

Spring
2017



SFCC Star

The bi-annual newsletter published by St. Francis Children's Center
Spring 2017: Volume 5

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



Driven to Achieve

By Mara Dučkens, Executive Director

On March 25, St. Francis Children's Center was honored to take part in the Donald Driver Driven to Achieve Awards Ceremony at The Pfister Hotel. That evening, former Green Bay Packer, Donald Driver, honored five community leaders with gifts of \$40,000 for the nonprofit organization of their choice.

Among the outstanding honorees was John Schlifske, Chairman and CEO of Northwestern Mutual, philanthropist, and father of six. John and his wife Kim have long been friends and supporters of St. Francis Children's Center. We were humbled and elated to learn that our organization would be the beneficiary of John's \$40,000 Driven to Achieve Award. This generous donation from the Donald Driver Foundation will support programming for children and families at St. Francis Children's Center.



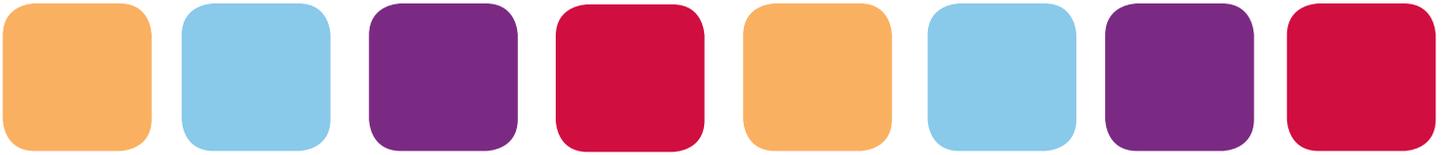
And a huge thanks to #80, Donald Driver, for using his celebrity to shine a spotlight on important human services work taking place throughout the Milwaukee community!



On behalf of our board and staff, and the children and families we serve, a huge thanks to John and Kim Schlifske for recognizing our work in this very special way. Your leadership in the community is an inspiration to all of us and we are grateful for your continuing support.

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Family Activity Center Spring Schedule

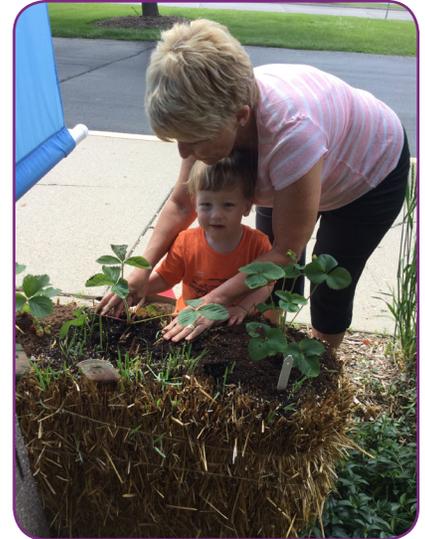
By Dori Buschke, Principal and Director of Programs

We are excited to announce that our Family Activity Center (FAC) is rolling out a new schedule of free events for spring. Our FAC provides programming for families of children with special needs. We designed the program as a place for families to gain support and resources and to network with other families. And to have fun as a family!

On **Saturday, April 8th from 10-11:30 am**, we held a spring gardening event led by Carmen Berte, a master gardener and SFCC classroom assistant. Families enjoyed rotating through garden-themed activities including a planting station where children planted seeds to take home to grow and nurture, a flower-making craft, drawing center, reading nook and sensory station.

Starting April 11th through May, families can enjoy open play groups on Mondays from 10 am to noon and on Thursdays from 1-3 pm. These sessions are for children with special needs through approximately age 6 and their typically developing siblings and friends. Play groups are held in a wonderful space set up as an early childhood classroom. Children can explore toys, materials and books to their hearts' content.

On April 20th, from 6:30 to 8 pm, psychologist Rick Clark will present on how to foster skills within young children to promote successful play, a very important part of development. Topics will include cooperative play, coordinated play, visual discrimination and emotional awareness. Rick will send families off with helpful tips and strategies on ways to use enjoyable family play time to target and foster children's development.



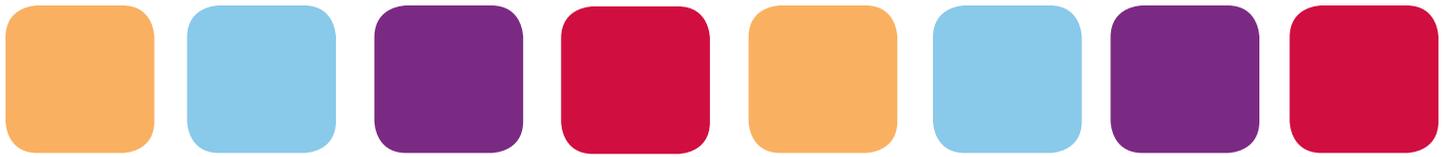
You can contact Jennifer Drechsler, program coordinator, at 414-351-0450 or jdrechsler@sfckids.org for information on more upcoming events, programming and resources including parent groups and weekend open play sessions.

A Word from our Family Activity Center Coordinator...



Hello, my name is Jennifer Drechsler and I am excited to be joining St Francis Children's Center as the new coordinator for the Family Activity Center.

I was a first/second grade classroom teacher before staying at home and raising my three children. My background is a good fit for helping parents of children with special needs. My oldest son was diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder and is now a freshman in college. I have a daughter who is a junior in high school and my youngest son, who has a learning disability, attends a program that helps him to strive for success despite his challenges. I look forward to sharing my experiences and knowledge with other families who are given the tremendous honor of parenting a child with special needs. I look forward to meeting you at our Family Activity Center activities!



St. Francis Children's Center Happenings...



In November, students from Nicolet High School's National Business Honor Society held a Toy Drive benefitting St. Francis Children's Center, donating hundreds of toys for children and families in our Birth to Three Program.



In December, staff posed for a photo in their ugly holiday sweaters just before our Winter Break.



In March, WISN-TV stopped by to interview Executive Director Mara Dučkens and film around the Center for a segment about our 24th Annual Wine, Beer & Chocolate Tasting.



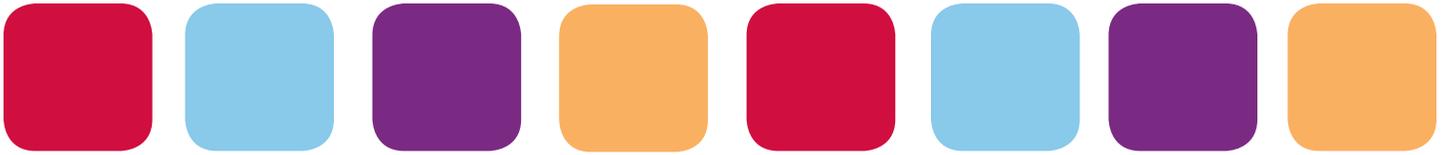
In February, roughly 60 adults and children joined us in our Family Activity Center for our first-ever movie night, featuring "Finding Dori."

Our Newsletter is Going Digital!

In an effort to save money (and trees!), we will not be mailing newsletters out to all of our supporters starting in 2018. Instead, we will mail out postcards to let you know when a newsletter is available online. For those who still prefer a paper copy, please contact Tara Clark at tclark@sfckids.org or 414-351-8851 ext. 223.

If you sign up for our email list, you will receive an email with a link to our newsletter. Follow these simple steps to join our email list:

1. Visit our website at www.sfckids.org.
2. Locate the purple/blue box on the bottom of the home page that says "Sign up to join our email list."
3. Type in your preferred email and hit Enter.
4. Begin to receive updates on what's happening, including news about our annual events.



Therapy at St. Francis Children's Center

Tips on Toe Walking

By Nicole Bailke, Physical Therapist

It's not uncommon for young children learning to cruise along furniture to stand and walk on their tip toes. This usually resolves gradually with most children between 12 and 15 months of age walking independently with their feet flat on the floor. Sometimes however, children continue to demonstrate a preference to walk on their tip toes even after they have mastered the skill. This preference for walking on their toes is termed "toe walking."

Toe walking is an atypical gait pattern characterized by an absence of normal heel contact on the floor by both feet when walking. It has many different causes. Children with neurological disorders toe walk due to increased tone in their muscles, while children with muscular disease toe walk due to weakness. Some children toe walk due to sensory processing disorders and others due to visual or vestibular disorders. But the most common cause of toe walking is habit (also known as idiopathic toe walking). In this case there is no underlying pathology/abnormality causing the toe walking. These children demonstrate walking/running on the tip toes of both feet but can stand and often walk with feet flat on the floor if cued/asked. What's wrong with that you may ask? Although initially more of a cosmetic issue, over time children that consistently walk on their tip toes can develop tight calf muscles which eventually limits their ability to stand with their feet flat on the floor or to bend at the ankle to perform functional skills including getting up from a chair, squatting and stair climbing.

Regardless of the cause, it's important to try and diminish the frequency of the behavior. You can try using a verbal cue like "flat feet" or "heels down" as a reminder or perhaps have the child wear shoes if they toe walk less with their shoes on. Sometimes these strategies are enough to help them achieve a typical gait pattern. However, many children that persistently toe walk can benefit from conservative treatment including physical and/or occupational therapy to help address the underlying cause or give home programming to help maintain range of motion as long as the child continues



to toe walk. If you are concerned that your child has been walking for some time and persistently walks on their toes or seems unable to stand with both feet flat on the floor then talk to your pediatrician as this may be an indication of an underlying problem and your child may benefit from further evaluation.

Printing Pals Summer Session

Does your child struggle with handwriting skills? Columbia St. Mary's at St. Francis Children's Center offers a 7-week enrichment group that covers the mechanics of handwriting, including grasp, letter formation and legibility. Fun multi-sensory handwriting exercises will support child's learning and improve fine motor skills essential to handwriting development. Designed for children in 4-year-old kindergarten through 4th grade.

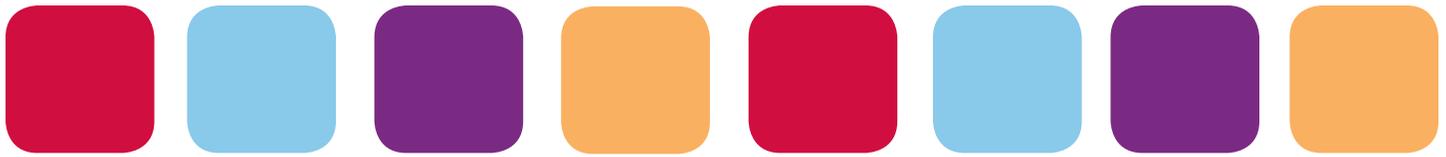
Tuesdays, June 20 - August 15, 2017

3:45-4:45 pm

(no class July 4 or July 25)

Cost - \$210 and advance registration is required. To register, contact Keri Scholz, OTR, at 414-351-8850 or Keri.Scholz@ascension.org.

Enrollment is limited. Register early!



Following up on Eliot

By Molly Wohlfeil, Birth to Three Program Manager

Eliot was referred to the Milwaukee County Birth to Three Program in November 2013 when he was just three and a half months old. While Eliot was getting fitted for a helmet due to his plagiocephaly, or the flattening of one side of the skull, his specialists commented to his parents on his extreme low muscle tone. Eliot's parents, in consultation with his pediatrician, made the referral to the Birth to Three Program.

Following Eliot's evaluation at St. Francis Children's Center, he began receiving intervention services from a physical therapist. His family learned that he had global developmental delays, meaning he had delays in at least two areas of development. While they finally had a diagnosis, his family never really received clear answers as to what caused his delays. When Eliot first started therapy, he had no head control and had extreme low tone. He also had a flat head because of a preference of laying on one side over the other. As he got older, it also became clear that he had speech delays and limited means of communication.

After his initial physical therapy services, Eliot began attending SFCC in our Young Toddlers classroom where he worked with a special education teacher, a speech therapist and an occupational therapist. While his parents were somewhat reluctant at first to have him in a social setting due to his many needs, they soon were overjoyed at the progress and growth Eliot displayed in this new social environment.

During Eliot's time in the program, his team was immediately impressed by his determination and warmed by his wonderful, bubbly personality. He soon gained head control, started sitting up and standing up,



and he began walking. Eliot also learned sign language in his Toddler East classroom, which helped him communicate with his family, teachers, therapists and classmates. Today Eliot uses a communication device to further assist him in communicating with those around him.

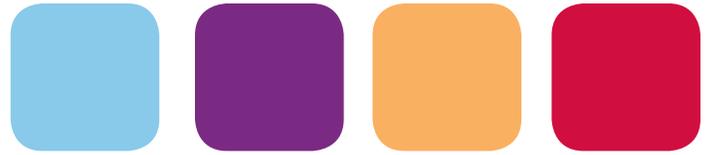
Eliot graduated from the Birth to Three Program in 2016, but we recently reconnected with the family when his younger sister Allison was referred to the Birth to Three Program. Allison will receive speech therapy from the same therapist who worked with Eliot.

In reconnecting with the family, Eliot's parents eagerly talked about Eliot and reported the progress he has made. Eliot's parents describe him as a very polite and endearing young boy. People enjoy being around him because he is sweet and has a great sense of humor. He loves the iPad, can double click on things, likes playing with the shape sorter, and loves the swings.



They also reflected on their own experiences with the program and his team. They shared a story of when Eliot's therapy team texted them a picture of the first time Eliot stood up in therapy... they'll never forget that day. Mom spoke of how resourceful the team was and the familial bond they felt with Eliot's entire team. They were also grateful that the team suggested braces for Eliot, told them about the Katie Beckett program, and how the whole team was so supportive of the family and Eliot.

We are delighted to see the progress that Eliot has made, and we can't wait to see his sister also grow through the Birth to Three Program!



High School Helpers

By Kara Petersen, Development & Volunteer Coordinator

At St. Francis Children’s Center, volunteers are so important to our success. With their help, our classrooms function better, our events run more smoothly and little projects become easier.

We greatly value our relationships with our individual volunteers, as well as our local partners who help us connect to volunteers.

Two of these partners that we have the pleasure working with each year are Divine Savior Holy Angels High School (DSHA) and Marquette University High School (MUHS). Both of these schools have two-week service projects that connect their senior students with local organizations. During these two weeks, the students go to work at their assigned service site every day instead of going to their normal classes.



DSHA students Abby, Rachel, Isabel, Zoe, Colleen & Abby.

chance to gain real-life experience in a workplace devoted to children. By the end of it, they learned how to be more patient, how to better communicate with children both with and without special needs, and ways to help in a classroom setting.

Rachel from DSHA said “I learned so much during Vocare, like the values of patience and compassion...”

“I’ve learned quite a bit from not just the teachers, but also from the kids. It’s awesome to see them finding happiness in the simplest of things and interacting with each other in positive ways,” MUHS student Sam shared.

But they’re not the only ones who benefit from this experience. It’s wonderful for us to have extra people to help and who we can depend on. They can provide extra one-on-one time with the kids, help with classroom projects and become positive mentors for our students.

We want to thank both Divine Savior Holy Angels High School and Marquette University High School for offering this opportunity to their students and to community partners like us. But most importantly, we want to thank the students who allowed themselves to open up to our children and lend a helping hand to our staff. Thank you!



MUHS students Tim, Brian, Sam, Jack, William, Will & Alex. Not photographed: PJ.

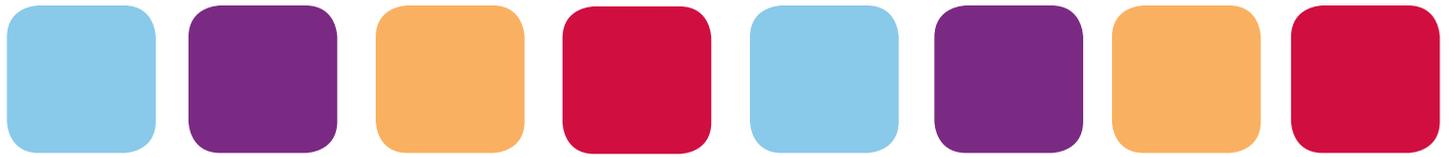
We recently hosted groups from each school: six young women from DSHA for their Vocare service project and eight young men from MUHS from their Senior Shared Life project. Each student was placed in one of our classrooms where they became colleagues with our classroom staff and new friends with our children.

Some of the students came into the situation feeling nervous and unsure of their position here. Others were calm and confident.

“Walking in on that first Monday, I really thought I knew just about everything when it comes to young children, but wow was I so wrong,” MUHS senior Alex explained.

During their two weeks, these students had the





Lots of Love for Wine, Beer & Chocolate

By Kara Petersen, Development & Volunteer Coordinator

On Saturday, March 18, more than 250 community members joined us for our 24th Annual Wine, Beer & Chocolate Tasting held at our Center. The event, co-chaired by Dr. Adam King and Lindsey King, was a great success, raising over \$55,000 to support our special education, therapy and support services that we provide to young children in our community.

In addition to featuring a large sampling of fine wines, craft beer and delicious chocolates, other event highlights included a huge silent auction, exciting raffle prizes, and a wine pull. The event also featured a live auction emceed by Today's TMJ4's Scott Steele with items like two round-trip flights with three nights' accommodations in Cancun courtesy of Funjet Vacations and a spa package courtesy of local Whitefish Bay businesses.



Entertaining guests all throughout the evening were performers from Dead Man's Carnival. Guests enjoyed magic, face painting, entertainment from strongmen and acrobats, and more.

This event would not have been possible without the support of our Presenting Sponsor, **Rockwell Automation** in partnership with **Rockwell employees and SFCC board members Dave Dorgan and Patty Roberts**. We would also like to thank our Tasting Room Sponsors, **WaterStone Bank** and **Mara Dučkens & Kevin Kriehn**.

We were also able to offer for the first time in event history a VIP experience to guests in thanks to the **Law Offices of Lindsey King**, our VIP Lounge Sponsor.

Lastly, a very special thank you to **Ray's Wine & Spirits** for



helping coordinate our wine and beer selections, and to the many volunteers from Bostik, Northwestern Mutual, Kiwanis of North Shore Milwaukee and the Glendale community who ensured the event ran smoothly. Stay tuned for details for next year's event!

To view more photos from the event, visit us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/SFCCKids.



Save the Date: 2017 Awards Banquet

We are pleased to announce that we have set a date for our 2017 Leading Lights Awards Banquet! The event will be held on **Wednesday, October 11** at The Pfister Hotel.

The event will honor three individuals for their leadership in the community, community service efforts, and work with children.

More details will be made available soon at www.sfcckids.org.



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Origami Fun with Whitefish Bay High School

We recently had a special visit from members of Whitefish Bay High School's Origami Club who taught our Kindergarten students all about the art of origami. After explaining that origami is the art of folding paper, our students joined them in making their very own origami animal dolls.

We'd like to thank the Origami Club for taking time out of their day to share their passion for origami with our Kindergarten class. This was a very fun learning opportunity for us!

