

# Fulfilling the needs of every student

## ISD receives update on local autism program

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MANISTEE — April is Autism Awareness Month, so it was only fitting that the Manistee Intermediate School District Board of Education receive an update during their monthly meeting on local efforts in that area.

Manistee ISD Director of Special Education Jim Scranton introduced to the board Micheal Amor, who is a consultant for Autism Spectrum Disorder and Brooke McIssac, who is an Autism support specialist.

They work closely with area school districts in helping them accommodate with children who have autism disorders.

Types of autism spectrum disorder include Asperger syndrome, childhood disintegrative disorder, Rett syndrome, pervasive developmental disorder and classical autism. Characteristics of these types of autism include impaired social interaction and communication skills, and a limited range of activities and interests.

SOURCE: Autism Society

“This happens to be Autism Awareness Month, so it was kind of timely that we had them for this presentation today,”

Scranton said. “Brooke is working as a classroom supervisor and two days a week as our autism support specialist. In the past five or six years our services to that population have really expanded. She has worked really hard with the local districts and teachers, and parents in special development and they really have come a long way.”

The addition of McIssac is something Amor feels has really added to the program because the number of students is on the rise. It provides more services to

# STUDENTS: FROM PAGE 1A

the schools.

"In case you haven't watched television this month, the center for disease control has released their new numbers and they said 1 in 88 students have an Autism Spectrum Disorder," Amor said. "We just had an IEP before I came here and we added out 54th student into our county in how many we have that get service in our local area."

Amor said that Manistee County averages about the same as the national numbers in terms of children who are suffer from autism disorders. She said the past year has been a very busy one for them at the local level.

"Things Brooke and I have been able to do we are pretty excited about," said Amor. "We have helped support our locals with increased training and we work with our coaches of our school districts around the county and our peer mentoring program has been able to be picked up."

The addition of McIssac has allowed them to do some more intensive programs with the peer group and supporting the coaches in the district, said Amor. This year they really focused on their mini-intensive training and they were able to do some work with the high school families in transition services.

"With the increase in students with autism going through the programming in about 10 years, we are going to see a boom of students who are going to need post secondary

programming," said Amor. "It is really amazing the amount of kids that are going to hit the community mental health system."

Some of the things they have done is provide training the para professionals around the county on accommodating and modifying the curriculum. Amor said she has been very impressed with what she has viewed on the para pros and the educational staff in the county.

"We had an average attendance of about 27 people for these meetings," said Amor. "They gave up their own personal time and all we did was feed them. We also had some representation with the SEEDS program, so that was nice."

Amor also presented to community partners and this program touched on people with autism in the work environment and things they can bring to jobs. She said they had representation from Love INC., West Shore Community College, Dial-A-Ride and just a variety of other work places where they have worked around the community.

McIssac said when she used to teach at the Kaleva Elementary School she was the autism coach and just beginning a peer program there. When she moved to the ISD she continued to work on implementing that in the different districts.

"This year we began a program and I worked with the teams that work in that building so sometimes it is social workers, speech ther-

apists and we build this little group on suggestions from the teaches and we train them," she said. "We meet with them weekly and bi-weekly to ask if they are having trouble in the classroom or playground."

"We were able to start a peer group in Onekama this year and one at CASMAN for the ninth grade, and one at MCC for a second grader. We also did some work with a fourth grade class at Bear Lake. So, they are all taking little bits and pieces to build a program," she added.

The program has been super successful and the

kids have been great, according to McIssac.

"We are helping the locals in their coaching and problem solving, so often when I meet monthly with them we tweak their plans," McIssac said. "Right now is a big transition time and some students don't have their transition binders, so today was the day I pass out all that information. I will be meeting with the special education teachers in building so they build this binder, so they are all set to go for next year. That is going to be a pretty big job for the rest of the year."