

# Community Support Network gears up for second annual BBQ Picnic

**By Riley Murphy**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Get your barbecue bibs ready!

The Community Support Network is hosting its second annual BBQ Picnic on July 20.

The network is dedicated to fostering a community where every individual, regardless of ability, is valued and supported.

They work to advocate for children and adults with differing abilities.

Mike Brunetto, the leader of community partnerships and collaboration with the Community Support Network, says he hopes to build a network of like-minded and dedicated families who are invested in one another, not just part-time, but full-time, through events like the BBQ.

‘There’s nothing part-time about what we do as advocates; we need the strength to support and we need people that want to be a part of a network of families that lean on each other,’ said Brunetto. ‘Healthy and supportive relationships take time and compassion, and if you’re willing to offer both then this is the group to join.’

He said part of the reason they host these events is that transitions can be extremely hard for all students, but especially those who need caregivers or are young adults with differing abilities, as well as those who are facing the transition out of schools, where support systems may be lacking.

‘We are constantly trying to find a place where we belong, and so, given that our options are somewhat limited, it’s important for us to make sure that we create those avenues, create those situations and remove those barriers so that they have a place to go and they are integrated to the best possibilities into the community,’ said Brunetto.

Apart from building connections and relationships, the BBQ will be filled with activities, games, music, and of course, lots of food.

Brunetto said registration has so far exceeded last year’s amount at this time.

The number of volunteers has also grown from last year, and Brunetto shared he can’t thank them enough, as it serves as an indication of people wanting to be part of something special.

‘Everybody needs a place to belong, and especially those with multiple exceptionalities and special needs, it’s always a struggle to figure out where can you go on a Friday night or what’s out there that we could join. I think what we’re trying to establish here is a group that comes together that has a lot of things in common. We talk about good times, we talk about struggles, and then we share information and then the next thing you know you end up building lifelong friendships and that’s the goal,’ said Brunetto.

Brunetto also shared the network is looking to partner with and design daytime programs for young adults with differing abilities once they move into community living.

‘It’s time for us to utilize the passion of advocates like myself who want to work with others and create something, create a legacy, so that our family members use the services that we create,’ said Brunetto.

He encourages every family to attend the Community Support Network Picnic and said the worst that can happen is that you make a

new friend.

?We have to keep in mind that in the midst of all the celebration, there are a lot of tough and intentional conversations that we need to have. Whether that would be with families and each other or also with our local agencies and the town in order to put things together for our families, I'm committed to doing that and it's great to know that a lot of people are willing to help,? said Brunetto.

The BBQ will be held at Cold Creek Conservation Area from 12 noon to 5pm.

Pre-registration can be completed at [caffipicnic.eventbrite.com](http://caffipicnic.eventbrite.com).

Registration must be done in advance.