



Family Support Center

at Northwest Tri-County Intermediate Unit 5

Summer 2026 Newsletter

CONNECT WITH ME

Hello Everyone.

My name is **Michele Hecker**
I am the Family Support Center
Coordinator at IU5. I am here to
support you through your special
education journey, which can feel
overwhelming at times. I can help
you discover disability resources,
find community events, and connect
with support groups. I can also
provide support by attending IEP
meetings with you. If you have
questions or concerns about your
child's experience in Special
Education, please feel free to reach
out. I'm here to help!
Call **814-450-3345** or email
FSC@iu5.org.

SEASONAL CELEBRATIONS

JUNE 2026

June 6 - Visually Impaired People Day

June 13 - Global Wellness Day

June 20 - Summer Solstice

June 21 - Father's Day

June 27- Helen Keller Day

Helen Keller was an author, activist, lecturer, and advocate who was deaf-blind. She became a powerful voice for people with disabilities, overcoming significant challenges and inspiring others through her achievements. This day is observed on her birthday to honor her resilience and lasting impact.

JULY 2026

July 2 - Civil Rights Act Anniversary

On July 2, 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a transformative law outlawing discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. This historic legislation was a cornerstone of the Civil Rights Movement, ending segregation in public places, prohibiting employment discrimination, and laying the foundation for greater equality in the United States.

July 4 - Independence Day

July 15 - Developmental Disability Professionals Day

July 25 - World Drowning Prevention Day

July 26 - American Disabilities Act Anniversary

AUGUST 2026

August 2 - American Family Day

August 21 - International Self-Care Day

August 30 - National Grief Awareness Day

National Grief Awareness Day is dedicated to recognizing the reality of grief and encouraging open conversations around loss and healing.





July is Disability Pride Month



Every July, communities across the United States recognize Disability Pride Month. It's a time to celebrate the strength, achievements, identities, and contributions of people with disabilities. Disability Pride Month also serves as an important reminder that disability is a natural part of human diversity and that every person deserves inclusion, respect, accessibility, and equal opportunity.

Disability Pride Month is observed in July to commemorate the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) on July 26, 1990. The ADA was a landmark civil rights legislation that helped protect individuals with disabilities from discrimination in employment, education, transportation, public spaces, and many other areas of daily life.

Today, Disability Pride Month is about much more than legislation. It is about recognizing that people with disabilities are valuable members of every community. Disabilities may be visible or invisible, present from birth or acquired later in life, and can affect people in many different ways. Disability Pride encourages individuals to embrace their identities without shame and challenges society to remove barriers that prevent full participation.

According to the CDC, more than 1 in 4 adults in the United States lives with a disability. People with disabilities are our neighbors, coworkers, students, family members, and friends. Yet many still face obstacles related to accessibility, healthcare, education, employment, transportation, and social inclusion.

Disability Pride Month is an opportunity to move beyond awareness and toward meaningful inclusion. By listening to disabled voices, celebrating differences, and working together to remove barriers, we help create communities where everyone can thrive.



DID YOU KNOW???



Alarming Facts About Screen Time and Child Development

Children ages 8–12 spend an average of 5–6 hours per day on screens, while teens average 8–9 hours outside of schoolwork. Excessive screen time has been linked to delays in attention, language, social skills, emotional regulation, and problem-solving, especially in younger children. Blue light can also disrupt sleep by interfering with melatonin production.

More screen time often means less time for outdoor play, reading, face-to-face interaction, and physical activity. Heavy social media use may also contribute to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and social comparison in adolescents.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends screen-free times, device-free meals, outdoor play, and keeping screens out of bedrooms at night. Technology can be a valuable tool when used intentionally and in moderation, but healthy development depends on relationships, movement, creativity, and real-world experiences. Educational, supervised screen use is very different from passive scrolling or endless video viewing.



UPCOMING COMMUNITY EVENTS

Monday Music in the Woods – Asbury Woods

Mondays, June 1 through July 27, 2026, 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Free and open to the public. Visitors are encouraged to bring their lawn chairs or a blanket to enjoy the show. The 2026 Performers and Food Trucks are as follows:

June 1, 2026 – Performer: BB2 – EclecticDuo, Food Truck: Mule Creek Grille
June 8, 2026 – Performer: Angelo & Friends, Food Truck: Edogg's
June 15, 2026 – Performer: Tommy Link, Food Truck: Passalinqua's
June 22, 2026 – Performer: George & Ray Trio, Food Truck: BBS
June 29, 2026 – Performer: 2 For the Show, Food Truck: Long Island Lunch Wagon
July 6, 2026 – Performer: Key West Express Liite, Food Truck: Underdog BBQ
July 13, 2026 – Performer: Kokomo Time Band, Food Truck: Brady's Chuck Wagon
July 20, 2026 – Performer: Kate Kruszewski, Food Truck: Atacolyse
July 27, 2026 – Performer: Rankin & Schell, Food Truck: A Waffle Miracle

Asbury Woods, 4105 Asbury Road, Erie, PA 16506

For more information, visit: www.asburywoods.org/events/monday-music-in-the-woods

Free Family Movie Night – Victory Family Church Meadville Campus

Monday, June 1, 2026, 5:30 p.m., 6:00 p.m., and 6:30 p.m.

Movie feature: Zootopia 2.

They have everything you need for the perfect family night out: complimentary popcorn and free soda for all attendees. Plan to arrive early and enjoy live entertainment, including Magic Steve, the balloon artist bringing creativity to life, and the Tree Family Party Piggies.

The Movies at Meadville, 11155 Highline Drive, Meadville, PA 16335

For more information visit: www.eriereader.com/calendar/50205/free-family-movie-night

2026 Sunset Music Series – Beach 1 at Presque Isle State Park

Wednesdays, June 17, 2026, through July 15, 2026, 5:30 – 8:30 p.m.

Each week, attendees can look forward to two live bands, local food trucks, ice cream, hula-hoop playshops, and extended swimming hours - all set against the backdrop of Lake Erie's beautiful summer sunsets at Beach 1. Bands for each event will be announced.

Presque Isle State Park, 1 Peninsula Drive, Erie, PA 16506

For more information visit: www.discoverpi.com/events/upmc-sunset-music-series

Lagoon By Pontoon

Weekends (Fri, Sat, Sun) May 22, 2026, through September 6, 2026, departing at 9:00 AM, 10:30 AM, and 12:00 PM.

Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources staff and volunteers offer a free interpretive pontoon boat ride throughout Misery Bay and the lagoons. The rides are first-come, first-served. Sign up 15 minutes before the start time at the Pontoon Station on Presque Isle. You must be present to sign in. Limited to 16 per ride.

Pontoon Boat Station at Presque Isle State Park, 1 Peninsula Drive, Erie, PA 16506

For more information visit: www.eriereader.com/calendar/50188/lagoon-by-pontoon

Autism Society NWPA Summer Family Picnic Adventure – Sunview Golf

Sunday, July 12, 2026 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.

Join the Autism Society NWPA for their Annual Summer Picnic with a fun new twist. This year, families have the flexibility to create a day that works best for them. Enjoy group-rate discounts when you pre-purchase activity tickets and choose the experiences your family will love, including mini golf, bumper boats, go-karts, driving range, and more!

Sunview Golf, 12270 Edinboro Road, Edinboro, PA 16412

For more information visit : www.autismnwpa.org/event/summer-family-picnic-adventure/

Discover Presque Isle

Monday, July 20, 2026 through Sunday, July 26, 2026

Presque Isle State Park, 1 Peninsula Drive, Erie, PA 16506

For more information visit: www.discoverpi.com/events/dpi

For more details and additional events by county

Erie County, [Erie Reader Events Calendar](#) Crawford County, [Crawford's events page](#) Warren County, [Warren County YMCA website](#)



UPCOMING COMMUNITY EVENTS

8 Great Tuesdays 2026

Tuesday, July 7, 2026 through Tuesday, August 25, 2026, 6:30 PM,

Lineup includes:

July 7, 2026 – The Clarks

July 14, 2026 – Killer Queen, a tribute to Queen

July 21, 2026 – A1A: the official and original Jimmy Buffett tribute show

July 28 2026 – Boys in the Band: the Alabama tribute

August 4, 2026 – Chris Higbee

August 11, 2026 – Songbirds: a tribute to Fleetwood Mack

August 18, 2026 – First to Eleven

August 25, 2026 – Boat House Row: a yacht rock experience

Liberty Park, 726 West Bayfront Parkway, Erie, PA 16507

For more information, visit: www.erieevents.com/venues/rebich-investments-amphitheater/8-great-tuesdays/

95th Annual Warren County Fair

Monday, August 10, 2026, through Saturday, August 15, 2026

Warren County Fairgrounds, 230 Barton Run Road, Pittsfield, PA 16340

For more information visit: www.warrencountyfair.net

Pay What You Can Farm Stands

Various Dates and Locations

For more information visit: www.builderie.org/hope/pwyc/

or www.eriereader.com/calendar

Crawford County Fair

Saturday, August 22, 2026 through Saturday, August 29, 2026

Crawford County Fairgrounds, 13291 Dickson Road, Meadville, PA 1335

For more information visit: www.crawfordcountyfairpa.com

141st Annual Erie County Fair

Sunday, August 30, 2026 – Saturday, September 5, 2026

Erie County Fairgrounds, 13993 PA-8, Wattsburg, PA 16442

For more information visit: www.wattsburgfair.com

89th Annual Waterford Community Fair

Monday, August 31, 2026 through Saturday, September 5, 2026

Waterford Fairgrounds, 13012 Route 19 S, Waterford, PA 16441

For more information visit: www.waterfordfair.org



LOCAL RIGHT TO EDUCATION TASK FORCE

Parents, Caregivers and Individuals with Disabilities – Have a Voice in Your Community!

LTF5 invites parents, caregivers, and individuals with disabilities to attend our upcoming Local Task Force meetings. Your experiences help guide discussions, identify gaps, and strengthen supports in our community. Every voice adds value!

Why Attend a Local Task Force Meeting?

- Connect with other families, self-advocates, and community partners
- Help influence programs, services, and policies
- Learn about proposed disability related legislation
- Share concerns in a supportive environment
- Stay informed through free presentations on disability resources and topics

You don't need special knowledge, you have lived experience!

LTF5 MISSION

Local Task Force 5 is committed to empowering families, individuals, school systems and local agencies to better support students with disabilities through meaningful collaboration and shared resources.

LTF meetings provide a safe environment where parents/caregivers can share experiences and receive guidance on their concerns. The LTF promotes collaboration and positive problem-solving between parents, LEAs, and community partners. The LTF also works with LEAs to identify systemic or potentially systemic issues and raise those issues to the level of the State Task Force if necessary.

LTF5 MEETING DATES:

Thursday, September 10, 2026 – 9:00 – 11:00 am
Thursday, October 8, 2026 – 6:00 – 8:00 pm
Thursday, November 5, 2026 – 9:00 – 11:00 am
Thursday, January 21, 2027 – 6:00 – 8:00 pm
Thursday, March 11, 2027 – 9:00 – 11:00 am
Thursday, April 29, 2027 – 6:00 – 8:00 pm
Thursday, May 27, 2027 – 9:00 – 11:00 am

For meeting agendas and more information, please visit the [Local Task Force page on the Northwest Tri-County IU5 website.](#)

To Join Meetings Virtually:
Meeting ID: 349 554 5391 Passcode: 5610
[Click here to join the zoom](#)

Questions and Concerns can be directed to the LTF5 Chairperson Jennifer Ford: jfordLTF5@gmail.com or LTF5 Co-Chair Michele Hecker: ltf5@iu5.org or (814)450-3345.



COMMUNITY CORNER

DiVittorio Center For Autism

The DiVittorio Center for Autism is a nonprofit autism support and education organization based in Corry, Pennsylvania. It was created to provide services, resources, and support for autistic individuals and their families, especially in rural communities where autism services can be limited. Founder Kathryn DiVittorio is a parent of a child with autism, who has experienced the difficulty of finding local autism services firsthand. The center's mission is to empower those with Autism as well as their families through personally tailored educational programs and therapeutic interventions, promoting growth, independence, and quality of life from early diagnosis through adulthood. They offer:

- **Community inclusion opportunities**
- **Educational programming**
- **Family support and resources**
- **Sensory-based programs**
- **Therapeutic interventions**
- **Transition planning for older youth and young adults**

Their Autism Programming Sessions are designed to provide valuable insights, practical strategies, and engaging experiences tailored to the unique strengths and needs of autistic individuals. The sessions also offer an inclusive space to learn, connect and grow for caregivers, educators, clinicians and self-advocates. Some of the programs they have offered or planned include:

Sensory Play & Learn

The Sensory Play & Learn Program offers a safe, structured environment where neurodivergent children can engage in purposeful play while developing motor, social, and communication skills. With a focus on sensory regulation, exploration, and fun, this program is designed to meet children where they are offering both stimulation and calm when needed.

This program fosters growth through play and connection, supporting children in developing skills they can carry into school, home, and the community. This program is available for private scheduling or group use, where applicable. Contact them if you are interested in these resources or if you would like access to their sensory room.

LEGO Club (partnerships with the Autism Society of Northwestern PA)

The DiVittorio Center for Autism partners with the Autism Society of NWPA for the LEGO Social Club held in Corry, PA. LEGO Social Club is an effective way for autistic children and teens to improve their social interactions and communication skills. The club is designed for grades K – 12 and meets on the 2nd Saturday of the month from 9:30 AM to 11:00 AM at 221 N. Center St., Corry, PA 16407. Registration is required. Neurotypical siblings are welcome.

The “Gentle Diner” sensory dining experience

The Gentle Diner is a unique, immersive program designed to help neurodivergent individuals and their families build confidence in real-world dining environments. Through guided exposure, supportive coaching, and sensory-friendly tools, participants are introduced to various restaurant settings, from fast food to sit-down dining at a comfortable pace. Each session provides:

- **A welcoming space to explore new environments**
- **Supportive meal practice based on sensory and dietary needs**
- **Safe food strategies and communication coaching**
- **Peer connection and community support**
- **Reflection time to build confidence and carry skills forward**



DiVittorio

CENTER FOR AUTISM

DiVittorio Center for Autism

Executive Director: Kathryn DiVittorio
(814) 273-6682

229 W. Washington Street, Floor 3, Corry, PA 16407
P.O. Box 11 101 S. Center Street, Corry, PA 16407
www.divittoriocenterforautism.org





ONLINE RESOURCES AND TRAININGS

There are many online resources and trainings available to parents, caregivers and individuals with disabilities. Here are just a few!

Achieva Family of Organizations help people with disabilities lead lives of personal significance through diversity, equity, and inclusion. They have many resources, services, and advocacy webinars available to families.

The Autism Society of Northwestern Pennsylvania is a local organization supporting individuals and families of those living with autism spectrum disorders in Crawford, Erie, Mercer, and Venango Counties. They have many programs, resources, and training available to support families across the lifespan.

Families to the Max (F2MAX) is a state-wide family network that maximizes academic access, expectations, and learning. By joining this network families have access to a wealth of information and training opportunities.

Parent to Parent empowers and supports parents, caregivers, and individuals with special needs using a peer collaborative approach which fosters mutual growth and resilience in families and among programs.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is dedicated to building better lives for those affected by mental illness. They offer a variety of programs and services at no charge to families.

The PA Family Network – Vision for Equality works to transform state policies, practices, and systems to better assist and support the families of individuals with disabilities. They have several programs and resources available on their website for families to access.

The Parent Education & Advocacy Leadership (PEAL) Center has many resources to help families new to Special Education in Pennsylvania, including Tipsheets, Family Guides, and Checklists.

The Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN) supports school districts, early intervention programs, and families in improving outcomes for students with disabilities by providing professional development, technical assistance and consultation, and resources and tools related to special education and inclusive practices.

FEATURED TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Bridging Knowledge to Know-How: Empowering Pennsylvania Educators and Partners - August 4-7, 2026

Uniting Pennsylvania's educators, community partners, families, and youth to explore insights and tools that bridge knowledge and practical application. This conference will bring together Pennsylvania's educators, community partners, families, and youth to explore the latest insights, strategies, and tools that bridge the gap between knowledge and practical application.

Sessions will have a specific focus on autism, sensory disabilities, secondary transition, and students with complex instructional needs. Participants will gain tangible strategies to enhance teaching practices, drive student success, and adapt to the evolving demands of today's classrooms. Bridging Knowledge to Know-How: Empowering Educators and Partners offers conference attendees a broad, inclusive platform to learn from presenters as they share their expertise and innovative practices. This conference was built from the strengths of the HELIX, National Autism, and Secondary Transition conferences.

We can't wait to see you in August!

**Location: The Lancaster County Convention Center
25 S Queen St, Lancaster, PA 17603**

SUMMER PROGRAM! June 9 - August 25

The Incredible Years® Parent Program is designed to give parents practical, proven tools to help their children thrive socially, emotionally, and academically.

Through this engaging program, you'll learn how to strengthen your relationship with your child, build their confidence and independence, support language and school readiness skills, and guide positive behaviors using encouragement, routines, and effective strategies. Parents also gain valuable skills in managing challenging behaviors, teaching emotional regulation, and fostering strong friendships all in a supportive, understanding environment with other families. This program empowers you with real-life strategies you can use every day to help your child succeed at home, in school, and in the community. Each session provides a complimentary meal. Childcare and transportation assistance are available with advanced registration. Made possible through financial support from the Office of Children and Youth.

Bridging Knowledge to Know-How 2026

Empowering Pennsylvania Educators and Partners

AUGUST 4 - 7 | LANCASTER, PA

ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

This conference will connect Pennsylvania's educators, community partners, families, and youth to explore the latest insights, strategies, and tools that bridge the gap between knowledge and practical application.

WHY ATTEND?

Gain tangible strategies to enhance teaching practices, drive student success, and adapt to the evolving demands of today's classrooms.

SESSION TOPICS:

- ✓ Autism
- ✓ Sensory Disabilities
- ✓ Secondary Transition
- ✓ Complex Instructional Needs



“THE INCREDIBLE YEARS”

Autism Spectrum & Language Delays Parent Group

This program is offered to parents of children on the autism spectrum or with language delays in order to promote children’s emotional regulation, social competence, language skills, school readiness, and relationships with others.

Location

Autism Society
NWPA
3308 State St
Erie, PA 16508

Choose Your Session:

Summer Session

Every Tuesday
June 9th - August 25th
from 11:00 am - 1:30 pm

Fall Session

Every Monday
September 14th - December 14th
from 5:30 pm - 8:00 pm

Spring Session

Every Wednesday
January 6th, 2027 - April 7th, 2027
from 5:30 pm - 8:00 pm

This free of charge program is a *14-week, multi-family group*, which will be facilitated by *two therapists*, with the goal of promoting positive relationships, persistence coaching, social and emotional coaching, empathy and social skills, self-regulation skills, limit setting, and behavior management.

Contact the Autism Society
NWPA to register:
autismnwpa.org/events
or call at (814) 455-3540



Contact the Erie Family Center for
more information or any questions:
info@ErieFamilyCenter.org
or call at (814) 520-8214

Each session provides a complimentary meal. Childcare and transportation assistance is available with advanced registration. Made possible through financial support from the Office of Children and Youth.

LOCAL SUMMER RESOURCES

(SHARED ON BEHALF OF MACARONI KID ERIE, PA)

ERIE SUMMER CAMPS 2026

Still figuring out summer? This is your shortcut to 20+ camps in one place.

bit.ly/ErieSummerCamps2026

Don't wait! Camps are filling quickly.

ERIE PRESCHOOLS 2026 COMMUNITY GUIDE

Is preschool on your list for fall? Where do you even start? What's available? Are you already late?

This guide will help:
bit.ly/EriePreschoolGuide2026

Spots can fill earlier than you'd expect. It's worth taking a look now!

MENTAL HEALTH MINUTE



THE POWER OF Positive Self-Talk

The way we talk to ourselves matters. Positive self-talk helps build confidence, reduces stress, and strengthens our mental and emotional well-being.

POSITIVE SELF-TALK CAN HELP YOU:



Reduce stress and anxiety



Boost confidence and self-esteem



Improve mood and outlook



Build resilience and motivation



Strengthen self-worth

WAYS TO PRACTICE POSITIVE SELF-TALK

Be kind to yourself. You're doing the best you can.



Focus on your strengths, not your mistakes.



Celebrate small wins. Every step counts.



It's okay to have hard days. You are not alone.



Choose encouraging words that lift you up.



Remember:

You are worthy. You are enough. And the way you speak to yourself can change everything.



Be your own biggest cheerleader.

FAMILY SUPPORT CENTER CONTACT INFORMATION



FSC@iu5.org



Michele Hecker
FSC Coordinator
(814) 450-3345



252 Waterford St.
Edinboro, PA 16412



IU5 Family
Support Center



iu5.org



It is the policy of the Northwest Tri-County Intermediate Unit not to discriminate on the basis of age, religion, sex, race, color, national origin, ancestry, disability, or non-job related disability (including sexual harassment, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression), in the admission or access to, or in the provision of services, programs, or employment in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 1604 of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Executive Order 11246 and 11375, Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 and its amendments, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act, the Civil Rights Act of 1991, the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act. More specifically, the Intermediate Unit does not discriminate on the basis of sex and prohibits sex discrimination in any education program or activity that it operates, as required by Title IX and its regulations, including in admission and employment. For information relevant to this policy, contact: Brad Whitman 504 Coordinator and ADA Coordinator - 252 Waterford Street Edinboro, PA 16412 - Phone: 814-734-8401 brad_whitman@iu5.org or Sally Daehnke Title IX Coordinator - 252 Waterford Street Edinboro, PA 16412 - Phone: 814-734-8430 sally_daehnke@iu5.org