Starting a Special Needs Ministry
Kelly Cahoon- DC Church
www.godeepcreek.com
kcahoon@godcchurch.com

#1. Find your heartbeat: Connect to a story of a child with special needs.

#2. Start building your vision and vision cast with your senior leadership.
   - Stories of families in your church this is going to help.
   - How God is leading you on this journey.
   - Your commitment.

#3. Determine what area of ministry Special Needs will fall underneath?
   - Are you a large church? Is there a Pastoral Care Pastor?
   - Are you going to be doing this on your own/ in conjunction with another job?
   - Who will take care of kids when they grow older? Will the youth ministry?
   - Who will take care of deaths in the ministry?
   - How will you handle hospitalizations/ long term medical care when families need support? Who will support the families in those situations?

#4. Do your homework:
   - Read Books! See Facebook group for links.
   - Visit websites that are also listed on the Facebook group such as:
     joniandfriends.com, theinclusivechurch.com, easterseals.org, specialneedsparenting.net
   - Check out your local Children’s hospital for seminars!
   - Join Facebook groups: Autism society, Down Syndrome, Sensory-Processing groups.

#5. Make visits to other churches with Special Needs Ministries.
   - Networking gives you friends to bounce ideas off of but it also helps when you are close in proximity. You can refer families to one another!
   - Visit during the week to ask a lot of questions and then visit again later on a Sunday.
   - Ask for sample documents.
   - Take a lot of pictures! It will help you when pricing things out you like.

#6. Know the Budget/ Fundraising.
   - Price everything and don't cut things short.
   - Know your budget.
   - If you don’t have a budget, no problem. Work with local businesses by giving them a vision of the ministry. See what happens! It is a great way to tell the community that your church is starting a Special Needs Ministry, when you partner with a local business.
   - There is something about Special Needs! God will touch the hearts of people! Watch what He does!
#7. Know how you “plan” on running the ministry.
   - Buddy system?
   - How many volunteers will it take each week?
   - Will you run the ministry for all of your services?
   - Will you have self-contained rooms?
   - How many children/adults can fit in those rooms?
   - Where will the rooms be located? Will they be together or separate?
   - Be creative!

#8. Present everything again to your senior pastor.
   - Give him your whole detailed plan.
   - Give him every reason you should do this!
   - If you can’t answer his questions, tell him you will find the answers and get right back to him.

#9. Vision Cast with your Kid Min Team and your Church!
   - Kid Min Team: Make sure they hear it before the church! Make sure they are excited about your vision! Their excitement can be like wildfire! You want them to be “Pre-planted advocates” for when you vision cast for the church!
   - Church: Make sure you educate them, spark their interest, and you connect their hearts to a heart of a special needs child.

#10. Leadership/ Volunteers-
   - Leadership- Have Service Leaders or Team Leaders and make sure they share the same vision!
   - Define your role and their role in the ministry. Have job descriptions.
   - Volunteers- Help them understand where they belong in the ministry so they are passionate about serving. Train them! Use video trainings to start out.

#11. Invite your church for an open house.
   - Have all of your team members there with their name tags on!
   - Be ready to welcome new team members and parents with important documents ready and volunteers ready to give tours!
   - Have activities ready for kids. Make it a safe place for kids right away. Offer private tours for families that can not stay.

#12. Soft Opening
   - Take time to transition existing kids in the ministry.
   - Work out any issues.
   - Take your time!

#13. Advice / Mistakes
   - Parents: We avoid using parents as volunteers in the ministry.
   - Policies: Just because someone else’s policy works for them, it may not work for you!
   - Location: Avoid any upstairs locations.
   - Look at the room: Remember that they are kids first! Don’t forget the fun stuff!