

Circle of Friends - The Path to Inclusion Final Report Project Objectives

Listed below are the Project Objectives for Circle of Friends' (CoF) School Duplication Program funded by the Autism Speaks Family Services Grant (AS):

- A. Two new school districts will each establish CoF
- B. Four workshop trainings will be conducted with each of the two participating school districts.
- C. An advisory team will be established at each school site; Advisors will be guided and trained to set up CoF at their schools.
- D. At each school site within each district, 8-10 students with autism spectrum disorder along with 20-50 general education students will be recruited to participate in the program.
- E. Students with special needs will be fully included at lunch 1-2 times per week throughout the school year.
- F. Non-disabled students will be trained to model and shape social skills for their new friends with autism.
- G. Within two months of the first Workshop, inclusion lunches will begin.
- H. A student officer board will be established to work with and support advisors.
- I. Students participating in CoF will be trained to give Disability Awareness presentations to their peers.
- J. Non-disabled students in 5 classes will listen to Disability Awareness presentations in Year 1, completing a questionnaire at the end of the presentation.
- K. Students with autism will participate in additional extracurricular activities with their non-disabled peers.
- L. Advisors will observe that their students experience increased inclusion, self - confidence and independence.
- M. Program will be evaluated.

Circle of Friends - The Path to Inclusion Final Report Project Steps

A.

- Schools were identified by administrators in the contracted districts.
- Each participating school identified at least three staff members to serve as CoF advisors for their sites.
- Advisors were guided to identify and introduce the program to student participants both with and without autism.

B.

- Program Facilitators arranged workshop dates with each district administrator.
- Between the time of the application and the start of the grant period, CoF's newly formed Education Task Force determined that the School Duplication Program would consist of 3 workshops each year for two years instead of four.
- Additional districts were added to the grant, which compensated for funded workshops.

C.

- Once the contract was signed, District Administrators contacted participating schools and had them identify at least 3 staff members who would serve as CoF Advisors.
- Three workshops dates were set and completed for each district, with the exception of Middletown. Due to illness, one Facilitator had to postpone their third workshop to May 17.
 1. The workshops provided training in identifying students to participate in the program, teaching Advisors how to work with general education students to model and shape social language skills of students with autism, and how to run the lunch program in the natural environment.
 2. Workshops focused on setting up the program on the campus, recruiting and identifying participating students, lunch pairings, social skills training, role of Advisors, parent meetings, etc.

D.

- Advisors were trained by Program Facilitators on how to recruit students with and without autism for the program.
- They were also taught how to recruit general education students for CoF by visiting classrooms.

E.

- At the workshops, Advisors were trained by Program Facilitators to identify days and locations for the lunch program.

F.

- Advisors were trained at each workshop on ways to teach general education students to model and shape appropriate social skills for peers with autism.
- Challenges that arose with students were discussed both at workshops and through email and phone support between workshops.

G.

- Workshops provided the training medium on establishing lunch programs of inclusion.

- Phone and email support between workshops helped advisors trouble-shoot challenges that arose.
- Advisors identified the days for the program and best locations.

H.

- Advisors were trained by Program Facilitators at workshop 3 to develop a student officer board.
- Year 1 – student officers are selected by Advisors.
- Year 2 – students, at the discretion of Advisors, go through an interview process, giving them an opportunity to practice interview skills for college and jobs.

I.

- The Education Task Force determined that Advisors should be trained during Workshop 4 or 5 on how to implement Disability Awareness (DA) trainings for their students.

J.

- Advisors are trained by Program Facilitators to teach their students about the D.A. Presentations.
- Advisors train their general education students at their site to present.
- General education students are grouped to present to peers in classes.
- Presentations to general education classes are organized by advisors.

K.

- At workshops, opportunities to bring inclusion into extra-curricular activities were discussed.
- Advisors planned off-campus activities for all students.

L.

- Through the development of the CoF program, inclusive lunches, and extracurricular activities, inclusion increased.

M.

- Schools in all districts will complete surveys.
- The Education Task Force recently developed a Data Collection Form that will be completed at the final workshop of this year by the Program Facilitators to track data and progress. In the future, this form will be used at each workshop.

Circle of Friends – The Path to Inclusion Project Outcomes

A.

- CoF was able to use Autism Speaks funds to start our School Duplication Program in 4 new school districts (totaling 20 schools).
- A total of 18 of the 20 schools established CoF on their campuses, ranging from elementary schools to high schools.

San Benito SELPA Schools,* Hollister, CA:

Margaret Maze Middle School, Rancho San Justo Middle School, Spring Grove School K-8, Tres Pinos School K-8, Anzar High School, Southside School K-8, Cerra Vista School K-6

**This a rural area, so the schools in this SELPA are all very small.*

Middletown Township Public Schools, Middletown, NJ:

Bayshore Middle School, High School South, Thompson Middle School, Thorne Middle School

Roswell Independent School District Schools, Roswell, NM:

Goddard High School, Mesa Middle School, Roswell High School, Sierra Middle School *One school has been delayed due to staffing issues.*

San Marcos Unified School District Schools, San Marcos, CA:

Carillo Elementary, La Costa Meadows Elementary, Mission Hills High School, San Elijo Middle School, Woodland Park Middle School. *One school has been delayed due to staffing issues.*

B.

- All districts received 3 workshops over this year – a total of 12 workshops were held (Middletown's third workshop will be held on May 17th due to Program Facilitator's illness.)

C.

- Each of the 18 schools has established advisory teams that run the inclusion program at their school and has established a CoF program on their campus, bringing a better understanding and acceptance of differences to their schools.
- Students with autism have a circle of friends (2-3 general education students) built around them at least one time per week. Some schools have two or more days/week. One school has been delayed due to staffing issues

D.

- Of the 15 schools reporting to date, a total of 138 special education students, with about 58 with autism spectrum disorder, and 321 general education students participated in the new chapters. These numbers will continue to grow as the chapters enter into year 2 of the program.

E.

- 80% of the total schools with programs have lunch circles one time a week and 10% meet for lunch two times a week.

F.

- 100% of general education students participating in CoF have been trained to model and shape social language skills for their new friends with autism and other special needs.

G.

- 65% of the total schools started inclusive lunch circles within 2 months of beginning the program; 5% within 3 months; 20% within 4 months.
- One school had part time staff and has been hesitant to start the program without additional support. District administrator is committed to working with this school to get the needed support. The other school had key staff members out for personal issues.

H.

- The Education Task Force determined that the development of the student officer board should typically not take place until after the third workshop at the end of year one. Only about 5 schools have established an officer board thus far.

I.

- The Education Task Force determined that Disability Awareness training would occur in Year 2, at Workshop 4 or 5. It is therefore too soon to have conducted the trainings. However, 15% of the schools decided to train their general education students to do presentations in 5 classes next month.

J.

- 15% of schools will conduct Disability Awareness training in 5 classes next month. For the rest, it is too soon as this training is now typically conducted in year 2 of program.

K

- 50% of the schools have started extracurricular activities with their students with autism and other disabilities beyond the lunch circles. The other 50% is expected to start in year 2.

L.

60% of the schools have completed the survey to date. Responses when asked "how has CoF helped your students" in the following ways: 1) self confidence: 8% completely; 50% very much; 25% somewhat, and 17% slightly; 2) inclusion: 50% very much; 25% somewhat; 25% slightly; 3) independence: 33% very much; 42% somewhat; and 25% slightly.

M.

- Two forms of evaluation have been completed. Advisors from 60% of the schools completed online surveys, the results of which have been reported above. The rest of the surveys are still to come. In addition, the CoF Workshop Data Collection Form was done during the final workshop of this year for each, also reflecting above outcome results.