On May 8th and 9th, the Massachusetts Early Intervention Consortium (MEIC) Conference was held at the Best Western Royal Plaza Hotel in Marlborough, MA. This conference brings practitioners, 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 generosity 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.

This year’s keynote speaker was Nancy Carlsson-Paige. As Professor Emeritus at Lesley University; founder of the University’s Center for Peaceable Schools; and, to author (and co-author) of many books and articles on media violence, conflict resolution and peaceable classroom, her talk focused on the societal trends that the influence of media and technology have on the early years of development.

There was a breadth of workshops available at the MEIC Conference this year, ranging from Awesome iPad Adaptations and Apps to Music In Me! Music Therapy Songs and Strategies for Success, 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 22nd 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 parents were present. The EIPLP shared a video of families 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...see our Dad's Perspectives and MEIC Quotes below!
Danny’s Perspective
A Dad’s Perspective on the MEIC Conference 2013
by Danny Bronx

My name is Danny. At 41 years old, I didn't think I would be a father let alone a father of a child with special needs. I didn't think my house would be full of nurses, therapists, social workers and I also didn't think my living room would be full of wheelchairs, standers, oxygen tanks and much more equipment than furniture.

At 41, I didn't think I would meet people that I truly love and respect even more than people I've known my whole life. So...I also guess it's safe to say, I didn't think I would go to an Early Intervention conference for parents.

I know you probably think "I'm a man, I don't need any help" but we do. Yes, there were not a lot of men there and it's hard to get away from work and life... but you need too, you really have to take advantage of things like this. Because let's be honest, do your friends and family know what your going through?

Here I met parents, Early Intervention specialists, and many more people who know exactly what I'm dealing with. Within ten minutes I met a parent whose child had a totally different issue, but was going through the same issues my family was going through. We hugged, cried, exchanged emails and have plans to meet up again even though we live a couple hours away from each other.

These conferences are great. You learn something, you have fun, and you bond with others – all helping to make you a better father than you already are. Dads need to attend these conferences and these conferences need dads to attend.

Derek’s Perspective
A Dad’s Perspective on the MEIC Conference 2013
by Derek Loftus

I was introduced to the world of children with special needs, parents and therapists nearly three years ago, through my daughter's journey. I have had the pleasure of meeting many nice and helpful people.

For the past 2 years, my wife and I have been asked to attend a conference that was being held for Early Intervention therapists and families – the MEIC (Massachusetts Early Intervention Consortium) Conference. I was a little skeptical of what I was getting involved in because of my line of work; we don’t really attend conferences and seminars – so I was a little nervous feeling like a fish out of water.

I soon realized that I had nothing to be worried about. I was introduced to many new faces both parents and therapists, that were attending the conference. Yes, there was no hiding the fact that dads do not make up a large percentage of the attendees at this conference. However, this did not matter as the day went on. We moved from conference room to conference room attending lectures and presentations that were full of materials and different ideas that we could use to help broaden our own child’s experience and potential. For instance, this year I attended a music therapy workshop. Before I even entered the room, from down the hall, I could hear the presenter singing away. When I entered the room I was amazed to see a room from wall to wall, full with people sitting on the floor to attend this presentation. They all had musical instruments in hand, whether it was a maraca or a drum. The presenter made this workshop so fun and hands on, that during the lecture I was thinking to myself, I am going to try this when I get home with my kids...even though I have a terrible, terrible singing voice.

Soon after the first day was finished, all the families that attended were invited to a family dinner. The Early Intervention Parent Leadership Project hosted the dinner and only families attended. This gave me a chance to talk to a few of the other fathers that were present and to see how their day was. I quickly found out, much like my own experience, that the lectures that they attended were very helpful and useful in their daily life. I was amazed to see that when the room was smaller, the concentration of dads that were present seemed to double or even triple!

My own experience as a dad being present at this conference, has helped me to gain valuable information, meet new people and gain access to a great wealth of knowledge that is available from just doing what come easy to me – which is talking. I found myself talking to everyone and anyone that would listen to me (or appear to be listening), whether it was over breakfast in the morning, lunch, (continued)
From this dad's perspective the conference was well worth attending, both from a learning aspect and also a social opportunity. Yes, during the day I learned from the presenters. But when the day was through, I met other parents that are going through similar experiences. When the conference came to a close, I realized that even though I might not be able to remember every single thing that I learned in these two days, I had made some new friends and built relationships with other families that I would feel comfortable asking for help or assistance if we needed it.

I am the proud father of a 2 1/2 year old boy with Autism. This was my second opportunity to enjoy the MEIC Conference.

As a parent, I really enjoyed attending because I was able to interact with other parents, who like me have a child with special needs. At this conference, I was not stared at when the crowd became overwhelming for my son, or he had a tantrum.

The workshops were great and for the most part, interactive. I'm not sure if my favorite was the "helping to relax" workshop or the "sing with me" workshop. I also enjoyed the fact that I was able to get away from our normal routine for two days.

I believe that many times we don't realize how many resources are out there to help us out. This conference is a great way to get hands on information and hopefully share it with others who may need it like you did. Would I go to this conference again if the opportunity were to arise again? Hands down, without a doubt I would be there!
MEIC 2013 Quotes
Parents’ Perspective on the MEIC Conference

“I really enjoyed the class on “picky eaters”. I was only able to attend on Thursday, but wish I was able to make both days after taking the class. When registering for the class I tried to gear my learning experience to where my son is now developmentally. My son, now 19 months, is a former 23 week preemie and any information I can get is always helpful, so “picky eaters” was right up our alley and I found it extremely informative. Thank you for involving the parents in this conference!” – Melissa

“My husband and I greatly benefited from attending the conference. We appreciated that several of the sessions were geared towards parents. The topics were relevant. We learned about a variety of programs that our son may be eligible for, or may assist us in managing his care. If we didn’t attend the conference I don’t know if we would have learned about these services/agencies. The conference also provided a great opportunity to speak to other parents about their child and their EI experiences. Overall the conference was a wonderful learning experience both in and outside the formal sessions. I would highly encourage other parents to attend the conference in the future.” – Kristina

I don’t know how to sum up such an amazing experience in two sentences. My advice is keep advocating for your children, stay strong, and use the resources around you! This conference was educational, organized, and inspirational! - Melissa

“What a great conference. The speakers and presenters were first rate, interesting, engaging and humorous. Thanks for treating us parents like “Rockstars” --complete with “backstage, green room with all the comfort and necessities for the day’ – Amy

“I had an amazing time at the conference! It was an incredible experience for both Charlie and I. In the two days and 5 workshops attended I walked away with more useful information than I had been able to gather on my own in almost 3 years. Being a parent of a special needs child can be incredibly overwhelming with all the uncertainty of what resources and support networks are most beneficial for your child, this conference was a fantastic opportunity to meet many like-minded parents and learn of appropriate resources that my daughter can benefit from. Thank you so much for the opportunity to attend, network and learn from some of the most professional and compassionate people I have had the honor to meet.” – Katie

“The greatest piece of advise I received at the MEIC conference was to request a copy of my son’s assessments and recommendations to review prior to the IEP team meeting. I thought this might be common knowledge but I have since learned that many parents and providers are not aware that it is your legal right.” – Nicole

“The sensory processing seminar was life changing for me. I’ve never sat in a conference room with goose bumps and tears of joy. Sensory Processing Disorder was explained in detail and, after years of feeling every diagnosis he is given isn’t quite right, a laundry list of my son’s behaviors was listed under Sensory Processing Disorder. I know feel like I can help my son obtain a true diagnosis and the help he has always needed.” – Heidi

“I only can advocate for any family who is being diagnosed with a life changing disease to take advantage of the organizations and agencies in place which exist to help and guide us parents. The changes can be overwhelming, there is so much to find out and so much to learn. The diversity of support we received from the Parent Leadership Project so far has made a big impact on planning and reorganizing our needs and our life and helps on our journey of caring for our daughters. The past conference helped us once again to gain new information, perspectives and skills. Thank you so much for that.” – Helena

“I found the conference informative and empowering. “It was encouraging to see so many parents and professionals coming together to help our children. I left with many new ideas.” – LeAnne
The Parent Leadership Project was created to support parents whose children receive Early Intervention services. The Project’s main goal is to promote lifetime advocacy, leadership skills and the development of an informed parent constituency, which will encourage Early Intervention services to be increasingly family-centered. The Project is a parent driven endeavor, which continually seeks family involvement and input regarding the needs of families enrolled in Early Intervention and is implemented by parents whose own children have received EI services. The Project staff consists of a Statewide Director, a Communications Coordinator, an EI Program Focused Monitoring Parent Coordinator & Education Coordinator and Collaboration & Outreach Coordinator. Please feel free to contact any of them with your thoughts, suggestions, and concerns.

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To receive the Parent Perspective Newsletter, a free publication, published four times a year or the Parent E-Perspective published at least two times a year, by the Parent Leadership Project, call us toll-free at (877) 353-4757 and ask to be added to the PLP mailing list or email eiplp@yahoo.com

**NEXT DEADLINE:** We welcome your input and suggestions for resources and articles. The next deadline is **July 30, 2013**. Please call our toll-free number (877) 353-4757 or email the newsletter editor at kris.levine@state.ma.us.

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