

SUMMARY OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT MEEETING
SATURDAY September 19, 2015

Below is a summary of the brainstormed ideas that were generated by the people who attended the CCC Needs Assessment Workshop. Participants were asked to address three questions.

I. What is happening at Follen to help you and your family feel welcomed and supported? What programs have helped or are helping to meet your needs?

In general, Follen is a welcoming community. Children and families feel accepted. There are opportunities available such as the Youth and Junior choirs, holiday activities, teen programs that offer numerous activities that accommodate a range of needs, expertise from various professionals in the community who are willing to give of their time, individuals who have shared their personal stories in service, and the Sunday morning support group for parents of children with special needs.

II. What is not working for you at Follen? What needs do you or your family have that have not been met at Follen?

Programs such as R.E., OWL, Volunteer programs, and other activities and offerings at Follen need to keep children with a variety of special needs in mind so that adaptations can be made for children whose strengths are in areas not related to language. Examples of adaptations would be having more concrete, hands on activities, and more work-based volunteer activities for children and youth who are transitioning out of the public school system, and have more mentors available to help children at all ages.

III. What ideas or suggestions do you have so that Follen could be more supportive of families of and children with special needs?

A number of suggestions were offered as follows:

- a. An RE program designed for children with special needs
- b. An Adaptive OWL program so that all youth have the opportunity to be exposed to the curriculum, whether as part of the class or not. Might it be possible to collaborate with other churches to offer a separate program for youth on the margins. OWL includes separate curricula for various age groups.
- c. Having the OWL program for younger ages would also be a positive move.
- d. When a parent is in distress over a special needs child, people should be encouraged to reach out to that person with a phone call, email, or in some other way to offer support and let the person know their concerns have been heard and are cared for.
- e. Mentoring was mentioned many times.

1. Pairing an older child or youth with a younger child as a “special buddy” would enable that child to have a special connection to someone at the church who could help the child become integrated in the community and feel connected.
 2. Mentors who could act as coaches for young adults transitioning out of the public school system who could help them prepare for job applications, interviews and other skills and tasks related to finding a job.
 3. Sponsor training for youth mentors to mentor younger children.
 4. Help parents become educated about IEPs. A workshop on IEPs could be offered.
 5. Offer work-based activities for young adults (high school grads) such as making soup for Sunday morning or meals or help with hospitality preparation for Sunday mornings or office work under the guidance of an adult who could guide them.
 6. Parents of special needs children usually feel overwhelmed by all the paper work and deadlines involved in getting services for their children. Having a peer sit with the parent to help the parent get organized and focused while feeling supported could be quite helpful, especially to single parents.
- f. Suggestions were offered for a variety of support groups
1. Parent support group for parents of younger children that also include the ability for parents to exchange information
 2. Parent support group for parents of young adults with special needs who are transitioning out of the public school system support programs and no longer have an institutionalized program to help them.
 3. Have a Covenant Group that would be especially welcoming to parents of special needs children
 4. Start a psycho-educational group for parents of children with special needs that might transition into a support group
 5. Offer a group for young adults to discuss specific topics with pizza to provide opportunities to socialize
- g. Conduct an anonymous Needs Assessment survey to be sent out to the community. Include these questions. Ask specifically if they have a child who is uncomfortable or feels disenfranchised at Follen. If so, what could Follen do to welcome their child?
- h. It is crucial to offer child care for all Follen activities