

There is still time
to **DOUBLE** your
impact through the
Matching Challenge -
April 30th deadline!

YOU HELPED MATT PURSUE HIS
PASSIONS IN A YEAR OF CHANGE!

Read his story inside!



The | Tapestry

Spring/Summer 2021 Celebrating Uniqueness During Autism Awareness Month



A Note From Our Executive Director



Dear Little City Family and Friends,

April marks the annual recognition of Autism Awareness Month. For many people, it is an opportunity to spread awareness with a blue light, ribbon or even colorful puzzle piece. For others, it may be a chance to watch an inspirational video and see how autism does not define those on the spectrum. For some, it may go unnoticed.

But at Little City, Autism Awareness Month is a reaffirmation of everything we do. The lights, ribbons and puzzle pieces are all symbols that others are seeing and believing in what we do together every day. It's a reminder that people with autism and developmental disabilities matter, that they are part of the community and that they deserve the same respect and opportunities as everyone else.

In this *Tapestry*, you will see just a few of the stories on how you are helping change their lives and how they have changed our lives as well. Little City's ChildBridge Center for Education is celebrating 10 years of changing lives and giving students with developmental disabilities opportunities and experiences they could not get anywhere else.

Starting with a student body of three in 2011 to the 38 students it serves today, you have helped the Center for Education evolve into one of Little City's crown jewels.

You'll read about Matt and Ricky, two people with autism who are unique in their own ways. Their ability to adapt to the ever-changing world we find ourselves in is a reminder that people with autism are as capable and willing as anyone to adjust with the right communication.

And you will read for what I am personally most excited about, the upcoming Little City's Got Talent virtual variety show. This show on April 22 has truly been a labor of love for so many of our staff,

residents, participants and viewers will get to see firsthand the incredible talent people with autism and developmental disabilities possess. It is sure to be a night of great entertainment and hopefully an eye-opening and inspirational event for our donors and supporters.

I cannot thank each of you, our donors and supporters, enough for the compassion and generosity you show our participants in so many ways. And during this special month, I ask you to continue to spread awareness about autism — reach out to family, friends, or co-workers about the important work we are doing together to impact those with autism.

Let them know there are places where supporting and empowering people with developmental disabilities happens year-round and not just in April. Share this newsletter, invite them to watch the talent show, show them the real stories of how people with developmental disabilities are getting the opportunities they deserve because of the support from people just like you.

When we work together and share our passion, Autism Awareness Month can be every month.

Yours in service,

Shawn E. Jeffers
Executive Director

PS: Don't forget! There's still time to have your donation **DOUBLED!** Thanks to the generosity of long-time Little City supporters Matthew and Tina Schubert, all donations made by April 30th to our autism campaign will be matched dollar-for-dollar, up to \$20,000! Donate today at www.littlecity.org/autism.

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Getting to Know Autism

If you've met one person with autism, then you've met one person with autism. That truth is evident every day as we work together to provide and create every opportunity for individuals with autism to always reach their unique potential.

But as we continue to celebrate this special month filled with awareness for autism, we are reminded of the facts that bring us all close together in our pursuit to help those in need.

WHAT IS AUTISM? Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a group of complex disorders in early brain development that are characterized by varying degrees of severity with difficulties in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication and repetitive behaviors. Autism can be associated with intellectual disabilities, difficulties in motor coordination, attention and physical health.



There is no known
cause or cure for autism.



1 in 54
CHILDREN
IN THE UNITED STATES ARE
DIAGNOSED WITH ASD



An estimated **60%** of
people with autism are **verbal**

8 out of 10
CHILDREN WE SERVE HAVE AUTISM



BOYS ARE NEARLY
4 TIMES
MORE LIKELY TO HAVE AUTISM THAN GIRLS



The cost to provide just the
educational essentials for one
individual with autism can amount
to well over **\$60,000 per year.**



Autism effects all
racial, ethnic, and
socioeconomic groups.

Over 50% of children with ASD have
an intellectual disability with
challenges in daily function.

This is why YOU are so important in the work we do!

Because of support from donors like you and so many others in our community, children and adults with autism are experiencing every opportunity in life to reach their unique potential throughout their lifetime.

Each individual with autism that we serve together has a uniquely-designed program to provide a variety of learning and living environments, including specially-designed, sensory-rich homes, and the ChildBridge Center for Education – our therapeutic day school. And as our children grow into adulthood, they are participating in job readiness training.

And it doesn't just stop at those essentials . . . these individuals are able to be involved in recreation activities, social events, training in daily skills, art and more.

It is for individuals just like Ricky and Matt that you can read about in this latest edition of the Tapestry that we celebrate the uniqueness of individuals with autism and continue to support the programs and services that help create so much success for them.

And that is why this matching gift opportunity is so important.

Thanks to the generosity of longtime Little City supporters, Matt and Tina Schubert, every dollar you give before the April 30th deadline will be matched – dollar for dollar – up to \$20,000. This means there is still time to **DOUBLE** your impact on individuals with autism!

Please partner with us during this special Autism Awareness Campaign and put more power in your giving – reaching **TWICE as many individuals with autism and helping each of them reach their unique potential. You can send your gift using the enclosed reply envelope or give securely online at www.littlecity.org/autism**

Your donation will be
MATCHED!





Day School to Celebrate Ten Year Anniversary

The ChildBridge Center for Education is celebrating 10 years of changing lives for students with autism and developmental disabilities.

The therapeutic day school is one of the most influential services provided because of you - unlocking the potential of people with autism and other developmental disabilities anywhere from ages 10 to 21.

The dynamic learning space first opened its doors in 2011 — coinciding closely with the launch of Little City’s Duffey Family Children’s Village — and welcomed a small group of three students. Since that time, both the Village and Center for Education have grown together as the school now serves 38 students, virtually all of whom live at Little City.

“One of the biggest areas of growth since the school opened has been in the relationship with the residential staff,” said Jessica Kingji, school therapy and clinical coordinator. “The communication between the homes and school is so strong now that the children are really getting a comprehensive and consistent approach in how they learn.”

Your help with a major expansion in 2015 is what allowed the school to grow into what it is today. The expansion included an overall doubling of size with four additional classrooms, a life skills lab, vocational lab, library/media center, two therapy rooms and a sensory gym.

In non-pandemic times, the community is also a big part of the classroom as some students take up to three community trips a week to learn skills such as grocery shopping, accessing emergency services, volunteering and other vital social skills.

Phil Siegel, principal of the Center for Education, said regardless of what activity or class a student is engaged in, the priority is always engaging them with the learning method that works best. Whether it is through visual cues, a more hands-on experience or even through music and

singing, the staff at the Center for Education bring a specialty in reaching students with autism and developmental disabilities that cannot be replicated at traditional schools.

“Our staff does an amazing job of connecting with each student and learning how each communicate and what they need,” Phil said. “It is incredible to see what a student can learn when they start to feel like they are understood and can express themselves.”

It was an idea that was misunderstood in the 1980s and 90s, as the push to have students with significant autism and other developmental disabilities in traditional schools led to Little City closing the doors of its first school, which had started in 1964. Public policy leaders soon realized those students were getting fewer opportunities to succeed at overburdened traditional school districts and schools like the Center for Education once again became a vital resource.

With specialized programs such as speech therapy, occupational therapy and art and music therapy, there is no shortage of specialized approaches to support students. And as the school starts to build toward the next 10 years, they hope to continue bringing in more students at younger ages.

“The earlier you can reach a student with autism and developmental disabilities, the better chance they will have to build life skills,” Phil said. “So we hope to bring in more students earlier in their education in the next few years.”

Anyone interested in learning more about Little City’s ChildBridge Center for Education should contact Phil Siegel at psiegel@littlecit.org.

Please consider donating today by sending back the enclosed reply envelope with your gift. Your gift today will reach twice as many children with autism and continue to offer vital services that enable each of them to reach their fullest potential.



Meet Ricky: Communicating Success Because You

People with autism often communicate in different ways, and Ricky has some of the most unique ways of communicating at Little City.

Ricky, a 17-year-old student at ChildBridge Center for Education, has become known for his special ways of expressing his feelings. He may high-five you, hug you or in what has become the school-favorite, touch foreheads with you.

“He touched foreheads with me about three days after I first started working with him and it was really special,” said Meaghan Grap, Ricky’s special education teacher. “He just has this warmth to him and can say so much with his eyes and his smile.”

When it comes to communication, Ricky stands out even at school. While many students thrive with communicating through tablets and technology, Ricky has used a combination of static boards and a Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS). Both the static board and PECS are systems built on visual cues. Ricky can either point to a picture on the board or hand a small card with a picture on it to staff to communicate what he wants or is thinking or feeling.

In his three years at the school, Ricky has made tremendous progress in using those communication tools to express himself and regulate his emotions. The most recent example is also the most telling as Ricky seamlessly transitioned to a new classroom and new routine after returning to school under COVID regulations.

“When he first came here, Ricky absolutely would have had behaviors with how big of a change we had coming back to school,” Meaghan said. “He’s able to adjust very well because of the prep and knowing about the change and our ability to communicate those things to him. It’s been really nice to watch.”

Ricky has about four more years at ChildBridge during which time his social worker, Robert Rigali said communication would continue to be the focus. He has shown the tools necessary to transition to Little City’s adult programming and even potentially work in maintenance or clerical fields if his skills continue to develop as they have been.

“It was hard for him to adapt to change when he first came, but this year alone he has shown an incredible ability to adjust and pick up on new routines,” Robert said. “We’ve seen far fewer struggles as the years have gone by, so the goal is to keep working on his communication and his ability to express himself to others.”



All of Ricky’s achievements are thanks to you! Support from donors just like you have made so many opportunities possible for individuals just like Ricky. But many more need your help, and you can help do that by giving with the enclosed reply envelope. Thank you for your compassion!



Meet Matt: Stepping Up to Lead During Change

Change isn't always easy, especially for people with autism who often thrive on routine. But when the world changed in 2020, Little City's Countryside Center took the opportunity to change with it, and people like Matt helped lead the way.

For years, Countryside Center's primary program was performing subcontract work for outside vendors, but as the state has worked to eliminate that kind of sub-minimum wage work, Countryside worked toward transforming its programming. With COVID-19 forcing a lengthy shut down, Countryside took the opportunity to completely change, and a whole new experience awaited participants when they returned in September.

Gone were the work areas marked A, B, C and D that would have up to 50 people busily working at their stations. In its place are classroom pods of 8 to 10 people working on daily curriculums to improve life skills, social skills and enjoy recreational and fitness courses.

It was a massive change for people like Matt who had only ever experienced the daily routine of the subcontract work for his five years at Countryside, but he has embraced the change and his positive approach to the new routine has helped set the tone for others.

"To go from what they had to this new programming is a really big change, even for our staff, who went from supervising production to becoming teachers" said Lisa Cluster, vocational services director. "But Matt has really enjoyed the change and picked up immediately on the new routine. He's adjusted to every new protocol and is just really easy going and even-keeled about everything."

The change has brought out the best in many people as the smaller groups of 8 to 10 people as opposed to the groups of 50 has inspired many people to come out of their shells and be more social. Lisa said there has been a noticeable improvement in behaviors for quite a few participants and staff are learning more about each person's passions and interests.

For Matt, his love of musicals and drawing has always been well known, but this new programming could eventually allow him to monetize those passions. Lisa said the goal is to create different

tracks for people to choose, including a vocational track that would lead to Little City's Employee Development Services program and a creative track that would allow people to pursue passions such as drawing, horticulture and other creative work with the goal of selling their work in a micro-business format.

With so much continuing to change and evolve at Countryside in the wake of COVID, Lisa said it is a blessing to have people like Matt who can lead by example and approach changes with a positive attitude. Countryside has built back up from 13 people who initially came back in September to nearly 50 people today. Another classroom of 8 to 10 people will be coming back in April.

"Matt is just a really great guy and he has been great to have around with all these changes," Lisa said. "Even the staff were a little hesitant at first, but you can see how much they enjoy it because they get to spend more time with people like Matt and learn about each person. They all have interests you may have never known about. Change isn't always bad and I think we are seeing that we are changing to provide an even better service now."

Your impact on Matt is helping him adjust to changes and find new paths to success. Thank you!





Little City's Got Talent

People with autism are all unique and uniquely talented.

As part of Autism Awareness Month in April, Little City will celebrate that uniqueness with the first-ever Little City's Got Talent virtual extravaganza. This showcase of Little City's brightest stars will take place on Thursday, April 22 and be hosted by Little City Executive Director Shawn Jeffers and longtime resident and the always charismatic Jeff Aiken.

"I am so thrilled to be part of a night that is going to spotlight why we do what we do at Little City," Shawn said. "The talent, persistence and joy of those at Little City is always inspiring. And to be able to host this special night with Jeff Aiken is a real treat and guarantees there will be plenty of laughs."

The idea for the night came when COVID prevented Little City from hosting its annual Gala in 2021. Still wanting to engage donors and supporters in a night of inspiration, those at Little City worked toward spotlighting the most inspiring people of all – the residents and participants with developmental disabilities.

Jessica Lynk, videographer and organizer for the event, said her time in Little City's marketing department has allowed her to see the incredible talent at Little City, but putting together the compilation of performances for Little City's Got Talent has been an even greater eye-opening experience.

"It's been awesome to showcase people we don't always showcase and see how so many people have come together to coordinate and make this happen," she said. "The staff has really helped everyone prepare and you can see how excited everyone is about it."

That relationship between staff and the performers will be a featured part of the show as well. Before each performance, a staff member will talk about what makes that person special and how

their talent has grown over time. Viewers will see that genuine and sincere love and care between staff and those they support and how that relationship truly is the key to Little City's success.

One such staff member is Malorie Solus. As Little City's Special Olympics coach and director of the choir, among the many other recreational courses she leads, Malorie has seen firsthand how much talent those at Little City possess. Her ability to connect with each individual has driven them to set new records, overcome fears and let their talents shine.

"I've been lucky enough to work with so many amazing people at Little City and I can see how hard they work every day," Malorie said. "You can't help but become friends with them and want them to succeed and they want to be pushed. I'm proud of all them and so excited they get this opportunity to show what they can do."

Viewers can expect a night of singing, dancing and even some athletic feats, including a power lifting attempt by Kevin who is one of Illinois' strongest Special Olympians!

The cost to access the live show is free, but viewers will have an opportunity to donate before the show and also after to show support for their favorite act. There will be a special post-show on Saturday to recap the night and announce all the winners.

**Don't miss the incredible
"Little City's Got Talent"
virtual show on April 22!**

**Register today for FREE at
www.littlecity.org/talent**

**Little City's
got Talent**

**To register to watch the show, donate
or for more information, please visit
www.littlecity.org/talent.**



Little City Gets Vaccinated!

Upcoming Events

Little City celebrated a momentous occasion in February as it held its first COVID-19 vaccination clinic on campus. Through Little City’s partnership with Walgreens, hundreds of staff and residents were able to safely and successfully receive their vaccine.

Although the pandemic has changed the future way Little City provides its programs and services, the administration of the vaccine was the biggest step in moving the organization forward. It was an incredibly emotional day, and Little City is so grateful for all the support each person was provided.

Thank you Walgreens and Little City staff who ensured that the day was an uplifting and positive experience.

Community Partners

Thank you to the following funders for their generous grants that support the work and mission of Little City. The below referenced grants were awarded on or after January 2021:

- The Coleman Foundation
- Elk Grove Township
- Hanover Township
- Palatine Township
- RTA
- Village of Schaumburg
- Wheeling Township
- Zurich North America / Zurich Foundation

Helping Hands

Little City extends its appreciation to the following groups and individuals for their recent volunteer work with us since January 2021:

Individual Volunteers:

- Natasha Bentle
- Sarah Compton
- Cathy Demetrio
- Tia Devine-Adde
- Taylor Harrington
- Madeline Kennedy
- Olivia Mathews
- Rebecca Menelle
- Priya So
- Emily Schroen
- Chris Spiek

Group Volunteers:

- Vicky Wen
- Jennifer West
- Jack Wojtowicz
- 100% Foundation
- Allstate
- Berkshire Hathaway Koenig Rubloff: Schaumburg
- Caterpillar
- Draper and Kramer
- Ernst and Young
- Friends of Countryside
- Glenbrook South High School Interact Club
- Hands on Suburban
- Holy Family Catholic Community Parish and Academy
- Hub International
- Jewel Osco: Palatine
- Knights of Columbus
- Lou Malnati’s: Schaumburg
- Medline
- Minor School
- Motorola Solutions Foundation
- Motorola Solutions
- Pearson Online Learning Services
- Pulte
- St. Edna’s Parish
- St Nectarios Church in Palatine
- Volunteer Match
- Village of Schaumburg
- William Rainey Harper College
- Zurich Foundation

58TH ANNUAL LITTLE CITY INVITATIONAL GOLF CLASSIC

Monday, June 21, 2021 | Twin Orchard Country Club | Long Grove, IL

You are invited to the most prominent and longest running charity golf invitational in the Greater Chicagoland Area. **This year, Little City is delighted to present Nancy and Timothy Desmond with the 2021 Humanitarian Award.**

To sponsor or register for the event, please visit www.littlecity.org/lci

2ND ANNUAL LITTLE CITY HERO WALK

Saturday, October 2, 2021 | Busse Woods | Elk Grove Village, IL

Mark your calendars as we gather at Busse Woods for a celebratory walk. Every step you take will help empower Little City participants, so create a team, encourage your friends and family to join you, and start raising money for children and adults in need! More details coming soon at www.littlecity.org/herowalk

POKER TOURNAMENT & CASINO NIGHT

Friday, October 22, 2021 | Chicago Sports Museum | Water Tower Place

Save the date for our next Poker Tournament & Casino Night! Hosted at the Chicago Sports Museum in the Water Tower Place on North Michigan Avenue, it’ll be an exciting night filled with Texas Hold ‘Em and casino games with incredible prizes at stake! More details coming soon at www.littlecity.org/poker

2022 ANNUAL DINNER GALA

Saturday, May 14, 2022 | The Drake | Chicago, IL

Save the date for our next in-person Annual Dinner Gala, celebrating and supporting the dreams of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Details and registration info to come at www.littlecity.org/gala