

Fall
2018



st. francis
children's
center

SFCC Star

The bi-annual newsletter published by St. Francis Children's Center
Fall 2018: Volume 8

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



Tips for Self Care Over the Holidays and Beyond

by Mara Dučkens, Executive Director



I travel quite a bit, and even though I've flown countless times, you will still find me paying close attention to the safety instructions at the beginning of each flight. While other passengers are busy thumbing through their magazines, I sit erect and watch intently. I hope that I will never need to open an airplane

door or operate the flotation device beneath my seat, but if it does happen I want to be prepared!

During each in-flight presentation comes the moment that makes all parents pause: "In case of a loss of cabin pressure, put your own oxygen mask on first." Have you ever noticed that airlines don't believe that message is strong enough? As the airplane taxis on the runway before takeoff, the flight crew stops in front of each parent to get confirmation that they will forego assisting a child until their mask is in place. That is because most parents instinctively put the health and safety of their children before anything else.

Ensuring that our oxygen masks are secured first makes perfect sense. We need to be conscious and alert in order to take care of our children. This doesn't just apply to airplane emergencies. In life, if we want to provide consistent support for our kids, we have to ensure that we are emotionally and physically healthy. However, in the throes of everyday life, our needs often fall by the wayside.

Understanding that "me time" is difficult to come by for busy moms and dads, here is a short list of nurturing

activities that you can do in 60 minutes or less, once a week. An hour of respite can help you reconnect with your interests and recharge for the children in your life.

1. Find an outlet for creative expression

Take a hip hop dance class, pick up that violin you haven't touched since high school, launch a blog about your love of cooking or invest in a coloring book. Find a way to nurture your creativity. Making art from life experience is a beautiful way to express yourself, and it also allows you to examine life's challenges from a new perspective.

2. Connect with a friend

There is a lot of research documenting the benefits that social connections have on our quality of life. In other words, nurturing our partnerships and close friendships is good for our health and longevity. Loved ones help us reduce stress, consider different perspectives and share

(continued on page 2)

In this Issue:

2 *Stay Warm & Cozy in the FAC*

3 *Matilda: Exceeding Expectations*

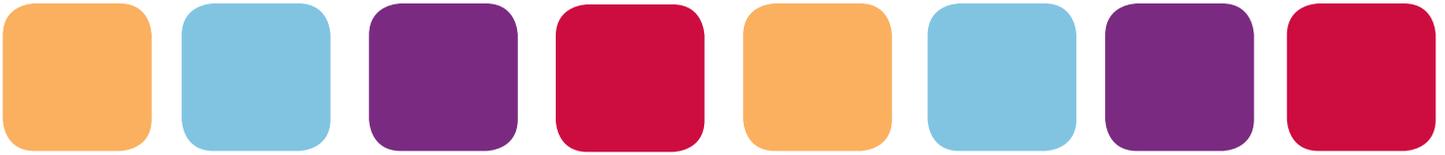
4 *CLTS: A Year in Review*

4-5 *ECE: New Things in Store*

6 *Record-Breaking Year for Awards Banquet*

6 *Save the Date for Wine, Beer & Chocolate*

7 *SFCC Participates in Sprecher Root Beer Bash*



feelings. Rather than texting someone to let them know you care, invite them on walk in nature. You will get exercise, reap the benefits of socialization...and it's free!

3. Spend time being quiet

We live in a fast-paced world where we are constantly bombarded by stimuli. Our lives are filled with noise. Over time, this can have a negative impact on our lives. It is important for all of us to unplug and be quiet. In the silence, you can connect with your ideas and dreams and replenish your energy along the way. Whether you take a warm bath, participate in a meditation class or spend an hour in prayer, this time will help you find focus and peace.

Parenting is the most demanding and rewarding job in the world. Our kids need us to be present and healthy. This month, as you give gifts to all of the special people in your life, remember to give one to yourself.

Happy Holidays!

Margie Dickens

Stay Warm & Cozy in the FAC

by Jennifer Drechsler, FAC Coordinator

As the weather outside gets frightful, the full schedule of events and activities in the Family Activity Center is pretty delightful! We are busy putting the finishing touches on the January-April 2019 calendar:

What's Returning:

We still will be having our weekly **Chatter and Scatter** group on Tuesdays and Wednesdays for children with special needs (up to age 6), their typically developing siblings, parents and caregivers.

And yes, our monthly **Super Saturday** session will continue as well! Besides the FAC, we'll open the gym and other indoor play areas for this big playdate for our FAC families. We're hoping to add a second Super Saturday each month so watch for that in the spring!

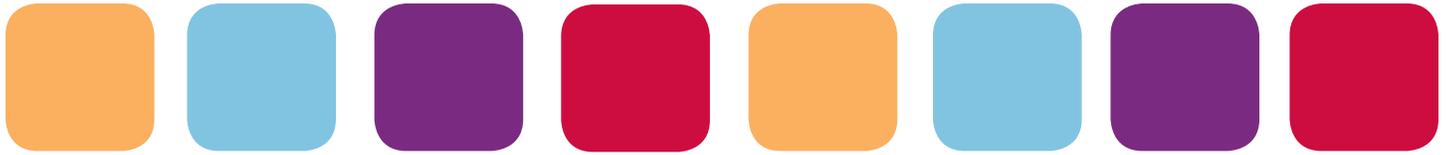
Our twice-monthly **Kids Klub** (a social group for pre-teens, ages 8-12) is up and running on Thursdays after school. We are making new friends and having fun playing games, doing electrical experiments and building with legos.

Ring in the new year with **Sibhops**, for brothers and sisters (ages 8-12) of children with special needs! This social group gets together every other month for fun activities and recreation, but also for support from other kids who are experiencing the same joys and struggles with their siblings.

What's New: Mark your calendars for **Thursday, Jan. 17** for a special presentation featuring John Gehlhaart of WaterStone Bank Investment Services and Attorney William Lyne. The two will discuss how you can financially **Plan for the Future for your Child with Special Needs**. Watch the schedule for more information.

What's Moving: In February we will be holding another session with our friends from **Saturday Flips4All** group...but at a new location. More to come!





Matilda: Exceeding Expectations

by Linda Schuster, Birth to Three Service Coordinator

Like other parents, Mary and Aaron were excited when they discovered they were expecting a sibling for one-year-old Liam. However, when they went in for their 20-week ultrasound, things didn't go as they expected. They were told that their daughter, Matilda, had Spina Bifida, a condition where part of the spinal cord is damaged. Mary remembers, "It was very scary when we were told Matilda's diagnosis because we weren't sure what to expect for our child."

After consulting with medical staff, Mary and Aaron decided to undergo fetal surgery to repair the spinal defect before the baby was born. According to a 2011 study by the New England Journal of Medicine, babies who receive prenatal surgery are less likely to require shunts, walking aids or wheelchairs, and their brains tend to stay healthier.

Three months after the fetal surgery, Matilda was born full-term with hip dysplasia. This means the bones in her hip joint did not fit together correctly. To help correct the dysplasia, doctors recommended a soft brace to help the socket form around the hip bone. Then, at three-months-

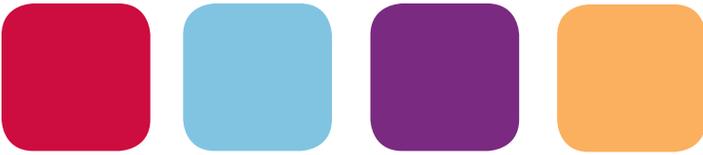


old, Matilda started receiving physical therapy through St. Francis Children's Center's Birth to Three program. This important program, funded by the Milwaukee County Disability Services Birth to Three Special Education Early Intervention Program, serves infants and toddlers up to age three who have developmental delays or special needs by providing them with the supports they need. This can include speech, physical and occupational therapies, special education, psychological therapy and family education, training and counseling.

Matilda proved to be a fast learner! She progressed from sitting independently to crawling. Then, after walking with the assistance of a walker, she started standing without this device and even walking by herself. "Through therapy, we anticipated Matilda would walk with assistive devices, but she exceeded our expectations when she started to take independent steps," explained Michelle Schofield, Matilda's Physical Therapist from Ascension. "It has been so wonderful to see Matilda's curiosity grow as she is able to explore her environment. Her family has been there every step of the way as her primary team members and have carried through all of the therapy ideas and suggestions to help Matilda's overall development."

Today, Matilda is an active 3-year-old who loves to dance, wrestle with her brother and play on the playground. While we're sad that she's moving on from our Birth to Three program, we know Matilda will continue to exceed expectations. Her Birth to Three Service Coordinator Linda Schuster said, "We have had the privilege of working with Matilda for the past three years and have marveled at her growth and development. We anticipate she will continue to have great success in all areas of her development as she enters the next phase of her young life."

"Everyone in the Birth to Three program has been so helpful and supportive in caring for Matilda and making our lives easier by bringing the services Matilda needed to our home. We are fortunate to have received this care for our daughter."



CLTS: A Year in Review

by Liz Rickaby, Long Term Support Manager

The Children's Long Term Support Waiver at St. Francis Children's Center services approximately 270 families in Milwaukee County in support of Milwaukee Disability Services. The children and families served are faced with tremendous challenges in daily life due to their diagnoses of a cognitive disability. Every family served shows an adversity that is incomparable, triumphs that are tremendous, and an outlook incredibly positive.

This year in CLTS, our service coordinators have facilitated services for children that have a direct impact on health and safety, social awareness, accessibility, respite opportunities and daily living skill training among a multitude of other necessities.

During summer, several children had the opportunity to attend respite camp. Each camp opportunity was determined through conversation and gauging a child's interest in different learning and social experiences. This gives an opportunity for a child who is 9 to be exposed to social situations while enjoying swimming, tennis or arts and crafts. It also allows for a 17 year old to be inspired by his creative mind and want to help others, building a imaginative play area for those children younger than him to explore and create without restraint. Summer camp allows parents a break from care, knowing that their children are not only safe and well



Above: One of the children in our CLTS program receives an iPad, thanks to the generosity of the Parklawn Kiwanis!

cared for, but also that they are gaining opportunities for growth.

Under the CLTS waiver program, a child's needs are determined and outcomes are identified to address their needs. Social awareness and daily living skill training are at the forefront as a child grows. Through the Waiver program's ability to fund providers who give opportunities for groups and explicit lessons geared toward those with disabilities, children are able find an increasing amount of independence in life. Daily living skills include cooking, cleaning, organizing, counting money in practical situations and community opportunities with a trainer. These necessary skills help our children and families plan for successful adult independence.

As St. Francis Children's Center's CLTS program moves into the new year, our dedicated service coordinators will continue to work side by side with the families they serve through waiver guidelines and creativity.

ECE: New Things in Store!

by Kim Evans, Early Childhood Education Program Manager

We are excited to announce some new and exciting changes happening in the ECE Program this fall/winter!

Character Traits

The staff at St. Francis Children's Center is committed to the social emotional development of all children. Our classroom staff is dedicated to providing warm, supportive and nurturing interactions that promote healthy brain development, as well as healthy social development. The next step in fostering the healthy development of all children served in and out of the center is to implement a new character education program, focusing specifically on teaching and modeling actions and language that will contribute to creating active citizens of our society.

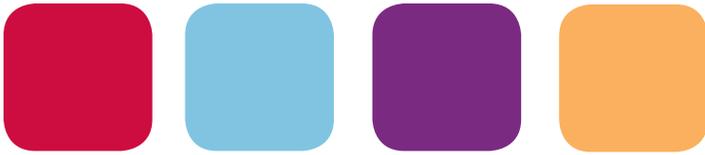
In preparation to build this character education program, we distributed a survey to determine the character traits that our parents felt were most important. After collecting and analyzing the results, we are proud to announce that the following character traits will serve as the foundation of our character education program:

RESPECT – Appreciating and valuing oneself, others and the environment

COMPASSION – Showing kindness to others and helping people in need

EXPLORATION – Learning about the unknown

PERSISTENCE – Not giving up and trying again
(continued on next page)



RESPONSIBILITY – Doing what we are expected to do and taking ownership for what we do

Fostering the social emotional development of children is a team effort, and we are happy to share that responsibility with our parents. The goal for this program is that these traits are continuously practiced and reinforced here at SFCC, in the home and out in the community, so we need your help too. We are looking forward to beginning this new chapter with our families. And a special thanks to everyone who participated in this important survey!

Outdoor Classroom

Thanks to a generous grant from the Greater Milwaukee Foundation and support from the Harley-Davidson Foundation and Dr. Mark Ackerman (former Child Psychologist at SFCC), we have started construction on our new Outdoor Classroom! Our goal is to create a classroom experience that combines an experience in nature to pique children’s curiosities along with constructive play that will support our STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts & math) curriculum.

This fall, we completed the installation of durable, weatherproof equipment from Community Playthings, to include wooden blocks, a wheelbarrow, kitchen and sand/water tables. Plus, we’ve added outdoor musical instruments from Freenotes Harmony Park, including several xylophones, drums and chimes. This equipment is designed to withstand our harsh Wisconsin winters to allow for year-round play and hands-on educational experiences in the great outdoors.



Is it a fort? A pirate ship? Students use their imaginations in the weatherproof Outlast Arbor from Community Playthings.



In the spring, the Outdoor Classroom will also feature a butterfly garden with a reading nook--perfect for children with sensory issues who seek a quiet place. To make the Outdoor Classroom accessible for all children, we are seeking additional funding to add a paved walkway that connects all of our play spaces, soft surfacing around the playground equipment (to assist children with physical challenges) and even a wheelchair-accessible swing!

When the Outdoor Classroom project is completed, we will invite everyone to a special grand opening event, so stay tuned. In the meantime, please ask your children about our new equipment. We will be sending out a survey soon to parents about your child’s thoughts and experiences regarding the musical instruments and other equipment. This will help us as we strive to improve all of our outdoor play spaces here at SFCC.

Classroom Changes

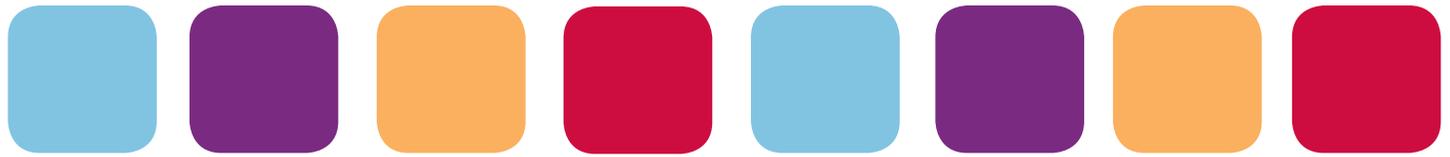
As with everything else, our Early Childhood Education program continues to grow and evolve. With that in mind, we’ve made some changes that will allow us to better meet the individual needs of every child:

Pre-Kindergarten/Kindergarten (Pre K/K) classroom (Ms. Molly and Ms. May’s room): The former Pre-K North classroom is now our Pre K/K classroom. Children who were in the classroom before the transition are still in this same room. However, they are now joined by the 6 children who were previously in the Kindergarten classroom (Ms. Kris’s room).

Preschool North classroom (formerly Ms. Kris’s room): This room will soon house a second preschool classroom to keep up with the demand. This Preschool North classroom will be led by Ms. Maribeth Penno, formerly our Toddler West teacher, and Ms. Kris will join her as classroom assistant. This classroom will open after Winter Break on January 2, 2019.

Fireside Chats

Our Executive Director, Mara Duckens, and I will be hosting two “fireside chat” sessions that will outline the vision that SFCC has for our Early Childhood Education program. Our first one was held on Wednesday, December 19, and thank you to everyone who attended! We will let you know as soon as we schedule the second chat, along with a list of topics we will be discussing. We hope to see you there!



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, November 7, for our 2018 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 from some of our Early Childhood Education students accompanied by Dr. Rick Clark, Child Psychologist, on piano. The performance included "How Far I'll Go" from the Disney movie, Moana, as well as "Happy Anniversary" to celebrate St. Francis Children's Center's 50th Anniversary in 2018. The celebration continued as we honored all of our past award recipients from 1983-2017 with a video. After dinner was served, we began the program part of the evening to honor three exceptional community leaders:

Linda Gorens-Levey of General Capital Group received the Humanitarian Award.

Herb Kohl Philanthropies, represented by JoAnne Anton, was the recipient of our Children's Service Award.

And, **Dr. Eve Hall** of Milwaukee Urban League was awarded the Community Service Award.

A special thanks to our two amazing co-chairs this year, **Tracy Johnson** of the Commercial Association of

REALTORS of Wisconsin and **Kimberly Kane** of Kane Communications, for making our 2018 Awards Banquet such a huge success. Also, we'd like to extend a warm thank you to **Steve & Shelagh Roell** for generously sponsoring the event as a Platinum Sponsor.

And finally, we'd like to mention Sam and Cherie Purdy and their family, who shared their story via a special video shown during the Awards Banquet. Diagnosed with a terminal disease, they were told their unborn child wouldn't survive birth. Today, Enoch is three-years-old and continues to beat the odds with therapy and other support services from St. Francis Children's Center.

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



From left: Tara Clark, Kimberly Kane, JoAnne Anton, Linda Gorens-Levey, Dr. Eve Hall, Mara Dučkens and Tracy Johnson

Save the Date: Wine, Beer and Chocolate Tasting!

New year, new location...Save the date for our 26th Annual **Wine, Beer & Chocolate Tasting** event on **Saturday, April 13**, at the Sprecher Brewing Company at 701 W. Glendale Ave., in Glendale!

We may be moving the event to a new venue, but we'll still be offering all the same great event features like a variety of fine wines, craft beers, spirits and gourmet chocolates for sampling. The event will also feature a huge silent auction, raffle, a wine pull, live entertainment and much more!

If you are interested in sponsoring this fun-filled event or participating as a wine, beer, chocolate, spirits or food vendor, please contact Tara Clark at tclark@sfckids.org or 414-351-8851 ext. 223. Tickets will go on sale soon, and last year, this event sold out! Please visit sfckids.org for more information.





Happy 50th Anniversary!

by Tara Clark, Director of Development & Marketing

This year, St. Francis Children’s Center celebrated 50 years in the Milwaukee community at our 50th Anniversary Picnic & Carnival event on Saturday, July 21. All proceeds raised from this event helped us to sustain and strengthen our programs for children with special needs.

Even though the rainy weather chased us indoors, guests enjoyed a picnic atmosphere inside with carnival games, tours of the center, grilled burgers and hot dogs from Mr. Picnic, kids’ hairdos from Cost Cutters, a cupcake walk, arts and crafts, a bounce house, music from Fox & Branch, stories from the Pocket Lady, a program featuring our very own SFCC kids, and much more. When the afternoon finally came to a close, we sang “Happy Anniversary” to St. Francis Children’s Center and ended the day with a big birthday cake.

A big thank you to everyone who attended or supported St. Francis Children’s Center’s 50th Anniversary Picnic & Carnival. A special thanks to all our volunteers,



vendors, in-kind sponsors and donors, along with all of our families and friends who “sponsored a family”, so everyone could join in our celebration. We’re looking forward to ANOTHER 50 years of serving children and families in our community!



Thank you to our 50th Anniversary Sponsors!

Ascension
Catholic Financial Life
Educators Credit Union

First Bank Financial Centre
Kiwanis of North Shore Milwaukee
Laffey, Leitner & Goode
Dave Dorgan & Family



6700 N. Port Washington Road
Milwaukee, WI 53217-3919
414-351-0450

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
MILWAUKEE, WI
PERMIT NO. 3069

St. Francis Children's Center Participates in Glendale's 2nd Annual Sprecher Root Beer Bash

We had so much fun running carnival games at the 50th Anniversary Picnic in July, that we decided to do it again on Sat., August 25, for the Sprecher Root Beer Bash at Richard E. Maslowski Community Park! As in 2017, we hosted the Root Beer Olympics, with a root beer chug, keg throwing contest and other events, but this year, we also added root beer themed carnival games for the younger kids.

Other event highlights included the Glendale Police Department Run/Walk, root beer-inspired food, live music, and--of course--lots of root beer. Money raised from the Olympics, along with donations from food vendors, will support the services St. Francis Children's Center provides to children with special needs. Mark your calendars for next year's Root Beer Bash on **Saturday, August 24, 2019!**

