A Collaboration to Reduce Conflict and Support Families' and Kids' Learning

By Carole Conn, BASF ADR Director

Shiela comes to the school one day and sees her son's Speech Language Pathologist with a baby. She discovers that the pathologist had been out on maternity leave. She is extremely upset that this was not communicated to her. The Principal begins to explain to Shiela that a letter was mailed out to all families explaining the maternity leave and that the district had worked to find a substitute provider, without success. Shiela is so upset she refuses to talk to the Principal and demands that her son's services missed sessions be made up as soon as possible.

When communications falter, when learning assessments and individual education plans have not been implemented as expected or when a limitation of resources has created an interruption in services, high emotions, misunderstandings and mistrust can develop. This story is one example where such conflict between those invested in a child's learning disrupts a child's progress. A new approach and unique collaboration to de-escalate conflict in special education and restore relationship and understanding now exists to support families.

Beginning in the fall of 2014, The Director of the Mediation Services Program at the Bar Association of San Francisco and the Chief of Special Education and other key personnel at the San Francisco Unified School District's Special Education Department started a conversation about bringing non-adversarial dispute resolution strategies into special education. Quickly, Support for Families of Children with Disabilities was brought in as a critical partner to support a new avenue for resolution. An innovative tool called the “Collaborative Conference” was created to resolve differences between families and the district with the larger goal to improve, restore, and strengthen over time, the consistency, civility and health of communications for the academic life of a child with special needs.

The SFUSD-BASF-Support for Families of Children with Disabilities (SFUSD-BASF-SFCD) collaboration offers the two-hour Collaborative Conference, or mediation, facilitated by BASF’s panel of mediators trained special education. SFCD Family Resource Specialists prepare families, answer questions, educate about processes and otherwise, attend the Collaborative Conferences to support families in the session. Under the collaboration, SFCD also offers conference space for the Collaborative Conferences, childcare, and after-hours availability, if needed.

The success and innovative model of the program has garnered state and national attention. For three consecutive years in a row, program colleagues have presented at the Special Education Local Plan Area Conference, an annual conference of special education educators, professionals and administrators across the state. In 2018, the program was invited to present at the national CADRE Conference, which is the National Center on Dispute Resolution in Special Education with great interest in the approaches and partnership. What distinguishes the SFUSD-BASF-SFCD program from other dispute resolution methods used in special education is the provision of services through a neutral, outside, non-profit provider of mediation services and the critical support offered by another outside non-profit, Support for Families. This is important for engendering trust both among families and the district.

The project is now going into its fourth year of operation having attained successful outcomes: The number of formal complaints filed has dropped by 44% over the last three years, and the program has received over 200 referrals for services.

With the SFUSD 2025 vision in mind, “to provide every student quality instruction and equitable support in order to thrive in the 21st century”, the BASF-SFUSD-SFCD collaboration strives for the same. Clear understandings and trusted relationships are important to reaching these goals. We look forward to the coming year and continuing to reach for the success of every child with special needs.

For more information, contact Joe Goyos, at Support for Families with Children with Disabilities at jgoyos@supportforfamilies.org or 415-282-7494 x118 or Carole Conn, at the Bar Association of San Francisco at cconn@sfbbar.org or 415-782-8934.
Calendar of Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event Description</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan 1 Holiday - Office Closed</td>
<td>All Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan 2 IEP Clinic - Cantonese</td>
<td>6:00pm - 8:00pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan 9 IEP Clinic - English</td>
<td>4:00pm - 6:00pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan 11 How to Address Difficult Behaviors</td>
<td>9:00AM - 12:30PM</td>
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<td>Jan 11 Vocational Training (En/Ch)</td>
<td>1:00pm - 3:00pm</td>
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<td>Jan 14 Respite and Personal Asst. (En/Sp)</td>
<td>6:00pm - 8:00pm</td>
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<td>Jan 16 IEP Clinic - Spanish</td>
<td>4:00pm - 6:00pm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan 18 PMP - Parent to Parent (Spanish, pt. 1)</td>
<td>10:00AM - 2:00PM</td>
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<td>Jan 20 Holiday - Office Closed</td>
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<td>Jan 23 Transition to Adulthood Clinic</td>
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<td>Jan 24 Holiday - Office Closed</td>
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<td>Jan 25 PMP - Parent to Parent (Spanish, pt. 2)</td>
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<td>Jan 28 Respite and Personal Asst. (En/Ch)</td>
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<td>Jan 29 Info on Student Assignment Redesign</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jan 30 Vocational Training (En/Sp)</td>
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<td>February 2020</td>
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<td>Feb 6 IEP Clinic - Cantonese</td>
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<td>Feb 8 Kidpower</td>
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<td>Feb 11 Residential, Sup’d &amp; Indep. Living</td>
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<td>Feb 13 IEP Clinic - English</td>
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<td>Feb 17 Holiday - Office Closed</td>
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<td>Feb 18 Residential, Sup’d &amp; Indep. Living</td>
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<td>Feb 20 IEP Clinic - Spanish</td>
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<td>Feb 20 Supplemental Security, SSI and SSDI</td>
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<td>Feb 27 Transition to Adulthood Clinic</td>
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<td>Mar TBD Supplemental Security, SSI and SSDI</td>
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Educational Workshops and Clinics

Learn about resources, rights, and responsibilities in monthly parent/ professional workshops and weekly small-group clinics. Caregiving for children and interpretation services are available with advance reservation for clinics and workshops.

**Workshops**

- **KidPower - Child Protection Workshop for Adults - Positive Peer Communication Skills**
  - Saturday, February 8, 9:00 AM - 12:30 PM
  - Parents, educators, and other adult leaders will learn social safety skills to keep kids safe with people! This class focuses on issues between peers and siblings at school, out in the world, at home...Everywhere! KidPower skills prepare people to develop healthy relationships and make safe choices with others. This workshop focuses on skills & solutions for peer/sibling issues, including bullying; stranger safety is not included.

- **Residential, Supported, and Independent Living Services**
  - English and Spanish: Tuesday, February 11, 5:30 PM - 7:30 PM
  - English and Cantonese: Tuesday, February 18, 5:30 PM - 7:30 PM
  - Residential services are for those who prefer to live in a licensed community care home, who need the care and supervision provided by such a facility. Supported living services are services and support for persons to live in homes that they own, lease, or rent. Independent living services is training in areas necessary for persons to live independently without supervision and support services.

- **Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) Workshop**
  - Thursday, February 20, 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM
  - This workshop will provide general information about eligibility and maintaining benefits for SSI and SSDI. It will include information about SSI for a child, age 18 redeterminations, and disabled adult children receiving SSDI under someone else’s account (i.e., deceased, disabled, or retired parent).

- **Clinic**
  - Individualized Education Program (IEP) Clinic
  - Learn about special education law, the IEP process, what to do when things aren’t working, and how to become a more active and effective team member. Bring your questions and real life issues.

- **Chinese: 1st Thursday, 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM**
  - English: 2nd Thursday, 4:00 PM - 6:00 PM
  - Spanish: 3rd Thursday, 4:00 PM - 6:00 PM

Transition to Adulthood Clinic

Successfully navigate the transition from school to adulthood. Learn how to navigate special education transition services and how to effectively participate in the development of your child’s transition plan. Appropriate for parents of children ages 12+. 4th Thursday, 4:00 PM - 6:00 PM

Parent Mentor Program

**Parent to Parent**

Participants will learn about the Parent Mentor Program and receive interactive training on positive listening and communication skills. If you would like to sign up, please contact the following people:

- Joe Goyos (English)
  - Phone: 415-282-7494 x118
  - Email: jgoyos@supportforfamilies.org

- Olga Maldonado (Spanish)
  - Phone: (415) 282-7494 x121
  - Email: omaldonado@supportforfamilies.org

Workshops and Clinics are FREE and held at Support for Families, 1663 Mission Street, Suite 700, San Francisco (between Duboce Street and S. Van Ness Avenue). Pre-registration is required. To attend, reserve childcare and/or interpretation services, you must register at least one week in advance by calling (415) 920-5040 or emailing info@supportforfamilies.org.
Support Groups & Parent Child Interactive Groups

Support groups are FREE and held at Support for Families unless otherwise indicated. Childcare can be provided unless otherwise indicated but MUST be reserved in advance. If you are interested in participating in any of these groups, or if you are interested in a specific issue, call (415) 920-5040 or e-mail info@supportforfamilies.org for more information. We have staff who speak English, Spanish, and Cantonese. Come to a support group to find solutions to challenges, learn advocacy skills and explore resources. Support groups provide a network for families to gain strength by sharing experiences with peers.

PARENT SUPPORT GROUPS

Autism Parent Group
Meets 4th Tuesday of the month
6:30 PM - 8:15 PM

Cantonese-Speaking Parent Group
Meets 2nd Saturday of the month
1:00 PM - 3:00 PM

Chinatown Child Development Center (CCDC) Group
For Cantonese-speaking families of children with special needs. Meets at the CCDC
720 Sacramento Street
3rd Monday of the month;
9:30 AM - 12:00 PM

Families of Adults with Disabilities
Meets 1st Monday of the month
6:30 PM - 8:00 PM

Families of Children Birth to 5
Meets 1st Thursday of the month
6:00 PM - 7:30 PM

Parents of School Aged Children Group
Meets 3rd Thursday of the month
6:00 PM - 7:30 PM

Prader-Willi Parent Group
Meets quarterly on Saturdays.
Next date is January 18.
10:30 AM - 1:30 PM

Spanish-Speaking Parent Group
Meets on 2nd Wednesday of the month
10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Transition and Adulthood Group
Meets on 3rd Monday of the month
6:30 PM - 8:00 PM

UCSF Inpatient Parent Group
Meets at Family House
540 Mission Bay Boulevard N.
every Thursday
1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

GROUPS FOR YOUTH

Conversation & Social Club for Transition & Young Adult AAC Users
Meets at the Noe Valley Public Library Meeting Room,
every Monday
4:30 PM - 5:30 PM

Special Family Events & Volunteer Opportunities

Special Family Events
Special Family Events and activities provide opportunities for families of children with special health care needs and disabilities to experience new activities in a stress-free, accepting space.

The supported environment is welcoming and encourages families to connect their children to the community and try something new. Check out our special events below for more information and dates.

Family Access Day at the Aquarium of the Bay
Saturday, February 22, 9:00 AM—11:00 AM
Registration opens Thursday, January 23 at 10:00 AM

Family Access Day at the San Francisco Zoo
Sunday, March 8, 9:00 AM - 11:30 AM
Registration opens Thursday, February 6 at 10:00 AM

Family Access Day at the California Academy of Sciences
Sunday, April 26, 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM
Registration opens Thursday, March 26 at 10:00 AM

Information & Resource Conference 2020
Saturday, March 21, 2020, 8:30 AM - 3:30 PM
at John O’Connell High School. Registration opens Tuesday, February 18 at 9:30 AM.

Call (415) 920-5040 to register for any of these events. Space is limited and on a first come, first served basis. You can also visit our website at www.supportforfamilies.org.

Volunteer Opportunities
Volunteers are extremely important to the work we do. We could not offer our huge range of programs, events, and workshops without our treasured volunteers.

We are currently seeking volunteer photographers to assist us in documenting our events, conferences and fund raisers. If you are interested in volunteering with us, please contact Rachel Klegon, the Special Events and Volunteer Manager, at rklegon@supportforfamilies.org or (415) 282-7494, ext. 126.

Group Volunteer Opportunities
We welcome the opportunity to work with groups and corporations. If you are interested in learning more or connecting with us, please email Rachel Klegon at rklegon@supportforfamilies.org.
All services are free of charge:
- Phone Line & Drop-In Center
- Information & Resources
- Resource Library
- Support Groups
- Parent Mentor Program
- Educational Workshops
- Special Family Events
- Short-Term Counseling
- Community Outreach
- Parent Child Interactive Groups
- Website: www.supportforfamilies.org

This newsletter is published quarterly in English, Spanish, and Chinese. If you have a question or comment, email info@supportforfamilies.org

Support for Families
1663 Mission Street, Suite 700
San Francisco, CA 94103
T: (415) 282-7494
F: (415) 282-1226

Family Resource Center Warmline, Information and Referral
1663 Mission Street, Suite 700
San Francisco, CA 94103
T: (415) 920-5040

Mission Statement
The purpose of Support for Families is to ensure that families of children with any kind of disability or special health care need, and the providers who serve them, have the knowledge and support to make informed choices that enhance children's development and well-being. We promote partnership with families, professionals and the community at large, because it is through partnership that we create a community where our children can flourish.

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How You Can Help - Donate
All services and events, even childcare, are always free of charge to encourage participation by all families. With the demand for services greater than ever, your donations help make this possible. A gift to Support for Families means that families of children with special needs will be better prepared to help their children and that more children with disabilities will live their lives with dignity and opportunity.

Send a check to our address or give online at http://bit.ly/donatesfcd. Every gift can help make a difference in the life of a child with special needs.

Support for Families strives to present families and professionals with a wide range of views and options in its materials and trainings.

The materials and trainings are not necessarily comprehensive, are not meant to be exhaustive, nor are they an endorsement of the author and/or presenter.

If you would like to offer feedback or if you know of additional resources, speakers and/or materials that may be helpful, please contact us at info@supportforfamilies.org.