

A quarterly publication from Families Together, Inc., the Parent Training and Information and Health Information Center for the State of Kansas



New Co-Executive Directors Lesli Girard and Tami Allen

Welcome New Co-Executive Directors!

Our long-term Executive Director, Connie Zienkewicz, retired on June 30, 2019. She left behind some big shoes to fill, but new Co-Executive Directors Lesli Girard and Tami Allen are the perfect pair to continue to lead our organization.

Lesli has provided 33 years of service to Families Together and serves as the Project Director of the Parent Training and Information Center and oversees our organization's work with the Kansas State Department of Education. Her focus on family engagement and partnerships within the educational process will be invaluable in her new role.

Tami has worked for Families Together for nearly 30 years. She serves as the Family-to-Family Project Director and manages the organization's work with the Kansas Council on Developmental Disabilities. Tami brings with her a vast knowledge of medical services available to Kansas families that include a child or youth with special health care needs.

Lesli and Tami have both held leadership positions for over 20 years. With their combined experience and passion to help Kansas families, Lesli and Tami are sure to be fantastic Executive Directors!

Great Times at Harmony For A Cause

Our second annual fundraiser for Families Together, Inc. was a fantastic success, thanks to our wonderful supporters and families! The evening was filled with delicious food, lively dancing, and sharing stories of what our organization provides for families across the state. Guests enjoyed the amazing items that were donated for our silent auction and participated in a live auction as well.

A great big thank you to all of those that attended or supported us in any way!



The baskets donated for the silent auction await bidders.

A laughing couple dances to music provided by Bucky Fowler and Southern Charm.



The live auction underway. People bid on trips, experiences, and competed for the beautiful centerpieces.

Back To School



Another August is here, signaling the start of a brand new school year! The first few weeks of adjustment can be difficult for parents and students alike. If you add in new schools, transitions to new grades, or IEP meetings, it can easily feel overwhelming. Just remember you're not alone! Here at Families Together, we offer assistance to families that may be having a difficult time navigating services for their child. Questions about the IEP process or your parental rights? Need someone to explain the waiver process or how to help medically support your child in school? Give us a call at any of our three centers, and we will be happy to help answer any questions you may have!

Also, be sure to check out our list of workshops and events on page 5. Our events are designed to help parents connect, learn and feel supported. We're here to help you feel empowered so that you can be the best advocate for your child!

For more resources, visit www.familiestogetherinc.org.

Understanding Individualized Health Care Plans (IHPs)

If your child has a specific special health care need that impacts their daily life at school, they may benefit from having an Individualized Health Care Plan (IHP). An IHP is an official, written document that can be attached to a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP), Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), or Section 504 plan. It can also be a separate document. Similar to an IEP, IHPs are developed by a team. These teams are usually lead by the school nurse and can include other members such as parents, primary care physician, school professionals and, when appropriate, the student. IHPs can be for complex medical conditions, or for temporary health care needs like broken bones or long-term illnesses; anything that could impact a student's learning or routine at school.

An IHP for a student should include things like: the administration and dosage of medication; the health related services the student will receive at school; location and direction for how those services will be provided; the person or persons responsible for providing those health related services; instructional use for any device or piece of medical equipment; transportation plans, including special circumstances like field trips; and an emergency action plan for national disasters and evacuations, as well as medical emergencies related to the student's medical condition. Emergency plans should clearly designate roles and responsibilities. IHPs are flexible plans that should be updated whenever a change occurs with your child's medical condition. Communication with the school's health provider and the rest of the IHP team is very important to ensure that your student is safe and cared for during the school day. If you would like more information about IHPs, or a form to help with the development of a plan, contact one of our centers!

Congratulations!

A big congratulations is in order for our very own Austin Hanson from the Topeka office. Austin took First Place in the USA Boccia Nationals 2019 tournament this summer in San Antonio!



TOGETHER WE CAN LEARN CONFERENCE

September 28, 2019

University of Kansas Edwards Campus
Best Conference Center
12600 S Quivira Rd.
**Overland Park,
Kansas**



Dr. Patrick Schwarz, professor, author, motivational speaker and leader in Education (Inclusive Education, Special Education, General Education, Educational Leadership)

Opening Keynote

From Disabilities to Possibility: 5 Keys to Achieving an Inclusive Life - One of the keys to achieving an inclusive life is building on each individual's fascinations, passions and interest areas. Patrick will explore new ways of using these areas as positive teaching tools that calm, motivate and improve learning.

Afternoon Keynote

Addressing Adventuresome Behavior While Keeping the Dignity of All Intact - Both a person-centered, authentic, functional approach to assess behavior and a problem-solving process will be applied to combine components of the very best user-proven behavioral support strategies.



Lee Stickle, Director of the Kansas State Department of Education's Technical Assistance Support Network (TASN) Autism & Tertiary Supports

Closing Keynote

Channeling Your Inner Gumby - Each of us face challenges in daily life. Some are faced with increasingly difficult circumstances; loss, loneliness, isolation, violence and uncertainty can cause us to question or rattle our confidence, undermine our ability to make meaningful connections, distort our character and make coping difficult. What can we do?

Breakout Sessions

- [Empowering Families: Talking about Mental Health, Mental Illness and Self-Care in the Home](#)
- [Sibling Panel](#)
- [Working with Your Child's Medical Team](#)
- [The Facts About Social Security, Medicare, KanCare \(Kansas Medicaid\) and Work Incentives](#)
- [Ensuring Your Child's Safety in the Digital Age](#)

[**https://19twcl.eventbrite.com**](https://19twcl.eventbrite.com)



Education Advocate Update: Starting the School Year Strong



As an Education Advocate, you are the child's voice until he or she reaches the age of majority. Throughout the process, you will learn each child's strengths and challenges and you will help to identify and advocate for the services that each individual child needs to succeed. Here are some tips to help you advocate for your student at school.

Stay informed.

Do not hesitate to reach out to the child's foster parents, the school or case managers. Doing so will help you be familiar with the child's specific needs. Explore the child's strengths, behaviors, and challenges. Work with the school to find ways that best support how he or she learns.

Organize important paperwork.

Keep copies of all report cards, progress reports, multidisciplinary evaluations, and IEPs. These specific documents provide important information for the child's learning and how much progress they are making.

Build relationships with the school team.

Get to know the child's teachers and IEP team who are working with the child. Building relationships with the whole team can help keep the lines of communication open, and trust is built with one another.

Don't be afraid to ask questions.

It's important to make sure you fully understand the child's accommodations before you give your consent for the child to receive services. Don't ever be afraid to ask questions, request further evaluations, or express your concerns with the school's recommendations regarding the child's services. It's a good idea to get any requests in writing.

Remember that you're an important part of the team.

Education Advocates shouldn't feel pressured to make a decision. You're an equal member of the decision making team. While it's important to be open minded to school staff's thoughts and suggestions, you don't have to agree if it goes against what you feel is best for the child.

Get to know and talk to the child.

Touch base with the child about how school is going for him or her. It's important to know if the accommodations and modifications for the child are being implemented. This helps you make sure the IEP is being followed. When the child is old enough, encourage self-advocacy.

As always, thank you to all education advocates. We value your hard work and dedication. Please call the Families Together center nearest you if you have any questions or concerns.

Q. Can my child have an IEP if she only needs physical therapy?

- A. Yes. The IEP team may determine that the only special education service needed for a child with a disability is a related service, in certain circumstances:
- If it consists of specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of the child, any related service, including para support or speech-language pathology, is considered special education
or
 - If a child needs OT, PT, or interpreter services for deaf children in order to be educated in the least restrictive environment, that service is considered special education.

It is important to remember that a child is eligible for special education if 1) the student meets the eligibility criteria for at least one exceptionality category; and, 2) demonstrates a need for special education. So if a student only needs accommodations or modifications that do not require specially designed instruction, the child's needs may be met through a Section 504 plan or other means instead of an IEP.

Taken from the Kansas Special Education Services Process Handbook

Workshops

Our workshops, trainings and conferences are offered to parents, education advocates, general educators, special educators, para-professionals, administrators, service providers, and other individuals who care for and about children/youth who have disabilities. For more information and to register, visit famiestogetherinc.org/events/

Education Advocate

Over 900 children in Department for Children and Families (DCF) or Department of Corrections (DOC) custody are in need of someone to represent them in special education matters. This training is for birth parents, foster and adoptive parents, DCF contracted agency workers, and volunteers.

DCF, DOC, and KSDE employees are not eligible to serve.

- [Kansas City](#)
August 20, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
- [Topeka](#)
September 17, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
- [Hays](#)
October 17, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.
- [Wichita](#)
November 19, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Transition

[Transition to Adulthood Team Empowerment Conference](#)

This conference is for Kansas youth (ages 14-21) who have disabilities and their families. Educators and others who believe that all youth should have the opportunity to work, live and play in their communities are also welcome to attend. The training is designed to help youth, their families and others learn about how to prepare for life after high school.

- **Wichita**
October 5, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

"I attended the conference thinking I had a fairly good grasp on services available, but I left with the knowledge of so much more that I did not know. I also think it was wonderful that my son got the opportunity to hear about these services. I especially think it was beneficial for him to hear about advocacy and having a voice for himself. "

-Parent Attendee

[Family Employment Awareness Training](#)

A two-day training designed for families, their young adults who have significant support needs, and the professionals who support them.

The goals of FEAT are to increase expectations for competitive employment of the young adult with a disability and increase knowledge of state and federal resources to support the employment of the young adult.

- **Hays**
Oct. 19 & 25, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Parent Training

[Together We Can Learn Conference](#)

- **Kansas City**
September 28, 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Parent Leadership Conference

Save The Date– More Information to come

- **Topeka**
November 15 & 16

Contact Us

Garden City Center

gardencity@famiestogetherinc.org

620-276-6364

1-888-820-6364

Topeka Center

topeka@famiestogetherinc.org

785-233-4777

1-800-264-6343

Wichita Center

wichita@famiestogetherinc.org

316-945-7747

1-888-815-6364

FamiliesTogetherInc.org

Confidence in Advocacy: A Family Story

My story starts 29 years ago when we adopted a beautiful baby boy who was sweet and caring. By second grade he was struggling. We were told he had ADHD and other problems. IEP meetings were held. These meetings made me feel discouraged and they gave me no hope for my son. I did one time travel to Garden City to talk with the ladies at Families Together. I was so beaten down at that time it was hard to make a connection with them.

Now we have adopted my son's two oldest children — Jessie who is 11, and Jaxson who is 7. Jessie has been on an IEP since kindergarten. Because of what I had been through with my son, I just signed the IEPs and felt the school would do what was best for Jessie. Jessie needs lots of structure and teachers who are organized and disciplined. Last year was tough. There was lots of loss for Jessie this last year— her beloved pet and four family members who meant much to her. We were adjusting her medications. She was in a bigger class and there was a lot of bullying going on. When she had enough and retaliated, she was long-term suspended. She had a five-day stay in a mental health hospital. We were connected to High Plains Mental Health and they referred us to Families Together. I remembered how nice they were when I visited those many years ago. My husband and I called. We were having weekly IEP meetings and I was an emotional wreck. My daughter attended the meetings with us. Laurie from Families Together was there to help, give advice, direction and help build my confidence so I could become a better advocate for Jessie. Sometimes she would join the IEP meeting by speakerphone. We did get her back into her regular school. We attended a Family Enrichment Weekend, which was awesome. During that time, I signed up for a new program called the IEP Mentor Program. She worked with me to be more educated and participate in the IEP process for Jessie. Laurie attended a meeting with us. I felt more confident and spoke for my daughter. I did not feel weak and helpless like I had for so long. We did make a difference that day. I have to say Families Together is an awesome group of people.

—Dena Goetz

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Confianza en la Defensa: Una Historia Familiar

Mi historia comienza hace 29 años cuando adoptamos a un hermoso bebé que era dulce y cariñoso. Para el segundo grado estaba batallando. Nos dijeron que tenía TDAH y otros problemas. Se llevaron a cabo reuniones de IEP. Estas reuniones me hicieron sentir desanimada y no me dieron ninguna esperanza para mi hijo. Una vez viajé a Garden City para hablar con las damas de Families Together. Estaba tan lastimada en ese momento que era difícil establecer una conexión con ellas.

Ahora hemos adoptado a los dos hijos mayores de mi hijo -- Jessie, que tiene 11 años, y Jaxson, que tiene 7. Jessie ha estado en un IEP desde la Kínder. Debido a lo que había pasado con mi hijo, acabo de firmar los IEP y sentí que la escuela haría lo mejor para Jessie. Jessie necesita mucha estructura y maestros organizados y disciplinados. Jessie perdió mucho este año pasado --su querida mascota y cuatro familiares que significaron mucho para ella. Estábamos ajustando sus medicamentos. Ella estaba en una clase más grande y había mucha intimidación. Cuando tuvo suficiente y se defendió, ella fue suspendida por un largo periodo. Ella tuvo una estancia de cinco días en un hospital de salud mental. Estábamos conectados con High Plains Mental Health y nos recomendaron a Families Together. Recordé lo buenos que eran cuando los visité hace muchos años. Mi esposo y yo llamamos. Estábamos teniendo reuniones semanales de IEP y yo era un desastre emocional. Mi hija asistió a la reunión con nosotros. Laurie de Families Together estuvo allí para ayudar, dar consejos, dirección y ayudar a construir mi confianza para que pudiera ser una mejor defensora de Jessie. A veces se unía a la reunión del IEP por teléfono con altavoz. Pudimos llevarla de vuelta a su escuela regular. Asistimos a un fin de semana de enriquecimiento familiar, que fue increíble. Durante ese tiempo, me inscribí para un nuevo programa llamado IEP Mentor Program. Ella trabajó conmigo para ser más educada y participar en el proceso del IEP para Jessie. Laurie asistió a una reunión con nosotros. Me sentí más segura y hablé por mi hija. No me sentía débil e indefensa como lo había estado durante tanto tiempo. Hicimos la diferencia ese día. Tengo que decir que Families Together es un grupo increíble de personas.

—Dena Goetz

IEP Mentor Program

Have you ever wanted someone to attend an IEP meeting with you? Or, do you want to know more about your rights in the special education process? Or, maybe you'd like to feel more empowered and strategize for your student's future? If you answered yes to any or all of these questions, you might be interested in the IEP Mentor Project. Last October, Families Together, Inc. received funding from the Kansas Council on Developmental Disabilities (KCDD) to initiate the IEP Mentor Project. A Mentor is a Families Together staff person who:

- helps families plan and strategize for upcoming IEP meetings;
- encourages families to have high expectations for their sons and daughters and their futures by using the LifeCourse framework to plan for a good life;
- connects families to available community resources;
- assists parents in understanding their rights in special education processes and transition planning;
- attends an IEP meeting with the family; and,
- provides follow-up after the meeting.

Target families include a son or daughter with a developmental disability who is 12 years old or older. Families should be willing to commit to an in-person meeting or video conference, share educational records and participate in a project evaluation. If you'd like more information or would like to schedule an appointment with a mentor, please contact the Families Together Center nearest you!

Staff Spotlight

How long have you been with Families Together?

I started working at Families Together in March of 1995, which means I'm working on my 25th year!

What programs do you work on?

Currently I am the IEP Mentor for the northeast part of the state.

Tell us about your family!

I've been married for 23 years and together we have five children. We have two Weimaraners and two cats.

When you're not serving families, what do you like to do?

I love to drive on low maintenance and/or very muddy roads in my jeep. I also love spending time with family and friends, playing games and laughing until my stomach hurts. I like ending the day by reading a good book. Canoeing, anything outside and in the water are favorites as well. When it gets cooler, I'm a big fan of watching Jayhawk basketball, Chiefs football and Sporting KC soccer and driving my jeep in the snow!

What do you like most about working at Families Together?

Disability has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. I started advocating for my brother at a very young age and spent many summers volunteering at the Capper Foundation. I have great passion for doing what I can to assist anyone with a disability and their families. Now, I have two daughters that have IEPs, so I feel that I understand and empathize with parents who are navigating special education. I have a particular fondness of working with kids who struggle with behavior and teens in transition. I love strategizing with teams to find positive and creative outcomes for kids.

I would be remiss if I didn't say that I have the best co-workers. It makes coming to work each day pretty great!



Darla Nelson-Metzger

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Welcome to Families Together, Inc. August Newsletter

Families Together, Inc. provides assistance and guidance to help parents and youth become partners in decision-making. Our non-profit is the Parent Training Information Center as well as the Family-to-Family Health Information Center for Kansas.

What's Inside?

In this edition of our newsletter, we share some of the exciting changes happening at Families Together, Inc. and highlight a few of our new specialized programs. We look at starting a new school year, and how Families Together, Inc. can help. You'll find a full calendar of our events and workshops, as well as information about our upcoming Together We Can Learn Conference happening on September 28, 2019. It's going to be great, and we hope to see you there!

Nosotros hablamos español 1.800.499.9443