

EMPOWER

A NEWSLETTER FOR **ask** FAMILIES & FRIENDS

ADVOCACY
SERVICES FOR
KIDS

Raising kids can be tough. If you need help... Just ASK.

NEW THIS WINTER AT ASK:

Hello readers! Hope you have been staying dry and toasty whenever possible during the extraordinary winter conditions we have experienced this year. As the year transitions from 2013 to 2014, Advocacy Services for Kids is also undergoing change. With gracious funding from the Kalamazoo Community Foundation, we have recently completed our move from the Arcus building to our new location at 216 Balch Street, Kalamazoo MI, 49001. While our office address has changed, our mission, vision and values remain the same. As you might imagine, the disruption of any move sparks a desire to reset, refocus and grow anew. In reflecting on where ASK has been and our vision for the future we have decided to use this time of transition to strengthen our connection to you, our supporters, as well as the community at large. To achieve this, we have planned targeted outreach initiatives to consumers and providers in the coming months. As we acquaint ourselves with our new office and neighborhood, we here at ASK would also like to take this issue to begin reintroducing our caring and dedicated staff to the community, as well as reminding our readers about some of our programs.



EMPOWERING PARENTS TO HELP THEIR CHILDREN SUCCEED

Imagine the following scenario: you are a camel. Your back has just broken and nearby the challenges of parenting remain, showing no signs of letting up their straw-throwing barrage. You are not alone, camel; many of us have been there! It is in times like this that a parenting handbook would be nice, wouldn't it? Not just a guide to kids or teens but a handy resource including how to better handle difficult situations with a school or maybe even a law enforcement official. Now, there are certainly many great resources for parenting out there. Sadly, no magical and unequivocal parenting handbook exists because each child's relationship to their caregiver, their world and themselves is unique. Support Partners recognize that parents are a child's best advocate and should be empowered to use their voices. A Family Support Partner brings her personal experiences and knowledge of raising a child with mood, emotional, and behavioral challenges and uses it to empower families and give them hope.

At a Glance:

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Funding for ASK comes from:



Meet Christine!



Greetings! I have been with ASK for over 5 years as a Family Support Partner. I love meeting our families and getting to know who they are and figuring out with them what we can do to help their family be the best they can be when going through trying times. As a parent myself with a daughter with a diagnosed mental illness, I know how difficult and frustrating the systems can be to get the help that our children need. And sometimes more importantly, I know firsthand how that diagnosis and the stigma involved with it can affect the entire family. We had to find a whole new "normal" and accepting that mental illness and everything that goes along with it had "happened to us", was a huge part of that. I want to instill hope to our families and help them see the light at the end of the tunnel. It's okay! I want people not to be embarrassed or ashamed (there's that stigma) about what they are experiencing because they are not alone. Life happens to everyone. I want us to talk about it, not isolate it. We can help each other with our experiences much more efficiently if everyone doesn't try to hide it. I'm an open book and I always tell people,

don't judge me because of my story because if you don't have one, someday you will! I hope sharing my family's troubles can help another family through theirs.

I'm the mother of 3 beautiful children, an 18-year-old boy and a set of 9-year-old boy/girl twins. Both of my boys have been diagnosed with ADHD and other emotional challenges. When my youngest son was in kindergarten, the school he attended suspended him indefinitely and pushed to expel him for his behavior. I knew what they were doing wasn't right and that they hadn't done all they could to help him, but I didn't know how to advocate effectively. At that point, I began searching for help and found ASK. I reached out to ASK and met a wonderful Family Support Partner. She helped me navigate the system and understand the rights my son had to an appropriate education. With her guidance and support, she helped me write a letter to request a Special Education evaluation. The district declared him ineligible because his behavior was not impacting his academics and as a result of her encouragement, I was able to have him at least receive tutoring to keep him socially and educationally stimulated so he could succeed. Frustrated with the thought of constantly battling the school to get my son help, we moved to a district that had a reputation for working with children with special needs. I felt overwhelmed and defeated but when the new school year started my FSP gave me the confidence to pursue Special Education again. Once he was evaluated and began receiving services, things began to improve. Each year has been better than the year before because of the partnerships I have made with the school staff. In the fall of 2012, I became a Family Support Partner at ASK because I wanted to help others as ASK helped me. While I am still learning, my goal is to empower other families and support them through their journeys.

Meet Corrie!



ASK GUIDING MISSION: To empower families, behavior and emotional support, training, collaborating with parents to improve the world. OUR: Parents will be respected advocates in the... V: ASK members are... interact... with... members... Call... Get... Emp...

WHAT IS CALLING ALL YOUTH?

The continued success of our youth programming depends on the hard work and dedication of our Youth Involvement Coordinator, Kristina Dristy and Peer Mentor, Maggie Hartness (Pictured Below). They had this to say about the Calling All Youth Programming:

“Calling All Youth is the youth advisory board for the Kalamazoo System of Care. The advisory board is a group of 15-17 year old youth who have personal experience living with a mood, emotional or behavioral (MEB) challenge, or are a family member of a person with an MEB challenge. These youth are ready to take on a leadership role and provide feedback to professionals about System of Care services.

CAY exists to empower youth to use their voices to create positive changes for young people in our community. We provide teens with an opportunity to advocate for themselves and others, and to overcome negative stigmas attached to youth who are experiencing mental health challenges. CAY is a safe space for teens to share their stories and be part of a youth driven team where everyone’s voice is valued.

“CAY exists to empower youth to use their voices to create positive changes for young people in our community.”



Youth Involvement Coordinator Kristina Dristy (Left) & Peer Mentor Maggie Hartness (Right)



advocacy services for kids

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SLIDING INTO THIS ISSUE:

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