

# Employee Spotlight

Meet Abby Dunn, Manager of Middletown Child Opportunity Zone

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Given her relentless support of Middletown School District's Enrichment Programs and steadfast dedication to engaging students and their parents, it's no wonder that Abby Dunn was chosen for an EBCAP Employee Spotlight. As the Manager of the Middletown Child Opportunity Zone (MCOZ), Abby has made significant contributions to the program --- evident in the praise she's received from colleagues both within and outside East Bay Community Action Program (EBCAP).

According to Christine Arouth, Director of Newport Family COZ, "Abby is very detail oriented and focused on quality and safety for all students. She works in partnership with Middletown Public Schools to support student and family engagement. And as a resident of Middletown, she very much enjoys contributing to the success of her community," adds Christine.

More accolades come from Rosemarie Kraeger, Superintendent of Middletown Public Schools. "Abby is always looking for new ideas to engage students. She promotes the vision of the Middletown Schools, 'Ensuring Success for Every Student,' by providing activities that include all students' interests. Abby is an integral member of our school community," Superintendent Kraeger affirms.

Abby explains the inspirational aspects of her job. "I very much enjoy serving my community and seeing families at school events." Her work in the community began in 2004 when she was appointed the After School Coordinator for the Newport Family Child Opportunity Zone. "I learned everything I know from Samatha Brinz, former Director of Quality Initiatives, and Christine Arouth and I loved it." She explains that this support, plus

many training opportunities, helped her improve her educational skills. All her hard work paid off when she was appointed Coordinator of MCOZ in 2014 and then Manager of the program in 2019. "It's been amazing. I look back and think where did the years go."

Introduced in Rhode Island in 1995, Child Opportunity Zones link schools with comprehensive support services for children and their families. They provide services that not only improve the quality of family and community life, but also improve educational outcomes for children. Abby explains how MCOZ offers students K-8 afterschool enrichment programs as well as winter, spring, and summer vacation camps.

"MCOZ also offers a variety of family and child programs and provides intervention support to the Middletown School District," she relates.

Since 2014, MCOZ has served 1710 students, organized 607 programs, and documented an impressive list of 1236 volunteers. "We invite parents, community members, teachers, pretty much anyone who is interested (and who completes a background check) to coordinate a program," states Abby. She proceeds to further explain MCOZ's partnership with the Middletown's School District. "MCOZ coordinates programs through the district's Beyond the Bell program," she relates. This program engages K-8 students in academic and enrichment opportunities that foster self-confidence and boost academic achievement. "They are intervention programs for reading and math and are made possible with the help of teachers at Middletown's two elementary schools and Gaudet Middle School," states Abby. "MCOZ is at each site and helps with student enrollment, communi-

cating with parents, setting up classrooms, and coordinating buses which were just added last year," she adds.

Vacation camps are also designed to support enrichment needs of students and feature recreational activities, arts and crafts, and special events. Unfortunately, as many things changed due to Covid-19 restrictions, MCOZ summer camps were limited in their offerings this year. "We began enrollment for our summer camps in January and had a 6-week program ready to go. Each week was individualized, and we already had a waiting list," relates Abby. "Obviously, with the Governor's and Superintendent's guidance we had to cancel the whole summer program, restart, and re-enroll," she recalls.

Restructuring the summer camp program included paring it down from six weeks to four weeks and limiting enrollment while simultaneously developing virtual camp options. "In previous years, families were able to choose individual weeks for their children to attend. This year, families had to commit to all four weeks of in-person camp in an effort to lessen the coming and going of different campers each week," states Abby. "We were allowed 26 campers for our on-site camp and ultimately ended up with 24 campers."

When asked about the plans for the 2020-2021 school year, Abby explains that at this time all MCOZ enrichment and intervention programs have been put on hold by the Middletown School administration. Abby is confident in her program's ability to offer safe and transparent virtual and in-person programs and is hoping to do so as soon as possible. "Our community is dedicated and supportive and I know our children will be put at the center of any and all decisions," states Abby with optimism and hope.

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