

Scituate mariner, January 27, 2011

Scituate CORSE Foundation will focus on more than schools --

Photos



AccesSport America instructors Nate Berry, left, and Duncan Shea teach Abbey Johnston and Hanna Lydon how to windsurf during a joint program between Scituate Community of Resources for Special Education, the town education department and AccesSport America last August.

Scituate —

As Tracy Johnston, co-founder of **Scituate's Community of Resources for Special Education** (CORSE), recently presented an update to the school committee, she said the non-profit that was just an ambitious idea put forth by parents five years ago has grown into a community organization bigger than she had ever anticipated.

“It just keeps growing and growing, and the amount we have been able to do in the community so far has just been great,” she said.

Johnston and Marynell Henry started CORSE in 2006 to provide supplemental educational services for children with special needs. The organization now provides students with in- and out-of-school activities, summer camps and even family activities. The organization is making some changes to its bylaws this year, which is why Johnston presented her update to the school committee.

Initially, when CORSE was first founded, the school received 80 percent of the programs supplied, but in recent years, Johnston said the organization is moving toward a more community-wide approach, teaming up with the Scituate Recreation Department as well as community businesses. Therefore, CORSE will no longer allocate a specific amount to the schools.

“Parent and faculty assessments were the driving forces behind these decisions,” said Johnston. “And now it just gives us more flexibility to provide for the community rather than just Scituate

Public Schools. I still think when you look at the percentages at the end of the year the schools will still get a lot.”

The programs CORSE offers now range from sailing to computer technology, and they are open to all students. Johnston said the major difference is that the staff is trained in special education and there is a higher ratio of instructors to students.

“Some programs have more special needs that not, but it’s really leveling out and we’re fulfilling our mission of becoming more integrated because we feel it’s important for both groups of kids,” said Johnston.

The programs also have a minimal fee, which given the training of the staff and the number of staff on hand, would be much more had the organization not made it a goal to be affordable, according to Johnston.

“Our main idea when we started this was we wanted to make these kinds of opportunities the same fees as any other program offered through the town,” she said.

In total, Johnston said CORSE is giving back \$90,000 to the community in fiscal 2011, which ends June 30, and she can guarantee \$50,000 per year from now on.

Johnston said this year, CORSE “started to refine and set priorities,” many of which were dictated by feedback from parents and staff.

“In our assessment, both parties felt that the most important thing was the programming, and we got that message loud and clear.” She said.

In the initial years, Johnston said CORSE spent more on faculty training and technology, but is going to focus on programs this year. After-school programs during the school year include computer technology and academic supports in reading, writing and study skills.

Working with the Scituate Recreation Department, CORSE is able to run programs for students that include basketball, soccer, running, yoga and summer camps.

CORSE also partners with community organizations such as Funtastics, Booth Hill’s Therapeutic Riding Program and the Patriot Cinema Mil Warf Plaza to put on events and programs.

For information on CORSE, visit corsefoundation.org.

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