

PRESS RELEASE
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Looking Ahead to Kindergarten and Beyond
Mill Neck's ECC Hosts Transition Workshop for Parents

Mill Neck Manor Early Childhood Center (ECC) recently presented their annual two-part "Transition to K" workshop. The workshop is offered for ECC families whose son or daughter is set to graduate from the ECC in August and then begin kindergarten in their home school districts in the fall. Moderator of the workshop, ECC Social Worker Cecelia Lynch, acknowledged that while this milestone is certainly exciting, preparing for it can also be somewhat overwhelming for families, especially when children have special needs.

Part one of the workshop focuses on the transition process itself, including differences between CPSE (Committee on Preschool Special Education) and CSE (Committee on Special Education) meetings, eligibility criteria for services, classifications, options and placements. It reviews what to expect from a child's IEP (Individualized Education Plan) and provides an overview of available resources.

Much information, surely, but it encourages parents to take an active role in the process. With that, Lynch reviewed some key points for parents in preparation for their district meetings; for example, obtaining copies of reports and plans; writing down questions and identifying their child's abilities and personality. "Parents know their child best, so the committee gets a look at the whole child," she said.

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She encouraged parents to invite someone, such as a friend or parent member (a volunteer parent in their school district who is familiar with the process), to attend the meetings with them.

While the first part of the workshop provides much of the “technical” information, the second part presents the information on a more personal level. At the most recent workshop, Lynch introduced two moms whose children are ECC graduates. As other alumni parents have done over the years, Sara Maragos and Lisa Vizza shared their experiences and the tips that helped their families. Each also expressed their gratitude for the support and expertise they found at the ECC.

Maragos’ son, Alex, attended the ECC for two years and began kindergarten this past September. While Alex still needs to reach some academic goals, she is pleased with how well he’s doing socially and how much his speech has improved. She described his school day; most of it spent in a general education classroom, with time set aside for individual and group speech therapy. “For Alex, it’s been very good being part of a general ed class. He’ll model the behavior of the other kids. Being in group speech is also beneficial because he learns and interacts with others in the group. It’s been a very positive experience.”

For Vizza’s son, James, now a six-foot ninth grader whose interests include engineering and running, the ECC is “the greatest thing that could have happened to him and to our entire family.” When James started at the ECC, he had language difficulties; very little expressive language and also some issues with transition, his mom noted. “I was looking for an ‘old fashioned’ type of nursery school, less focused on technology and more about encouraging children’s motor skills and advocating for themselves. Learning to put their coats away; learning to use the bathroom. Mill Neck came closest.” That, along with the array of services, including physical therapy, occupational therapy and speech intervention, all worked toward getting James ready for kindergarten. “His kindergarten teacher remarked how he was able to sit and focus for 20 minutes; sometimes this isn’t easy for typically-developing children,” Vizza said.

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Both Vizza and Maragos advocated joining SEPTA (Special Education Parent Teacher Association), a school district organization offering support and resources. Another tip: taking your child to his/her new school before the first day of classes, by visiting the playground, meeting the principal and/or future classroom teacher or attending school functions (concerts, carnivals), helps the child become comfortable with the new environment.

Vizza reminded parents that, “yes, it is important to educate yourself, but don’t make yourself crazy. If after a time, you feel plans are not working, it is your right to ask the committee go back and reevaluate.” Maragos suggested approaching everything with a team perspective. “There is no need to be adversarial. The districts are on board with meeting the child’s goals.”

Lynch reassured parents that Mill Neck is with them every step of way during their child’s transition. The ECC “prep” team, including the child’s teacher and therapists, meets with parents before any district meetings. The ECC professionals are further involved with the CPSE/CSE committees via reports and attendance at meetings.

It is widely acknowledged that the sooner early intervention services begin, the more successful a child will be down the road. For the majority of current and alumni ECC families this is evidenced first with their children attending kindergarten in their home districts and again when those little graduates continue to benefit from the program’s expertise, support and dedication years after they have moved on.

Founded in 1991, the Early Childhood Center (ECC) provides early and intensive assistance to children, ages 3 and 4, who may have deficits in speech, language/communication, cognitive and gross and fine motor development. The ECC is part of the Mill Neck Family of Organizations, which also includes Mill Neck Manor School for the Deaf, founded by Lutheran Friends of the Deaf in 1947. For more information about the Early Childhood Center, please call (516) 922-4100, ext. 276, or visit <http://www.millneck.org>.



Lisa Vizza (left) and Sara Maragos, ECC alumni parents, were guest speakers at the recent “Transition to K” workshop moderated by ECC Social Worker Cecelia Lynch (at right).

Photo Caption:

At the “Transition to K” workshop, Cecelia Lynch, Social Worker at the ECC (left), introduces Carolyn Gammerman, Director of the Early Childhood Direction Center.

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