

Fall
2017



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center

SFCC star

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Fall 2017: Volume 6

Our mission is to serve and educate children with special needs in inclusive environments enabling them to reach their greatest potential.

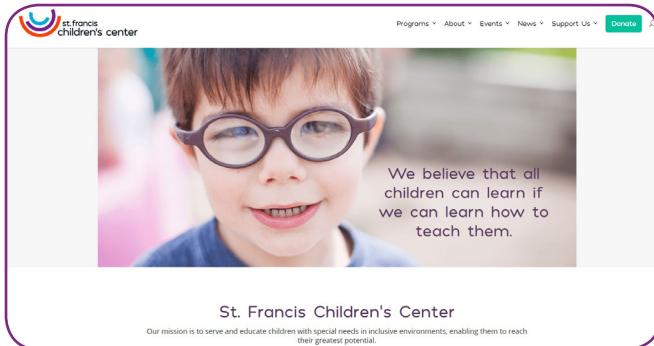


St. Francis Children's Center's New Look

By Mara Dućkens, Executive Director

Every day, we hear parents and children remark about the life-changing programs at St. Francis Children's Center. Parents use words like empowering, accepting, supportive and nurturing to describe our programs. Children talk about the fun, friendships, learning and play that takes place. From our top-rated inclusive Early Education Center, to our high-impact community-based programs for children with special needs, we are ensuring that young children – and their families – have the tools needed to reach their greatest potential.

To acknowledge our unique approach to working with children and families, and to celebrate the daily successes taking place at St. Francis Children's Center, we have recently redesigned our website.



With easy to navigate pages, colorful images, and inspiring stories, we are confident that you will enjoy exploring our new site. Whether you are signing up for programming, making a donation, checking the school lunch menu, or perusing the Family Activity Center calendar, you will be able to easily access the information you need. And while you're on our site, we know you will glean a sense of the magic that takes place at St. Francis Children's Center, day in and day out.

But there's more! In honor of our 50th Anniversary in 2018, you may have noticed that we have also updated our logo. The three vibrant colors in the design come directly from our playful classrooms and therapy spaces, and the three arches represent nurturing and growth, like a bird in a nest preparing for flight. After all, that is what we specialize in at St. Francis Children's Center – helping all children find the inner-strength and self-confidence needed to soar.



We hope you will take time to visit our website often, and stay connected through our regular email updates and Facebook posts. (A shorter version of this story can also be found on our new blog.)

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Sibshops: Celebrating Siblings of Children with Special Needs!

By Dori Buschke, Director of Programs

The typically developing brothers and sisters of children with special needs are a special group too. Though they are unique individuals, they often share a set of concerns and challenges that come with their role. A significant fact sometimes overlooked is that these brothers and sisters will most likely be involved in the lives of their siblings with special needs longer than anyone else in the family. This alone demonstrates the importance of providing them with education, support and information that will lay a solid and healthy foundation for their journey ahead.

At St. Francis Children's Center, we are delighted to help provide this foundation through our offering of a program called Sibshops, founded in 1990. In the Sibshops sessions, typically offered monthly, the children engage in energetic games and activities that foster friendship, trust and bonding. This in turn allows them to engage in open and frank discussions about their love for their siblings with special needs as well as the frustrations they experience because of them.



Common themes emerge when the children discuss these complex relationships. Often times these kids feel left out and ignored due to so much family attention and resources being focused upon the siblings with special needs. Some express resentment that their families cannot visit restaurants or recreational spots because the special needs may create a barrier. Children worry they may be responsible for their siblings when they become adults, and they wonder how they will navigate this unknown future. They also experience mixed emotions

when their siblings with special needs are bullied or made fun of. It angers and saddens them when this happens, yet they are sometimes embarrassed by their siblings. Some have disclosed the worry of acquiring the conditions experienced by their brothers or sisters.

Attending Sibshops allows children to express their concerns, fears and frustrations in a safe and accepting environment where they learn that their new-found friends experience the very same feelings. The adult facilitators, specially trained to offer Sibshops groups, carefully guide discussion and validate the children's feelings.

Former Sibshops attendees have expressed deep appreciation for what the program has brought to their lives beyond closer relationships with their siblings. Lasting friendships have been made with others they've met through the program and some have been inspired to choose career paths working with individuals with special needs and disabilities.

For more information on Sibshops at St. Francis Children's Center, visit our website at sfcckids.org or call Jennifer Drechsler at 414-351-8851 ext. 314.





Becoming Rock Stars

By Kendra Carter, Children's Long-Term Support Program Manager

Eleven years ago, Nadia and her twin brother, Malcolm, came into this world nine weeks early. At age one, Nadia wasn't yet walking, so she was referred to St. Francis Children's Center (SFCC) while being evaluated for Milwaukee County's Birth to Three Program. After she was determined to be eligible for services, she started physical therapy and additional early intervention services with her SFCC team to help shape her development.

As Nadia turned three and began the transition out of the Birth to Three Program, she was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. She received services and support through her school and, with the right support and guidance, Nadia's parents were able to get her started on Milwaukee County's Children's Long-Term Support (CLTS) Waiver Program at SFCC. CLTS is a home and community-based service Waiver that provides Medicaid funding for children who have substantial limitations in their daily activities and need support to remain in their home or community. Eventually, Nadia began ABA therapy, which is explained by Autism Speaks as "the use of techniques and principles" such as positive reinforcement, "to bring about meaningful and positive change in behavior."

Although she has always been a friendly girl, before therapy, Nadia wouldn't make eye contact with those around her and had very limited verbal communication. Today, her language has taken off! She speaks in complete sentences, initiates and maintains conversations with others, responds to her name and can answer basic safety questions. Plus, her eye contact has improved tremendously. She's in school and doing a phenomenal job!



Nadia's twin, Malcolm, is also on the autism spectrum. However, his needs aren't as significant as Nadia's, so he has always been able to do many things on his own. After receiving speech and language services at SFCC through the Milwaukee County Birth to Three program, Malcolm's mother jokes that, "He won't stop talking!" Like his sister, Malcolm is interested in music and the arts and tells others that he is going to be a rock star when he grows up.

Nadia and Malcolm's mother has many great things to say about the services they received from St. Francis Children's Center, but she is especially happy to see how much Nadia has improved over the years. Not only did she learn to walk and talk, but now, like her brother, Nadia is able to do things more independently.

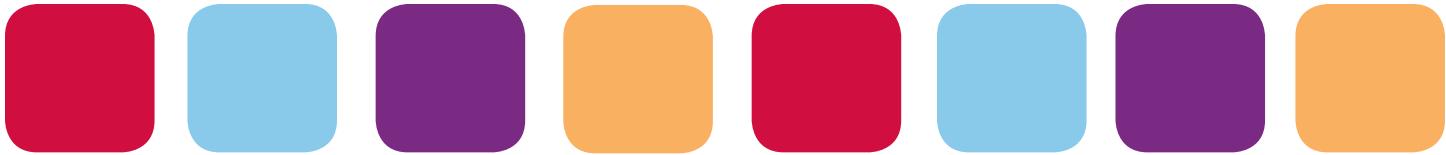
Eleven years ago, the future was very unclear for these two preemies. But today, their parents feel that the sky's the limit for Nadia and Malcolm. Like all parents, they are hopeful that their children will be able to achieve whatever they set their minds to...including receiving high school diplomas, living on their own, maintaining jobs, being a part of the community, and yes, perhaps even becoming rock stars!

Sign-Up for our Email List!

We'd love to stay in touch with you via email! Sign-up today to get updates on what's happening at St. Francis Children's Center and discover how your support helps tons of children in our community. We'll also soon start sending this newsletter through email and we don't want you to miss it!

Follow these simple steps to join our email list:

1. Visit our website at www.sfcckids.org.
2. Locate the "Subscribe" box on the bottom of the home page.
3. Type in your name and preferred email, then hit "Subscribe!"



Therapy at St. Francis Children's Center

Help Me Talk

By Anne Scannell, Margaret Regan & Adele Eklund, Pediatric Speech Language Pathologists

As pediatric speech pathologists, we often hear parents say that their child is not using words. **Here are some ways to encourage your child's speech and language development:**

- Talk to your child as you care for him/her throughout your day, as well as about what you are doing while you are with him/her. Label objects, people and actions too. For example—"cut apple," "see the car," "put shirt on," etc. Keep your speech simple (1-3 word phrases) and continue to talk as you play with your child, labeling toys and the pretend actions of the toys you are playing with.
- Read colorful books with simple pictures to your child every day. Don't worry about reading the specific words of the story. Instead, label the pictures and actions using simple phrases. For example—"boy jump," "red bird," "night night baby."
- Imitation and repetition work wonders for learning language. Nursery rhymes and songs are familiar and predictable. Your child will most likely join in with some finger/hand movements and/or words.

- Modeling is teaching something by doing or saying it first. This is accomplished by describing your actions and your child's actions with simple words

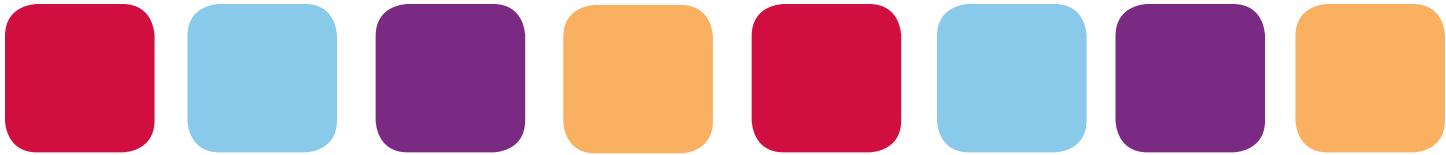
Other Hints and Ideas:

- Reduce your use of questions.
- Give your child the time to respond. Slow down and allow your child the time to come up with words on his/her own.
- Reduce your speaking rate.
- Emphasize sounds and use inflection in your voice
- Offer choices from two items to encourage back-and-forth exchange.
- Create the need for your child to communicate by not anticipating all his/her needs.
- Have your child make an effort to communicate an idea by pointing or using a basic sign (such as, "me," "eat" "more"), vocalizing or trying to imitate a word

But maybe the most important thing to remember is to remember to praise your child's efforts to communicate with you. For example: "I like it when you use your words," or "Good for you. You used your words!"

Have fun with your child exploring and talking about the world around you!





Joshie's Journey Through Birth to Three

By Amanda DiPalma, Birth to Three Service Coordinator

Joshua, affectionately referred to as "Joshie" by his friends and family, was referred to Milwaukee County's Early Intervention/Birth to Three Program in July of 2015 for a concern with his gross motor skills (these develop through the use of the large muscles in your body like your arms and legs.) His parents noticed he wasn't developing in the same way as his peers and wanted to help him accomplish what his peers were accomplishing. After Joshie was evaluated for the program, they found he qualified and was referred to St. Francis Children's Center to receive services.



When Joshie started working with his team at SFCC, he was just under a year old and was not yet crawling, pulling to stand, or getting into the 4-point position (hands and knees on the floor). Using Joshie's family's existing routine and concerns for his development, the team developed goals for him to work towards - being able to roll, crawl, and get into 4-point during free time.

After his first six months in the program, Joshie had accomplished all of those goals. He was able to roll from tummy to his back unassisted, crawl, pull to stand, and sit independently. The next goals that the team decided to work towards were for Joshie to walk and begin to use his words. While his team and family were thrilled with his progress, they soon had new concerns. His physical therapist, Lisa Davis, and his mom, Thresa, began noticing that Joshie had heavy breathing, a delay in hair growth, was frequently sweaty, and had an overall difficult time completing tasks without breaks due to shortness of breath. When Thresa took him in for his two year check-up, his doctor discovered that his PDA (Patent

ductus arteriosus) had not closed properly. PDA is a heart defect caused by problems in the heart's development. In January of 2017, Joshua had surgery to correct the PDA and has improved tremendously.

"His hair filled in, he has more energy, [is] vibrant, and [has come] alive," his mother explained. His therapists report that he no longer has shortness of breath, he is talking more, and walking. According to his therapist Lisa, "he has taken off," and is making progress every day.

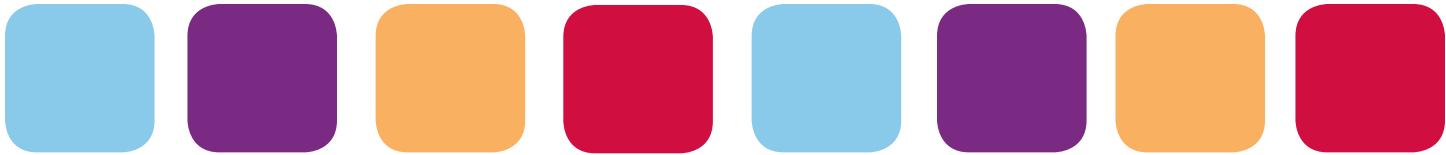
"The staff always had my family's best interest at heart..."

Joshua will be graduating from the program this month, the day before his 3rd birthday. When asked about the Birth to Three Program, Thresa explained, "I want everyone to know about the dedication and support that they can expect to receive through the services from St. Francis Children's Center's Birth to Three Program. The staff always had my family's best interest at heart and we are very grateful."

Joshie is now developmentally age appropriate, able to be independent, and has hit his milestones. Thresa is so proud of Joshua, as is his entire St. Francis Children's Center team.



Birth to Three information reported in this article was supported by the Milwaukee County Disability Services Special Education Birth to 3 Program under a RFP contract. This program is a Special Education Program funded with IDEA Federal Funding. The content is solely the responsibility of the author and does not necessarily represent the official views of the Milwaukee County Disability Services Division.



SFCC Volunteers of the Year

By Kara Petersen, Development & Volunteer Coordinator

Reliable, flexible, committed, passionate, selfless and kind – these are just a few of the qualities that make a volunteer great. At St. Francis Children's Center, we are lucky to have lots of people helping us every week with these qualities.

This year we recognized some of these individuals at our Annual Meeting, honoring them with the Youth Volunteer of the Year Award, Volunteer of the Year Award and Distinguished Leadership Award.

Eunah and Hannah Cha – Youth Volunteers of the Year

Eunah and Hannah are sisters who have made volunteering a family affair. Both began volunteering as classroom assistants after they each turned 15. Throughout the past two years, they have collectively contributed over 180 hours of service to our organization. In addition to assisting in the classroom, they've helped in other ways, like coming to the Center with their high school's Origami Club to teach kindergarteners simple origami.

Eunah and Hannah exemplify some of the best qualities of a volunteer. They are kind, dependable, hardworking, and most importantly, engaged with our students. These are just some of the reasons we selected Eunah and Hannah Cha as our 2016 Youth Volunteers of the Year.

Joan Bruce - Volunteer of the Year

To call Joan the "Volunteer of the Year" is an understatement. Instead, she should be recognized

as the "Volunteer of the Past Two Decades." Joan has dedicated herself to helping our organization since 1998. Next year she will celebrate 20 years of volunteering at St. Francis Children's Center. In that time, Joan has spent over 900 hours helping us, primarily assisting with administrative tasks and data entry, but always willing to lend a hand with whatever we need help with. Nothing is too big or too small for her to tackle.

We are in awe of her commitment and dedication, and were honored to recognize Joan Bruce as the 2016 Volunteer of the Year.

David Dorgan – Distinguished Leadership

Nearly 18 years ago, Dave Dorgan began his relationship with St. Francis Children's Center when his daughter began attending our Early Childhood Education Program as a newborn. His position as one of our parents soon evolved into one of our board members in 2008.

Since then, Dave has remained on our Board of Directors, offering guidance to our organization. He has demonstrated an outstanding commitment to St. Francis Children's Center through his leadership, advocacy, mentoring and philanthropy. It was our great pleasure to honor Dave with the 2016 Distinguished Leadership Award in thanks for his many years of thoughtful leadership and direction.



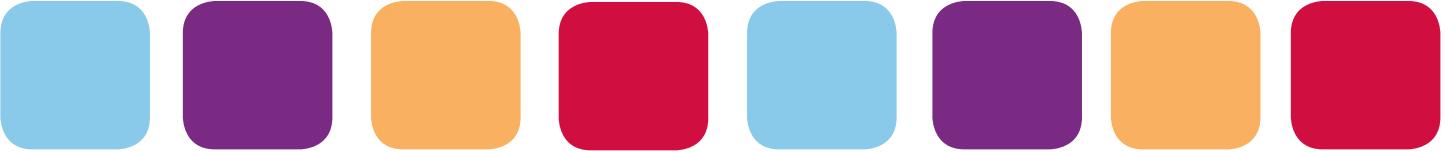
Hannah Cha and Eunah Cha, 2016 Youth Volunteers of the Year Recipients



Joan Bruce, 2016 Volunteer of the Year Award Recipient



David Dorgan, 2016 Distinguished Leadership Award Recipient



Awards Banquet Raises Over \$180,000

By Tara Clark, Director of Development & Marketing

Thank you to everyone who joined St. Francis Children's Center on Wednesday, October 11 for our 2017 Leading Lights Awards Banquet! This annual event broke a fundraising record this year, as we raised over \$180,000 to support programs for children with developmental delays and special needs in our community.

Approximately 300 guests filled the Grand Ballroom at The Pfister Hotel as the evening kicked-off with a special performance of The Beatles' "All You Need is Love" by some of our Early Childhood Education students accompanied by Dr. Rick Clark, Child Psychologist, on piano. After guests hummed along on their kazoos and dinner was served, we began the program part of the evening to honor three exceptional community leaders:

Danae Davis of Milwaukee Succeeds received the Children's Service Award.

Grady Crosby of Johnson Controls was the recipient of our Community Service Award.

And, **Dennis Klein** of C.D. Smith Construction was awarded the Humanitarian Award.

A special thanks to our two amazing co-chairs this year, **Julia Taylor** of the Greater Milwaukee Committee and **Chris Layden** of the ManpowerGroup, for making our 2017 Awards Banquet such a huge success. Also, we'd like

to extend a warm thank you to **Steve & Shelagh Roell** and an **Anonymous Donor** for generously sponsoring the event.

And finally, we'd like to mention Nancy Gapinski and her family, who shared their story via a special video shown during the Awards Banquet. Her son, Ben, was diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder when he was two years old and received Birth to Three and Children's Long-Term Support services at St. Francis Children's Center.

Thanks again to all our sponsors, Associate Chairs, parents, donors, board members, staff and community partners for your support!



Photo taken by Kim Evans of Focused Moments Photography

From left: Julia Taylor, Mara Duckens, Dennis Klein, Danae Davis, Grady Crosby and Chris Layden

Save the Date: Wine, Beer and Chocolate Tasting!

Did you know that 2018 marks the 25th anniversary of our annual Wine, Beer and Chocolate Tasting? To celebrate, we are making the event bigger and better than ever. Save the date! **The annual fundraiser will take place on Saturday, April 21 from 7-10 pm at the Holiday Inn Milwaukee Riverfront (4700 N. Port Washington Rd.)**

We may be moving the event down the street, but we'll still be offering all the same great event features like tons of great wines, craft beers and chocolates. The event will also feature a huge silent auction, raffle prizes, a wine pull, entertainment and more.

Watch our website - sfcckids.org - as we start to release more event details. Tickets will go on sale soon! If you're interested in sponsoring the event, please contact Tara Clark at tclark@sfcckids.org or 414-351-8851 ext. 223.





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St. Francis Children's Center Participates in Glendale's Root Beer Bash Sponsored by Sprecher

On Saturday, August 26, the City of Glendale held its first ever Sprecher Root Beer Bash at Richard E. Maslowski Community Park and St. Francis Children's Center was there for all the fun. The event started with the Glendale Police Department 5k Run or 2-Mile Walk. Other event highlights included root beer-inspired food, live music, tons of root beer and the Root Beer Olympics. Money raised from the Olympics, along with the proceeds from North Shore Events Center's food tent, will support the services St. Francis Children's Center provides to children with special needs. We hope to see you all at next year's Bash, which is sure to be bigger and better than ever.



The Root Beer Olympics featured friendly competitions for adults, kids and teams. Challenges included root beer chugging, keg tossing, an obstacle course and more.