

Spring
2019



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children's
center

SFCC Star

The bi-annual newsletter published by St. Francis Children's Center
Spring 2019: Volume 9

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



SFCC Kids and Parents Inspire Us to Reach the Top

by Mara Dučkens, Executive Director



I am happy to announce that St. Francis Children's Center has once again been named a Top Workplace by the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel! This honor is something that our entire team shares – after all, the award is not an acknowledgement of the space we occupy, but of the hard working people who fill it with

their love, expertise, kindness, dedication and commitment to teamwork.

St. Francis Children's Center is a special place because each of our team members wants to make the world a better place for the children and families we serve. SFCC employees are driven by our very special mission: to serve and educate children with special needs in inclusive environments, enabling them to reach their greatest potential.

When we see the children in our care grow and succeed – and this happens every day, around every corner at SFCC – we feel a shared sense of joy, pride and fulfillment.

On our Top Workplace survey, the SFCC team agreed that our work brings us a deep sense of purpose. We are driven by our commitment to you: the children, parents, grandparents, volunteers and community partners who trust our team to educate, serve, and inspire.

We share this award with you and thank you for your continuing support of St. Francis Children's Center.

Happy Spring & (almost) Summer!

**TOP
WORK
PLACES
2019**

This year, St. Francis Children's Center was ranked 59th in the Top Small Workplace category.

journal sentinel

We are proud to have received Top Workplace honors in five out of the past seven years!

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Welcome Cherie Purdy, our new FAC Coordinator!



Have you noticed a familiar face working in our Family Activity Center lately? We are so excited to announce that Cherie Purdy joined our SFCC

family in December as our new FAC Coordinator!

As a mother of a child with special needs, Cherie and her family have participated in many FAC programs and activities since we started the program in Fall 2016. In addition, her family was featured in our Awards Banquet video in November 2018 (check it out at sfckids.org), and her husband, Sam, has started a **Dad's Group** at SFCC for men who have children with special needs.

Besides her experience with the FAC and other families, Cherie brings extensive knowledge of community resources and a strong commitment to advocacy to her new role. When you see Cherie, please give her a warm welcome!

Summer 2019 FAC Calendar

Our Family Activity Center provides free and low-cost programming for ALL families in our community who have children with special needs. Please visit our website at sfckids.org/FAC for a full listing of our regular weekly and monthly and bi-monthly activities, and mark your calendar for these FREE special events:

Super Saturdays - Sat., June 8, 10am-Noon

Come celebrate Father's Day at this special edition of Super Saturdays! Stop by for crafts, snacks & more!

All Abilities Field Day - Sat., June 29, 10am-Noon

Bring the whole family and enjoy a fun morning playing accessible and adaptable games and other activities, including Frisbee Tic-Tac-Toe, Human Ring Toss and more. Free and open to the public! Volunteers needed!

When my son was born, we were immediately immersed in what felt like a foreign land we didn't know existed. I think a lot of people feel this way when they find out their child has special needs. It is so easy to become isolated and to feel like no one understands. In those first years, we were often discouraged and felt like we would never be able to navigate all the different resources and programs. Luckily, in the midst of all of this, we found the Family Activity Center. The FAC became a place for my family to come and play with other families who understood what we were going through. I hope that the FAC can become a place like that for your family too.

My first encounter with SFCC happened at the end of 2015 when my son started Birth to 3 Services. Since then, I have developed a deep respect for the goals and mission of each person who works here. Everyone truly believes in the potential of each child. I am so excited to be a part of this team and continue that mission as the Coordinator for the FAC. We have a lot of great programs that I am excited to continue and a lot of new programs I am excited to expand.

The Family Activity Center exists for you. As you look over the calendar, please let me know if you have any questions or suggestions!

Cherie

Caregiver & Me Yoga - Tues., July 16, 6-7:30pm

Minda Devorkin returns for a special yoga and meditation session for caregivers, their children with special needs and typically developing siblings. Hurry! RSVP required and space is limited.

What You Need to Know about Your Child's Special Education Rights

Tues., August 20, 6-7:30pm

Sally Flaschberger from Disability Rights Wisconsin will teach you how to actively participate in making educational decisions for your child. RSVP required.



Bryan: Overcoming Obstacles in His Way

by Eileen Medrano, CLTS Service Coordinator



Like other kids his age, Bryan is cheerful and happy and loves to be around family and friends. Even though he is not mobile and relies on his wheelchair throughout the day to move around, this energetic 11-year-old has been overcoming obstacles since the day he was born.

At birth, Bryan was diagnosed with cerebral palsy, a digestive disorder, hemophilia, a musculoskeletal disorder and a seizure disorder. When he was first

enrolled in Milwaukee County's Children's Long-Term Support (CLTS) Waiver Program at St. Francis Children's Center seven years ago, his family lived in an apartment that accommodated his needs. However, Bryan's parents always dreamed of owning their own home, and that wish finally came true in 2016.

Although the family was excited about their new home, they were also concerned about how they would be able to transport Bryan in and out of their home for school, community outings and frequent medical appointments. With multiple sets of stairs and a steep front yard, the home presented them with some challenges. His parents considered building a ramp to help them move Bryan back and forth to their vehicle, but unfortunately, a ramp was not feasible.

When the family expressed their concerns to their CLTS service coordinator, Eileen, she began searching for options to assist Bryan and his family. After multiple years, much research and lots of CLTS staff collaborations, Eileen was able to share some good news with the family: the CLTS Waiver would be

able to fund a wheelchair lift for Bryan. The contractors are currently gathering equipment and supplies, so they can start the project by the end of summer or early Fall 2019.

Bryan's mom shared, "My family and I are beyond grateful for this wonderful opportunity. Bryan is going to love his wheelchair lift!"



Phase 1 of Outdoor Classroom is Almost Complete!

As we mentioned in our Fall 2018 newsletter, St. Francis Children's Center has started construction on our new Outdoor Classroom! We are happy to report that--despite challenging weather this spring--Phase 1 is almost complete. Thanks to grants from the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, the Harley-Davidson Foundation and the Badger Meter Foundation, along with generous donors like Dr. Mark Ackerman (former Child Psychologist at SFCC), our kids are already enjoying the outdoor musical instruments from Freenotes Harmony Park and wooden blocks and sand/water tables from Community Playthings.

The last part of this phase will be the installation of our butterfly garden with a reading nook. This quiet spot will provide kids with Sensory Processing Disorders a calming place to take a break from play.

Phase 2: All About Inclusion

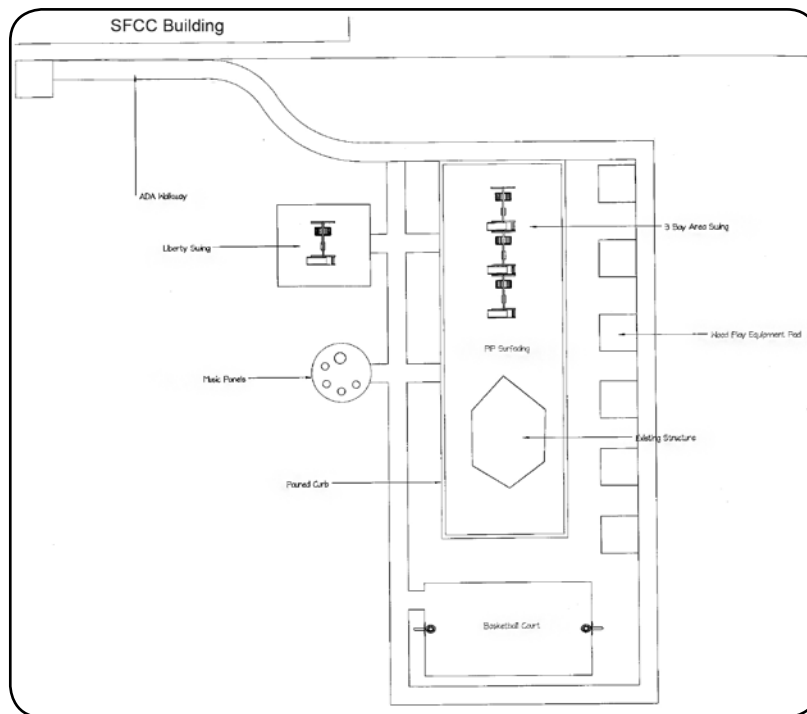
Now, we are working to raise funds for the second part of the project, which will make our Outdoor Classroom inclusive and welcoming for ALL kids who come to SFCC for our Early Childhood Education, Family Activity Center and Birth to Three programs. Each of our play and educational spaces will be connected by fully-accessible pathways, so children in gait-trainers, wheelchairs and strollers can easily access them.

Other features include rubber surfacing around all the play areas to help with accessibility, a Liberty Swing for children in wheelchairs and a Buddy Bench. The Buddy Bench was created by a second-grader who wanted to make sure everyone had a friend. If a child is looking for someone to play with, he or she sits on the bench. Kids

who aren't sitting on the bench are encouraged to ask classmates on the bench to join in on their fun.

Why an Outdoor Classroom?

Unfortunately, the last 20 years have marked a sharp decline in the time children spend outdoors, exploring their world. Being outside offers a learning experience that allows children to use all of their senses while stimulating creativity and brain development in ways that are just not possible indoors.

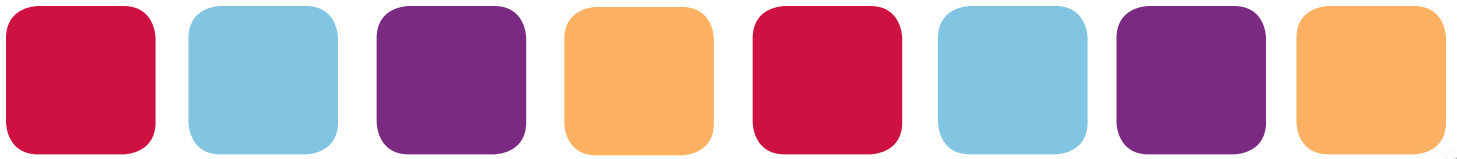


Another benefit? It opens up more options for our EL Education (formerly Expeditionary Learning) topics! For those of you who don't know, SFCC has been using the EL model to ignite curiosity in our preschool, K4 and Kindergarten classrooms since November 2017. Actually, we were one of the first Early Childhood Education Centers in the country to incorporate this method of hands-on learning! Past 6-8 week

"expeditions" have focused on how scientists study their world, dinosaurs and volcanos, but with an Outdoor Classroom, our kids can dive into even more exciting subjects like plants, bugs, erosion and more!

We Need Your Help


Any contributions to our Outdoor Classroom are greatly appreciated. To donate, you can click on the donate button on our website at sfckids.org or use the **envelope attached to this newsletter**. Just mention your contribution is for our Outdoor Classroom. Thanks so much for your support!



Making Music in our Doe-Re-Mi Music Corner




If you've been near our Snake Slide in the atrium recently, you may have seen--or heard--a brand new addition, our Doe-Re-Mi corner! This play area, filled with musical instruments, was donated by Nancy Fairman, in honor of her mother, Delores

"Doe" Fairman. Doe volunteered at St. Francis Children's Center from 2011-2014 and passed away on April 17, 2018. According to Nancy, Doe really valued the time she was able to spend in the classrooms with our children. 

"I know she always was very happy on the days she volunteered and always looked forward to going. She would refer to the kids she volunteered with as her own," Nancy explained. Since music and the kids



were so important to her mother, Nancy wanted to find a way to keep her spirit alive here at SFCC.

"We loved having Doe in our classrooms. It was apparent that she enjoyed the kids and they enjoyed her," remembers Dori Buschke, Director of Programs. "She was just the kind of volunteer that the teachers appreciated. She knew the classroom routines and where the materials were kept, and she always dove right into the activities in a way that provided true help and support. We miss her!" 

Nancy generously donated a variety of musical instruments to create the corner, including a giant musical piano play mat, ukuleles, a drum, a tambourine, a xylophone, maracas and more! And, we have more instruments planned for the space in the near future. Thank you so much Nancy for your donation!



Another Fun-Filled Wine, Beer & Chocolate Tasting!



On Saturday, April 13, we welcomed a crowd of 300 to our 26th Annual Wine, Beer & Chocolate Tasting at the Sprecher Brewing Company in Glendale. Once again, this important fundraiser was a great success, raising \$50,000 to support the special education,

therapy and other support services that St. Francis Children's Center provides to children and their families in our community.

In addition to a large sampling of fine wines, craft beers, cider, spirits & liqueurs and delicious chocolate confections, other event highlights included tours of the Sprecher Brewery, an extensive silent auction, raffles and a wine pull. The event also featured live music from Jordan Kroeger and Ryan Ogburn of *Chicken Wire Empire*.

All guests were given a Sprecher keepsake glass, but VIP ticket holders also treated to exclusive beverage and chocolate samplings throughout the night. Also new this year was the option to Lyft to and from the event. Guests were given a promo code for \$10 off of their ride to encourage safe driving. And, for the second year in a row, designated drivers received free root beer and other alcohol-free beverages, courtesy of Sprecher Brewing Company.

While we are grateful for the support of ALL of our sponsors, we'd like to acknowledge our VIP Sponsor: **Rockwell Automation**, Entertainment





Sponsor: **WaterStone Bank** and our Sommelier
Sponsor: **Ascension**. And, a special thanks to everyone who donated silent auction and raffle items, our beverage and chocolate vendors, our parents who contributed wine for the wine pull and items for our classroom baskets, community and Bostik volunteers, board members, guests and SFCC staff for your help. We couldn't have done this event without you!

Want to see more event photos? Check out our Facebook page at [facebook.com/SFCCkids](https://www.facebook.com/SFCCkids), and we hope to see you again in 2020!



SAVE THE DATE!

27th Annual Wine, Beer & Chocolate Tasting

Sat., April 25, 2020

The Quad at Elite River Glen

Besides adult beverages and chocolates for sampling, act like a kid again with mini-bowling, arcade games, an obstacle course & more!





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Save These Dates for Summer Fun at SFCC!

Friday, June 7

Early Childhood Education Picnic & Kindergarten Graduation

Friday, June 14

Join St. Francis Children's Center at our Community Grill fundraiser from 11am-4pm at Sendik's in Whitefish Bay! Stop by, purchase a brat or hot dog and support SFCC programs!

Wed., June 26

SFCC hosts Network at Night from 5-8pm! Meet other professionals from the Glendale area, enjoy beverages and light appetizers and learn more about St. Francis Children's Center. Adults only. For more information and to register, visit welcometoglendale.com/event/network-at-night.

Sat., June 29

Bring the whole family from 10am-Noon for our 1st Annual All Abilities Field Day! Enjoy a fun morning playing accessible and adaptable games and other activities. *(See page 2 for more information)*

Friday, July 12

Join St. Francis Children's Center at our Community Grill fundraiser from 11am-4pm at Sendik's in Whitefish Bay! Stop by, purchase a brat or hot dog and support SFCC programs!

Sat., August 24

Celebrate the 3rd Annual Sprecher Root Beer Bash with us at Maslowski Park in Glendale! SFCC will once again be hosting carnival games and the Root Beer Olympics. Fun for the whole family!