

Social Work in the Public Eye



Catherine A. Hogan

Catherine A. Hogan, executive director of Inclusion Teaming, was interviewed for a story in the Westport News in Westport, Conn.

The article explained that the nonprofit organization helps special-needs children learn to improve their communication skills by pairing them with volunteers from area high schools.

Hogan said in the story that three current clients with Asperger's syndrome, a form of autism characterized by social isolation and communication deficiencies, are paired with three of the student volunteers.

The students work with the special needs children for 75-minutes a week.

"Kids with differences usually have a hard time with some group-work skills, such as taking turns," Hogan said. "We use fun tasks to remind them that there are certain things they must do as we go through the teaming process."

They also exercise together.

The sessions include discussions about listening, giving feedback and being tolerant of another's point of view.

Hogan also coordinates anti-bullying programs for educators and professionals, the story explained.

"One of the major reasons children are bullied, she said, is that others cannot understand why they're acting seemingly different," the article said. "However, if (special-needs children) could practice interacting socially with other people their age — and, likewise, if teens who have no skills differentials could spend more time being with those with special needs - understanding, acceptance and tolerance would flourish."

Although Inclusion Teaming has about 45 students on its roster of volunteers, Hogan said she hopes more students with atypical communication skills will step forward and join the groups that are being formed.

"We don't care what their atypical skills are, because we pair children with similar learning profiles together anyway," Hogan told the newspaper.
