



TREES NETWORK

February 2026 Newsletter

Parent and Family Meeting

Monday, February 2, 2026 7PM - 8PM

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

Join us virtually on **Monday, February 2, 2026 from 7 PM - 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. There will also be time for questions! 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/e1yFx3x58kvMSTWSA) (<https://forms.gle/e1yFx3x58kvMSTWSA>) Upon registration, registrants will be sent a Google Meets calendar invitation.



Save the Date!

Monday, March 2, 2026 7 PM - 8 PM

Understanding Behavior

Parent and Family Meeting

Join us virtually on **Monday, March 2, 2026 from 7:00 pm - 8:00 pm** for our monthly parent and family support meeting. We are pleased to welcome Brittany Maurizi, Founder of Balanced Behaviors, LLC and a Behavior Consultant and Licensed Behavior Specialist in Pennsylvania. Brittany will discuss understanding behavior, how to effectively communicate what you are observing at home and school, and how to interpret data presented through Functional Behavior Assessments (FBAs). To register, 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/o8ekXGh6ZokMr9ut7) (<https://forms.gle/o8ekXGh6ZokMr9ut7>) Upon registration, registrants will be sent a Google Meets calendar invitation.

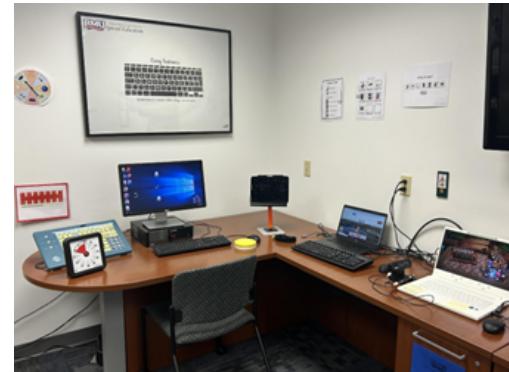
Individual IEP Collaborations and/or Conferences

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. We can 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 time.

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.



Featured IEP Resources

IEP Accommodations: From Paper to Practice

Each month, we will highlight one key component of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and share resources to support understanding and implementation. These monthly spotlights are designed to break the IEP into manageable parts, clarify roles and responsibilities, and provide tools that can be immediately applied in classrooms and meetings. By focusing on one detail at a time, we aim to strengthen collaboration, improve consistency, and ensure IEPs are meaningful support for students.

What Are Accommodations? IEP accommodations are supports that change how a student learns or demonstrates learning, without changing the instructional content or expectations. They are designed to provide equitable access to instruction, assessments, and the school environment. Accommodations must be provided consistently across settings and by all staff working with the student. They should be reviewed regularly to ensure they align with the student's current needs and IEP goals.

- **Classroom & Instructional Accommodations** - Instructional accommodations adjust how content is presented and how students engage with learning. Supports such as preferential seating, visual schedules, chunked assignments, and guided notes help students access instruction without changing learning expectations.
- **Testing & Assessment Accommodations** - Testing accommodations provide students with fair opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge. Common supports include extended time, small group settings, read-aloud options, and assistive technology, and should always reflect what supports are used during daily instruction.
- **Behavior & Sensory Accommodations** - Behavior and sensory accommodations support self-regulation and engagement. Tools such as movement breaks, sensory supports, calm-down spaces, and positive behavior cues help students remain focused and participate successfully in the learning environment.
- **Family-Friendly Supports** - Family resources clarify what accommodations mean and how they should be used. Plain-language explanations and sample questions empower families to collaborate with school teams and advocate for consistent implementation.

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.

Variety's My Bike®, My Stroller®, and My Voice® Programs

They are actively accepting new applications for all three programs for Southwestern PA. Variety offers three adaptive equipment programs for eligible kids and families to apply for one, two, or all three pieces of equipment, including adaptive bikes, adaptive strollers, and communication devices. These programs open possibilities for kids and their families to live healthier, safer, and more fulfilling lives at home, school, and throughout the community. Learn more about each program and/or start an application at www.varietypittsburgh.org.

Various Saturdays (January - April; 10AM-2PM) - Camp Woodlands Jr. Day Camps

Camp Woodlands Jr. (CWJ) is designed for campers, ages 6-12. Each Saturday session features a wide range of activities including arts and crafts, nature exploration, music, sports, "snack-tivities," and more. The Saturday session costs \$75 (lunch included). 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

February 6th - 8th (starting at 5:30pm) - Teen/Young Adult Weekend Retreat at The Woodlands: Pairs, Pods & Packs Weekend

A lively, social weekend all about friendship, teamwork, and belonging. Campers will enjoy group games, collaborative activities, and a special zoo visit on Saturday. From 5:30 PM on Friday to 11:00 AM on Sundays, these inclusive getaways for youth with disability and chronic illness are created for individuals ages 13-24. Each retreat costs \$585. 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

February 7th at 10:00AM - Pittsburgh Steelwheelers Wheelchair Basketball Double Header

The Pittsburgh Steelwheelers wheelchair basketball team will face off in a double header against the Cleveland WC Cavaliers. The games will take place in the Trees Hall Gymnasium on Allequippa St. at the University of Pittsburgh. Entry is free and more information on location and parking can be found on the Steelwheelers website at <https://www.steelwheelers.com/wheelchair-basketball-events-and-media>

February 8th 11:00AM – 1:00PM - Autism Caring Center Valentines

They will be making valentines, a heart themed STEM craft/experiment and end with a sweet treat. 7051 Steubenville Pike Oakdale Pa 15071 www.autismcaringcenter.com

February 8th 2:00PM-5:00PM - [Live Autism Friendly Open Mic @ Band Together Clubhouse](#)

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

February 12th 5:00PM - 7:00PM - Open Up Mix · Mingle · Matter- Happy Hour Mixer

Open Up is extending a warm invitation to a casual Mix, Mingle, Matter happy hour at Trace Brewing. It is a casual nonprofit networking happy hour where community members are invited to meet local organizations, learn about volunteer and leadership opportunities, and explore ways to get involved — or simply connect with others doing meaningful work. [Link for More Information or to Register](#)

February 12th AND February 19th 12PM - 1PM Lunch and Learn with Special Needs Consortium Community Education Committee

The Special Needs Consortium Community Education Committee invites all who want to learn more about Medical Assistance (MA). MA is also referred to as Medicaid and Medical Assistance. Janice Meinert from PA Health Law Project will provide two lunch and learns. Learn about MA categories including MAWD, changes at age 18, asset and income limits, HIPP, EPSDT and an explanation of those acronyms! Attend one or both. Join with the link below or receive Zoom link in an email by contacting Mary.Evrard@AlleghenyCounty.US

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/91908771964?pwd=3CcqhP0GoQ0Qzhhf5wc3LoAPcNeUPA.1>

Meeting ID: 919 0877 1964 Passcode: 513108

February 27th - March 1st (starting at 5:30pm) - DIVA Weekend Retreat at The Woodlands

Dreams-Inspiration-Vision-Advocacy participants focus on the power of self-love and self-care in all its forms. Activities are designed to foster attitudes of inspiration, confidence, and pride. Participants will highlight what makes them their authentic selves through fashion, music, and conversation. The DIVA Retreat is open to participants, both male and female between the ages of 16-35 who wish to celebrate EVERYTHING that makes them awesome. This retreat costs \$585. 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

February 27 6:00PM - 9:00PM - [Live Autism Friendly Open Mic @ The Warhol](#)

The Andy Warhol Museum 117 Sandusky Street, Pittsburgh

April 15th and 29th 5:00PM - 7:00PM Big Feelings, Real Solutions: Helping Your Child Through Challenging Behaviors - Beaver Valley Intermediate Unit

This is a 2-part presentation on behavior management and childhood trauma conducted at the Beaver Valley Intermediate Unit in Center Township (Beaver County). This event is completely free, and the target audience is parents/guardians/caretakers, group home workers, agency employees, and adoption/foster parents. Contact Chris McCabe at christopher.mccabe@bviu.org or Melissa Niedbala at melissa.niedbala@bviu.org to register.

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

- **Allegheny Library Association Programs & Events** (<https://aclibraries.org/explore/library-programs-and-events/>)
- **Beaver County Library Systems** (<https://www.beaverlibraries.org/system-wide-events>)
- **Butler County Federated Library Systems** (<https://www.bclfsl.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, March 24, 2026 at 9AM. To register, email strocheck@afit.org.
- The Allegheny County Local Task Force will meet on Wednesday, February 4th from 12:00-2:00 pm. The RMU Trees Network will be speaking at the meeting. To join, visit <https://www.ltf3.org/meetings>

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 Mary Evrard, Community and Communication Liaison Coordinator for the Office of Developmental Supports (ODS) referenced in our January Supports Coordinators meeting.**



- **Supports Coordination Eligibility in PA** - The Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) has committed to the individuals who receive services through the Consolidated and Person/Family Directed Support (P/FDS) Waivers and to the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) that all Consolidated and P/FDS Waiver providers will be deemed qualified to provide their applicable services according to guidelines set forth in each of the waivers prior to rendering these services.

<https://www.pa.gov/agencies/dhs/resources/for-providers/developmental-programs-for-providers/sc-organization-qualifications>

- **Individual Support Plan** - An Individual Support Plan (ISP) promotes an understanding of the value, purpose and requirements for working with teams to develop a person-centered plan. A step by step approach to the completion of the Outcome Section of the ISP is described with numerous examples. ISP Development and ISP Monitoring include information to help increase understanding of the personal preferences section of the ISP and provide detailed examples and clarification on the Supports Coordinator role in monitoring the ISP.
- **Prioritization of Urgency of Need for Services (PUNS)** - PUNS provides a uniform instrument that is used by County Intellectual Disabilities Programs, on an on-going basis, to collect a standard set of data on individuals who are waiting for intellectual disabilities services and supports. It is a significant management tool for County Intellectual Disabilities Programs. PUNS has been formally adopted by the Office of Developmental Programs as a requirement for annual County Plans and for use in program budgeting. The County Plan and Budget Process is the annual planning and budgeting process in place across Pennsylvania to address the needs of individuals.
<https://id-supportscoordination.weebly.com/puns.html>
- **Lifecourse Framework** - The Charting the LifeCourse framework was created to help individuals and families of all abilities and all ages develop a vision for a good life, think about what they need to know and do, identify how to find or develop supports, and discover what it takes to live the lives they want to live. The framework is the keystone for supporting a community of learning that champions transformational change through knowledge exchange, capacity building, and collaborative engagement. <https://www.lifecoursetools.com/lifecourse-library/lifecourse-framework/>
- **Adult Autism Waiver** - The Adult Autism Waiver (AAW) is a 1915(c) Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) Medicaid waiver designed to provide long-term services and supports for community living, tailored to the specific needs of adults age 21 or older with ASD.
<https://www.pa.gov/agencies/dhs/resources/intellectual-disabilities-autism/autism-services/adult-autism-waiver>

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RMU Trees Website (<https://donne94.wixsite.com/rmu-trees-network>)
RMU Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/RMUTrees/>)

