On May 7th and 8th, the Massachusetts Early Intervention Consortium (MEIC) Conference was held at the Best Western Royal Plaza Hotel in Marlborough, MA. This conference brings providers and parents together to educate; support and empower their work with the stakeholders of Early Intervention – children and families ages birth to 3.

This conference provides excellent resources for parents of children who are in or have been in, Early Intervention. The Early Intervention Parent Leadership Project (EIPLP) was thrilled to once again be able to host at least one family from each program, at this Conference. The EIPLP was able to host due in large part to the support of the Department of Public Health. Additional funding generously, contributed by Criterion Child Enrichment, Thom Child & Family Services and the Regional Consultation Programs (RCPs) allowed for additional families to attend this Conference.

There was a breadth of workshops available at the MEIC Conference this year, ranging from Infant, Toddler and Family Development, Interactive Stories, Music & Movement and everything in between. Of course, families were welcome to attend any workshops being offered. However, this year, there were even more workshops that were specifically parent and family centered, helping families to participate with ease.

On Wednesday evening, the Early Intervention Parent Leadership Project was pleased to host the annual MEIC Parent Dinner. This year marked the 23rd year of the Early Intervention Parent Leadership Project. The evening began with an opportunity for parents to mix and mingle. Both EIPLP and Family TIES of Massachusetts family staff were present. The EIPLP shared a video of families throughout the day, whose experiences had been impacted by Early Intervention. All in all, the MEIC Parent Dinner was a wonderful expression of parent commitment, creativity and initiative.

To see more photos from the MEIC Conference, visit us on FaceBook and "like" our page! To hear what parents had to say...read on to Katie’s article and MEIC Parent Quotes!

**MEIC Conference 2014**

*Massachusetts Early Intervention Consortium*

“The highlight of this year’s conference for me was connecting with other parents within the Early Intervention family. The camaraderie, instant understanding, and openness at the family dinner was priceless to me-- thank you for this opportunity.”

-Amy

“...As always, it was wonderful to see so many parents working to make a better life for all our children with disabilities. Their ideas, energy, and work are inspiring.” -LeAnne
As the parent of a child with special needs, I constantly question my ability to juggle between the necessities of one child versus a wonderful event or opportunity for another. I have an incredible, typical, healthy step daughter who I have loved since as long as she can remember and I’d say that we have the ideal close knit relationship most parents/step parents can only dream of having. Lainey was 6 years old when Charlie was born and she took becoming a big sister with such grace and an even stride that I almost felt even more guilty than if she had been jealous. When Charlie was diagnosed, we did our best to explain to Lainey everything that was going on with Charlie and that we wouldn’t have Charlie in our lives for as long as we should so that we would do our best to give her the happiest life for as long as we have her. Unfailingly, Lainey took this so well, I was uncertain whether she fully understood what we were trying to explain. Needless to say, we have had to cancel so many plans and events for Lainey due to hospitalizations or illness that I constantly feel beleaguered with guilt. So when I was given the opportunity to attend the 2014 MEIC Conference and saw that the first workshop was Sibling Issues: Fair isn’t Always Equal, I jumped gleefully at the opportunity, the fact that this workshop was hosted by none other than two of the three Hoyt brothers, I was beyond thrilled.

Charlie arrived in high fashion as usual, donning her newest tiara and sash and her favorite tutu. As soon as we entered we were greeted by the ever amazing Darla Gundler who insisted that we needed to get a picture of Charlie and Rick together (how cool?!). So we snuck in the back of the room and sat down to listen to their personal experiences on both sides, the typical child versus the child with special needs and how treatment of one can’t be compared to the other. It relieved such a tremendous burden off my shoulders and I can only hope that one day Lainey could have the same “normal” relationship with Charlie that Russ and Rick have with one another. Rick’s mother fought for inclusion in education before inclusion was even a term and the Hoyts made every facet of life equally important for Rick, not just the medical, physical and educational but also the social and functional. Learning how every member of the Hoyt family learned to communicate with Rick was astounding and I can only hope that one day we will find our own way to give Charlie the freedom to communicate with us. The workshop was everything a life with a child with special needs is rolled into a few hours, mostly funny with some serious touches.

I felt like a teenage girl meeting Justin Bieber when we got to meet Rick and Russ, I was absolutely star struck. They are so down to earth and funny, I can’t tell you how far a good sense of humor gets you when you’re living life with a child with special needs. Charlie was kind enough to share her crown with Rick and was even happy enough to give a smile (ask her photographer what it takes to get so much as a smirk out of her then you’ll understand why that’s amazing). I swear even she knew we were in the midst of real life heroes. Rick asked if I was planning on running for Team Hoyt, and despite the fact that I am grossly out of shape, I have my goals set and plan on joining Team Hoyt by summer’s end, God help me.

The MEIC Conference is such an amazing experience for anyone who has the desire to learn more, to reach out and find new approaches and techniques to helping your child or patient. It is an incredible opportunity to meet like-minded individuals and make friends based on a bond that runs way deeper than most people can comprehend. Not to mention, you just may get the opportunity to meet some of your own heroes or find out that you already know a few.

Unconventional Heroes
A Mom’s Perspective on the MEIC Conference 2014
by Katie Cone

MEIC 2014 Parent Quotes
Parents’ Perspective on the MEIC Conference

“Thank you for the opportunity to attend the conference, it was a great experience and we especially enjoyed meeting other families. We learned new ideas at some of the workshops that we are going to try at home with our daughter.” -Kristi & Geoffrey

“I went home feeling empowered and immediately put into use, knowledge I’d gained.” –Suzanne

“I love the MEIC Conference! It was very exciting to meet and connect with so many other parents from my region and around the state. I was impressed at the number of couples who were both able to be present for some or all of the to-day conference. The EIPLP team made it very easy for parents to participate.” –Paul

“Participating the MEIC Conference means two entire days that I can devote to focusing on a few key topics as they relate to my grandson but without the interruptions of daily life. As an added bonus I was able to talk with other parents who have some of the same struggles. This was my second time attending and I’m learning that I’m not alone. For as long as I am invited, I will attend. Thank you so very much!!” –Karen

Read more of what parents had to say or see more MEIC photos on our Facebook wall...www.facebook.com/EIPLP