From the Desk of Janine Chittenden, BSN, RN  CSHCS Program Supervisor

We have exciting news to share!!! We have been awarded a generous grant from the CSHCS Family Center, the parent-directed section of CSHCS. These funds will help us reach more eligible families by teaching our community agencies and educators about CSHCS and the Family Center.

This funding has also given rise to our newest project, an on-line parent support group. Your feedback has shown us that it is often difficult for parents of special needs children to meet other parents who are walking a similar path, and that face-to-face exchanges, though so cherished, are few and far between. We hope this group will allow you to connect with other special needs parents, learn together, share your stories, and encourage one another.

This new site is presently under development. We have hired a parent consultant, who has three children with special needs, to facilitate this private Facebook group. You will receive an email invitation to join, so be sure to send your updated email addresses to Irene Atwood at iatwood@miOttawa.org or Brenda Kempf at bkempf@miOttawa.org.

In this issue of Special Kid’s Corner, you’ll find information on preparing for a winter emergency, how changes to the MIChild program could affect you, tips for staying healthy this flu season, and a fun holiday game to play with your child(ren). You’ll have an opportunity to learn about your CSHCS staff, and so much more. I hope you enjoy it!

www.michigan.gov/cshcs

Celebrating Bills Removing Offensive Language from Law

Our very own Janine Chittenden (pictured far left), CSHCS Program Supervisor and CSHCS Advisory Committee member, attended a ceremonial bill signing with Gov. Rick Snyder to celebrate the passage of bills, now known as Public Acts 89-94 of 2015. The bills replace offensive references to "crippled children" with the updated language, "children or youth with special health care needs". Janine says of the experience, "It truly was an honor to update the Public Health Code statutes with language that now recognizes the person before the disability."

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'Special Kids Corner' newsletter is written by your CSHCS staff. This issue was edited by Amy Fontaine. We’d love to hear from you: afontaine@miottawa.org
Janine Chittenden, BSN, RN, CSHCS Program Supervisor

My nursing education began in high school where I was a Candy Striper and Nurse’s Aide. Later, I attended MSU and graduated from GVSU. I have lived in Ottawa County since 1968 and have worked for the Ottawa County Department of Health since 1981.

My work began with providing children with well-child checks, immunizations, and making home and school visits to ensure healthy children and pregnant moms. I joined CSHCS in 1995, and consider it is a privilege to work with you, who have children with special health care needs. Your resilience and strength amaze me. I gain from you every day.

My family includes my husband Dwight (married 40 years), our two adult sons, one daughter-in-law, 3 grandchildren and our yellow lab, Max. Outside of work, I enjoy long distance running, twirling baton, and building bonfires at the cabin. You can find me combing the sand for beach glass, gardening, golfing, fishing, and cheering on the Spartans!

Brenda Kempf, CSHCS Representative

I began working for CSHCS about 10 years ago as clerical support, and now I am the representative for the program. A day in the life as the Program Rep consists of helping families with enrollment, eligibility, billing and insurance questions. I am the liaison for families between the local and state levels. One of my goals is to try and help families remove barriers in accessing their health care needs. My hope is to make someone’s difficult day a little easier.

Now that you know about my role in CSHCS, here is a little snapshot of my life outside of the office. I was born and raised in Grand Haven. I have been married for 18 years and we are currently in the process of building our new home. I am blessed to be surrounded by a large crazy family that keeps me busy.

I love to bake. I love walks on the pier and in the gorgeous county parks we have. I also really love photography, chocolate, organizing (any and everything), Christmas, Michigan State Spartans (Go Green), and spending time with good friends (in no particular order).

Leslie Ver Duin, BSN, RN CSHCS Program Nurse

Being a CSHCS program nurse is actually my second career. With a degree in biology, natural resources, and environmental health, I worked as a health inspector and then in household hazardous waste and recycling for a neighboring county. After seven years, I returned to GVSU for my second degree, this time, in nursing. Prior to joining CSHCS, I worked on an ICU/telemetry hospital floor, and then in an adult kidney dialysis clinic for many years.

As a CSHCS program nurse, I love connecting with families, helping as I can. It is rewarding to problem solve with them to find solutions that work best for their particular circumstances or needs.

I grew up in southeastern Michigan, but since attending GVSU I have made West Michigan my home. I most enjoy spending time with my husband and our two young children Sarah (6) and David (4). We stay busy as a family, as the kids are starting their school “careers” and exploring their own interests. In my leisure time, I enjoy being active when I can. I love exploring the many county parks via hiking, running, or skiing. As of this summer, I am (finally!) the happy owner of a kayak too.
Kelsey DeMull, BS, RN, MPH  CSHCS Program Nurse

Prior to joining CSHCS two years ago, I worked with the Peace Corps in Guatemala, teaching preventative health to the local women. I am wearing my traditional dress from Guatemala, for a Peace Corps dinner, in this picture with a grad school friend.

After my time with the Peace Corps, I added a Master’s degree in Public Health from U of M (Go Blue!) to my nursing degree from GVSU. I speak Spanish and work to remain fluent to allow me to serve Spanish speaking families in the CSHCS program. As a CSHCS program nurse, I enjoy the privilege of being able to step into the lives of CSHSC families in order to provide the support they need for a child to reach his or her full potential.

I was born and raised in West Michigan. In my free time, I enjoy spending time with my family and being active outdoors. I also like to volunteer through my church and with the mentoring program at Bethany Christian Services.

Irene Atwood, CSHCS Clerical Support

I have provided clerical support to the CSHCS team since November, 2014. I enjoy my work and I am happy to be part of this caring team, helping families with special needs children in the community.

I am a native Filipino. For 19 years, I worked in an IT department of a prepaid healthcare insurance in the Philippines. This experience helped me to understand the intricacies of the policies, procedures, and workings of the healthcare industry.

I graduated and received a BS in Computer Science from AMA Computer College in 1993. Even though I don’t really enjoy programming or coding, it was challenging and fulfilling to create a system for the company I worked with. I have always believed that challenges are what make life interesting, and overcoming them is what makes it meaningful.

I fell in love with an American and we were married in April, 2012. I was granted a U.S. spouse visa and joined my husband in Holland, MI in 2013. I enjoy cooking, playing with my dog, hiking, exploring parks in Michigan. I love nature, and helping people in the community.

Amy Fontaine, CSHCS Parent Consultant

I have been an elementary teacher, a restaurant manager, and a business analyst. I hold a Master’s in Teaching from Aquinas College and a BA in Industrial/Organizational psychology from MSU (Go Spartans!).

I loved teaching, but put a more formal career on hold to raise my triplets Jolie, Emily, and Sam. They were born at 26 weeks, each weighing less than 2 pounds. They are truly miracles and a testament to the power of prayer. I can’t believe they’re 17 years old already!

My children have special needs, and have each had CSHCS coverage for a variety of diagnoses throughout the years. I am very thankful for the blessing of this program!

Working as a parent consultant for CSHCS allows me to make a difference in the lives of families like mine, who are caring for special needs children. It is also an honor to work with such a compassionate, intelligent and professional group. My past CSHCS grant projects have found me conducting customer service surveys to improve service delivery, writing newsletters, and planning summer park parties for CSHCS families.

I am most excited to be facilitating the new online parent support group (please read all about it on page 5). I don’t have much free time these days, but I read nightly and love to spend time with my family.
Parent’s Corner: Thoughts from the heart

During the last two years, I faced a devastating breast cancer diagnosis, and aggressive treatment in the midst of raising my special needs triplets. Today, I am very thankful for my recovery and to everyone who helped me during this difficult journey. I couldn’t have done it without all of their help, love, and prayers. I am eternally grateful!

I wanted to share a few reflections on my experience, in the hope that you find encouragement for your own journey as a special needs parent:

◊ First, even though it is hard to ask for and accept help, people genuinely want to help. Asking for what you need will be a blessing for you and the people who love and care about you. Now, my heart is full of gratitude. I know that I can never repay all the kindness that has been shown to me, but I hope, one day, to pass on the kindness in return.

◊ When parenting a child with special needs, it is sometimes necessary to focus on getting through the here and now, rather than to consider an uncertain future. Now, I have a special needs trust, and plans for the unthinkable. It was not easy to face, but doing this has given me a sense of peace.

◊ Parenting a special needs child can be isolating. I have found comfort in connecting with other special needs parents. Now, I feel a sense of community and much less alone. I hope you will join our new online parent-to-parent support group. You can read about it on page 5. Please know that you don’t have to go it alone!

◊ Parenting is difficult, even in the best of circumstances, and caring for a child with special needs can increase stress. Now, I am trying not to sweat the small stuff, even if it feels like big stuff. I’m using deep breathing to lower my stress level, and I take a respite break to recharge my spirit as often as I can. Managing stress is so important!

◊ Finally, if we don’t take care of ourselves first, how will we be able to care for our children? I must confess that this is still an area of struggle for me, and one I will focus on in the coming year. I hope you will do the same. Make those doctor appointments you have been putting off. Vow to eat a little healthier. Find time to exercise. Find your happiness. The best gift we can give to those we love is to take care of ourselves, so we can be here to take care of them!

I wish you good health and blessings in the coming year!

Amy Fontaine, CSHCS Parent Consultant

Calling All Writers

We’d love to feature your story in the next edition of Special Kid’s Corner!

Would you, your spouse, your child with special needs or a sibling be willing to share a personal story?

Suggested topics include, but are not limited to:

- Finding community resources and how they’ve made a difference for your family.
- Ways for organizing your child’s health information. Tricks, tips, and apps!
- Self-care: Tips for putting your own needs on your To-Do List.
- Managing life with the additional demands of raising a child who has special needs.
- Working with educators and therapists. Building a team to meet your child’s needs.
- Transition to adulthood. Guardianship, or Special Needs Trusts.
- Your story of diagnosis, challenges, and triumphs.
- Being a sibling to a child with special needs.
- Vacationing with a child who has special needs.
We Have Exciting News to Share!!!

Ottawa County CSHCS is proud and excited to announce the creation of a Facebook group exclusively for parents and caregivers raising children and youth with special needs.

We've often heard from the special needs families we serve, about the tremendous, yet un-met, need for support and encouragement from others who are in a similar circumstance. We hope you will find the new Facebook group a treasured place to connect with other parents who are also experiencing the abundant joys and unique challenges of raising children and youth with special needs.

Amy Fontaine, who is raising triplets with special needs, will serve as parent consultant and administrator for the group. Group guidelines will be established to help the group run smoothly and to ensure a positive, accepting and encouraging environment for all its members.

Members will be able to join this closed group by invitation only. Invitations will be emailed soon, so please make sure your current email address is on file with CSHCS (contact Irene Atwood at: iatwood@miottawa.org to update your email).

We hope that you will join each other to share your stories, ask questions, learn from each other, share useful resources, comfort each other, and renew your spirits. It is our fondest wish that this, as yet un-named group, will become a source of inspiration and connection to you on your journey of raising your special needs children and youth.

If you have any questions or suggestions regarding the new Facebook Group for families and youth with special needs, please contact Amy Fontaine at: afontaine@miottawa.org.
MIChild Transition to Medicaid Expansion

Read if your child currently has MIChild

Effective January 1, 2016, the MIChild program has converted
to a Medicaid expansion program.

Transition Specifics:
- Children enrolled in MIChild will transition from their current health plan (Priority Health or Molina) to the same Medicaid health plan (Priority Health or Molina) as of January 1, 2016.
- The program will retain the name MIChild, but it will now be administered by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS).

What do I need to do?
- You will receive a letter in late December assigning you a MDHHS specialist/case worker.  
  ⇒ Keep this information handy to report any changes in income, employment, or other required changes. Yearly renewal will now be done through MDHHS as well.
- You will receive a new mihealth ID card to replace your MIChild card.  
  ⇒ Begin using your new mihealth card on January 1, 2016 for all doctors and pharmacies.  
  ⇒ If you already have a mihealth card, continue to use your current card—the numbers remain the same. If you need a replacement card, call 1-888-988-6300.
- You will receive an additional card from your Medicaid Health Plan.  
  ⇒ Use your new Medicaid health plan card in conjunction with your mihealth card.

What does this mean for my child’s coverage?
- MIChild services will be expanded to include all Medicaid covered services.
- Eligibility for MIChild remains the same.
- Travel requests will now go through your Medicaid Health Plan, not through CSHCS.
- Adults in the Medicaid Expansion Program will be switched from a Medicaid Health Plan to straight (fee for service) Medicaid.

The Affordable Care Act and CSHCS

CSHCS coverage is not considered insurance under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). CSHCS only covers eligible diagnoses, and therefore primary care, preventive care, and other health care are not covered.

Now through January 31, 2016, families can sign up for full-coverage insurance under the ACA. This is true even when a person has a pre-existing condition.

The Health Insurance Marketplace (Exchange) lets you compare all of your insurance choices. Be sure the insurance you choose covers all your special health needs.

You can also use the Marketplace to see if you are eligible for low cost coverage, or to get help signing up for Medicaid if you qualify.

Visit this website to sign up or to learn more: https://www.healthcare.gov/get-coverage/

Open Enrollment for coverage ends January 31, 2016

Has Your Insurance Changed?

Do you have a new primary insurance? Did you change carriers or drop coverage?

If so, please contact Irene Atwood at:
  iatwood@miottawa.org
  1-616-393-4439

The information she will need from you:
♦ The name of your insurance provider, the policy number, and group number.
♦ The date of birth, and social security number of the primary insurance holder.
♦ The effective date of the policy change.

A delay in sending us your insurance changes, could cause a delay in payments to your CSHCS providers, and your prescriptions may not be covered by CSHCS. Contact Irene today!!!
Grandmothers used to say, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” and the phrase still holds true today. Emergency planning is important for all, but it is especially critical for individuals with a disability or special healthcare needs.

Taking an active role in preparing will bring you peace of mind, knowing you and your loved ones will be taken care of in the event of an unexpected emergency, such as a winter storm.

Michiganders are familiar with winter storms, which can sometimes knock out heat, power and/or telecommunication services to your home, even for days at a time. This is cause for concern if your family member relies on electricity for medical equipment or refrigeration for medications. Be prepared by having a generator or another back-up plan.

In addition, contact Emergency Services ahead of time if you might require immediate assistance during an emergency, such as a power outage. In our county, Ottawa County Central Dispatch keeps a list of individuals who require special help during an emergency. Contact them at this non-emergency number for assistance, 1-800-249-0911.

If you might require an ambulance, be sure to keep a pathway cleared for emergency vehicles and that your house numbers are visible.

For frequent trips to the doctor or hospital, keep your car winter ready with plenty of gas, a scraper, shovel, flashlight with batteries, a stash of food, water, and warm blankets. Be sure your cell phone is fully charged before heading out the door.

Another important way to prepare for an emergency is to sign up for Smart911. With the information you provide, the 9-1-1 operator and first responders will know exactly what you have decided they need to know in an emergency, and valuable time can be saved. See the inset below to learn more about Smart911. Visit https://www.smart911.com to register.

Finally, having a 3 day supply of non-perishable food items, water and all medications is helpful should you be unable to leave your home. Keep flashlights and fresh batteries for light and blankets for warmth in case utility services are disrupted. Do not use a stove or grill to provide heat indoors. Dangerous fumes can build up quickly. Ensure you have a working carbon monoxide alarm in your home as well.

For more information on making a basic emergency plan, visit: http://www.michigan.gov/michiganprepares

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**Smart911**

Registering with Smart911 is free, secure, convenient and it could save your life or the life of someone you love.

**You decide** what information the 9-1-1 operators and first responders will need to know to help you quickly and efficiently in an emergency.

Creating your Smart911 Safety Profile, allows you to provide critical details about each family member, such as:

- Medical conditions
- Severe allergies
- Medications
- Medical equipment or oxygen use
- Physical or developmental disabilities, such as Alzheimer's or autism
- Emergency contact information
- Location information, and more!

**Did you know** that precious minutes can be lost when a 9-1-1 call is placed from a cell phone, because call takers and first responders have limited information about you and only a general sense of your location?

Fortunately, when you link each of your family’s landline and cell phones to your Smart911 account, your family’s Safety Profile is visible to the 9-1-1 operator whenever a call is placed from one of the phones you register.

**Smart911 is currently available in Ottawa County.** When you travel to another Smart911 participating county, your family’s Safety Profile will be available to the 9-1-1 operators there as well.

Register for Smart911 by visiting: https://www.smart911.com
**The Flu**

We are in flu season. Children with chronic health concerns are at a higher risk of becoming seriously ill from the flu. According to the CDC, there are two main ways to prevent influenza:

- **Take preventative measures:**
  - Wash your hands frequently with soap and water.
  - Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects that could be contaminated with germs.
  - Try to avoid close contact with those who are sick.

- **Get the flu shot:**
  - It is important that children with chronic health concerns get vaccinated. They are at a higher risk of becoming seriously ill from the flu, especially those with cardiac health concerns, neurological conditions, and respiratory health concerns like asthma or cystic fibrosis.
  - If the child with a chronic health condition cannot be vaccinated, those that live with the child should be vaccinated to help prevent the child from getting it. Talk with your child’s doctor if you are unsure if your child should receive the vaccine.

To find more information on preventing the flu visit:
  - http://www.cdc.gov/flu
  - or call 1-800-CDC-INFO

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**La Influenza**

Estamos en el tiempo de la influenza. Niños con enfermedades crónicas tienen un riesgo más alto de sufrir síntomas graves de la influenza. Se puede prevenir la influenza por dos maneras principales. Según al CDC las maneras de prevención son:

- **Tome medidas preventivas como:**
  - Lávese las manos frecuentemente con agua y jabón.
  - Limpie y desinfecte las superficies y objetos que pueden estar contaminados con gérmenes.
  - Trate de evitar el contacto cercano con personas enfermas.

- **Reciba la vacuna contra la influenza:**
  - Es importante que vacune los niños con enfermedades crónicas (más ellos que tienen enfermedades respiratorios como asma o fibrosis cística, enfermedades del corazón, y afecciones neurológicas) porque son de alto riesgo.
  - Si el niño con la enfermedad crónica no puede recibir la vacuna, se debe vacunar las personas que viven con el niño. Hable con el doctor principal de su niño si tiene duda de quién debe recibir la vacuna.

Para obtener más información, visite:
  - http://www.cdc.gov/flu/espanol
  - o llame al 1-800-CDC-INFO

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**Parent Voices Needed to Share the Importance of Immunizations**

Two bills introduced in the Michigan State Legislature would curtail efforts to improve Michigan’s childhood immunization rate and further endanger our most vulnerable citizens.

House Bill 5126 would eliminate the rule requiring parents seeking non-medical waivers to receive balanced education about the benefits and risks of immunizations from their local public health department. House Bill 5127 would strip a local public health department’s ability to exclude children with a communicable disease or those without vaccine protection, from attending school during an outbreak.

In light of this proposed legislation, the Michigan Council for Maternal and Child Health (MCMCH) is seeking individuals who can speak to how vaccines benefit them and their family.

Maybe you have been touched by vaccine-preventable disease or you have an infant too young to be fully immunized. Perhaps you have an immuno-compromised child or your child can’t be fully immunized for medical reasons, and you want to protect them.

Whatever the reason you feel connected to the issue of vaccination, sharing your story will ensure that public policy and public opinion reflect the need for strong immunization rates.

Please share your real-life examples about how vaccines save lives. Opportunities could include providing testimony to legislative committees, talking with the press, or meeting with individual legislators to tell your story.

If you are willing to be part of this vaccine positive network, or would like to learn more, please contact Bree Anderson at the Michigan Council for Maternal and Child Health at: banderson@mcmch.org.

*** MCMCH is part of a group of statewide advocacy organizations working together proactively on legislation and policy to improve immunization rates in Michigan.***
Do You Want to Build a Snowman?

Stay warm and cozy, while you build a snowman, playing this fun winter game! For younger children, you could cut out construction paper parts ahead of time instead of drawing.

- Roll a one, draw a hat.
- Roll a two, draw a head.
- Roll a three, draw a top body.
- Roll a four, draw a bottom body.
- Roll a five, draw a face.
- Roll a six, draw a carrot nose.

For some really yummy fun, play the game by building your snowman out of marshmallows, small pretzel sticks, a candy corn for the nose, and mini chocolate chips for buttons and eyes!

Your CSHCS Plan of Care
A summary of your annual nurse visit

Your Plan of Care contains:
- Your child’s health history
- A list of all your child’s doctors and providers, including addresses and phone numbers
- Goals for your child’s health and your family’s well-being
- An action list for both you and your CSHCS nurse

Your Plan of Care can help you:
- Manage your child’s healthcare
- Organize large amounts of information
- Plan for the future
- Track yearly progress
- As a handy reference during doctor visits
- Connect with resources

⇒ Remember to sign and return the signature page of your Plan of Care in the postage-paid envelope!

Family Support Network
1-800-359-3722
Parent-to-Parent Support operated by the CSHCS Family Center

It can really help to talk with someone whose child has a similar health need or disability. The Family Support Network is made up of parents who, like you, have children with special needs. These specially trained parents listen to your concerns and share information about available resources.

To talk with a parent of a child with a condition similar to your child’s, call the CSHCS Family Phone Line at: 1-800-359-3722 or send them an email: cshcsfc@michigan.gov

Children with Special Needs Fund
The CSN Fund helps with the purchase of equipment and services that promote optimal health, mobility, and development, enhancing the lives of children and their families.

For more information, call the CSN Fund at: 1-517-241-7420
Online applications are available at: www.michigan.gov/csnfund
For help with the application, call your local CSHCS office, or the CSHCS Family Center Phone Line.
The CSHCS Family Center:
This is the parent-directed section of CSHCS. It is formally named the Family Center for Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs.

The CSHCS Family Center helps families who are raising children with special needs by:
⇒ Operating the family phone line.
⇒ Running the Family Support Network.
⇒ Providing health resource information and emotional support for any Michigan family raising a special needs child (regardless of CSHCS enrollment).
⇒ Granting Scholarships for parent to attend conferences.
⇒ Conducting trainings and presentations on parent/professional collaboration and children’s special health care needs.

CSHCS Family Center Phone Line:
1-800-359-3722
Monday through Friday
8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

CSHCS Family Center Email:
cshcsfc@michigan.gov

Family Support Network
For parent-to-parent support, call the CSHCS Family Center
1-800-359-3722

CSHCS Online payment site:

Family-to-Family Health Information & Education Center (F2FHIEC)
https://f2fmichigan.org/
517-324-7396

F2FHIEC Parent & Professional Training Schedule:
https://f2fmichigan.org/upcoming-events/