

# Everyday Kids, Everyday Lives

*A Vision for  
Pennsylvania's  
Children*



# Everyday Kids, Everyday Lives

## Introduction

*Everyday Kids, Everyday Lives: A Vision for Pennsylvania's Children* gathers the reflections of Pennsylvanians who care deeply about the lives of young children and their future in the Commonwealth. Its purpose is to inspire and guide others who also care deeply about strengthening child and family life in Pennsylvania. The document was developed through a collaboration of parents, professionals and policy makers who met over the past year to discuss and debate what ALL young children (birth to age 8) in Pennsylvania should expect of their communities and families. Through this vision statement their thoughts are joined to create a compelling and inspiring vision of child and family life that includes **all** young children in all aspects of community life:

All kids should live in loving families and welcoming communities. Loving families and welcoming communities include love & relationships, fun, growth, learning, resources, acceptance, competence, spirituality, health and safety.

The pages that follow weave together the voices of those who gathered to build this statement with ten themes that emerged from the dialogue across the state. This structure is intended to help the reader explore the rich and varied themes surrounding children and their families, themes that project participants identified as inextricably linked to the day-to-day well being of all children, their families, and their full participation in community life. Each section explores the distinct characteristics that facilitate nurturing families and welcoming communities. Each section also includes statements that reflect stakeholders' views of where Pennsylvania stands in relation to the vision they have articulated. Quotes directly from Pennsylvania's parents appear with this exploration, too.

The partners in the collaboration to develop this statement hope that people throughout the Commonwealth will use *Everyday Kids, Everyday Lives* as a framework to understand what kids and their families want, need and deserve when advocating for positive changes in the lives of children, their families and their communities. *Everyday Kids, Everyday Lives* is intended to help people begin the dialogue necessary to plan and gauge progress and accomplishments. The parents, service providers, policy makers and facilitators have developed this vision statement for use by anyone and everyone committed to Pennsylvania's kids and their future!

*A Vision For Pennsylvania's Children*

All kids should live in loving families and welcoming communities!

Love & Relationships

Growth

Learning

Fun

Loving families and welcoming communities include

Resources

Spirituality

Health

Safety

Acceptance

Competence

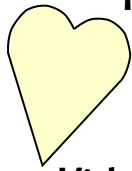
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## Everyday Kids, Everyday Lives

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Loving families and welcoming communities include LOVE & RELATIONSHIPS!

Kids need to be loved, nurtured, and supported. Kids should know that they are loved, valued and respected.

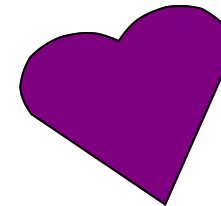


Kids should feel and know that they can trust the people around them, including their families, caregivers, friends, professionals and others.

Kids need permanent relationships with people they can count on and who won't leave them.

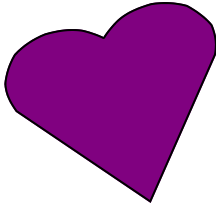
Kids belong in families, and families are the people who love them unconditionally.

Kids want, need, and should have friends.



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## Where are we now?



In Pennsylvania, families are supported to nurture and love their kids.

Kids are searching for friendships, and sometimes they have trouble finding them.

There are kids in Pennsylvania who do not have permanent, stable families.

Because there are limited options for families, some kids in Pennsylvania live in institutions.

There are kids in Pennsylvania who are exposed to many forms of violence that threaten them and their ability to form caring relationships.

## Everyday Kids, Everyday Lives

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Loving families and welcoming communities have FUN!

**Kids need opportunities for joy and laughter.**

**Kids need, want and should have playmates.**

**Kids need places to play and have fun.**

**Families should have fun together.**

**Supports and services should help families and kids enjoy each other and have fun.**

*"You know kids are thriving when they are interacting with other kids and being included."*

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## Where are we now?

Everyday and everywhere kids in Pennsylvania are playing and having fun.

Some communities do not have sufficient resources for all people to enjoy themselves, play and have fun.

Families of kids with disabilities more often feel isolated from their communities.

Sometimes kids need others to help them make friends.

Sometimes using supports and services interferes with families' and kids' time for fun.



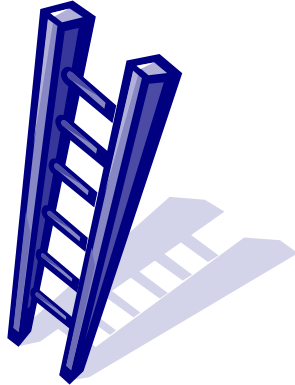
## Everyday Kids, Everyday Lives

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Loving families and welcoming communities foster GROWTH!

**Kids need rich and challenging experiences to grow.**

**Kids need the confidence that encourages them to explore, play and grow.**



**The people who support kids should have high expectations of them.**

**Parents want their children to grow up and make a contribution to society.**

*"It's OK to climb, but look back and lift someone else along the way."*

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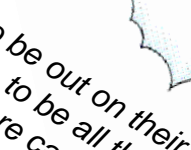
## Where are we now?

Kids grow at their own pace.

Poor attitudes and low expectations are often significant limitations to growth.

Kids with disabilities can and do make contributions everyday.

Overprotection of kids may deny them the opportunity to have rich and challenging experiences.



*"To be out on their own, to be all that they are capable of."*

## Everyday Kids, Everyday Lives

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Loving families and welcoming communities include **LEARNING!**

Childcare programs, pre-school programs and schools should welcome, support and plan carefully for all children.

Kids need care and education that is individualized, accommodates their unique needs and is accountable to them and their families.

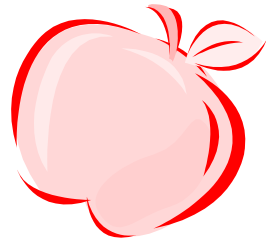
Successful care and education requires partnering and collaboration among parents, kids and educators.

Kids learn better when caregivers and educators use state of the art practices.



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## Where are we now?



Some kids with disabilities are included in regular classrooms, but many are not.

The hundreds of school districts in Pennsylvania all operate differently.

Not all kids are welcome in all care and education settings.

Services in Pennsylvania are often implemented in ways that result in excluding children with disabilities from their neighborhood schools.

Parents are often not treated as equal partners in planning for their child's care and education.

## Everyday Kids, Everyday Lives

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Loving families and welcoming communities have RESOURCES!

Parents need information, options and the power to make choices in order to make good decisions for their kids.

Kids deserve quality early childhood education and care.

Kids and their families need well-paid, well-qualified staff who stay around to support them over time.

The systems should work together to support kids to make smooth transitions.

*"It's harder to go through the system than the disability."*

Kids need someone to take responsibility for coordinating their care or services.

Families benefit when other families support them.

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## Where are we now?

Resources are available to kids and their families in varying amounts.

There are more resources available to some kids, based on a disability label rather than need.



Multiple systems of services and supports are complex and not well coordinated.

Some parents get more and better information from each other than from the system.

Parents often encounter significant barriers to getting the information and support they need.

Families need more accessible and affordable community resources, like child care, recreation and entertainment than are available now in Pennsylvania.

## Everyday Kids, Everyday Lives

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Loving families and welcoming communities practice ACCEPTANCE!

Communities are places where people live and have relationships with each other. Children are contributing members of their communities.

Welcoming communities are ones that work to stop stereotypes, harassment and fear of differences.

Communities should welcome all people, including kids.

Community members benefit collectively and individually from the gifts and talents all people offer.

Communities have a responsibility to care for, protect and nurture all the people in them.



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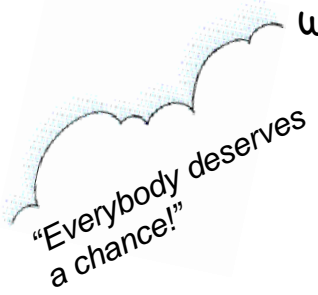
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## Where are we now?

All communities work hard to create an environment that welcomes people of diverse backgrounds and experiences.



Stereotypes about disability can isolate kids and their families from their communities.

All community resources need to be more inclusive of kids with disabilities and their families.

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## Everyday Kids, Everyday Lives

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Loving families and welcoming communities expect **COMPETENCE!**

**Families have the most intimate and longstanding knowledge of the members of their family. To best support families, people who work with children must integrate that knowledge into the supports they offer.**

**Information is a resource and is power. People need information to be able to make decisions, to influence and to help. Everyone needs accurate information.**

**People who work with children need the knowledge, skills and attitudes to support all kids and families.**

**People who work with children must practice professional and ethical behavior.**

**Families must have relevant, accurate and timely information to make informed decisions for their children.**

**Families need options in order to make good decisions.**

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## Where are we now?

Thousands of people throughout Pennsylvania are dedicating themselves to helping kids and their families everyday.



People who work with kids need skills and abilities like partnering with families, negotiating and conflict resolution.

People who work with kids need to stay current on trends and information in their fields.

Many parents feel they need more support and more accurate information, especially at the time their child receives a disability diagnosis.

Families feel they do not have enough quality options from which to choose. They worry that they cannot trust others to care for their kids.

Families often feel that the knowledge they have is not valued.

## Everyday Kids, Everyday Lives

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Loving families and welcoming communities include SPIRITUALITY!



**Many families want their kids to have a spiritual life.**

**Faith communities should embrace and welcome all families.**

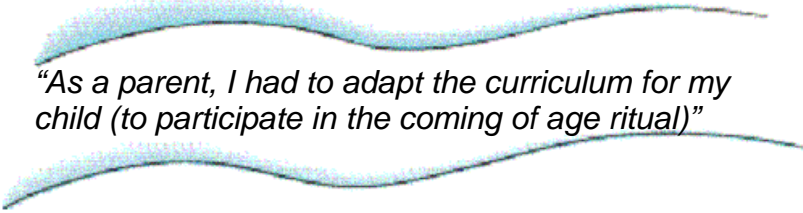
**Kids should have the opportunity to participate in the rituals and ceremonies of their faith.**

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## Where are we now?

Many faith communities need education, support and leadership to include kids with disabilities.

Some places of worship are not physically accessible to all worshippers.



*"As a parent, I had to adapt the curriculum for my child (to participate in the coming of age ritual)"*

## Everyday Kids, Everyday Lives

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Loving families and welcoming communities support HEALTH!

**Families and kids deserve high quality, affordable and accessible health care and health insurance.**

**Kids need their health care and other supports and services to communicate and work with each other.**

**Kids deserve a safe environment and supports that foster their physical and emotional well-being.**



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## Where are we now?

Kids throughout the US and in Pennsylvania go without high quality, affordable and accessible health care and health insurance.

Many families cannot afford health insurance, yet they have too many resources to receive Medical Assistance. Alternative programs to bridge those gaps have too few resources to assist all the families who need it.

Kids with disabilities experience significant barriers to quality health care, such as limited access to and availability of specialists, dentists, and assistive technologies.

## Everyday Kids, Everyday Lives

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Loving families and welcoming communities ensure SAFETY!

**Kids deserve to be safe and secure. They should be protected from harm.**

**All families need adequate food, clothing, housing and money to be safe and secure.**

**Kids need communities free of violence. Their homes, childcare programs, neighborhoods, playgrounds and schools need to be safe.**

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## Where are we now?

Domestic violence and substance abuse are powerful threats to the safety of children and their families.

Families worry about the current and future safety of their family members, and yet they must rely on a system they feel has inadequate safeguards.

Pennsylvanians are worried that the public system does not adequately recognize, protect and resolve abuse and neglect of children.







# Everyday Kids, Everyday Lives

## Acknowledgements

Everyday Kids, Everyday Lives: A Vision for Pennsylvania's Children was developed through a collaboration of parents of young children, people who work with young children, and people who make policy about young children in Pennsylvania. Over the course of 12 months and across the state, these people met to discuss and debate what ALL young children in Pennsylvania should expect of their communities and families, resulting in this vision statement. Their openness and willingness to closely examine the current state of affairs and to envision a future that includes all children in all aspects of community life cannot be understated.

The collaboration was facilitated by the Human Services Research Institute and the Institute on Disabilities, Pennsylvania's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research and Service at Temple University, with support from the Pennsylvania Developmental Disabilities Council, Grant #21490012. Project team members include:

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