

Fall/Winter
2019



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SFCC Star

The bi-annual newsletter published by St. Francis Children's Center
Fall/Winter 2019: Volume 10

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



2019: Looking Back on a Successful Year

by Mara Dučkens, Executive Director



We're so proud of all that St. Francis Children's Center has been able to accomplish in 2019. Throughout the year, all of our inclusive classrooms were filled with children learning and playing together. Our Family Activity Center provided more supportive programs than ever

before. In our Birth to Three and Children's Long Term Support programs, offered through contracts with Milwaukee County, we continued to help more and more children reach their individualized goals. And once again, we were named a Top Workplace in Milwaukee – a testament to our dedicated, mission-driven staff team.

In addition to providing the high-quality services that we're so well known for, we've also been able to launch new initiatives and expand our reach deeper into the community:

- Our new Curiosity Club, for kids ages 6-9, is helping young people with special needs and typically developing peers cultivate friendships, build confidence, and explore fun activities.
- Our Outdoor Classroom is growing as we've added new learning and play components to this beautiful green space.
- This summer, we launched our first-annual All-Abilities Field Day (page 3), which helped

children at various developmental levels play sports and engage in outdoor activities together.

This time of year, as you contemplate your year-end philanthropic giving and reflect on those organizations that are making a positive difference in the Milwaukee community, we hope that you will consider a gift to St. Francis Children's Center. Your generosity helps to ensure that children with special needs have access to our high-quality, life-enhancing programs. **You can make an online donation today at sfckids.org.**

Happy Holidays from all of us at
St. Francis Children's Center!

In this Issue:

- 2 *FAC: Serving the Whole Family*
- 3 *First-Annual All-Abilities Field Day*
- 4 *Meet Charlie: The Kid with Skills*
- 5 *ECE: Transitioning to a New Classroom*
- 6-7 *Leading Lights Awards Banquet 2019*
- 8 *Wine, Beer & Chocolate 2020*



Our FAC has Programs for the **WHOLE** Family!

The Family Activity Center (FAC) at SFCC continues to build and shape programs for children with special needs--but also for their parents, caregivers and typically developing siblings as well. We know that it can be a struggle to find a community where you can interact with other families who understand the experience of raising children with special needs.

So, here's an overview of the special opportunities the FAC offers for each member of your family:

Kids with Special Needs

Chatter & Scatter: Our FREE Tuesday and Thursday play group is for kids up to age 6 with special needs and a parent or caregiver. Siblings and friends are welcome too!

Super Saturdays: We open ALL of our indoor play areas (gym, ball pits, etc.) once a month for a big family playdate!

Curiosity Club: Make friends, play games, conduct experiments and just have fun! Monthly for kids with and without special needs in 1st-4th grades.

Flips 4 All: Run, play and tumble at Flips 4 All, an inclusive gym in Glendale for kids of all abilities. Offered once a month.

Typically Developing Siblings

Sibshops: A program specifically for the 8-12 year-old brothers and sisters of a child with special needs. Sibs meet other kids just like them, play games and receive support in a fun, relaxed setting.

(See above) Kids without special needs are also welcome at Chatter & Scatter, Super Saturdays, Curiosity Club and Flips 4 All too!

Dads Only!

Dad's Group: Being a father of a child who has a disability, a medical condition, or special needs can be isolating: your friends may not get it, you often put your partner's or spouse's needs above your own, and the many other "parent" groups offered are typically filled with moms. It's important to have a place where dads can discuss their own unique frustrations, victories and everyday accomplishments without having to filter themselves.



Our Dad's Group is led by Samuel Purdy, a school psychologist and father of a child with special needs. (That's Sam and his son, Enoch, in the photo!) The group meets most months at the FAC, but they also plan outings, including going to a Brewers game.

Just for Moms

Mom's Night: How does a night out of the house sound? Let's add some appetizers, conversation, networking and laughs with other mothers of kids with special needs...now we almost have a party!

*This group is just starting out, so please join us on **Wed., February 12**, so we can plan more nights like this in the near future.*

For dates, times and registration for these activities, plus information on other special events in the FAC, please visit our website at sfckids.org!



All-Abilities Field Day

We had a blast on Saturday, June 29, as our Family Activity Center hosted its first-ever All-Abilities Field Day! The free event was open to the community and featured activities for kids of all ages and abilities, including frisbee golf, a play car wash, human ring toss, an Orbeez pool, parachute games and much more.

A very special thank you to all of our volunteers from Kiwanis Club of North Shore Milwaukee, Kohl's and the North Shore community. We would also like to thank the North Shore Library, the North Shore Fire/Rescue team and Special Olympics for joining us. We are already looking forward to our second-annual event in 2020!





Charlie's Story: The Kid with Skills

Jim and Laura Baker had a pretty uneventful pregnancy the first time around with their daughter, Anna, so they expected the same when Laura was pregnant with their second child. However, at a routine appointment 18 weeks into the pregnancy, they received some shocking news from the doctor.

"We found out we were having a boy, we were excited," remembers Laura. "And then, at the end, he mentions that our son had spina bifida, the *severest* form of spina bifida."

The doctor felt Laura would be a good candidate for fetal surgery, which would place baby Charlie's spinal cord back inside his

body while she was still pregnant. He also explained that this surgery was not a cure for spina bifida, but babies undergoing surgery before birth had shown improvements. That was all Jim and Laura needed to hear. "The surgery went great. They said it was one of the fastest fetal surgeries they had done," Laura said. "I just had a feeling that Charlie and I had this."

Charlie was born on October 9, 2017, and while the surgery went well, the Bakers didn't know what the future held for their new baby. "So, a lot unknown. But, at the same time, once we got to meet that kid, we knew he had some skills for himself that were going to help him out," said Jim.

The team at SFCC was ready to give Charlie and his family the support they needed. Cherie in our Family Activity Center provided a fun and inviting space for Charlie and Anna to play with other kids while Jim and Laura were able to connect with other parents of children with special needs. Lisa and Jackie, on-site therapists from Ascension, started



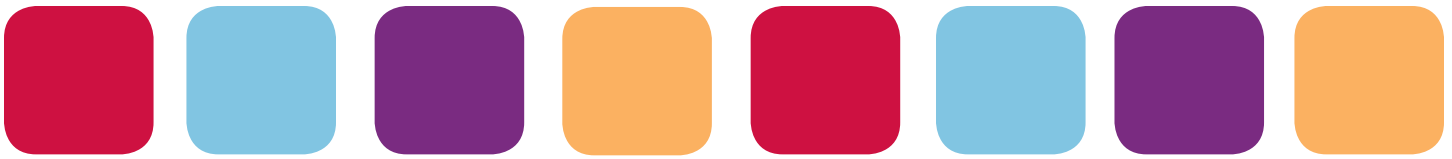
"Now that I've seen everything that St. Francis Children's Center offers, it's a community for us." - *Jim Baker*

working with Charlie on his fine motor skills and walking with a gait trainer. And, his First Friends classroom teachers, Miss Velbra and Miss Helen, began training to learn about Charlie's specialized healthcare needs.

"I love the inclusive nature of St. Francis, and the fact that my daughter can go there, and my son can go there, and everyone's comfortable," explained Laura. "I knew when I dropped him off...they weren't afraid of anything they had to face to take care of Charlie or that they were nervous or that they thought he was fragile, because he's not."

Charlie turned two in October, and his parents are amazed at how far he's come. "I think Charlie is thriving. He's talking...he's running all over, he's ramming into walls," Laura said. "I mean, he's doing things that we weren't sure he'd be able to do faster than I thought he would do them!"

Check out the video "Charlie's Story" on our website at www.sfckids.org to get the full story about the Bakers and for success stories about some of our other amazing SFCC kids!



ECE: Transitioning a Child to a New Classroom

by Dori Buschke, Director of Programs, and Kim Evans, Early Childhood Education Manager

Children enrolled at SFCC experience many unique opportunities. We are proud to offer inclusive classrooms led by highly qualified teachers and classroom assistants. Our Toddler, Preschool and PreKindergarten/Kindergarten lead teachers are licensed by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction with certification in Early Childhood Education and Special Education. The expertise of our teachers contributes to the development of individualized curriculum for all children. Our goal is to meet them where they are developmentally and help them successfully advance. Our teachers work with families to develop learning goals for each child to focus on in the classroom and at home.

We are equally as committed to ensuring comfortable, successful classroom transitions for children as we are to ensuring their sound development. Children at SFCC are afforded participation in a thoughtfully planned transition process when leaving one classroom for the next.

Planning the Transition

The transition process for each child begins with the Enrollment Coordinator confirming availability in the next classroom. Once availability is confirmed, the Enrollment Coordinator will collaborate with the child's lead classroom teacher to ensure the child is developmentally ready to begin the transition. When a transition date has been decided upon, the teacher will meet with the family to confirm the transition schedule. This typically is a week-long process with the child spending increasing time in the new classroom each day. It is so important to provide time for children to acclimate to the new teachers, peers and the environment.



Certainly, for some children the transition can be difficult. When extra support is needed, arrangement is made for one of the child's current classroom teachers to accompany him or her to the new room at the onset of the process. Conversely, if a child is very excited and ready to fully transition to the new room without a gradual increase in time, with parent permission, we make that arrangement.

It is a combination of a child's birthday, level of development and available space in the next classroom that determines the timing of transitions. Should a child spend a little more time in a classroom than anticipated, our teachers are committed to providing a continued rich and stimulating social and academic experience. Our curriculum is aligned with the Wisconsin

Model Early Learning Standards and our teachers individualize learning experiences to meet the needs of and to advance all children. In addition, we strongly embrace the philosophy that children who are amongst the youngest in a classroom benefit from the modeling of the older children, while children who are amongst the oldest benefit from being good models for the younger.

The Philosophy of SFCC

It is the goal of SFCC to provide individualized care, education and intervention to ensure a nurturing environment for all children and to prepare them socially, emotionally and academically for their next school experience.

If you have any questions regarding the transition process at St. Francis Children's Center, please contact Kimberly Evans, Early Childhood Education Manager at kevans@sfcckids.org or Mariamgelly Guadalupe, Enrollment Coordinator, at mguadalupe@sfcckids.org.



Leading Lights Awards Banquet Sets New Record

On behalf of our Co-Chairs, **John Florsheim** of Weyco Group, Inc. and **Scott Wrobbel** of Deloitte, we'd like to thank everyone who joined us at our 2019 Leading Lights Awards Banquet on Tuesday, October 8, 2019. We are excited to report that the event raised over \$196,000 for the quality education and therapy services that we provide to hundreds of children with special needs in our community each year. And yes, this IS a new record!

Approximately 300 guests attended this important annual fundraiser in a new venue, the Grand Hall of the Northwestern Mutual Tower and Commons. Once again, some of our Early Childhood Education students, led by Miss Molly, kicked off the evening with a special performance of "The Green Grass Grows All Around", accompanied by Dr. Rick Clark,

Child Psychologist, on keyboard. After dinner, we began the program part of the evening where we honored these exceptional community leaders:

John & Kim Schlifske of Northwestern Mutual received our Humanitarian Award.

Julia Taylor of the Greater Milwaukee Committee was the recipient of our Community Service Award.

And, **Wanda Montgomery** of Children's Hospital of Wisconsin was awarded our Children's Service Award.

A big thank you to all of our sponsors, but especially to this year's Platinum sponsors: **Deloitte**,



Above: John Florsheim, Kim and John Schlifske and Scott Wrobbel.



Right: SFCC Executive Director Mara Duckens.



Awards Banquet (cont'd)

Kohl's and Northwestern Mutual. We are also grateful for the support of our Gold Sponsor, Marquette University. And finally, we'd like to acknowledge Jim and Laura Baker and their family for sharing their amazing story with us. You can watch the video "Charlie's Story" about their journey on our website at www.sfcckids.org.

Once again, a huge thank you to ALL of this year's honorees, Co-Chairs, Associate Chairs, sponsors, donors, parents, board members, staff, volunteers and community partners for helping us make our 2019 Leading Lights Awards Banquet the biggest in SFCC's history!



Above: SFCC students provided some pre-dinner entertainment.

Upper Right: Co-Chairs John Florsheim and Scott Wrobbel present Wanda Montgomery with the Children's Service Award.

Lower Right: Julia Taylor accepts her Community Service Award.



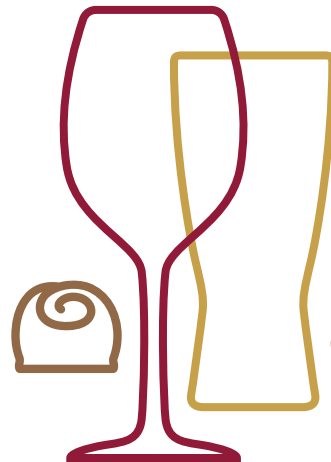
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@ The Quad at Elite-River Glen

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