



HELPING HANDS

INSIDE:
100 Hours
Life Achievement Center
Happy Campers

ABOUT THE AGENCY: Established in 1961, Hattie Larlham provides services to children and adults with developmental disabilities.

MISSION: Because we believe that life is sacred, Hattie Larlham enhances the quality of life for people with disabilities and their families through our commitment to comfort, joy and achievement.

CEO
Dennis Allen

EDITOR **LAYOUT**
Bill Wahl Matt Levar

FEATURE WRITER
Jennifer Kramer

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Matt Levar
Wendy Messeloff
Bill Wahl

COVER PHOTO
Mary Rabai Photography

ABOUT THE COVER
Tracker Peter Luckner mixes paint for Jessica during a Hattie Larlham Creative Arts session.

PRINTER
Academy Graphic Communication

CONTACT
www.hattielarlham.org

Development
800.233.8611, ext. 3880

Volunteer
800.233.8611, ext. 3147

Research
800.233.8611, ext. 3074

PROGRAMS AND SERVICES
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Photography for this issue of FOCUS provided by Mary Rabai of Rabai Photography, Hattie Larlham staff and iStockphoto.

Letter from the CEO



Dear Friends,

It takes many helping hands to provide the quality care families throughout Ohio have come to expect from Hattie Larlham.

In this issue of FOCUS Magazine, you will read about Peter, one of the professional artists working in the Hattie Larlham Creative Arts program. Peter acts as the arms and hands of people with disabilities enrolled in the program, putting their vision onto canvas. He recently began experimenting with a new painting technique that has really taken off with a few of our artists.

You will also read about Patricia, one of our most dedicated volunteers. Patricia has overcome her own disabilities to become an intangible member of our volunteer team. Earlier this year, Community Solutions recognized Patricia's efforts by giving her the prestigious Most Treasured Volunteer Award. We're very proud of all her hard work.

This issue also contains a special story about our *Hope At Work* project. The nearly three-year expansion and renovation of our main campus, the Center for Excellence, was completed this August. Our new Life Achievement Center extends our helping hands throughout the community by providing specialized outpatient medical, dental and therapy services.

As with all expansive projects, we can't do this alone. We are asking for your help as well. Though the expansion and renovations are now complete, there's still work to be done. We're in the process of raising the final \$2.3 million to fund the project. The \$13.7 million we've raised to date has come from donations made by people like you. We have not used any government funding.

I understand today's economic situation has been felt by nearly everyone. But your help has never been more important. I encourage you to read this issue, visit our Web site at www.hattielarlham.org and even call us to see how you can give a helping hand to more than 1,500 people with developmental disabilities.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dennis Allen'. The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

Dennis Allen
CEO, Hattie Larlham

Join the conversation. Follow Hattie Larlham on Twitter, be our friend on Facebook and watch us on YouTube. Find links to Hattie Larlham social networking sites on www.hattielarlham.org. We want to hear from you.

100 HOURS IN A YEAR

Patricia Cole isn't your typical 24 year old. The modest Hattie Larlham volunteer has hurdled more than enough obstacles to fill a lifetime.

“School was tough for her,” Patricia’s mother Karen Cole said of her daughter’s childhood. “She started having problems when she was three. As she got older, we thought she might have attention deficit disorder.”

It wasn’t until years and countless doctor visits later, that Patricia and her family discovered she had Asperger’s syndrome.

“We finally had an answer, but the diagnosis is forever,” Karen said of her daughter’s condition. “It gave us an outline of how to begin targeting the problem.”

Asperger’s is part of the autism spectrum. It’s characterized by difficulties with social interaction and the need for a structured environment.

Instead of letting her disability control her life, Patricia met it head on. She began spending summers at Hattie Larlham nearly seven years ago and quickly become an irreplaceable member of the volunteer team.

“She’s a big help to new volunteers,” said Jenna Allen, Hattie Larlham volunteer coordinator. “She goes out of her way to make each one of them feel comfortable.”

The average Hattie Larlham volunteer spends 30 hours a year helping with programs and projects. Last year alone, Patricia volunteered 100 hours to Hattie Larlham.

“It’s more than work; it’s fun,” Patricia said about her time at Hattie Larlham.



Patricia said her favorite part of volunteering is getting to see the kids. And she’s built a close connection with Christian, one of the children living at the Hattie Larlham Center for Excellence.

Karen said she can see a noticeable change in her daughter’s attitude since she began volunteering.

“She relates much better with people now and has an easier time communicating with peers,” Karen said. “She’s helping instead of being helped.”

Patricia’s dedication to helping people with disabilities was recognized earlier this year when she won the Most Treasured Volunteer Award. Hosted by Community Solutions, the award recognizes exceptional volunteer work throughout Northeast Ohio.

Patricia’s entire family was ecstatic when they heard the news.

“Patricia represents other people with disabilities,” Karen said of Patricia winning Most Treasured Volunteer Award. “She proves this can happen. You can overcome the most difficult obstacles in your life to achieve your goals.”



HELPING HANDS

Blue and yellow make green.
Red and blue make purple.
Yellow and red make orange.

This may seem like a lesson in primary colors, but to a group of 78 residents in Hattie Larlham's Creative Arts program, these color combinations mean choice.

"There are a lot of great people who provide care here, but it's about the care," said Phylliss Steiner, the director of Creative Arts and media production at Hattie Larlham. "But in this room, for a half hour per week, it's one tracker and one artist. Here, it's about the choice."

Creative Arts provides potential artists, regardless of ability, complete control over their creativity and self-expression.

A combination of art appreciation and application, Creative Arts engages children and adults in a variety of artistic activities, including painting, photography, sculpting, music, poetry, digital art and other forms of artistic expression.

"This program is 100 percent about quality of life," Phylliss said. "The fact that these kids are creating some amazing art is a bonus."

Starting as early as 2004, Hattie Larlham staff used art as therapy, often experimenting with watercolor or simple techniques. By mid-2007, the agency implemented a full art program because of the noticeable benefits for the participants.

"We see people grow within these walls; they are making a connection to one another," Phylliss explained. "Staff from other service areas were questioning, how is he doing that?"

HOW IT WORKS

One tracker. One artist. That's the team.

"You need to be an artist to be a tracker, to assist another artist," Phylliss said. "But the trackers must put aside their personal stuff because here it's about the artist participant."

Trackers are professional artists who are trained to serve as the fingers, hands, arms and legs of artists with disabilities. These professional artists become the helping hands of the program.

Hattie Larlham turned to The Matheny Arts Access Program for this specialized training.

Matheny Arts Access is a multi-disciplinary program operated

by the Matheny Medical and Educational Center in New Jersey. It offers participants the ability to choose from a variety of visual or performing art sessions.

The nature of the participants' disabilities is restrictive and often they have little freedom of choice in most areas of their lives. Empowering them to make choices is what the Matheny Arts Access program is all about.

The artist has full control over the artwork. Colors, brush strokes and painting tools are pictured on special charts that artists point to and ultimately choose each step in the artistic process. Using yes and no answers, the artist relates each color, shape, location and texture choice to the tracker.

"Everything that happens involves a question," Phylliss explained. "It's about listening. It's starting over every time, for every movement, for every color, for every stroke."

Artists and trackers use one of three techniques to create masterpieces.

Nearly all artists begin painting using the laser technique. A small laser-like pointer is attached to the artist's head so the artist can literally point where each brush stroke should appear on the canvas. This method produces large swooping lines in every direction. While the laser is the least precise

“I’ll never tire of hearing a parent say, ‘My kid did that?’”

method of painting, it is the easiest way to introduce new artists to the program.

The splatter method involves throwing paint on the canvas. Artists can choose to throw the paint from their fingers, brushes or anything lying around the studio. The artist chooses a point they want the splatter to hit. Then they choose their tools and colors. For even more control over the process, the artist can choose the placement of the tracker and the speed at which the paint is whipped onto the canvas.

THE STRING METHOD

The final method, known as the string method, is a very precise technique used by veteran artists because of the visual nature of the process.

"The string method is the simplest way to make a line," said Peter Luckner, a part-time Hattie Larlham tracker and full-time artist. Luckner joined the program nearly two years ago.

Using the string method, first the artist chooses a point from which to start. The tracker tapes a piece of string in this place. Next, the artist chooses the length and the direction the string will follow. Then, the artist chooses to use the string to create a line or an arc. They can do several in a row or trace the shape and use paint to fill it in. The string technique allows painters to develop their work with deliberation.

"Matheny gave us awesome instructions and charts to get us started with our program," Phylliss said. "But our trackers took it upon themselves to develop much more detailed charts to help guide our artists."

"What we found was that we serve a population much different than Matheny's higher functioning artists," Peter explained. "We wanted our artists to use art as a way to build on or learn from each experience."

According to Peter, the chart system makes the communication successful.

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Life Achievement Center Offers Community a Helping Hand



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Hattie Larlham has long been known as a first-rate provider of residential services and programs for children and adults with disabilities. But what many may not know is that founder Hattie Larlham’s original vision included outpatient services for families in need of unique, hard-to-find care.

With the Life Achievement Center opening on Aug. 11, 2009, this vision of providing a helping hand to the community and families has finally become a reality.

ONE-STOP SHOP

Think of the Life Achievement Center as a “one-stop shop,” said Carolyn Lehman, executive director of the Hattie Larlham Center for Children with Disabilities. “Families can find all the services they need under one roof.” Carolyn said the building includes a place for kids of all abilities to play together; a toy and gear lending library; a therapy pool; a stimulating garden, and a clinic for specialized medical, dental and therapy services.

Until now, said Ingrid Kanics, Hattie Larlham director of therapy, families have traveled long distances to reach the nearest hospital that can provide these services. In many cases, these patients are very medically fragile—they may have feeding tubes or multiple seizures that caregivers must manage carefully every step of the way. When they arrive at the hospital—often with their typically developing siblings in tow—it feels cold and institutional.

“Just picture what a difference it makes for families to drive up to a community center created specifically for them. That’s a completely different type of medical visit,” Ingrid said, beaming with pride. “It’s easier for the caregiver; it’s better for the patient; and it’s more pleasant for the siblings. It’s an ideal

way for Hattie Larlham to reach out and give something of significant value back to the community.”

LAY OF THE LAND

When families visit the Life Achievement Center, they will enter the building through its own bright, welcoming entrance, which sets it apart from Hattie Larlham’s residential facility and gives visitors direct access. Straight ahead, they’ll find Toys, Technology and Beyond, a lending library that feels more like a toy store, brimming with developmental and adaptive toys and games that promote physical and cognitive development for children of all abilities.

The next stop is The Play Center, an expansive space with high ceilings and plenty of natural light. This sensory-rich environment is filled with toys and games that encourage cognitive and physical development. The Play Center also serves as the home base for three inclusive summer camps for children with autism and sensory processing disorders, physical and developmental disabilities, to connect, learn and grow alongside typically developing youngsters.

Thank You

To the families, donors, contractors and staff whose hard work made this dream a reality for the people we serve.

2006-2009 MILESTONES

Jan. 15, 2006
Expansion and
Renovation Project
Announced.

May 27, 2008
Renovated Units, Cattail
Crossing and Reflection
Pond, Reopen.

Jan. 2, 2009
The Play Center at
Hattie Larlham Grand
Opening.

Aug. 11, 2009
Celebration of
Life Ceremony.

Aug. 14, 2007
Tee Pad Construction
Complete.



Sept. 23, 2008
Life Achievement
Center Opens.



June 24, 2009
Medical Annex Opens.



Sept. 5, 2006
Project Groundbreaking.



Aug. 20, 2007
New Technology Unit,
Sienna Woods, Opens.



Oct. 3, 2008
Renovated Unit,
Cascade Falls, Reopens.



Feb. 25, 2009
Renovated Unit, Whispering
Meadows, Reopens.



Aug. 5, 2009
Main Entrance Moves
to New Building.

The Happy Day School and the Help Me Grow programs bring their students to The Play Center regularly during the school year and Gail McAlister, director of children's services at the Portage County Board of MR/DD, can't say enough about what a rewarding experience the kids have. "It's so positive for them," she said. "There are lots of options to explore. They love the toy vacuum cleaner, the dress-up clothes, art, music and problem-solving. There's plenty of room to work on gross and fine motor skills. It's also a great area for kids to use all of their senses and develop school skills."

At the other end of the building, families will find the outpatient clinic, where planned offerings include medical care; dental care; physical, occupational and speech therapies; and adaptive technologies and therapies. Hattie Larlham's medical director, Richard Grossberg, M.D., served on the design team and said the idea behind the outpatient clinic is to offer children and adults with disabilities living at home with their families the same services that Hattie Larlham could only previously provide for its residents.

Dr. Grossberg uses the example of a dental appointment, to illustrate the unique outpatient needs of people with disabilities. "An appointment that would be relatively routine for you or me is much more difficult for someone who is in a wheelchair, has chronic medical issues and can't communicate verbally." First of all, caregivers need to identify providers who will accept Medicaid patients and can accommodate patients with disabilities. Then they must navigate waiting rooms, hallways and dental offices that are often too small to maneuver large wheelchairs.

Providers also need special skills for treating patients who may be unable to communicate the reasons for their visits, or the levels of pain they experience.

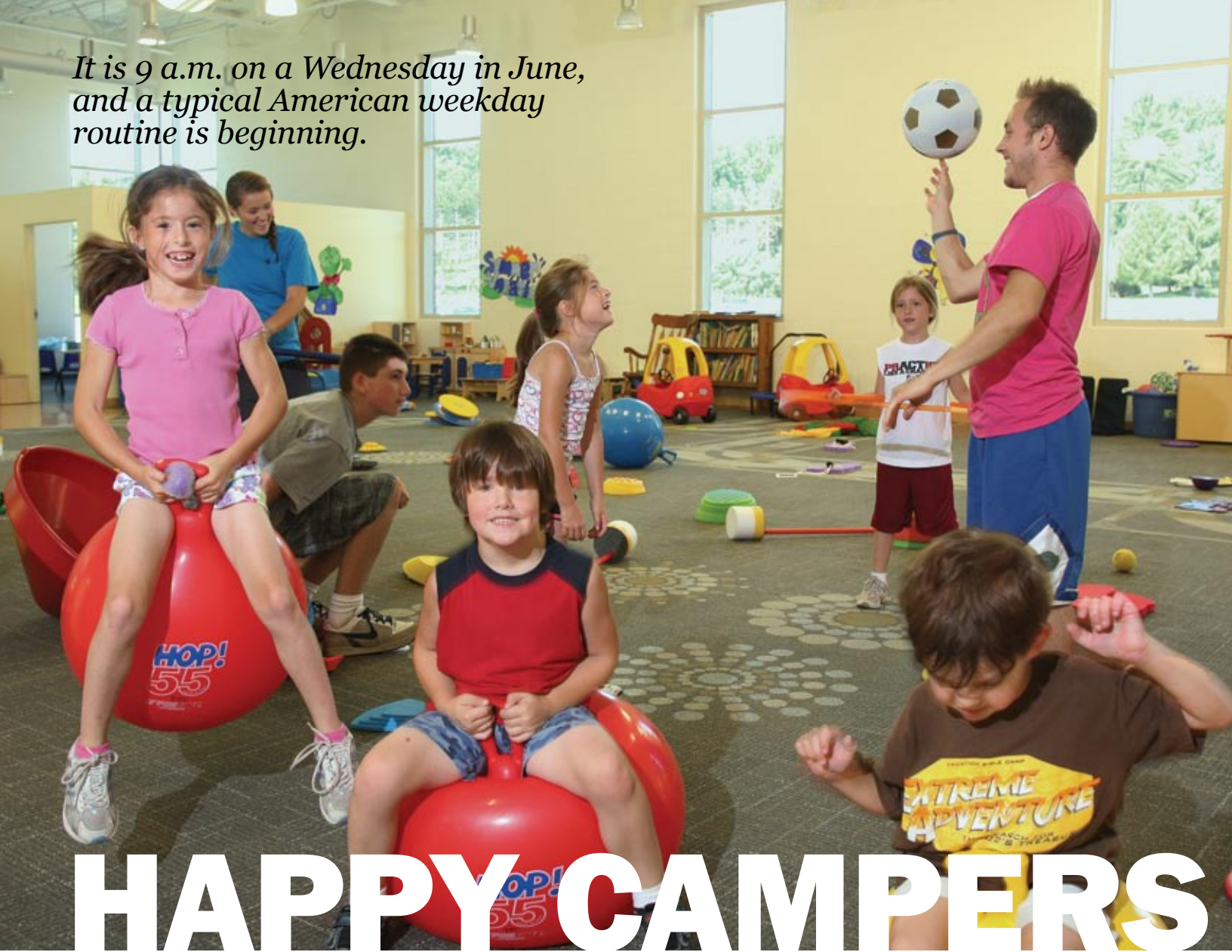
STRATEGIC PLANNING

The Play Center goes beyond Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility regulations to comply with all universal design principles and best practices for early childhood centers so everyone who comes to play can engage with everything in the room. The colors, lighting, sight lines and layout were all crafted to maximize ease of use for all types of children and the parents watching them.

This painstaking attention to detail extends throughout the facility. The therapy pool is kept at the optimal 94 degrees Fahrenheit for maximum comfort. The garden/playground is universally accessible, with foliage carefully selected for smells and colors that maximize sensory stimulation. In fact, the design team learned so much from its exhaustive research, that Hattie Larlham now offers consulting services for other organizations interested in creating similar centers.

"The Life Achievement Center is a wonderful way to expand our message of comfort, joy and achievement into the community," Carolyn said with a smile. "Hattie Larlham has always been about quality care—but it's also about constantly identifying needs and figuring out how to meet them. We're always thinking about what else we can do to help."

It is 9 a.m. on a Wednesday in June, and a typical American weekday routine is beginning.



HAPPY CAMPERS

At preschools, summer camps and day cares across the country, an armada of minivans are dropping off a fleet of children. There are hugs and reassurances and knowing nods to the staff. Some are saddened by the separation, some look back with apprehension, others are eager to start the day.

And yet, despite its similarities, this particular scene is unlike the others.

Each of the camp's 15 children, now burning off the morning's breakfast cereal like excess jet fuel, has autism. This is Connect with Play, a Hattie Larlham day camp designed for children with autism and autism spectrum disorder.

Autism is a neurological disorder that usually presents in the first few years of a person's life. People with autism, especially children, have difficulty relating to the world, processing information and communicating their intentions. Many children with autism are quiet and inward and seek to organize their lives through repetition and pattern.

If autism is a sort of communication roadblock, a poorly understood filter for outside stimuli and social interaction, then Connect with Play is the bulldozer, lovingly padded in bubble wrap.

"So many times we're so busy trying to fix the problems of children with autism that we don't just give them time to play," said Karen Stoltzfus,

recreation coordinator at Hattie Larlham. Karen oversees all the camps at Hattie Larlham, but this week her attention is focused on Connect with Play.

It is the third day of this one-week Connect with Play session, but for Karen and the staff, it started more than a month ago. Training for the 15-member staff began two weeks prior to the first day of camp. Before that, Karen and select members of her team spent the previous two weeks mapping out every detail of the week-long camp, from the pictographic itinerary on the wall to binders filled with allergy information.

"It's always challenging," Karen said of the process. "We find out what works and what doesn't."

What is Autism and Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Autism is a disorder that impacts the brain, typically in the first three years of life. The disorder is characterized by difficulty with social interaction, both verbal and non-verbal communication, very limited interests and repetitive behaviors.

There is no known cause or cure for autism. The disorder is not constrained to any one population. It can affect anyone without regard for race, gender, income, education or lifestyle. It is currently estimated that one in every 150 children in the U.S. has autism.

Autism is one of five similar psychological disorders. These conditions are grouped as a range, or spectrum, based on severity. The spectrum includes autism, Asperger syndrome, Rhett syndrome and other developmental disorders commonly referred to as Pervasive Developmental Disorder - Not Otherwise Specified (PPD-NOS).

Early diagnosis and intervention of autism can produce improved outcomes for people with autism and autism spectrum disorders.



Because of the children's needs, there are nearly as many camp councilors at Connect with Play as there are children in attendance. Add one intern and three volunteers and Connect with Play provides a true one-on-one staff-to-camper ratio.

Even with all this supervision, nothing feels mandated or enforced. There is giggling, shouting, tantrums and laughter. There is running, crawling, rolling and scooting. All of which have a time and a place at Connect with Play; not all of them, however, are scheduled.

Many of the staff are students from area colleges. They bring with them a knowledge base of children and autism from fields of study such as education, physical therapy, occupational therapy, nursing and psychology.

"Autistic children are still children," said Katie Keslar, an occupational therapy major at Malone University and part of the planning team. "They want to play with you. They want to interact with you, to interact with their peers. You just have to find a way to motivate them."

Finding that motivation can be difficult. There are challenges developing a curriculum for children with autism. One child may enjoy singing with the radio, while another is disrupted by the almost imperceptible sound of the ventilation overhead. By identifying what motivates them, staff gets the children to open up, interact and play with one another, overriding the instinct to invert and isolate.

For Katie, camp isn't all planning and strategy. Last night, she played softball, her arms pink to the elbows. "Fingerpainting is like my heaven," Katie said, grinning enthusiastically, her own inner child showing.

The result of the planning is a program that, on the surface, doesn't look like a program at all. It looks like fun. It is the cheese sauce to otherwise kid-unfriendly broccoli.

This is Lexi's first camp at Hattie Larlham. She is a quiet 9 year old with wide, almond eyes and sandy blonde hair. She likes building blocks and puzzle pieces, which she holds under her nose, pensively, habitually, as if identifying it by smell.

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“The charts help keep us on track with the yes/no system,” Peter said. “The tracker knows exactly when to pick up the brush, when to change the color or to start a new line.”

“By using the string, the kids learn that they, in fact, are making the line on the canvas,” Peter said. “This is a combination of therapy and fun. With individuals I’ve worked with for more than a year, they’ve made progress. They are making creative pieces. It’s an outlet for a lot of them.”

One of Peter’s success stories involves Nick, an artist who has grown by leaps and bounds with the string method.

Nick started, like many, just affixing the string to the painting to draw line after line. Then, Peter said, Nick began creating straight and curved lines, right after one another.

“With this new painting, he’s making lines meet lines, making complete curves; one even looks like a spider,” Peter said. “It’s really cool because most kids haven’t gotten to that level of understanding.”

GROWING THE PROGRAM

While painting is the mainstay of the program, trackers and artists are trying new art forms.

Maria Golden has been a tracker with Hattie Larlham for 11 months. She has a degree in photography.

“Bringing digital art into the program seemed like a natural progression,” Maria said. “If they like art, they seem to like all aspects of art. Photography is just another piece. It’s all about visual expression.”

Phylliss hopes others will appreciate the artwork.

“We display the works at Hattie Larlham and in exhibit spaces throughout Ohio,” she said. “It’s quite amazing to watch the artists light up when they see their pieces on display for the first time.”

It’s nice for the parents to view the work, too, Phylliss said.

“Parents often are skeptical of their child’s ability,” she said. “I’ll never tire of hearing a parent say, ‘My kid did that?’”

One of the sites that hosts the exhibit is University Hospital Rainbow Babies and Children’s Hospital. Hattie Larlham staff travel with artists and their families to exhibit spaces for formal showings.

“I remember watching Kaylie as we came down the hall toward her painting; she was checking each piece out, bobbing her head along,” Phylliss said. “She saw hers and started hitting her

hand on her chair. She looked around to see if others were looking at her painting. She recognized her work. That, in itself, is an accomplishment.”

Some of the artwork is so unique that it sells quickly at shows.

“I was at a craft show when a lady ran up to me, yelling, ‘That’s it. That’s it,’” Phylliss explained. “She wanted this piece for her foyer. When she asked if I was the artist, and I told her who really was, she was speechless. At that moment I realized, this program is about art, not about the disability.”

“This is a combination of therapy and fun.”



Campers, from page 7

During the summer months, when Lexi is away from school and children her own age, she has a tendency to regress socially and become inward. Vicki, Lexi's grandmother, is hoping Connect with Play will slow or even prevent this and keep Lexi progressing.

"It was so nice for her to go somewhere and have fun," Vicki said. "She is happy when she goes and when she gets home. I love it."

Vicki used to think Lexi just wasn't a morning person. She would resist getting up for school and throw fits in the car. It is her third day at Connect with Play and Vicki has noticed a change in Lexi's behavior. Now, Vicki thinks its school Lexi doesn't like.

For the past two days, Lexi has not exhibited any of her usual school-morning behavior. She has been easy to get ready and has not acted out during the commute.

"I came and I watched her, and I cried. I get emotional coming here [Hattie Larlham], but seeing her interact with kids her age..." Vicki said, her voice trailing off. "You couldn't find any better care."

Connect with Play is held in The Play Center at Hattie Larlham, part of the new wing built last year as part of the ongoing *Hope At Work* capital project. The spacious new facility allows camp to do things it couldn't before, like play kickball inside when the weather is uncooperative.

This morning, The Play Center's large, two-story windows are smattered in a grey summer rain. Any outside activities have been scrubbed from today's schedule. Inside, however, spirits are anything but dampened.

Camp councilors and children are circled, crouching, around a giant multi-colored parachute. Gripping the edge, they stand, throwing their arms up, letting physics pop the parachute into a brilliant rainbow dome. Kids, including a kinetic 6-year-old dynamo named Noah, run underneath, squealing as the big top deflates around them.

"He's like that," Lynn said of her son Noah, "until the minute he goes to bed."

Noah is the group's camp veteran. He has been coming to various Hattie Larlham camps for three years. He has short, black hair, an ear-to-ear grin that causes his whole face to squint and a penchant for turning laps into jungle gyms.

Watching him play, it's hard to believe Noah didn't speak until he was 4 years old. Noah was diagnosed with autism when he was 3 years old. Lynn and her husband adopted Noah when he was 5 months old. At the time, neither knew he had autism, but the couple soon gathered something wasn't right. Noah wasn't responding to his name.

"We thought he had hearing issues," Lynn said who runs a support group for mothers of children of autism.

One day at a previous camp, one of the other boys was crying. Noah overheard a councilor say the boy missed his mother. Noah went to the crying boy and hugged him. "Noah has never been aware of other's emotions," Lynn said. "That was huge for us."

"I think children with autism have difficulty with transitions, how long it takes varies from child to child," Lynn said. "If you do something everyday, it gets easier than if you do it once or

twice a week." Eventually, for Noah and for Lynn, Hattie Larlham became another safe place.

"I don't worry about Noah when he's here."

By all accounts, Connect with Play is nothing like what one would expect from 15 children diagnosed with a social off switch.

They are a veritable circus of motion and sound, these kids: each as much a part of the thronging multitude as they are uniquely individual.

From Noah, who is displeased with being photographed while simultaneously hamming it up for the camera. To Kate, who will give you the tiniest peck on the cheek and follow seconds later with the corresponding smooch sound effect. To Casey, who is at your side one moment and across the room the next. To Lexi, who thinks nothing of taking your hands in hers to make you clap along.

And yet, despite their differences and their diagnosis, in this environment, created just for them, on a rainy Wednesday morning in June, they are all just children.





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