

Making Strides

Abigail Tripp turned six in July. Thanks to the Children's Center, she is ready to go to kindergarten this fall alongside her peers. "When you get the correct staff with a child, you see them take off," says Abigail's mom, Jocelyn Tripp.

Jocelyn first took her three-year-old daughter to the Children's Center when she began showing speech delays and having frequent tantrums. She also had been diagnosed with a very rare skin disease called Epidermolysis bullosa.

Rachael Jones, Special Education Supervisor, said Abigail's goal was to play cooperatively when she began at the Center. "She had to choose an activity and remain engaged for 10 minutes, sit for five minutes during circle time and comply with adult requests," she said. "Abby demonstrated a

lot of refusal behaviors at the beginning, which resulted in crying, screaming, throwing items and banging her head."



And because of her unique medical condition, her individual behavior plan needed to involve accommodations and nurses. Abby's teachers worked very closely with her nurses to keep her safe and injury free, said Rachael.

"While at the Center, these accommodations have allowed her to feel safe to play, learn and grow with her peers while making amazing gains in her behavioral, social and academic skills."

Now, Abigail no longer requires an individualized behavior plan and has less frequent tantrums.

Abigail is working on being independent within the classroom, letting her teachers and nurses know when she needs medical help and telling her peers that she is feeling unsafe. She enjoys joining in circle time, playing with friends and is doing very well on her academic goals.

Jocelyn is thankful for the staff who have helped her daughter thrive.

"I am very grateful for Linda in speech. She has pushed Abby to work hard and develop new skills, and with Abby's one-on-one, Amanda now, I see her learning more."

Catching Up

Max Redd was almost three-years-old when he first started at the Children's Center. Next month, he will start first grade at Hall-dale Elementary School. He has come a long way says his mom, Melanie Redd.

"The biggest, most obvious change, was watching the development of his verbal skills. As he learned to talk, how to have



conversations and how to engage with people verbally, his whole world opened up," said Melanie.

Speech Language Pathologist at the Children's Center, Linda Coelho, said when Max first started going to the Children's Center he only knew a few words – but usually didn't use them in the correct way.

"He also had trouble following routines and directions, and it was hard for him to hold a conversation," said Linda.

Max made a lot of progress with his language, said Linda, and he learned how to socialize with his peers.

Max's mom, Melanie, said going to the Children's Center helped Max look forward to something and improved his patience.

"He learned that what was going on inside of him mattered to the people around him, so instead of getting frustrated and



sad and yelling or throwing things, he could tell someone; he wasn't alone in it."

Melanie said her favorite part about the Children's Center were the people.

"His teachers – and they all are teachers, every person there taught him something, whether they were actual teachers, aides, support staff, therapists, or maintenance – all enjoyed Max. They were patient and kind, and were happy to spend time with him – and

time with us."

Max is entering first grade, has his own pet cat and learned how to swim this summer.

"Every day, Max works to learn new skills – cutting, and drawing, and buttoning, and zipping, but also new ways to be himself in a world that's not always the way he thinks it should be," said Melanie. "The Children's Center really developed that work ethic in him – and we couldn't be more thankful or proud."



Special Education Program

Overseen by certified special education teachers, children receive individualized instruction in a specialized classroom or inclusive setting, depending on the strengths and needs of each child. The program focuses on pre-academic skills and readiness for the public school setting. Children may receive special education services in conjunction with other specialized services through the Autism or Behavioral Support Programs. Educators, clinicians, and behavioral analysts work closely together to ensure that the child receives a comprehensive approach to treatment.



Rachael Jones, Special Education Supervisor, says the goal of this program is to prepare children for mainstream kindergarten or pre-kindergarten by focusing on their social, academic and self-care skills.

“Children in this program have a wide variety of needs,” she said. “There are children with rare genetic disorders, physical and/or medical needs, autism, behavioral concerns, speech and language delays and mild development delays.”

Rachael, along with eight other staff members, provides Specially Designed Instruction to 12 children in four different classrooms at the Center.



“Specially Designed Instruction allows children to move through a continuum of care in classrooms that are most like a typical public preschool setting,” said Rachael. “Children can enter directly into one of our programs, or when a child no longer needs the more structured services available in our special purpose classrooms, they can move into one of our preschool classrooms, which are designed to prepare them for the typical kindergarten expectations and schedule.”

Rachael says this aligns with the Center’s philosophy to provide children services in the least restrictive environment as possible.



Playground Renovation Plans

Children in the Special Education Program use the playground every day.

“They love to run, climb, swing, dig and explore,” says Rachael.



Rachael says the children use the swings, slides, tricycles, sports equipment, trucks, shovels, pails and balls.

But there is some equipment they don’t have that would be beneficial.

“The children would benefit from a climber with stairs, monkey bars, hopscotch board, basketball hoop, numbers and letters to incorporate academics into outdoor play, more swings and sports equipment and wheelchair accessible swings and equipment.”

Jesse Higgins, a Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant in the program, says that a playground is im-

portant for children with and without special needs because it provides them with an opportunity to work on balance, core strength, coordination, sensory input, crossing midline, social interaction and self-regulation.

Rachael said it is important for the children in the Special Education Program to play outside as part of their programming. The playground allows for natural social situations to practice skills and opportunities for inclusive experiences with peers.

The Children’s Center is currently working towards raising funds to fully renovate the current playground at the Children’s Center. All



proceeds from the 2nd Annual Dinner & Auction will go to support this project.

The goal is to create a completely accessible and inclusive play space for children of all abilities. The organization hopes to break ground next spring and have the new playground ready by midsummer.

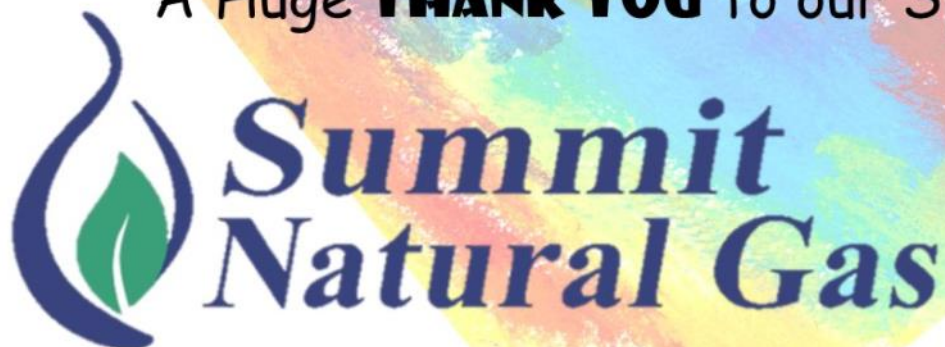
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Saturday, August 27, 2016

5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

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General Updates

“We have continued in our mission to provide the highest quality services and supports to children, especially children with special needs and their families. We have expanded programs in our Augusta location and have opened new sites in Skowhegan and Gardiner. We are in the process of adding more classrooms in Augusta and will be opening a new site in Farmington in the near future. In the spring, we are looking forward to breaking ground on a new, inclusive playground at our Augusta site.”

- Jeff Johnson, Executive Director



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