

Children's Center News

Spring 2017



Child Spotlight: Meet Elizabeth

Elizabeth is a child who makes Kara St. Hilaire, Autism Program Supervisor, sit back and watch.

“She gives me goosebumps when I see her engage with others or watch reactions to new experiences or to see the joy on her face when she is proud of herself for learning a new skill,” said Kara.

Elizabeth wasn't always this way. When Kara first met her in May 2015, Elizabeth did not show or respond to affection.

“She showed little emotion and appeared content staring at lights, grinding her teeth, spinning in place, and focusing on small parts of objects,” said Kara.

Elizabeth had no way to communicate. She could not gesture, and the only sounds she would produce was babbling, or making raspberry sounds.

Elizabeth only drank from a bottle. “We couldn't even get her to use a sippy cup. Elizabeth did not know how to feed her-

self. Her diet was so restricted because she did not have the oral motor skills needed to chew and swallow food safely,” recalled Kara.

Elizabeth also had trouble getting around, said Kara. She was afraid of walking up hill or steps, and of inanimate objects.



Daily, Elizabeth would respond to these frustrations by flopping, screaming, crying, hitting herself in the head, or banging her head on the floor.

But after being in the autism program at the Children's Center, Elizabeth has changed dramatically.

“Today, Elizabeth walks through the lobby doors like she owns the place. She is confident. She is proud. She greets familiar adults with a wave, and adores her

peers,” said Kara.

“She speaks in full sentences, and her words are intelligible 75 percent of the time. She is able to get her wants and needs met effectively. She knows her letters, numbers, colors, body parts, and she is able to identify emotions in herself and others. She sings songs. She enjoys making others laugh.”

Elizabeth now eats all of Julie's food, uses utensils, and drinks from an open cup, said Kara.

“She even spends time in Bursting Blossoms and plays interactive games with her peers,” said Kara. “Most importantly, she is no longer afraid. She walks up the hill gets on a sled, and laughs the whole way down. She explores the world around her with excitement and pure joy.”



Playground Update

“Today is May 10th and a very exciting day at the Children's Center. This morning our playground renovation began!” said Jeff Johnson, Executive Director.

Old and tired equipment has been dismantled and removed already. Over the next several weeks, the area will have drainage added, be leveled, have retaining walls built, pathways created, and equipment installed.

The landscape plan, which includes new trees, shrubs, flowers, and a garden will complete what will be a beautiful playground where all children will have access to all areas and play together.



Staff Spotlight: Get to Know Jenny

At 15-years-old, Jennifer McKendry volunteered at a summer camp for developmentally delayed children and youth in Hallowell.

Jenny was inspired. She realized the diversity of children's abilities and their potential for growth – with the right help.

Jenny committed her life to helping children with developmental delays.

She started out as an educational technician for a special education program and then a kindergarten teacher for 12 years.

In 2002, she found herself at the Children's Center.

"Right away, I liked the fact that children are hugged,



assisted, and taught partially through play. Time is provided to develop relationships, which I believe help children and families trust and work together with educational staff," said Jenny.

"The environment at the Center is positive, there is less red-tape to navigate to get children services, therapies are provided in-house, creating is encouraged, and teaching choices as well as flexibility is welcome."

At the Children's Center, Jenny has worked collaboratively with Kara St. Hilaire

to incorporate "floor time", which engages and teaches children more through play than strict dry repetition. Jenny believes floor play and similar interactions are powerful tools.



Recently, she became the lead teacher in the Stepping Stones III classroom, which primarily serves children ages three to five with autism who are able to function somewhat independently.

"I help guide fellow teachers, teach, plan curriculum and activities, build literacy and changes to benefit the children," Jenny said. "Hannah Mountain and I lead two classes of children, facilitating their growth and developing readiness to move on to the next level of their education."

Jenny has also worked to build a better book collection of high quality children's literature.

At the end of the day, Jenny most loves providing kids and their families with life changing education and fun.



Where Are They Now? Catching Up with Evan

Evan was only eighteen-months-old when he began receiving services for developmental delays at the Children's Center. About a year later, he received the diagnosis of autism and transitioned to the Autism Program into the Stepping Stones II Classroom.

Before Evan started going to the center, "Evan could not communicate and was easily irritated" said his mother, Amber Gagne.

"He spent most of his day crying," said Jazmyne, Evan's prior direct care staff. They walked the hallways with him, trying to learn his interests. She finally discovered that he

loves spinning, swinging, jumping, being tickled and eating food.

Once she learned his preferred activities, she was able to engage him in activities and



work on needed skills, especially communication.

"It took him a while to realize that there are people and things happening around him,

outside of his world," she said.

Evan graduated from the Autism Program at the Children's Center August 2016 and began kindergarten the same month. He was five-years-old.



"When Evan graduated, he was well-known around the center for his bright smiles and contagious laugh. He was voted 'Most Likely to Brighten

Your Day.'" said Jazmyne.

He "truly opened my eyes to a new world," said Hannah Mountain, another direct care staff who worked with Evan.

Amber said that he now makes eye contact, uses sign language and gestures to meet his needs, and understands her.

"The Center taught us how to understand and deal with his behavior," said Amber. She said she would recommend the center to anyone who has a child with delays, stating that "the staff are amazing and like a part of our family."

Evan is now six-years-old and continues to participate in a special education program at a local elementary school.

Children's Center Dinner & Auction

Please join us for the 3rd Annual Children's Center Dinner & Auction!
The evening will consist of dinner catered by the **LIBERAL CUP** and a
live auction with Maine Humorist, **GARY CROCKER**.



Saturday, August 26th

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

Doors Open 5:00 p.m.

Dinner 6:00 p.m.

Live Auction After Dinner

Governor Hill Mansion

136 State Street

Augusta, ME 04330



Cost of Admission:

\$40 per person

\$300 per table of eight.

Please RSVP by:

August 11th

Katelyn Pushard

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General Updates

Welcome Spring!

Excitement is in the air as we begin our playground renovation at our site in Augusta. Equipment for the new, inclusive playground started arriving in April, while the groundwork and installation began in May. Be on the lookout for a grand opening invitation!

We are also preparing for a new portable classroom at our location in Augusta. We expect the new space will arrive in July and be ready for services in early September. The additional classrooms will allow our organization to expand all programs and meet a much growing need in our area. More information to come as we get closer to the arrival date.

The 16th Annual Chili Chowder Challenge was a great success, raising over \$28,000 to benefit our playground renovation. We are already busy planning the third Annual Dinner & Auction scheduled for Saturday, August 26th the Governor Hill Mansion in Augusta.

We would also like to welcome Mark Tanner to the Children's Center Board of Directors!

Heather Dubord
Director of Finance
& Human Resources



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Congratulations to the Winners of the



16th Annual Children's Center Chili Chowder Challenge

Best Chili: The Liberal Cup, "Steerway To Heaven"

Best Chowder: Red Barn, "Laura's Famous Seafood Chowder"

Most Original Chowder: Maple Hill Farm Inn & Conference Center, "SPRINGZ SPRUNG"

Hottest Chili: The Liberal Cup, "Dragon's Breath"

Most Creative Display: The Liberal Cup

Most Creative Name: The Liberal Cup, "Steerway To Heaven"

Please let our sponsors and participating restaurants know how much you appreciate their support of the Children's Center!

Special thanks to our Musical Entertainment: Sam Shain and the Scolded Dogs.

Participating Restaurants:

Augusta House of Pancakes - The Black & Tan
The Liberal Cup - Pangea Catering - Damon's
Red Robin - Ground Round Sports Grille
Red Barn - Maple Hill Farm Inn & Conference Center

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