



TREES NETWORK

October 2025 Newsletter

Parent/Family Meeting

Monday, October 6, 2025 7 PM - 8 PM



Partners for Quality

Join us virtually on **Monday, October 6, 2025 from 7:00 pm - 8:00 pm** for our monthly family support meeting. Jeffrey Truxell, Work Incentive Practitioner for Partners for Quality, will be joining to share information about the programs offered through Citizens Care, Exceptional

Adventures, Allegheny Children's Initiative, and Milestones. These programs assist transition-age children and adults in developing and utilizing social, daily living, and employment skills to help people live, work, and experience all aspects of life. Come and learn about the differences in employment options and day programs. Anyone interested in attending 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/XZE3nQmdzm5QsFLZ8) (<https://forms.gle/XZE3nQmdzm5QsFLZ8>) Upon registration, registrants will be sent a Google Meets calendar invitation.

UPCOMING Parent/Family Meeting

Monday, November 3, 2025 7 PM - 8 PM

Least Restrictive Environment

Mark your calendars for **Monday, November 3, 2025 from 7:00 pm - 8:00 pm**. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

(IDEA) guarantees that all students with disabilities have the right to a public education in the least restrictive environment (LRE) that best meets their individual needs. That means that the LRE for one child may look different than the LRE for another child. Cindy Duch, Parent Training and Information (PTI) Project Director for Parent Education and Advocacy Leadership (PEAL) Center, is joining us to help us examine what an accessible education environment looks like and will share tips on advocating for the supports appropriate to create the LRE. There will be ample time for Q&A. 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/89PjxMBVSpaxAaSv9) (<https://forms.gle/89PjxMBVSpaxAaSv9>) Upon registration, registrants will be sent a Google Meets calendar invitation.



Upcoming Special Education Conference



On Monday, October 13, 2025, the RMU Trees Network is holding its annual Special Education Conference. This year the theme is **Leading the Way: Innovation and Inclusion**. It is free and 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. Register here: <https://forms.gle/vuq3xXvthG8FDdhc6>

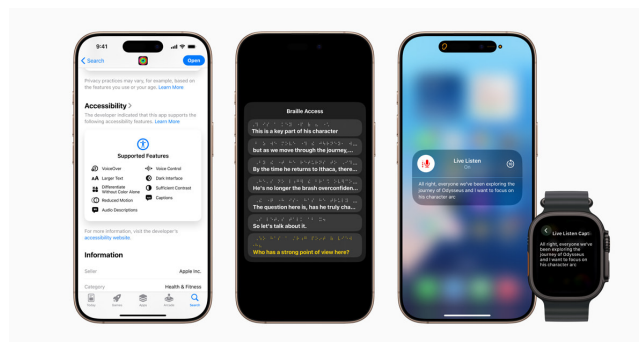
Assistive Technology Workshop

Apple Accessibility

How Tablets and Smartphones Can Help Bridge the Gap

Monday, November 10, 2025 6:00 PM - 7:00 PM

Join us virtually on Monday, November 10, 2025 from 6:00 PM - 7:00 PM to learn about tablets and smartphones accessibility features. Bekah Nesbitt, an Assistive Technology Coordinator for TechOWL, PA's Assistive Technology Act Program, will be joining us to describe assistive technology (AT), how AT helps individuals with disabilities, and how Apple Accessibility can be applied across disabilities. To register for this free family/parent workshop, please contact Vicki Donne at donne@rmu.edu or Deanna Hiltz at hiltzd@rmu.edu, or register at [Google Registration](https://forms.gle/CMzEm7KngKyF4asa6). (<https://forms.gle/CMzEm7KngKyF4asa6>). Upon registration, registrants will be sent a Google Meets calendar invitation.



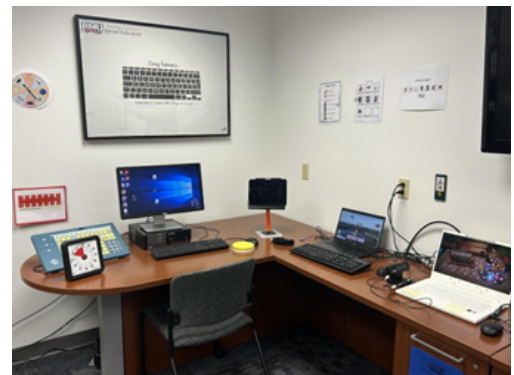
Individual IEP Collaborations and/or Conferences



The RMU Trees Network has set aside hours to virtually meet with individual parents and guardians who have IEP related questions. We recognize that IEP documents are fluid documents and issues arise throughout the school year so we thought this might be helpful to families. We are not attorneys, but we do speak the language of special educators and are available to listen and help you navigate the special education process. 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. Email Vicki at donne@rmu.edu or Deanna at hiltzd@rmu.edu to set up a conference 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 **Wednesdays from 9:00 am - 3:00 pm** and will be open to the public during this time 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 Artificial Intelligence (AI)

In our ongoing AI feature, we thought it might be helpful to highlight AI for people with hearing loss. AI is making real strides for people with hearing loss. Real-time captioning, speech isolation, lip-reading algorithms, and smart assistants are greatly advancing. In universities, tools like Glyph AI, Glean, Sonocent, and enhanced note-taking tools let Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing students follow lectures with live transcripts, summaries, and more. How accurate these programs may still be a concern, especially with noisy settings, strong accents, or difficult vocabulary, but there is a lot to be hopeful about.

- <https://www.innocaption.com/> InnoCaption offers real-time captioning making phone calls easier and more accessible for the deaf and hard-of-hearing community.
- <https://www.voiceitt.com/> Voiceitt has developed speech recognition for non-standard speech: opening the world of voice technology for people with speech disabilities, aging adults, and accented speakers.
- <https://help.genio.co/> Genio is a browser-based notetaking platform with a built-in accessible and organizational structure. Genio records a lecture or meeting and allows the user to take notes within Genio at the same time. Genio also translates the audio file into a transcript of the lecture or meeting that helps in reviewing notes.

Upcoming Events for Families at RMU

October 18th 10:00AM - 4:00PM

RMU Trees Network and Envision Blind Sports Clinic

Robert Morris University Recreation Center, 6001 University Blvd. Moon Township, PA 15108
If you are interested in attending the clinic or if you have any questions, please reach out to Jillian Stringfellow at jstringfellow@envisionblindsports.org or 251-610-3244.

October 25th 1:00PM - 4:00PM

RMU Trees Network and Band Together Pittsburgh

Game Day and Halloween Bash

The Basement in Nicholson Center at Robert Morris University, 6001 University Blvd. Moon Township, PA 15108.

For more details or if interested in attending the event, see <https://bandtogetherpgh.org/>.

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.

October 4th 1:00PM - 4:00PM Fall Festival at The Woodlands

Pumpkin Patch, Crafts, Vendors, Trick or Treating, Sensory Room, Food, Music & Games.
134 Shenot Road, Wexford. For more information contact Jessi Reed at jreed@woodlandsfoundation.org or by calling 724-935-6533.

October 9th 10:00AM - 3:00PM PA State Police Sunny Day Camp at Alameda Park in Butler

Sunny Day Camp was created to foster connections between law enforcement and individuals with special needs of every age. This one-day free event includes demonstrations from law enforcement officers and first responders with games, activities and much more. The event will conclude with a graduation ceremony. Snacks and a t-shirt will be provided to all participants while supplies last. The event is free but registration is required for all participants and all accompanying family members/care givers. Register at www.sunnydaycamp.org or contact Tpr. Bertha Cazy bcazy@pa.gov or 724-284-8100.

October 12th 2:00PM - 5:00PM Live Autism Friendly Open Mic

Band Together Clubhouse

378 Freeport Road, Blawnox, PA

<https://bandtogetherpgh.org/event/live-autism-friendly-open-mic-band-together-clubhouse-35/>

October 30th 10:00AM - 11:00AM PA ABLE and ABLE Expansion with ACHIEVA Family Trust - Online Event

ACHIEVA will host this webinar for individuals, families and professionals to learn more about PA ABLE and ABLE Age Expansion. Register here:

<https://events.gcc.teams.microsoft.com/event/01636f36-4125-4ccb-85dc-58512b01bb2e@aff0f5b6-7ab3-4f66-b46c-0b7d250ad998>

October 30th 11:00AM - 2:00PM Inglis Innovation Center Pittsburgh Open House

Join the Inglis team at the Inglis Innovation Center Pittsburgh for an afternoon of discovery and connection. Explore Assistive Technology and Home Modification programs through interactive stations with program managers. Learn about Inglis Assistive Technology Solutions and our Home Modifications for Independence programs at interactive stations. Light refreshments will be provided by Cookie Cookie Ice Cream. This event is wheelchair accessible. RSVP NOW:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/inglis-innovation-center-pittsburgh-open-house-tickets-1668782145319?utm-campaign=social&utm-content=attendeeshare&utm-medium=discovery&utm-term=listing&utm-source=cp&aff=ebdsshcopyurl>

October 31st - November 2nd (starting at 5:30PM) Teen/Young Adult Weekend Retreat at The Woodlands: Halloween Celebration Weekend

From 5:30 PM on Friday to 11:00 AM on Sunday, this inclusive getaway for youth with disability and chronic illness is created for individuals ages 13-24. Whether you're 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. Our activities encourage new experiences that spark creativity and self-discovery. Each retreat costs \$550. We accept out of pocket or private pay, ESY, and waiver funding. We also have a scholarship program called the "Wonderfund" to assist with cost, available upon request. To apply or for more information, contact Nicole Hicks, 724-935-5470 or nhicks@woodlandsfoundation.org www.mywoodlands.org

OPEN UP Mindfulness Classes (free)

Open Up's mission is to teach mindfulness tools through movement practices and interactive arts while centering people living with disabilities. 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/>

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>)

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 our upcoming parent/family meeting on day programs, supportive employment and competitive employment.**



- **Allegheny County Office of Developmental Supports** - The Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) Office of Developmental Supports (ODS) has fact sheets available for transitioning to adult life, day programs, and employment. <https://www.alleghenycounty.us/Services/Human-Services-DHS/Publications/Resource-Guides/Office-of-Developmental-Supports-ODS-Fact-Sheets>
 - **Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE)** - CIE is work performed by individuals with disabilities that pays at least minimum wage and takes place in a setting with non-disabled colleagues. The Office of Disability Employment Policy has a hub and initiatives focused on CIE. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/program-areas/cie>
 - **Employment First - Office of Disability Employment Policy** - Employment First is a national systems-change framework centered on the premise that all individuals, including those individuals with the most significant disabilities, are capable of full participation in [Competitive Integrated Employment \(CIE\)](#) and community life. <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/initiatives/employment-first>
 - **Supported Employment - Foothold Technology** - Supported employment enables individuals with developmental disabilities to work in their communities, with ongoing support from agencies. The model emphasizes placement in competitive jobs, which are positions that anyone could hold and pay the same wage regardless of disability status. This website includes benefits of supported employment, supported employment models, and industries hiring individuals with disabilities. <https://footholdtechnology.com/developmental-disabilities-software/supported-employment/>
 - **UDS Foundation - Benefits of Day Programs** - There are over 4,600 adult day centers across the United States, but some people with intellectual and physical disabilities aren't taking advantage of this valuable resource. For many people, day programs for adults with disabilities are far preferable than other long-term care options. This blog reviews the positives of day programming, allowing those with disabilities to remain in their communities to teach them valuable life skills. <https://udservices.org/day-programs-adults-with-disabilities/>
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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/>)

