

Children's Center News

Winter 2018



Meet Gabriel

Gabriel Look is a survivor. "She has fought and survived a lot of situations," said her mother, Brittany Look. She survived a severely premature birth as well as extreme neglect and abuse in an orphanage in Bulgaria. She witnessed "some pretty unspeakable things," said her mother.

Shortly after her adoption and move to Maine, Gabriel began participating in the behavior support program, occupational therapy, and

speech therapy at the Children's Center.

When she began at the center, she was at the developmental level of an infant, "requiring maximum adult support once she was upset. She would bang her head, scratch herself, pull her hair, and scream. She did not have the language to say what she needed or wanted," said Amber Stubbs, Treatment Services Supervisor.

"She learned self-reliance early on and she is a spitfire for it," said Brittany. She said Gabriel's greatest strength can be her greatest weakness because her tenacity often prevents her from asking for help.

"Gabriel has made tremendous progress in just over a year of being at the center," said Amber. "She can carry on a conversation. She knows how to play. She can interact. She understands how parts of the world work. She understands that we are a family, not just the next shift of caretakers," said Brittany.

"Gabriel is my second child to attend programs at the Children's Center and I am really impressed by how custom and individual the programs are for each child and how knowledgeable everyone is in their field," said Brittany. In regards to her daughter's case manager, Samantha Thibodeau,

Brittany said "I can say, without reservation, that she saved our sanity."

"The professionals at the Children's Center were not only willing to listen to my concerns ahead of time, they took the time to sit down and brainstorm why our situation might be unique and what steps we all needed to take to address my concerns," said Brittany.

"She might be small, but she is mighty," said Amber. Her mom said Gabriel loves going to school and sharing about her day each evening. "She has flourished at the Children's Center," said Brittany.



Champions of the Center

Charlie and Nancy Shuman of Charlie's Family of Dealerships have been huge supporters of the Children's Center for many, many years. They have supported the organization in a number of ways and have truly become a part of the Center family.



Nancy generously donates clothes, toys, or any other items she thinks might benefit the children and families of the center. She brings over huge bags of brand new items all of which go directly to children and families who might not otherwise have the ability to purchase these items for their families. *(continue on page 2)*

Champions of the Center

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The Shuman's and their children Steven Shuman and Elisa Emmons have also been incredibly generous in providing affordable and reliable vehicles for the center, donating a portion of the price themselves. Without these

vehicles, many kids would not be able to access services at each location.

Last and certainly not least, the Shuman's both personally and through their dealership have donated over \$40,000 in sponsorships over the past seven years.

The Shuman's were instrumental in the renovation of our fully inclusive and accessible playground. They support much needed services, help us address any unmet needs, and truly inspire us as an organization.

On behalf of children, families, staff, and the board of directors, we cannot



thank you enough for your ongoing support.

We truly appreciate your generosity to the center and the community as a whole. You are making an enormous difference, especially in the lives of young children with special needs.



Catching Up With Noah

“It takes a village to raise a child and it all started with this village at the Children's Center,” said Nacia Miller.

implications of a diagnosis, Nacia enrolled her child into targeted case management services followed by in-home support services at the center.

Noah began in the behavioral support program, previously known as Friends Express. He required a direct care staff within arm's reach at every moment. He did not understand what it meant to sit down or that anyone was talking to him if they did not say his name before their question or comment.

Her son Noah attended head start and then prekindergarten for a few months before being diagnosed with autism at the age of four years old. “I was lost and didn't know where to get help,” she said.

After struggling in the public, mainstream classroom, he was finally able to transition to the center where he received special education, occupational therapy, and speech and language therapy. Overwhelmed with the

Today, Noah attends a mainstream fifth grade classroom in the public school system with his peers.

While still receiving special education services, he prefers to create his own goals for his education. He even has plans to own a self-sufficient, family-managed farm one day.



“I think his love of gardening began at the center with all the garden themed classroom names; seedlings, growing sprouts, bursting blossoms, etc.” said Nacia.

Noah has many friends and many hobbies. He enjoys participating in karate—recently earning his yellow belt—and clubs at a local library and art gallery. Karate has helped him with his aggression, teaching him

only to use his skills to defend himself and to talk about frustrations rather than act on them. He no longer bolts away from his mother and actually enjoys perusing the next door retail store while his mother finishes her grocery shopping. “I don't think he would be where he is now without the Center,” said Nacia. She said that the agency not only provided services for her child but connected her with other programs that greatly benefitted her child and family as a whole, including Gallant Therapy Services and Edmund Ervin Pediatric Center.



Staff Spotlight: Josh Canty

Josh Canty began his education career at the University of Maine at Farmington graduating with a degree in Political Science. After graduation, he taught English as a second language in Mexico for nine years.



Last year, Josh moved back to the states and joined the team at the Children's Center. He has been working as

a direct care staff in the behavior support program since last September.

Josh recently joined the Utilization Review Team in an effort to monitor the quality of services throughout the agency. "He was a natural fit and choice for the Utilization Review Team," said his supervisor Amber Stubbs.

Amber describes Josh as inquisitive, hardworking, flexible, and super funny. "He wants to learn as much about the children, their triggers, and their goals, so that he can help them the best that he can," she said.

The majority of his time has been spent in our Busy Bees Classroom. Josh said he enjoys working with these



children because "they are honest and they do not hold back."

They are a lot of fun Josh said. He said he enjoys teaching the children to acknowledge and cope with their feelings, an important skill needed later in life.

"Kids always have the best stories. We always have something to talk about," he said.

The children have taught

him to improvise and be quick on his toes. "You never know what's going to come out of their mouths," said Josh. However, Amber noted "nothing seems to rattle his cage."

Despite the challenges, Josh said he keeps coming back because he enjoys seeing the progress all of the kids make over time. He said sometimes you do not see changes right away but slowly the child makes meaningful gains.

Josh said the most rewarding part of his job is seeing that he makes a difference and the children are taking steps, however small, towards their goals. He enjoys seeing the progress with all children at the Center, not just those in Busy Bees.

KSB Volunteers on the Way!

Kennebec Savings Bank is a well-known name in our community both for their outstanding business principles and their enormous generosity in the community. They provide both funding and volunteer support to numerous organizations throughout the region.

The Children's Center has been fortunate enough to be on the receiving end of their charitable contributions both through sponsorships and volunteer efforts. KSB has sponsored fundraising events at the center since 2010 raising over \$12,000.

As if that wasn't enough, KSB has representation on board committees and has sent one of the largest volunteer groups to the Chili Chowder Challenge the last few years.

On behalf of the children, families, staff, and board of directors of the Children's Center, thank you for everything you do for our agency and the community as a whole.



Calumet Club: Double Duty



Le Club Calumet holds the title of the only event sponsor and participating restaurant for the Chili Chowder Challenge for the last several years. They have been involved in the event for more than ten years and additionally began sponsoring the Dinner & Auction last year as well. Their sponsorships over the years have raised close to \$2,500.

The Club always shows up with upbeat, fun volunteers and warm, fresh, ready to eat chili and chowder. They have donated close to one hundred gallons of product and volunteer countless of hours at the event each year.

The children, families, staff, and board of directors thanks you for the many ways you give to our agency. The center and community are lucky to have you!

General Updates

We finally completed our playground and this fall children began using it after months of watching bulldozers, excavators, and worst of all, waiting for grass to grow. It is quite an achievement; one that for years will initiate and grow physical skills, emotional health and well-being, accelerate communication, and provide all kinds of fun. It's the only inclusive playground like it in the state and something we're very proud of. Thanks to the many, many people who made it possible.

The Birches have also opened — two new classrooms and therapy space for our behavior support programs. In two years, the number of children supported in this program has doubled. The new space is very needed and allows us to provide services to more children that need them.

We also have initiated case management services for adults who are parenting children. Many adults with children with special needs find navigating the system of care and supports confusing and frustrating. Case management can help find and coordinate needed services and provide other needed support for families facing challenges. The case management team at the Children's Center does extraordinary work, and expanding to meet the needs of adults seems a natural progression for us.

Jeff Johnson, Executive Director



Thank you committee members, sponsors, restaurants, vendors, auction donors, volunteers, and attendees. This event would not be possible without your support!

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