

**Scituate Recreation launches Counselor in Training program**

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Scituate Recreation’s volunteer family is a little bigger this year thanks to donations from the Gilmartin family of Scituate and the CORSE (Community of Resources for Special Education) Foundation. The donations helped create a Counselor in Training program to give any prospective volunteer, regardless of ability, some insight into the job of a counselor.

“We’re really proud and happy we’re able to bring this innovative program to Scituate this summer,” Jen Vitelli, recently retired recreation director, said. “This is something we figured maybe for 2017 is now happening this summer and we’re quite thankful to the CORSE Foundation and the Gilmartin family.”

The idea for a counselor-training program first came up several years ago, but the department lacked the funding and support it needed to see the program off, Vitelli said. This past winter, the pieces started to come together.

First, CORSE President Tracy Johnston approached Vitelli about helping to finance a portion of a Counselor in Training program that would be open to kids with disabilities, too. CORSE Parents had been asking Johnston how to get their kids involved as volunteers, and while recreation has been open to volunteers of all abilities, there was just too much demand and too little structure and supervision to accommodate that demand, Johnston said.

Vitelli was on board with the plan, but money was still an issue. She found her answer to the financial problem during a casual conversation about the program with the same recreation parent and instructor who raised the idea for a training program six years ago, Scituate Police Sgt. Jim Gilmartin.  “I didn’t get to finish the sentence when Jim said, ‘How much do you need? My family would like to write the check,’” Vitelli said. “That was quite generous.”

The donation to the town totaled $5,350—$3,350 from CORSE and $2,000 from Gilmartin’s family. The money helped pay for a group of educators to design the training and plan some basic criteria for the volunteers, and for an on-site person, Trevor Schattgen, who will assist with teaching and guiding the volunteers, Johnston said. “It’s a pilot. We’ve got a lot to work on, but it just gives more kids with a range of abilities a chance to volunteer,” she said. A dozen of the 49 volunteers are high-functioning children with disabilities, she said.

The volunteers will help oversee three programs: Little People, for 3- to 5-year-olds; Morning Adventure for 5-year-olds to third-graders; and Young People, for first- through sixth-graders. The program's first training, held in June, included role-playing practice to show them some situations they may face as volunteers, Johnston said.

For most eighth-graders going into high school, this is their first experience at having a job, she said. Through this volunteer program, they can learn basic skills, including filling out an application and time sheet, that they can use later in life, she said.

“They can transfer these skills to any job,” Johnston said.

Gilmartin echoed Johnston about the potential value of the Counselor in Training program.

“This program and all the others they provide benefit children every year and teaches them lessons that they will never forget,” he said.

Gilmartin said his father, Joseph, died in October, leaving the family some money and a wish that it be gifted to organizations that help people, especially children.

He already had an idea in mind. When his son, Joey, started volunteering as a counselor with recreation six years ago, Gilmartin spoke to Vitelli about the value a Counselor in Training program could have for the community.

This summer, because of the partnership and the donations, both of his sons are helping the recreation department: Joey as a staff member, and Andrew through the Counselor in Training program, Gilmartin said.

“My father loved his grandsons and Scituate very much and the fact that there were funds needed to start this program and my family had the resources to help was a wonderful match,” he said.

Over the years, Gilmartin said he’s seen the value of CORSE and recreation in the Scituate community both as a parent and as an instructor for All Stars Karate, taught by Danny Reynolds. He credited Reynolds along with Vitelli and Johnston for their positive impact on children of all abilities.

“It’s a very small thing that we’re doing compared to what these folks do every day,” Gilmartin said of his family’s donation.