



A Message from
Pete Caldwell



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Spring 2020

Playing Together – Without Groups

For many years now, We Care has provided Developmental Playgroups designed to help parents and children work together to meet each child's developmental goals.

Typically held at local First 5 centers, these playgroups bring a developmental specialist and teacher associate to the communities that need these services most.

With the shelter-in-place order, our staff had to quickly come up with creative ways to best provide fun activities to promote language, problem-solving, motor skills, and social interactions – without being in the same space. Lupe Henriquez, our Early Childhood Specialist, was perfect for this task.

She first tried using Zoom, but Lupe quickly realized that the group format was not going to meet every child's specific needs. She knew they would need a more personalized approach, so she and Monica Granados, the Teacher Associate assigned to Playgroups, reached out to the 38 families participating in this 8-week program.

Based on those conversations, Lupe and Monica:

- Created an **individualized plan** to meet each family's situation
- Put together **virtual activity packets** that include extra things for the children to do, such as yoga, art, physical activities, and cooking.
- Researched and provided **YouTube videos and books** that follow along with the developmental goals
- Pre-recorded themselves singing songs for the parents to play at the appropriate time in the activity plan, such as the **"hand-washing song"**
- Checked in through **FaceTime, phone calls or texts** to discuss the child's progress, answer questions, and in many cases, just listen to some of the hurdles the parents are facing

Thanks to Lupe's and Monica's adaptability and dedication, and the complete support of the caregivers, the transition to virtual playgroups has been extremely successful. Worried about a critical resource when their children need it most, families now finish sessions with new ways of learning that can last a lifetime.



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PLEASE JOIN US IN

Celebrating

WE CARE SERVICES FOR CHILDREN'S
60TH CELEBRATION
ANNUAL GALA

10.17.20

BLACKHAWK AUTO MUSEUM
DANVILLE



We are so excited about our 60th anniversary celebration this fall!

And if we're not able to throw the fantastic party we'd planned, we'll be creating a different kind of event that will still allow us to share and celebrate 60 years of helping our community's most vulnerable children.

Thank you for all you've done to help get us to our 7th decade of service!

A message from:

Pete Caldwell, Executive Director



Dear We Care Family,

If you're someone who cannot work from home, our thoughts are with you. If you are risking your health by being on the front-line of hospitals, grocery stores or any essential service, please know that we are incredibly grateful for what you are doing to help us all.

We have ended our initial response to COVID-19, and are settling into a new and temporary "normal." The level to which our clinicians, teachers, therapists, and specialists have been able to reach past their own worries to continue to help our We Care families has been absolutely inspirational.

We are still connected to every single child with whom we were working when the shelter-in-place took effect. And our staff has shown incredible initiative, creativity, and compassion in keeping our mission alive:

- **Developmental Playgroups are specialized and individualized video treatment sessions are held over Zoom.** This new offering helps ensure that children with special needs continue to get the services they need at the time in their lives when it will have the greatest benefit.
- **Mental health therapy sessions are conducted through video and phone appointments.** The children, some of the most vulnerable in the county, are assured their treatment will still provide a lifeline in this difficult time.
- **Preschool class students receive "activity bags" every two weeks.** Bags are designed to help bolster the virtual learning our teachers provide and to keep young students feeling connected.
- **Autism treatment classes continue to be developed.** We will be ready to welcome these children to our site the moment it is safe to do so.

This will be a difficult year for We Care financially, but what is clear is that the work we do is more important than ever:

- We provide answers for parents at a time **their lives have been turned upside down.**
- We provide treatment continuity for **children who would falter without it.**
- We are a force for health and safety when **domestic violence and child abuse is on the rise.**
- And we are ensuring that whatever "normal" becomes, We Care will be there to help give children the best chance available for **healthy, happy, and productive lives.**

When this is over, we will look back and know we never lost sight of the reason we exist. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for all you have done to make that possible.



Pete

Crisis Increases Need for Mental Health Support

Many of the families served by We Care are experiencing increased stress and difficulty related to **job loss/change, financial hardship, challenging daily routines, and reduced access to food and other resources like childcare.**

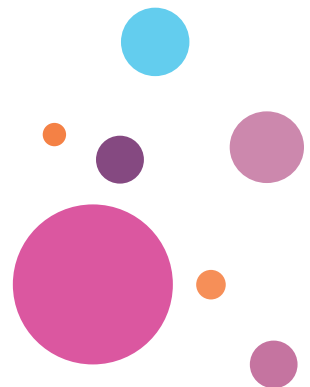
Children are challenged because they cannot go to daycare or school and see their friends, they can't go out to play with neighborhood kids, and they may not understand why these limits are in place.

Their need for parental support – for calming, comforting, and help with their feelings of confusion, frustration, and disappointment – is much greater than usual, yet parents may be understandably more stressed, distracted by job demands, and less able to respond to children's needs at this time.

To answer these critical issues, our clinical teams are using “telehealth” or video technologies to help parents, infants, and young children adjust to the considerable disruption associated with the pandemic:

- Children have been **comforted by seeing their therapists and their classroom teams** – even if they cannot come to preschool.
- **Seeing that their therapist is also home right now** has been extremely helpful to understanding that being at home and away from friends is not a punishment or “their fault,” but is instead something that is happening to everyone.
- Parents are using **We Care's support via phone or video calls** to find ways of accessing much-needed resources, managing children's increased behavioral difficulties, and helping children understand what the pandemic is and how it is affecting daily life.
- Video sessions might include **doing activities and playing together, reading stories, or just checking in.**
- As a result of the willingness of children and families to engage via telehealth, the video sessions have been highly successful as a means of **jointly involving the child and caregiver in therapy.**

Our aim has always been to strengthen family relationships. As this situation continues to evolve, therapists are providing support to caregivers through new technologies and therapy methods so that families can, in turn, provide even more support to their children.



Fun Focus on Development

Along with every other school, we had to temporarily close the doors of our preschool. But We Care's Developmental group brainstormed numerous new ways to connect with the children.

Our preschool staff began working from home and We Care's preschool started its "distance learning" on May 11:

- Thanks to generous donations from amazing families in our community, parents get an activity bag, plan, and instructions every two weeks, with goodies like **Play-Doh, books, Legos, and art supplies.**
- Teachers work with small groups on **different topics such as science, art, and math**, and the entire class participates in a **Zoom once a week.**
- Teachers focus on **every child's social and emotional well-being**, helping them to express themselves and their feelings, and providing tools to deal with things they are experiencing.
- A group is **dedicated to kinder-prep** for children who will be moving on in the fall.

Speech services started again in May:

Elysa Underwood, We Care's Speech Therapist, has been working on a telehealth therapy model for our Regional Center clients who range from birth to age three, with the typical age between 18 months and three years.

As you can imagine, providing telehealth services for young children with hearing and/or speech needs can be an enormous challenge. But Elysa was able to create an individualized model so children can continue to access this critical resource. And their families are extremely excited to continue to receive help.

Because of the Developmental teachers' dedication to each child's specific needs, open communication, and all the parents' amazing involvement, we are successfully closing the distance between us!



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We Care Wants to Stay Connected with You

We are updating our database and would be very grateful if you could take a moment to send your email address to ewilliamson@wecarechildren.org. We will check it to make sure we have your most current information. Thank you!

Thank You to Our Entire, Extraordinary Community!

Our staff. We had no idea how strong we were as a group until we were hit with the shelter-in-place. But we know now that we can weather any storm.

Our supporters. Your incredible generosity allows us to focus solely on what's best for the children without their families having to worry about paychecks or health benefits.

Our Board of Directors. Their leadership and smart, caring decisions help us turn on a dime to adapt to these new circumstances.

And above all, to our smallest heroes and their families.

Children already dealing with trauma, learning or developmental challenges are facing changes that none of us have faced before. Parents relying on our resources just to get through each day had even more worries stacked onto their already-full plates. But with the trust that has been built with We Care, these families are doing everything they can to help us find the best new ways to continue forward together.