



NEWS RELEASE

Cariglia Named Director at HMEA's Autism Resource Central

Agency veteran sees opportunities to raise awareness and expand reach as a 'one-stop' resource

Worcester, MA, August 16, 2021 – [HMEA's Autism Resource Central](#) (The Center) has named Kristen Cariglia as its new Director.

The Center, funded by the [Department of Developmental Services](#) (DDS) and administered by [HMEA](#) (Horace Mann Educational Associates, Inc.), provides vital services such as education, activities, referrals, and support to families affected by Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in [65 towns in Central Massachusetts](#).

In her new role, Cariglia's leadership vision is to continue to expand The Center's reach throughout central Massachusetts by addressing one of its biggest challenges.

"The 4000-plus people we serve right now is only scratching the surface," said Cariglia. "There are so many individuals and families with ASD who are not aware of everything we have to offer and all the ways we can help. That's a challenge we are committed to solving. We have an opportunity to serve a lot more people through The Center by increasing our exposure."

The Center's staff is well-versed in all of the agencies and programs that provide services to individuals and families with ASD including Department of Developmental Services (DDS), [MassHealth](#), [Mass Rehab Commission](#), public supports, private insurance, and the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process.

The Center continues to launch a wide range of new programs and services. According to Cariglia, one of the most popular new programs has been three robotics groups that provide hands-on, age-based Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) education for individuals affected by ASD. These groups were launched with a grant from the [Saint-Gobain Corporation Foundation](#) which recently awarded The Center an additional grant to expand the program.

Other new programs include cooking classes, gaming groups, financial planning workshops, banking and money management for teens and adults. The Center has also started a new collaboration with the [Gender Wellness Initiative at Children's Friend](#) in Worcester to provide groups and supports for members of the LGBTQ community diagnosed with ASD.

"Our staff take great pride in coming together as a team to assist individuals and families in need by creating a safe, accepting and inclusive space for everyone affected by Autism," said Cariglia. "We want to be the one-stop resource for everything Autism in Central Massachusetts."

Cariglia began her career at HMEA in 2002 as an Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapist, then moved to The Center in 2006 to become one of the state's first Autism Support Brokers. Recognizing a need for more oversight at the agency level, Cariglia created the role of Autism Waiver Supervisor in 2015 and remained in that role until 2018, when she was promoted to Assistant Director.

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Throughout her years with HMEA, Cariglia's passion and commitment remain with supporting families.

"It is not unusual for me to meet with a family at odd hours or schedule several meetings in order to complete an application or review an IEP," Cariglia said. "I feel I have gained a tremendous amount of knowledge and experience through my work with families and collaboration with other agencies however, there is always more to learn."

In her most recent role as Director of Operations, Cariglia led The Center's strategy to offer more virtual services by creating online workshops and parent groups and training staff on new technology platforms. Having built this virtual capacity prior to the pandemic, The Center was able to quickly and easily transition its in-person activities to virtual environments when the COVID 19 shut down occurred.

"COVID 19 has taught me to prepare the best we can for the unknown, look for guidance when needed, and to trust in each other and the community we have built," said Cariglia. "I'm excited for the opportunity to lead this amazing organization and for all the new possibilities ahead."

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