

Children's Center News

Summer 2017



Child Spotlight: Meet Sebastian



Sebastian Tomaselli was not talking when he entered a local head start program at the age of two. Worried about his delayed communication, his grandfather and mother hoped the support of staff and exposure to other children would help his development.

Because this was his first experience in a preschool setting, communication was not the only challenge Sebastian faced in his new classroom. He had very limited social skills and did not know how to play with his peers.

"He stood in the corner for the first two weeks," said Sue Daniels, previous Disabilities & Mental Health Manager at head start and now Early Education Coordinator at the Center.

The classroom was too large and chaotic, said Alisa Tomaselli, Sebastian's Mom. She wanted a more structured setting with a smaller adult-to-child ratio for her son.

Sue said she made a referral for special education through Child Development

Services (CDS). They tried to make accommodations within the head start program, but Sebastian needed more. "You could tell that he felt overwhelmed," she said.

Barbara Weiss, Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant from All Kids in Action, said Sebastian often became frustrated because he had no way to voice his wants and needs, which led to aggression and isolation from friends. He spent most of the day screaming said Sue.



Because of his limited progress at head start, Sue referred Sebastian to the Children's Center. He began in the Sunflower Classroom where he received one-to-one specially designed instruction three days per week.

When he was ready, he began visiting the preschool classroom setting called Bursting Blossoms at the Children's Center. He slowly increased his visits and will most likely be placed there five days per week in the fall said Sue.

"His vocabulary has exploded," said Alisa. He is putting words together and using sentences, which has led to less frustration and aggression as well as better listening and new friends.

His grandfather and mother have even seen a difference at home said Alisa. "He's proud to be able to say hi, bye, and goodnight to me now," she said.

"This place is amazing" and "he loves it here," said Alisa.

Sue said that Sebastian's family has always been very passionate about getting him services. Barb mentioned a strong parent involvement, including his mom attending occupational therapy sessions at All Kids in Action and the family participating in Targeted Case Management at the Children's Center.

"His success would not be as great without family involvement," says Barb. His story exemplifies the importance of caregiver participation and a team approach said Barb.



Where Are They Now? Catching Up With Melissa

Melissa Mann attended the Children's Center over twenty-years ago. She began in therapies as a baby and moved onto an inclusive education program when she was four-years-old said Laura Gabriel, Melissa's mother. She graduated at the age of five with a strong foundation for her future.

Child Development Corporation (SKCDC), which joined children in the Head Start program with children with special needs. This collaborative program contributed to the development of children by offering the benefits of an inclusive environment.

moving to Maine. She has also visited the Live Up Program for individuals with Down syndrome in New York City for several years. Lastly, she has attended the National Conference for Down syndrome in Massachusetts, Georgia, and Florida.



Laura said she appreciated that Melissa was able to receive her therapies, participate in preschool services, and interact with children of all abilities at the Children's Center. The staff was so friendly, wonderful, and dedicated to the babies and children at the Center said Betty Gabriel, Melissa's grandmother. They made you feel comfortable leaving a child there each day and Melissa obviously felt comfortable too she said.

Melissa participated in the First Friends program, the first inclusive program at the Children's Center. The program was a collaborative effort between the Children's Center and Southern Kennebec

Since graduating from the Children's Center, Melissa has come a long way. She entered the public school system and graduated from Cony High School she said. For the past six years, she has worked at Kennebec Pharmacy two days per week. She said she "is a hard worker and takes pride in her work."

Melissa has many friends and travels a lot. Laura said she attends a social program three days per week and participates in weekly or weekend camps during the summer. She has participated in summer camp through the PALS Program for the past fifteen years, which initially began in Philadelphia before

Over the years, Melissa has developed many interests and hobbies. Laura said she attended dance lessons from age four through her high-school years. During her teen years, Melissa said she enjoyed downhill skiing through Maine Handicapped Skiing. Currently, she participates in Summer Special Olympics each year.

Thanks to her father, Andy Mann, karaoke has become Melissa's favorite past time said Laura. She said she enjoys karaoke in her living room or out with friends. Melissa has a beautiful singing voice and the confidence of a rock star. She will continue to do great things.



Amanda Callahan has had a passion for working with children with disabilities that extends as far back as she can remember. She and her family have had a connection with the Children's Center for almost as long.

Her mother taught special education for many years, specifically a life skills program at a local middle school. Amanda remembers helping her mother with lesson plans and activity preparations when she was just a girl. She was hooked.

She eventually attended an open house at Kennebec Valley Community College (KVCC). "Speech Therapy



Staff Spotlight: Get to Know Amanda

kind of fell in my lap," said Amanda. After earning her associates at KVCC, she pursued her bachelor's in communication science disorders at the University of Maine at Orono. She graduated and earned her certificate as a Speech Therapy Assistant.

Amanda heard about the Children's Center through her mother who worked here many years ago. Amanda had volunteered here in

the kitchen for one summer while earning her degree, so she was familiar with the programs provided to young children with disabilities.

Amanda took the position of a Speech Therapy Assistant at the Children's Center shortly after graduation. She also worked as an education

technician in our behavior support program and our inclusive early education program for a bit. Now, she holds the title of Communication Specialist for all sites.

Amanda has many responsibilities in her role. She assists



with the telecommunication speech therapy program, ensures the correct use of visual supports and symbols within all classrooms, trains staff in the use of functional communi-

cation systems, and assesses and creates functional communication systems for children. She is also the lead teacher in the Sunflower Classroom and provides direct care to children three days per week.

When asked why she chose to work with young children



with special needs, Amanda said, "When you are working with a child on a particular goal they have been trying to achieve for so long, there is nothing better than the moment they reach their goal without any support, without any help from me."

Amanda said her favorite part about working at the Children's Center will always be seeing the growth of each child and hearing the quirky things they say that make you laugh. She has also found great pleasure in teaching her peers in her new role because this allows her to extend her reach to more children.

"We have installed the equipment, created paths, laid the mulch, and planted flowers. We have a couple of finishing touches we're working on but for the most part, it's ready. And what a playground it is!" said Executive Director Jeff Johnson.

He said that the playground features

Playground Update

forty-three pieces of equipment and activities and forty-one of them are inclusive, meaning any child can participate regardless of physical challenges. All forty-three features are accessible, meaning all children can get to all areas

and be part of any group anywhere on the playground.

"This play area will foster physical, emotional, and communication growth in extraordinary ways," said Jeff.

We are very much looking forward to showing you our new play space at our open house on October 5th at 2:30 p.m.



General Updates

It has been a summer of changes! We are almost done the playground! The children and teachers alike have anxiously waited to explore the new play area. I certainly will miss the giggling, chattering, and squeals of delight as children file through the administration wing to go outside to our temporary playground. However, I am happy that the children will finally have a fully accessible and inclusive playground for all to enjoy.

Once we have completed the playground and secured the new modular building, classrooms will be moving around to create even better spaces for each program. Teachers are excitedly planning the layout and functionality of their new classrooms.

Graduation is just around the corner for our children headed to kindergarten in the fall. The kids and teachers have worked so hard for this moment. We are thrilled to send them off to tackle their next big adventure!

With graduates headed to public school, we will be welcoming a new group of children at each site, getting to know each of them, and making plans to prepare them for their next adventure as well. Here is to a fun and successful school year!

Karen Littlefield
Human Resources & Quality Assurance Coordinator

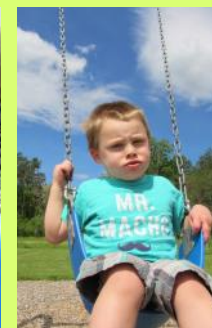


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Children's Center Dinner & Auction

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 18th
Katelyn Pushard
(207) 626-3497 Ext: 125
kpushard@childrensctr.org

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