

WE BELONG! Honors Inclusion Teaming, a New Non Profit Corporation located in Westport CT, for Excellence in the Promotion of Inclusion



WE BELONG in Fairfield County is a group of parents, educators, and service providers dedicated to the inclusion of children with disabilities in education, recreation, and employment throughout Fairfield County. Awards to twelve outstanding members of the community, who promote excellence in inclusion, were given on Monday June 14th at the Westport Library, McManus Room. The program was sponsored by the Connecticut Down Syndrome Congress.

Catherine Hogan, CEO and Founder of Inclusion Teaming was the award winner from Westport. Catherine notes that ordinarily, students with skill difference (with or without disability) and typical peers sit with each other in classrooms or pass each other in hallways with little understanding about the differences in social and academic performance that exist between them. Sometimes both groups of students share experiences with each other through mentoring or buddy programs or through class projects, but these experiences do not provide instruction on how different minds work or how to communicate effectively with different minds in the workplace. Catherine states that knowledge about differences decreases aggressive responses towards students that are not understood. She adds that 65 % of students are NOT involved in bullying, and this group of students would benefit from knowledge about how to work with effectively with people who have skill differences. An exciting benefit for students who have skill differences and an Individualized Education Plan is a unique and meaningful Transition experience.

Inclusion Teaming offers an interactive course on communication diversity to students with skill difference and typical peers from private and public schools. Small classes integrate students from both groups. Students explore brain-based differences in the way individuals see and use information. They learn how perceptions of information influence social response. Inclusion Teaming uses a structured group format, introduces guest speakers from multiple career fields, provides practice opportunities for communicating about workplace topics, and gives all students a year of free access to career exploring posts. The fee is waived for students earning community service credit, and scholarships are possible. Certificates of achievement and letters of recommendation are the same for both groups.

The goals of *Inclusion Teaming* are:

1. To increase knowledge about differences among student populations
2. To increase understanding between students with skill differences and typical peers
3. To reduce acts of bullying to students with differences
4. To provide a meaningful transition opportunity for students who receive special education services
5. To prepare students for communicating with people with skill differences in the workplace
6. To provide funding for participation to students whose families have a demonstrated financial need

Catherine Hogan is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Certified Professional Educator. Catherine graduated from Smith Phi Beta Kappa, with an AB degree in Clinical Psychology. Catherine completed her Masters degree clinical social work at the Smith School for Social Work, with a graduate award for her thesis on cross-cultural relationships. She has practiced as a school social worker, parent advocate, private practitioner. In addition, Catherine is a clinical instructor at the Yale Child Study Center, Mental Health Consultant for Yale Behavioral Health, and member of the Ethics Committee for the NASW CT. She maintains a education specialty practice in Westport.

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Some of the nominators for Inclusion Teaming were: Jean Schoenleber, Early Childhood Intervention Coordinator, Clinical Instructor Yale Child Study Center; Mary Gambardella, Partner at Wiggin and Dana and member of their Diversity Committee; Merieta Bayati, Administrative Assistant, Diversity and Inclusion Yale University; John Ralbovsky, Director of Exploring/Learning for Life Program CT; Patricia Stacy, Institute for Excellence, Yale New Haven Health System; and Jerry Sells, Digital Compositor, Industrial Light and Magic.