

Spring/
Summer
2021



st. francis
children's
center

SFCC Star

The bi-annual newsletter published by St. Francis Children's Center
Spring/Summer 2021: Volume 13

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



The Long Road Back

by Mara Dučkens, Executive Director



After a year of living apart, St. Francis Children's Center is helping families regain their "pre-pandemic" lives:

- In our Early Education Center, new babies are joining our infant rooms and

discovering the world around them; little ones are taking their first steps in our bright, inclusive classrooms; and school-aged children are building sensory, reading, writing and math skills with the support of our caring, masterful teachers.

- At our Family Activity Center, which serves families who have children with special needs, our supportive programming is going on the road! We're moving beyond our walls and into the community where we're needed most. This summer we're providing outdoor, in-person mindfulness and meditation for parents and caregivers; we're getting kids and their families out for play times at local, universally-accessible parks and playgrounds; and we're continuing to host Zoom support groups that link families together from the comfort of their homes.

- And our valuable home visiting programs through Milwaukee County – Birth to Three and Children's Long Term Support – are moving from providing virtual therapies and service coordination to using a hybrid model

combining in-person and telehealth support. This will help families reduce isolation caused by the pandemic.

It's been a long road! Now we're asking for your help during this meaningful rebuilding. Every gift to SFCC helps us provide high-quality programs that bolster and strengthen families in our area. Your support ensures that children with special needs are receiving therapy, special education, and service coordination. It guarantees that young children are receiving the best early education possible. And it means that entire families are embraced in an environment of compassion, learning and engagement. *Please return the attached donation envelope today!*

With your support, SFCC can impact the lives of over 1,000 kids in the Milwaukee area. When that happens, our entire community benefits!

In appreciation,

In this Issue:

2 *FAC: Compassion Resilience Group*

3 *B-3: Noah's Story*

4-5 *ECE: Lions & Zebras & Dinosaurs, Oh My!*

6-7 *Wine, Beer & Chocolate: Live & In-Person!*

8 *Remembering Nancy Rosenheimer*



FAC: Compassion Resilience Group Returns

This summer, our Family Activity Center is once again offering **Advancing Adult Compassion Resilience: A Toolkit For Parents and Caregivers**. The FREE 6-Week Class was developed in partnership with The Wisconsin Initiative for Stigma Elimination and Rogers InHealth. The goal is to provide a safe space where caregivers and parents can explore how they can continue to help their family members while also maintaining their own well-being.



Family Activity Center Coordinator, Cherie Purdy, said she wanted to offer a program that could be done online, at no cost to parents and would give caretakers valuable tools and meaningful connections with other parents. "It's a tall order, but the program ticked all those boxes. It is a program that meets you where you are and gives you tools that can be used in every relationship - not just parent and child ones," Cherie explained. A previous participant said the class helped her to see herself as a whole person, not just as a caregiver. According to Cherie, the program encourages everyone to take a good look at who they are and move forward to do better.

Topics covered include:

- Recognizing compassion fatigue and how to build your resilience
- Developing skills to help manage expectations and set boundaries within your family
- Practicing real-time and ongoing self-care
- Encouraging risk-taking and new ideas that contribute to family success

The group will meet via Zoom on Tuesdays at 8:00 PM, from June 29 - August 3.

To register for this program and other events in our Family Activity Center, please visit sfckids.org/FAC



Noah's Story: A Soon-To-Be B-3 Graduate!



whose development indicates the need for early intervention services. Following his diagnosis, Noah's B-3 team began forming new ways to help him overcome some of his challenges. They worked with his family to create goals for Noah, including his long-term goal to verbally communicate and short term goals such as eating from his plate. Previously, Noah would only eat certain foods, refused to eat from his plate and would not drink fluids. After working with his B-3 Teacher, Ms. Cheryl, Noah now eats from his plate and drinks fluids as long as he can use a straw. "It's understanding what works. The little things make the biggest difference," Rachel explained.

Noah's family was introduced to Milwaukee County's Birth to Three (B-3) Program at St. Francis Children's Center when his doctors and parents noticed that his speech was delayed and Noah was not verbally communicating. Soon after, Noah's mom, Rachel, also began noticing certain behaviors in Noah. "He just had different little quirks and things that he liked doing", Rachel explained. "He would stack and line up his toys all the time, he would cover his ears or completely not be responsive to his surroundings." Rachel's wife, Tiffany, voiced their concerns to her own doctor who recommended a screening tool to assess Noah's risk for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). After scoring a medium-level risk, Noah received a full evaluation and was diagnosed with autism at 18 months.

"I really feel like they [his B-3 team] are trying to understand and help. They find unique ways to help him... ways that I would never be able to think of." - Tiffany

Today, Noah is a happy toddler who loves hugs, music and drawing! He is working on

mastering how to tie his shoes, is responsive to his environment, continues to work on his verbal communication and is set to graduate from SFCC's B-3 Program this December.

With his B-3 team's support, Rachel and Tiffany were also able to get Noah enrolled into Milwaukee County's Children's Long Term Support (CLTS) Waiver Program where he will continue to receive the services he needs. "Without their [his team's] suggestions and help, we wouldn't have been able to access the resources we have," Rachel said. "And I love that they have always helped me understand his needs."

The B-3 Program is an early intervention program for infants and toddlers up to age three



ECE: Lions & Zebras & Dinosaurs, Oh My!

Happy shrieks and giggles can be found all around our building and playgrounds as summer learning is in full swing in SFCC's Early Childhood Education Center! While our doors currently remain closed to the public, we would like to highlight what our students have been up to this summer.

One big change that has taken place since last fall is the reopening of our outdoor playgrounds! For the first time since March 2020, our playgrounds are no longer divided into smaller play spaces, and the students have full access to all of the outdoor play areas. "We are definitely excited to use the outdoor playground, and it's been great to be able to see the kids explore it. For many of them, it's the first time they've ever been on it!" said Ms. Brianna, First Friends Classroom Assistant. As the kids take turns sliding down the slide, we hear the teachers gently remind the students to wait for their friends to get off the slide first. It is a reminder of how new spaces can create new learning opportunities for our young students to practice sharing and self-control.



The practice of sharing and collaborative play (working together) are recurring themes in all of our classrooms. In our Preschool rooms, the students will be practicing their social skills and collaborative play all summer long. It is not an uncommon sight to walk into our either of our Preschool classrooms and see our teachers emphasizing the word **sharing**. Ms. Jane, Preschool South Teacher, explains, "At this age, they don't quite want to share yet. They struggle with the concept, and we take time to teach them to share and be kind." To reinforce positive behavior, the Preschool classrooms have adopted *Kindness Counts*, a time during the day when the class takes time to recognize kindness between each other. "It's really a good way for them to practice their social skills, and it helps them understand their actions," said Ms. Therese, Preschool North Teacher.

Meanwhile, our Toddler Classroom will be spending a large part of the summer practicing their use of expressive language through voting. The class will sit once a day to vote on a variety of things, according to Ms.



Chelsi, Toddler Classroom Coordinator. "We will practice voting for things such as animals or food with the goal to help them understand why they like and choose certain things," Chelsi said. In the month of June, the Toddler Classroom voted on all things related to the zoo, including lions, tigers, elephants and snakes!

Using the same zoo theme, our Infant and Young Toddler Classrooms are taking the Summer to practice their comprehension skills by identifying what zoo animals look and sound like. Our youngest students will practice their tactile perception (touching) by locating animal toys hidden in basins filled with shredded paper. Activities like these ensure that the children learn and practice multiple concepts. "They are developing their verbal and non-verbal skills through these activities," Ms. Kerri, ICC Coordinator, explained.

One of the goals of our ECE program is for our students to develop the written and verbal communication skills they need to express their interests by the time they reach Ms. Molly's Pre-K/K5 Classroom. Every month, our kindergarteners take time to journal and vote on subjects they are interested in learning



more about. Ms. Molly then develops specialized lesson plans based off their interests. This summer, the kindergarteners have chosen a large array of things to explore including houses, dinosaurs, bugs, fruit bushes, the process of ice melting and zebras! "This approach to learning is not conventional," explained Ms. Molly, Pre-K/K5 Teacher. "But as teachers, we have the ability to make lesson plans that encompass what they need to learn but also make the lessons about things that the kids are excited about."



Wine, Beer & Chocolate: Live AND In-Person!

On Saturday, May 22, St. Francis Children's Center hosted our first public event since 2020 with our 28th Annual Wine, Beer & Chocolate Tasting in the Old Heidelberg Park at the Bavarian Bierhaus in Glendale. The annual fundraiser welcomed over 250 guests and raised over **\$45,000** to support the special education, therapy and other services that SFCC provides to children and their families in our community.

As in past years, there was a large sampling of fine wines, craft beers, cider, spirits & liqueurs and delicious chocolate confections. Event highlights included live music from The 5 Card Studs, an extensive silent auction, raffles and a wine pull. VIP Ticket holders were treated to an extra hour of sampling and a variety of hot and cold appetizers from the Bavarian Bierhaus during the exclusive VIP hour from 6-7pm.

While we are extremely grateful for ALL of our sponsors, we would like to acknowledge the following premier sponsors for their support:

Check out our Facebook page at facebook.com/SFCCkids for more event photos! And, save the date for next year's Wine, Beer & Chocolate Tasting... returning to the Bavarian Bierhaus on **Sat., May 21, 2022!**

Presenting Sponsor:
Bavarian Bierhaus

VIP Sponsor:
Rockwell Automation

Your Care is Our Calling Sponsor:
Ascension

Health & Safety Sponsor:
Northwestern Mutual

Entertainment Sponsor:
Bluemel's Garden & Landscaping Center

And finally, we'd like to send a BIG thank you to our beverage and chocolate vendors, everyone who donated silent auction & raffle items and wine for the wine pull, our parents who contributed items for our classroom baskets, our board members, community volunteers (including a large group from the North Shore Kiwanis!), guests and SFCC staff for your help. *We couldn't have done this event without you!*





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

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

Remembering Nancy Rosenheimer



We are sad to report that Nancy H. Rosenheimer (nee Dammann), a former staff member of St. Francis Children's Center, passed away on December 21, 2020, at the age of 87 years.

Nancy married Paul Rosenheimer in Madison in 1957. Soon after, the couple moved to the Milwaukee area, where Nancy was a medical technician at St. Mary's Hospital, and Paul worked in the Northwestern Mutual Life Home Office. After one year, Nancy "retired" to raise their three daughters.

When the girls grew up, Paul and Nancy moved to Neenah, WI, where Nancy started working at

a Montessori school. She enjoyed teaching kids so much that she applied for a teacher's aide position at St. Francis Children's Center when the couple moved back to the North Shore of Milwaukee. She worked at SFCC in our preschool classroom for nine years before retiring in 1998.

"Nancy liked that St. Francis Children's Center had kids with special needs as well as children with regular needs," Paul remembered. "She thought it was a really good idea because both groups benefited each other."

Two of Paul and Nancy's grandchildren, Ally and Elena, also attended SFCC. Besides her friends and family, Nancy loved dramatics, interior decorating and gardening, reading mysteries, and occasional games of bridge, tennis and golf.