



mission
empower

Educational Advocacy for the Inclusion of Youth

Annual Report 2009-10



Mission Empower seeks to empower all youth with disabilities to use their gifts and talents to follow their dreams through advocacy, education, and promoting inclusion.

“We will not tolerate another generation of young people with disabilities going through segregated education, segregated society, being dependent on their parents and public aid. We can make a difference in their future.”

~ Ed Roberts, Father of the Independent Living civil rights movement

Accomplishments

- Presented the “Stereotype Busters” community education program to schools, social service agencies and businesses including the Erie Small Business Alliance, Gannon’s University’s Occupational Therapy Association, the Achievement Center, and Upward Bound students
- Assisted more than 75 families throughout Erie County with educational advocacy services
- Founding member and organizer of the Erie Community Center Coalition which is working toward a fully inclusive community
- Completed our rebranding as Mission Empower
- Moved to our first office at 1932B West 8th St. Erie PA 16505
- Presented a four-part series of parent advocate trainings
- Increased our web and social media presence with the addition of our Facebook page and increased readership of the e-newsletter

Letter from our Executive Director

This quote to the left was declared more than *thirty years* ago. Sadly it is still the reality, more often than not, for youth and adults with disabilities. As noted in 2010, the Kessler Foundation/NOD Survey of Americans with Disabilities found that 21% are employed, 34% live in poverty and 17% have not finished high school. No other group of people has such a low rate of employment.

The national figures for unemployment for September 2010 states 9.56% of all Americans are unemployed. Among Americans with disabilities, unemployment is near 80%.

At Mission Empower we have a sense of urgency to empower youth who have disabilities so they have the tools to avoid becoming a statistic. Mission Empower’s programs are specifically designed to support today’s youth with disabilities in finding a path to becoming independent, successful employed adults.



Mission Empower, a grassroots 501c3 non-profit has served 115 families in Erie County since we opened our doors in late 2007 by providing education, advocating with families and by promoting inclusion. We encourage students with disabilities to build a strong educational foundation in partnership with their local school. Improving access to equal educational opportunities for all students strengthens Erie’s potential work force.

Why is there such a need for the services Mission Empower provides? Education civil rights laws are complaint driven. Parents of children with disabilities who are concerned or have questions about the services their child is entitled to often need assistance in navigating the very complicated protections afforded by the law and advocating for their child.

~ Jill Hrinda-Patten

Our Board of Directors

Vanessa Kefauver President/Secretary

B.A. in Criminal Justice, Edinboro University of Pennsylvania; Information and Referral Specialist for five years at Voices For Independence; and a life-long advocate who was included throughout her school career.

Anna Fischer Treasurer

More than 20 years experience as a bookkeeper/staff accountant; member of the Autism Society of Northwestern PA; mother of three children; advocated for own son who has Asperger’s syndrome.

Angela Johnson Director

Lifelong advocate and founder of The RECC Center Project (Relaxation, Exercise, Creativity, Community)—One-Stop-Shop For The Mind, Body and Soul.

Johnny Johnson Director

Author/historian who owns Living History and Helping You...Helping Me; more than 35 years experience as a school teacher; in retirement, he has developed and implemented youth mentoring and tutoring programs for the City of Erie School District.

Christine Linkie Director

M.S. in Occupational Therapy from Columbia University New York NY; Licensed Occupational Therapy in Ny and Pa; Certified in sensory integration and praxes; more than 7 years experience with New York Dept. of Education specializing in inclusion support for students with disabilities; currently occupational therapist with Niagara therapy; personal family experience with disability which shaped her passion for working with the community for inclusion for all.

Anthony Murphy Introductory Director

B.S. in Sociology of Edinboro University of PA; Instructor of Braille; over five years experience as Service Coordinator at Voices For Independence; life long advocate for people with disabilities including himself.

Jeremy's Story

My son Jeremy, where do I begin? He is handsome, smart, intuitive, and many more things. He loves playing in the dirt, going to camp and riding on the ATV, but most of all he loves knowing everything about everything. My son Jeremy has all of these characteristics, strengths and interests, but he also has Asperger's Syndrome, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, and Social Anxiety.

Jeremy is now ten years old, and our family has endured everything we love about Jeremy and the things that aren't so lovable. As a family and with the help of many, many people in the social work field, the teaching arena and extended family and friends, we now enjoy Jeremy more and more each day. It was about four years ago when I met Jill Hrinde-Patten and as we got to talking, I realized Mission Empower could help our family. I immediately learned more and took advantage of the agency's services. Kathy Lutz, an advocate for Mission Empower, provided us with help in understanding evaluations, treatment plans and the rights of children who have disabilities. Kathy also attended meetings with my husband and me to listen, take notes and advise us on Jeremy's behalf.

Our family is grateful for the services provided to us through Mission Empower. Now, several years after meeting Jill, I have completed the Mission Empower Advocate training and recommend the agency whenever possible. Thank you and keep up the great job!

The Smith Family

Goals

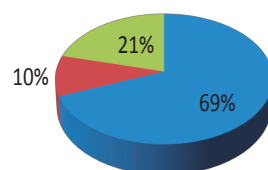
The year to come is exciting and bright... At Mission Empower, we see ourselves as a partner with schools, employers and the community to empower youth with disabilities.

- To this end, we are bringing in a national speaker, Dr. Patrick Schwarz, to give a day-long workshop on Universal Design for learning called Universal Design and Beyond: Learning Accessible for All in October of 2010.
- We want to give schools, parents and the community tools to include all children. We are working in collaboration with Gannon's Occupational Dept. to design an assessment tool to be used in classrooms determining how well they utilize Universal Design.
- We look forward to assisting and advocating alongside more families promoting inclusion with the needed supports and services in general education classrooms in local schools.
- We have been awarded a grant from the Erie Capacity Building Collaborative to develop logic models and evaluative processes to track our effectiveness. This will guide program development, improvement and show the community truly how valuable our services are.
- Turn our all volunteer organization into paid staff and increase the number of volunteers.
- Work with the Erie Community Center Coalition to advocate for inclusion for all.



Funding

- General (\$33,809)
- Educational Advocacy (\$5,075)
- Community Education (\$10,600)



General Funding Breakdown

ECBC	\$14,845
Fundraising Book	\$1,840
General Fund	\$9,739
Highmark Walk	\$3,835
Universal Design	\$3,250
Unclassified	\$300

Our Benefactors

Educators Club—\$1000+

Erie Insurance Inc.
Autism Society of NW PA
GE Foundation
Kerry and Cheryl Patten

Empowerment Club—\$500-\$999

Down Syndrome Support Gp of Erie Cty
PEAL Center
The Arc of Erie County
UCP Community Living and Support

Advocacy Circle—\$250-\$499

Bayada Nurses
Debra Thompson

Mentors—\$100-\$249

Megan and Briana Boyer
Gordon and Christina Brown
George Daransky
Kristy Farley
Angela and Johnny Johnson
Stephanie Hall
Christine Linkie
Tom and Amy Majczyk
Kirk and Jill Patten
Rudy Patten
Dr. Susan Robbins
Lois Regan
Holly and Avery Van Dyke

Youth Partner—\$50-\$99

Arthritis Associates
Frank, Kim and Landon Beachly
Amy Buttell
Kendra Eberly
Lawrence and Michelle Eimers
Renee and Ariel Fiebelkorn
Marcy Hoenes
Daniel and Mary Anne Hrinda
Margaret Pallandino
Philip and Laurel Patten
Pfeffer Insurance Agency
Marlene Pratt
Kirk Rexford
Veronica Rexford
Monet Rexford
Camden Rexford

Sponsor—\$1-\$49

Molly Anders
Mary Baird
Elizabeth Barns
Elizabeth Brandick
Nancy Chiappazzi
Jo Ann Clarkson
Kerri Cooney
Brenda Cooper
Steve Daransky
Donald and Dawn Defiori
Karen Dibble
Anna Fischer and Family

Estie Fischer
Russ Fisher
Gannon University Student
Occupational Therapy Assoc.
Bill Gross
Betty Hirsh
Kathy Hertzog
Evelyn Jones
Vanessa Kefauver
Lori Koning
Lucia Krupicz
Patricia Kuhn
Richard Linkey
William Lorei
Kathleen Lutz
Matthew Marnella
Jessica Murdock
Doug Micali
Michelle Moduszewski
Anthony Murphy
Julie Myers
Lori Nagy
Jim Nesgoda
Heather Orengia
Wes and Kim Palmer
Kevin and Luann Patten
Mrs. Polaski
Donavin Rexford
Linda Rose
Melissa Shaffer
Christine Starr
Karen Stull
Tammy-Jo Surgener
Carol Ann Taoukhi
Marcia Williams

Where would we be without our dedicated volunteers and community partners! Volunteers and community support are the back bone of M.E. We are indebted to:

- Steve Daransky, Michelle Eimers, Michelle Heverly, Jill Hrinda-Patten, Angela Johnson, Vanessa Kefauver, Rob Kocur, Anthony Murphy and Nancy Scott—the Stereotype Busters Team—for their creativity, dedication and willingness to go wherever they are needed.
- Kathleen Lutz, our volunteer Lead Educational advocate. Your wisdom and passion for supporting families and youth are extraordinary.
- Mary Christensen, our volunteer book keeper, who organizes our finances and keeps M.E. in line.
- Veronica Rexford, our volunteer marketing/assistant grant writer for your willingness to tackle any new project.
- Christine Linkie, for sharing her experience with inclusion to spearhead the Universal Design of Learning pilot project.
- The Board of Directors who guide and govern with wisdom and foresight.
- Action Printing, for printing our brochures, annual report and banner.
- Chris Mentch, of Mentch Consulting for guiding us through developing our e-newsletter and updating our web site.
- Erie Capacity Building Collaborative (ECBC) and The Nonprofit Partnership, for technical assistance and capacity building classes.
- ECBC for a grant for program design and evaluation processes.
- Erie Community Foundation, for the feasibility grant to launch the Erie Community Center Coalition.
- The Highmark Corporation, for sponsoring the Highmark Walk for a Healthy Community.
- Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council, for a grassroots grant for our "Stereotype Busters" Program
- Tops Market East 38th and West 26th Street, Wegman's West, Koldrock, Pepsi Co, and Stroehman's Bakery for donations of food and beverages that made our second annual picnic a success.
- Erie Health Spa, Gilbert's Natural Hair Care Center, Green Achers, Wendy's, Junior's Last Laugh, Splash Lagoon, Benjamin's Restaurant, Sidewalk Café, Smuggler's Warf the Erie Sea wolves, Experience Children's Museum, Erie Zoo, Chic-Fil-A, Erie Otters, Bistro 26, Dairy Queen West 26th, Erie BayHawks and the Erie Playhouse for incentives for the Highmark "Walk for a Healthy Community"

Mission Empower is an all-volunteer 501(c)3 non-profit organization providing much needed services to children who have disabilities and their families. Your tax deductible donation helps Mission Empower continue to promote inclusion in our schools and communities. To donate or for more information visit our website at www.missionempower.org or visit our Facebook page.

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