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WBZ Cares: A Grassroots Effort

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BOSTON (WBZ-AM) -- Each month, “WBZ Cares” highlights a worthy non-profit organization and tells the story of what that organization does for the community. This month WBZ is profiling The CORSE Foundation (Community of Resources for Special Education) which was established by a group of dedicated parents and educators to raise funds to provide high quality and affordable programming, training, and resources to benefit children with special needs (ages 3-22), their families, and educators throughout South Shore Massachusetts.

WBZ Cares features Community of Resources for Special Education, or the CORSE Foundation, providing life-changing opportunities and the necessary tools and resources for kids with special needs on the South Shore.

Mary Beth Fassnacht's son Stephen has Down Syndrome. He's been involved with CORSE since kindergarten. He's now 13.

“I started with one program because I wasn't sure and then now Stephen's done probably 20, 30 plus programs,” stated Fassnacht.

CORSE offers specialized social, academic, recreation, therapeutic and work skills programs. Helping those with special needs become more independent and reach their full potential.

“I feel like he has more confidence. His athletic ability is better. He's done a ton of programs, running programs swimming programs, you know summer camps. Just a ton of things, tennis, just independent things that every kid wants to be able to do. It's a major bonding experience and just friends which everybody needs and wants,” said Fassnacht.

It all began 14 years ago with a grassroots effort.

“It did. Two moms looking for some fundraising money,” outlined Fassnacht

Raising supplemental special ed funds for the schools.

“We raised $12,000 in one night, so obviously I'm like ‘this is a need I guess in the community’. There's a lot of special education parents that want to do more for their kids,” said CORSE President and Co-founder Tracy Johnston.

Tracy Johnston is one of the parents who co-founded CORSE. She also has a son with autism.

“Our sort of mission was, you know, it's not all on the school district to take care of our kids. It really should be a partnership with parents working with the school to provide the best experience possible for our kids,” said Johnston.

CORSE now offers 50 to 60 integrated programs a year open to all children. So those with and without special needs can participate together.

“The typically developing kids get just as much out of it as the children with special needs. And there's so many kids out there that may not be diagnosed with a special need, but may be just shy or, I don't want to join a sports team. Because they're integrated programs with quote, unquote, No Labels, they feel comfortable joining. So it really impacts the community on so many different levels. Our primary beneficiary are children with special needs because that's what we staff the programs to accommodate, but we have definitely, finally, I believe, reached our goal of true integration,” concluded Johnston.

WBZ NewsRadio1030's Shari Small Reports