, is an AI-powered personal tutor and teaching assistant from trusted education nonprofit Khan Academy. For learners and families, Khanmigo offers engaging, on-topic, and effective learning for students, and is designed with safety and learning. Unlike others, Khanmigo doesn't just give answers. Instead, it guides learners to find the answer themselves. Khanmigo is the only AI tool that is incorporated with Khan Academy's content library that covers math, humanities, coding, social studies, and more.

- <https://www.duolingo.com/> - **Duolingo** understands that everyone learns in different ways. Their goal is to give everyone access to a private tutor experience through technology. They believe anyone can learn a language. They have free real-life lessons that build language and communication through lots of varied practice in reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

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.

January 13th - March 26th (Tuesdays and Thursdays) 4:00PM-6:00PM Open Up Studio

Students will participate in an engaging yoga class, play imaginative games intended to promote mindful social interactions, and make crafts to help support a mindfulness practice at home. This is a smaller group setting with no more than 12 students located in Lawrenceville. <https://www.open-up.org/club-camp>

January 15th 8:30AM Special Needs Consortium Virtual Meeting

RSVP: snc@specialneedsconsortium.org

January 31st 10:00AM – 3:30PM 2026 Winter Virtual Family Retreat – PA Tourette Syndrome Alliance

Join The PA Tourette Syndrome Alliance for a mid-winter's day full of fun, great conversations and talent show. Get more information and/or register here:

<https://patsainc.org/events/ts-family-retreat/>

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/>)

Council Events

- The Pittsburgh/Allegheny County Local Interagency Coordinating Council (LICC) is a group of families, professionals, and community members who work to improve the delivery of Early Intervention services for young children with developmental delays and disabilities. Their next meeting will be held virtually on Tuesday, January 27, 2026 at 9AM. To register, email strocheck@afit.org.
 - The Allegheny County Local Task Force will meet on Wednesday, January 7th from 6:30 - 8:30 pm. To join, <https://www.ltf3.org/meetings>
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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 that were found to help online and virtual volunteer opportunities to meet service project requirements.**



- **Best Buddies** - e-Buddies creates social inclusion and friendships for people with and without intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in a virtual space.
<https://www.bestbuddies.org/what-we-do/ebuddies/>
- **Red Cross** - The American Red Cross has several volunteer opportunities that can be done from home or from other remote locations. Remote volunteers support many Red Cross programs and services by providing "behind the scenes" support and organization..
https://volunteerconnection.redcross.org/?nd=rco_opportunity_detail&opportunity_id=107978&postal_code=97031&return_nd=rco_opportunity_browse_list
- **United Nations** - Through the Online Volunteering service of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) program, you can connect with UN entities, governments, public institutions and civil society organizations. Find out how to become an Online Volunteer from any device, anywhere in the world.
<https://www.unv.org/become-online-volunteer>

RMU Trees Network Contact

6001 University Boulevard
335 Patrick Henry Trees Network Office Suite
Moon Township, PA 15108

Vicki Donne, RMU Trees Network Director
University Professor, Education Department,
College of Health and Human Science (CHHS)
donne@rmu.edu
412-397-5465

Deanna Hiltz, RMU Trees Network Outreach Specialist
Part-Time Faculty, Education Department, CHHS
hiltzd@rmu.edu
412-397-6058

[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/>)

