

What Others Have to Say

"The program has grown from a single concept to one that has become part of the culture in the Mansfield Public Schools...It is without reservation that I endorse the I Care Program..."



Mansfield Public School Superintendent

"For me, the I Care program was founded upon the belief that while all students are equal, each individual distinguishes him or herself with their own unique abilities, traits, and physical appearance.

Regardless if a child is in a wheelchair, displays behaviors associated with autism, or is a gifted student or athlete, all students should be accepted and celebrated for who they are. Through literature and classroom discussions, the I Care program exposes all of our students to conversations about these very topics...I am confident that you will find the I Care program to be a positive addition to your school. It has made a difference in the lives of our students."

Mansfield Elementary School Assistant Principal

"My experiences with the program as a volunteer have been excellent...The literature chosen for the program is very well written and age appropriate. In the younger grades, the stories and discussions focused on general topics such as differences and acceptance...With the older children, the discussions tend to focus more on specific disabilities...In all age groups, I have found the children to be interested in the stories, and very willing to discuss their own personal experiences...I have been very proud to volunteer for the I Care program, and look forward to continuing..."


I Care Volunteer

"I volunteered to work with 5th grade homerooms. I usually began my hour with an explanation about Down Syndrome, my daughter's issue. After establishing myself as a reluctant expert about this special need, I would assure the students that they could ask anything they liked about (my daughter), Down Syndrome and special needs in general, and that I would do my best to answer honestly and correctly. They were always eager to ask me questions, usually in a way that made me feel that they had been wondering about the answers for a while. It was very rewarding for me as a special needs parent and former educator, to provide an opportunity for regular children to learn about their special needs peers..."

I Care Volunteer



Introducing Children to Acceptance through Reading & Education



I - Introducing
C - Children to
A - Acceptance through
R - Reading and
E - Education

The I CARE reading program is made possible
with funds provided by:



The Jamie Fund

P.O. Box 256
Mansfield, MA 02048

For more information or to make a contribution,
please visit www.thejamiefund.org.

*"One mother's idea to explain her daughter's special needs to her kindergarten classmates has blossomed into an entire special needs awareness program at the Mansfield (Massachusetts) public schools." -
The Mansfield News, 01/14/2005*

How It All Began

While volunteering in her daughter's classroom one day, Kim Piro recognized that many typically developing children were unsure of how to interact with Jamie, her autistic daughter. A former



psychiatric social worker and now full-time mother, Kim immediately saw how she could make a difference in the classroom and affect change within her community.

In the fall of 2002, Kim asked Jamie's teacher if she could come in and read "Captain Tommy" - a fictional story created to help children better understand the challenges faced by kids with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Some extremely rich dialogue soon developed and the I CARE program - Introducing Children to Acceptance through Reading and Education, was born.

The next time Kim visited the school, she saw a big difference in the way Jamie's classmates were treating her. Jamie's condition was becoming less of an obstacle. The children couldn't wait to tell Kim about their successful attempts to engage her.

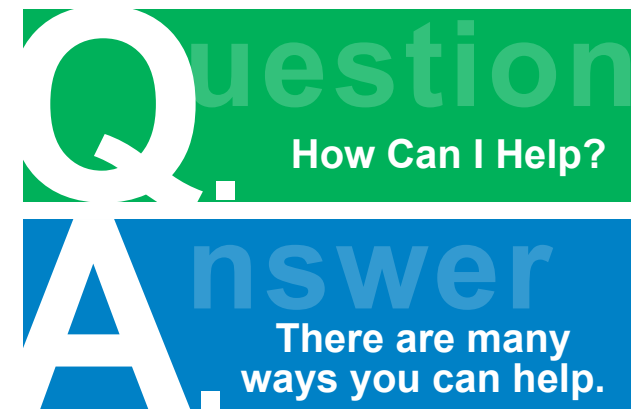
The Program

With an eye toward an inclusive school community, Special Needs students are frequently integrated into "typical" classrooms - along with typical children who naturally, have many questions. The I Care program was created in order to help answer some of these questions - often before they are ever asked.

"I Care" or Introducing Children to Acceptance through Reading and Education is one such program that works pro-actively within the Mansfield school system to help explain why some classmates might be different than others. Nearly fifty volunteers read to classrooms from an approved book list and then engage students and faculty in discussions about each story. I CARE creates a friendly, safe environment where thoughtful questions can be asked and answered. To facilitate classroom discussion, reading volunteers are provided with story-specific question and answer cards attached to the back cover of each book.

Kim Piro has personally researched and approved all of the reading material for the I CARE program. Topics may range from general differences to more specific disabilities including autism and Down's Syndrome. Parents and reading volunteers often suggest new titles for consideration and once approved, these titles are quickly added to our ever expanding I CARE library.

Presently, the I CARE program is designed for elementary school-aged children. However, future plans include enlisting the help of middle and high-school students to not only read to these younger students but also help develop peer programs for the higher grade levels. Additionally, I CARE is exploring new program opportunities with various local youth groups, dance & gymnastics academies and the YMCA.



Volunteers

Help build an I CARE reading program in your community or volunteer your time with an existing program. For more information or to register as a reader, please visit www.thejamiefund.org. Please note that all volunteers will be subject to a standard CORI check as required by the individual school system.

Donations

100% of your tax-deductible donation goes **directly** to expanding the I CARE reading program. The Jamie Fund Organization was created to establish the umbrella entity necessary to facilitate the I CARE and similar programs. Please make your check payable to:

The Jamie Fund
P.O. Box 256
Mansfield, MA 02048

Out Reach

Want to bring the I Care program to your school district? Please contact Kim Piro at www.thejamiefund.org for more information on how to bring this rewarding reading program to your school district.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Jamie Fund Organization believes it is important to educate typically developing children about acceptance of the special needs children in their communities. We endeavor to create and maintain a model which would provide the opportunity for others to participate in our existing programs and/or develop similar initiatives meeting the criteria of our charter. It is our goal to provide programs, tools, funds, and training for effective development of these programs wherever like minded individuals and communities need them.