# CORSE continues to make a difference for Scituate

**By Kelly Anne Clinton**

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Scituate —

Scituate’s Community of Resources for Special Education (C.O.R.S.E.) Foundation started in 2006 as a grassroots effort that aimed to fill the void in community-based programming for children with special needs.

The program, once an idea thought up by Tracy Johnston and Marynell Henry, has blossomed into a multifaceted organization that today garners support from the whole Scituate community.

Programs run throughout the year and vary from swimming lessons with Healthtrax, paddleboarding with Maritime Adventures, riding bikes with Lose the Training Wheels Bike Camp to after school academic help in math, integrated social development programs, and family outings at the movies and restaurants.

Though it may seem like the foundation has covered it all, the organization continues to grow both in ideas and manpower.

Most recently the C.O.R.S.E. Foundation’s board has grown to 15 members – the most they have ever had. Since its inception, C.O.R.S.E. has involved more than 1,700 volunteers to help support its programming.

“We’re up to a board of 15 – it feels like a big accomplishment. I never thought this would grow to need a board of 15 people, but it has,” co-founder and past board member Tracy Johnston said.

Johnston described the board as the group responsible for the number of programs C.O.R.S.E. puts on.

“The board is critical…They are the blood, sweat and tears of C.O.R.S.E. They just make everything happen,” said Johnston.

“I think we are reaching saturation now – we are doing so much and we want to continue to do it well, so this bigger board will be key in helping us forge forward,” she said.

C.O.R.S.E. programs can be broken into four categories.

First, the foundation provides academic support for special needs students. They run an after school program during the school year and this year they will be running a summer program before school gets started for students to gear up to go back to school.

Second are social programs, which help improve communication skills of students from kindergarten to high school. Scituate Public School faculty teaches both of these programs.

The third category encompasses recreational camps where students play different sports, which is meant to improve self-confidence and self-esteem by helping them to develop physical skills and learn fundamental skills in each sport.

And last, C.O.R.S.E. also puts on ‘Let’s Go Community Events,’ which allow families to do activities together, such as going to a restaurant, skating or boating.

All of the programs, while staffed for special needs, are priced like a typical recreation course. C.O.R.S.E. raises money throughout the year to be able to pay half of the program fees. The most popular fundraisers are the gala event in October and a golf tournament in June.

C.O.R.S.E. also helps pay for certain programs at the schools such as music therapy, yoga and other specialized courses that are offered at the elementary level for students with intensive special needs.

Many of the programs that C.O.R.S.E. offers, while staffed sufficiently for children with special needs, are open to all children in the community. This is something Johnston said was a priority from the beginning.

“When C.O.R.S.E. first started the perception of special needs programming was different – they were isolated. We tried really hard to make sure programs were integrated and that there were opportunities for typically developing children to enroll. I feel now that message is out there, that we’re not just a special needs organization, we’re an organization for all kids in the community,” said Johnston.

C.O.R.S.E. currently has a number of student volunteers who help promote this community-inclusive feeling. The high school has a Best Buddies program, the Gates Intermediate School has a new program this year, Respect All People, and the elementary schools run a similar peer mentor program. All of these programs are about Scituate students pairing up with students in the special needs classrooms.

“That has been a great experience because the kids who help feel really great and so do all the kids. It allows them to have role models and allows us to involve more of the community in our programming,” said Johnston.

Overall, Johnston believes C.O.R.S.E. has had an impact on the community.

“I feel like C.O.R.S.E. has really brought the community closer together. The message is really getting out there that this is community effort and because of that, parents with children with special needs kids aren’t feeling so isolated and parents without special needs kids are becoming more understanding,” said Johnston.

Members of the C.O.R.S.E. Foundation will be meeting to discuss new proposals for programming and funding for the upcoming year. The deadline to get a proposal in is June 1 and either Scituate Public Schools or the Recreation Department must sign off each proposal.

*For more information please visit the website at: www.corsefoundation.org*