

# Children's Center News

Fall 2017

## Celebrating 50 Years!

### Meet Kathy

Kathy Merrick attended the Mid-State Cerebral Palsy Center, now known as the Children's Center Early Intervention & Family Support, in the early 1970's. Both her and her mother, Nancy Merrick, Children's Center Board Member, recall the experience fondly.

Kathy was diagnosed with epilepsy and intellectual disabilities caused by a brain injury that occurred before or during birth according to her psychologist. Although she did attend nursery school for a few years, Nancy wanted to wait until she turned seven years old before sending her to public school due to her delays.

Kathy started kindergarten in a main stream, public school setting. "Her teacher just didn't have the time to help her," Nancy said.

Shortly after, she transferred to the Mental Retardation Center in Hallowell where they determined that "she was too high functioning" for that setting. "I didn't know what to do," she said.

Nancy had heard about the center through her position at the Department of Education and decided to send

Kathy to the program. Nancy said the center was "the best thing that happened to her for early learning."

"I could tell she really enjoyed the program. She had many friends and staff loved her helpful nature," said Nancy. Kathy said that her



teacher John Whitney was her favorite part of going to the center. "He was nice to me and taught me to work," she said.

"She was happy there, not frustrated like she had been in public school. I felt safer bringing her there," with staff trained to care for children with a variety of special needs Nancy said.

Kathy eventually transitioned to public school in third grade where she spent part day in a mainstream

classroom and part day in a special education classroom. She took the school bus like all of her other peers.

Kathy graduated from Gilbert Elementary, then Buker Middle, and then Cony High School in 1986 when she was twenty-one years old.



After graduating, she lived in different group homes. "She was often ignored because she did not need as much help as the other residents," Nancy said. So, they looked for other options.

Overseen by the same caretaker for the past eighteen years, Kathy now lives with a roommate in their own apartment above the caretaker. "She grew up a lot and became more independent when she moved out on her own," said Nancy.

Kathy said she worked briefly at a local department store but has since "retired." Now, she attends a day program for adults with disabilities through Goodwill. As part of the program, she volunteers for Meals on Wheels, the Augusta Food Bank, and a local church.

Art classes are her favorite part of the program Kathy said. She also enjoys special trips, such as going to the movies, celebrating birthdays, shopping for Christmas, and watching the Sea Dogs, she said.

When she's not at program, she enjoys scrapbooking, sewing, coloring, and puzzles. She enjoys going to church and reading lessons with Literacy Volunteers. "I am doing good with lessons," she said.

Kathy also cares for her calico cat, Mumma Cat by giving her food and water each day. She said one day, she would like to adopt rabbits and goats too.

Kathy and Nancy both remain connected to the center through volunteer opportunities as their way of saying thank you.

# Meet the Grady's

Jamie Grady began the Mid-State Cerebral Palsy Center in 1972 when he was only three years old. Although he presented with significant medical and developmental delays, doctors could not identify the cause or pinpoint a diagnosis, said his mother Sandy Grady.

Jamie saw many specialists and endured numerous examinations. Eventually Sandy and her husband would learn that Jamie had a type of leukodystrophy, a rare and progressive genetic disorder that impacts the central nervous system. This type of disorder can be inherited or happen spontaneously.

Jamie's sister Suzie Grady began showing some of the same symptoms. She too entered the Mid-State Cerebral Palsy Center the following year when she was just two years old.

Suzie was verbal and ambulatory but the symptoms worsened as she grew older. She presented with nystagmus in her eyes and an unsteady gait, which were both early signs of the progressive disorder.

Sandy said that she was grateful that Suzie did not need to undergo the same level of testing as her brother. Her parents knew and the doctor's confirmed that she also had a type of leukodystrophy.

Sandy said she could not have made it through this difficult time without the support of the center. "They were such a blessing," she said.

As mentioned previously, providers could not determine the cause of the symptoms. Sandy said that center staff gave her many resources and directed

her to the right people. "The staff offered so much support. They were so committed to the children and families," she said.

Sandy recalled a particular teacher, Sandra Barringer, who remained in constant communication with her. She had many questions and concerns regarding care for Jamie. She did not hesitate to call Sandy to discuss a particular incident or ask a specific ques-



tion. She understood that the parent was the expert and she wanted to do her best for Jamie.

"The entire staff, including kitchen staff, was extremely supportive," said Sandy. They always ensured that they made food the correct texture for both Jamie and Suzie.

Staff assisted in the transition process for both children in 1980. They made sure that they transferred to the most appropriate and highest quality program for their needs said Sandy.

Jamie transitioned to a pediatric facility for children with disabilities called the Little Red School House in the early 1980's. At that point, he was nonverbal and unable to move his limbs. "He was too debilitated to attend public school," said Sandy.

Jamie moved to the Bangor Pediatric Center and received special education through the Bangor Brewer public school system from 1984 to 1989.

Sadly, he passed away in 1989 when he was only 17 years old.

Due to her stage in the progressive disorder, Suzie was able to transfer to a public school system in Jefferson from 1984 to 1987. She also moved to the Bangor Pediatric Center where she too participated in special education through the Bangor Brewer public school system. Later on, Sandy hired a private tutor for her daughter. Unfortunately, Suzie passed away in 1999 when she was 25 years old.

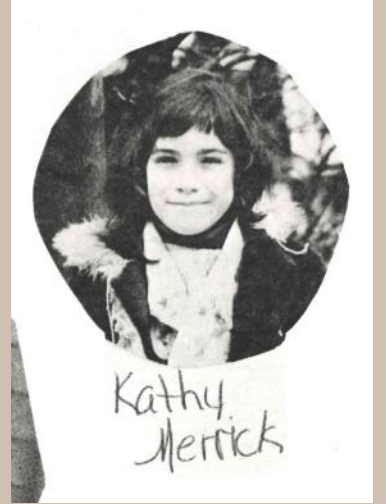
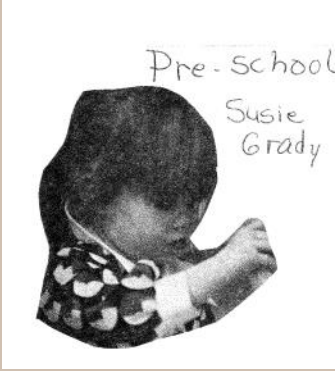
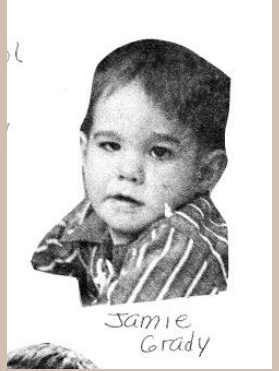
"Jamie and Suzie both had beautiful smiles," said Sandy. She said that they both were very social and outgoing despite their delays in communication and inability to speak.

"Suzie was excited to be at the center with other kids," she

said. Jamie was less thrilled to be away from his mother but staff knew him well enough to learn his tactics, such as making himself sick to go home and see he his mom said Sandy.

Sandy said that center staff provided the support needed to help these parents through a very difficult process. They played an important role in giving her children the happiest of childhoods, surrounded by caring friends, family, and staff. She said she could not ask for any more.

# Then & Now



# Brief History of the Center

1967—2017

The Children's Center has been a resource to local families since its humble beginnings in 1966. The agency became officially incorporated as Mid-State United Cerebral Palsy, Inc. in 1967. The purpose, focus, and even the name of the organization has evolved over the past fifty years as the center attempts to maintain an ongoing response to local needs.

The program operated from a private home until moving to the Penney Memorial Baptist Church later that year. The agency depended on volunteers to provide services, so the State of Maine provided a consultant to train volunteers on the job. The service focused primarily on school-age children with one preschool class for three to five year old children.

After a temporary move to Governor Hill Mansion, Kennebec County officials designed and built a facility at the current location using state and federal funds designated to serve individuals with multiple disabilities. The doors to the new building opened on December 2, 1978.

The Pleasant Street House was a short-term independent living program that served adults from 1978 until 1989. The pre-vocational program provided support and assisted adults with skill development for the activities of daily living. The center also expanded services to provide therapeutic and educational services to children from birth to three years of age in 1981.

From 1989 to 2012, the center operated a respite program as a support service to the parents and caregivers of children with special needs. In collaboration with Woodfords Family Services and United Cerebral Palsy of Northeastern Maine, the Children's Center developed state-wide

respite provider training and recruitment strategies that enhanced the program's capacity to meet families' needs.

The agency also managed a therapeutic recreation program administering state funding for children to participate in activities that help them develop long-lasting skills from 1990 to 2012.

In response to decreasing numbers of school-aged children due to successful efforts to mainstream children with special needs into public school programs, the agency began exclusively serving children from birth to age five in 1990. In that same year, the organization also changed the name to "Children's Center: Early Intervention and Family Support" to more accurately reflect its changing mission and programs.

From 1994 to 2006, the organization formed a collaborative with the Southern Kennebec Child Development Corporation (SKCDC) to create First Friends. The program joined children in head start with children with special needs. This collaborative service contributed to the development of children by offering the benefits of an inclusive environment.

Offering additional and expanded services resulted in space issues. In 1996, a mobile unit was added to the location for additional office space as an interim measure while the organization explored the possibility of expansion. When the lease expired for the mobile unit in 2000, the respite and finance programs moved to an office in Manchester and then back to a different office space in Augusta the following year.

The center created a targeted case management program in 2000 in order to assist parents as they work through the



range of emotions and maze of services they experience as parents of a child with special needs. The agency opened an office for targeted case management at the Federated Church in Skowhegan the following year, allowing the program to serve both Kennebec and Somerset Counties.

The organization conducted a feasibility study to determine their ability to raise funds to renovate and expand the building in response to these space issues. With a positive finding from the feasibility study, Kaye and David Flanagan provided leadership and worked with a dedicated group of community members to conduct a capital campaign to raise 1.5 million dollars in 2001.

As the result of their hard work and the generous support of the community, the center officially cut the ribbon on the newly renovated and expanded building in May of 2003.

As a result of the shift in focus to inclusive experiences for children, the Department of Education changed the classification of the organization from a special purpose program to an inclusive program in 2003.

In 2005, a grant from the United Way of Mid-Maine provided the center with the opportunity to begin offering educational workshops for parents and caregivers of children with special needs in Kennebec and Somerset Counties.

The agency completed a playground renovation in 2007 as well as an expansion project completed in June of 2009, which included an “Enchanted Forest” and more Maine-themed structures.

The center made the decision to offer child care in the fall of 2008 and an infant and toddler program in 2009 in order to strengthen the focus on inclusion.

The capital campaign from 2001 provided the funding needed to complete a classroom expansion project in 2010. The agency received an additional 400 square feet

of program space and an increased licensed capacity from 60 to 75 children. The organization was awarded a community development block grant enabling expansion in Somerset County that same year.

Realizing an even greater need for these types of services in the rural communities of Somerset County, the center began providing center-based day treatment and rehabilitative community support services through a new Autism Program and Behavioral Support Program established at a new location in Skowhegan in 2013.

In 2015, the agency continued to grow through a new collaboration with SKCDC, which involved providing day treatment services in a classroom at the Plummer Street Head Start Program in Gardiner. The organization also purchased the property adjacent to the current building in Augusta that same year in the hopes of increasing capacity in the future.

The center began this year with the opening of a new site in Farmington, which began offering day treatment and targeted case management services to Franklin County. The agency also expanded services by increasing the age range for case management to birth to age twenty-one. The organization recently completed a major renovation project to create a completely inclusive and accessible playground and installed a portable classroom to expand services in Augusta.

No longer operated by volunteers, today the center employs over sixty highly skilled staff to provide the array of services including: family services, inclusive early education, pediatric therapies, and specialized services for children diagnosed with autism or with behavioral health concerns. A volunteer board of directors governs the agency.

The Children’s Center continues to be an invaluable resource across central Maine. We look forward to continuing our work within the community to provide quality programming and services to children and their families.



## Children's Center

### 3rd Annual Dinner & Auction

The Children's Center 3rd Annual Dinner & Auction was a huge success! The Children's Center feels so fortunate to be a part of a community that recognizes the importance of early intervention services and generously supports our mission.

A Huge **THANK YOU** to our Sponsors:



G&E Roofing ~ MaineGeneral Health

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- ◇ Thank you to the many local businesses that donated items and services towards the live auction at the event.
- ◇ Thank you to our amazing guests for joining us and making our third dinner and auction such a huge success.
- ◇ Thank you to Governor Hill Mansion for the wonderful accommodations and Liberal Cup for the delicious dinner.
- ◇ A special thank you to our auctioneer, Gary Crocker, Maine humorist, for the many laughs and loads of fun.



## General Updates

Fun Fall Happenings at the Center:

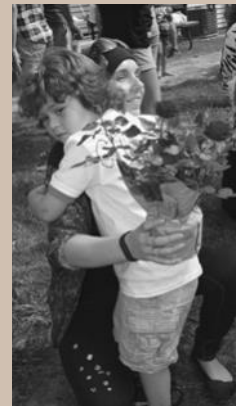
As we say goodbye to summer, we also say goodbye to some center graduates off to public school. We wish them the best of luck! As we say hello to fall, we welcome new students into all of our programs and begin getting to know our new friends.

The Children's Center was truly humbled by the most recent display of support at our 3rd Annual Dinner and Auction. We raised over \$22,000 towards the many specialized services we offer for children with special needs. Thank you again to all those who donated and/or attended the event!

The playground is officially up and running! Thank you to all those who supported the renovation, including event sponsors and individual donors. We would not have been able to do it without you. We were pleased to be able to say a special thank you to the Shuman Family for the donation of our major all inclusive structure on the playground.

As we head further into fall, we are busy making plans for the winter. The portable classroom is nearing completion. Also, we are already planning for our giving tree and staff celebration where we recognize community members and local businesses for their support.

Shelley Livie  
Intake Coordinator



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