



A Message from
Pete Caldwell



Pushing Beyond
Boundaries of Autism



Advocacy Corner

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Spring 2022

Brothers Share the We Care Experience

When Marlen first went online looking for early intervention options for her two-year-old son, Julian, she didn't know that clicking on the link to We Care Services for Children would be such a life-altering decision.

Julian was a happy and healthy baby who loved to play and interact with Marlen. But as he grew into a toddler, Marlen began to notice that he wasn't talking as much as other children his age. This verbal delay was also affecting his ability to interact with young children and express his needs to his mom. As Julian approached his third birthday with a vocabulary of only five words, Marlen knew it was time to find help.

This led her to We Care, and after an in-depth conversation with Darcie, the Director of Developmental Services, Julian was added to the waiting list for the preschool and registered for an eight-week playgroup.

When Marlen brought Julian to their first day of We Care's Developmental Playgroup at the First 5 Center in Pittsburgh, she felt a bit of trepidation as she had no idea what to expect. The We Care staff immediately made her feel comfortable, and as the first day progressed, she began to feel as if a weight was slowly being lifted off her shoulders. As she watched her son interact with children who also had developmental delays, and she connected with other parents, Marlen began to get the sense that everything was going to be okay.



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A message from:

Pete Caldwell, Executive Director



Dear We Care Family,

Having been born and raised in Contra Costa, I'm certainly aware that by the time you read our "spring" newsletter, it may be 95° out. As I write this, though, there's a cool breeze and green grass on the hill at We Care.

It certainly seems like a new year is here.

But what REALLY feels like a fresh start is that after a two-year, Covid-imposed gap, the plans we're making aren't centered on responding to the pandemic. We couldn't be more excited to have started the "Beyond Boundaries" program, be looking at new sites to base our mental health programs, and once again be organizing our annual Gala.

That's right, it's back on!

As you may recall, 2020 was We Care's 60th anniversary, and we had made very special plans to acknowledge and honor all the history – and all the children's lives – that fill those years. When it became clear we wouldn't be able to gather that fall, we consoled ourselves with plans for 2021. And of course, we all know how that year played out.

So please mark your calendars. We'll gather on October 15 at the Blackhawk Museum to celebrate 62 years of people like you supporting children in our community who needed that help the most. It's a remarkable story of generosity, perseverance, and the efforts of so many people over so many years. And it includes acknowledging the incredible assistance We Care received during the pandemic that enabled us to get to our "fresh start." We can't wait to tell this story.

So we hope to see you there! As always, please enjoy this newsletter, and please reach out if you have any questions about the ways we're moving forward in 2022.

On behalf of the children and families at We Care, thank you for all your support.

Sincerely,


Pete

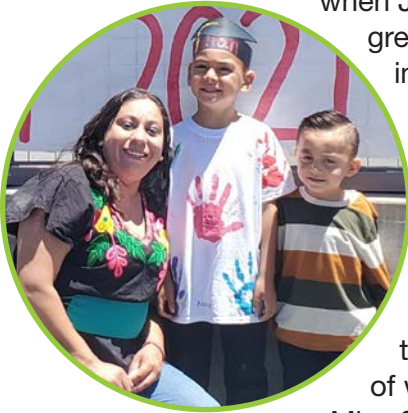

Brothers Share the We Care Experience (continued from page 1)

Each week in playgroup, Julian experienced hands-on learning that enhanced his sensory and fine motor skills, and Marlen learned tips and tricks that she could use at home to build on what they learned. They both loved the one-on-one interactions and Marlen loved watching Julian flourish. By the end of eight weeks, she knew he was ready to be on his own at We Care's preschool.

Although it was hard to leave Julian on his first day of preschool, when Marlen saw the excitement on his face, she knew that she had found the perfect place for him to thrive.

Throughout his time at We Care, his speech improved, he was interacting even more with other children, and the one-two step instructions from his teachers were instrumental in preparing him for kindergarten.

Time flew by and before Marlen knew it, it was graduation day! During the ceremony, when Julian's teacher asked him what he wanted to be when he grew up and he responded, "a firefighter," Marlen felt immense pride.



Julian loved everything about We Care's preschool, from the teachers to the friends he made while he was there. In fact, when his little brother, Alonzo, started at We Care, and cried on his first day before being dropped off, Julian gave him a big hug and told him, "It's ok, I went to We Care and now I'm in kindergarten. You don't have to cry – all the teachers are there for you." When Covid hit and Alonzo was at home taking classes on Zoom, Julian would pop his head in to say hi to the teachers, all of whom he misses greatly, and would get especially excited when he saw his favorite, Miss Sierra.

"I like We Care, and I miss all my teachers and friends."

— Julian

"I'm so blessed I have found We Care for my boys – it has been a phenomenal experience."

— Marlen

Pushing Beyond Boundaries of Autism

We are extremely pleased to introduce Beyond Boundaries, our new program for young children with – or at risk of – autism.

Based on the Early Start Denver Model (ESDM), this innovative program provides opportunities for children 18 months to 3 years to grow and thrive within a natural group environment. **Through a play-oriented and relationship-based approach, Beyond Boundaries facilitates developmental growth in children who need it most.**

After so many months of researching and developing the program – only to be faced with a long pandemic-related delay – we were incredibly eager to start the program in March at our Kirker Pass Road site. Head Teacher Maria, Occupational Therapist Lisette, and Teacher Associate Merci began working with the children we'd enrolled, and we immediately knew the time and effort were going to pay off for these children.

Most autism programs focus on shaping behavior. While this can be the most effective approach for an older child, ESDM has shown great effectiveness in very young children by focusing on using their relationships – to parents, teachers, and others – to improve their responsiveness and growth.



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Visit the Beyond Boundaries classroom, and you'll see one-on-one attention from teachers, play-time, social-emotional learning, positive reinforcement, and plenty of space to allow the children to feel comfortable around each other without forced interactions.

We Care is honored to be part of these children's lives and excited to explore their unique abilities with each family.



“From the moment a child walks in, we strive to make their experience at We Care unforgettable. We want the child (and their family) to feel heard and supported. Each small milestone that a child accomplishes is enough to cause us to feel overjoyed and happy, and lets us know that what we are doing is working.” — Head Teacher Maria



Advocacy Corner

To honor Autism Awareness Month and our new Beyond Boundaries program, we want to highlight the continuing need for increased awareness of the impact of autism on our community's children, and offer a simple way you can make a difference in their lives.

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a complex, often-lifelong developmental condition that typically appears during early childhood, and can impact social skills, communication, relationships, and self-regulation. The autism experience is different for everyone. It is typically defined by a certain set of behaviors, and is frequently referred to as a “spectrum condition” that affects people differently and to varying degrees.

The Autism Society—a nonprofit organization that advocates for civil rights and services that allow people with autism to fully participate in the community—has been advocating to use some of the \$3 trillion in federal funding during the Covid-19 public health crisis to help people with autism and other developmental disabilities.

If you share the belief that this is a worthwhile goal, the Autism Society has created an online letter you can send to your governor and/or your state legislator urging them to use some of this funding for the autism community.

You can access the letter here or with the following steps:

- Visiting www.autismsociety.org
- Find the [Get Involved](#) tab
- Click on the [Take Action](#) page
- Click on [“URGE STATE LEGISLATORS to Use Federal Funding for Autism Services”](#)

This will take you to a form that will create an online letter for you once you input your information. You can also customize the letter if you wish.

Together, we can make a difference for children with autism.



Join the We Care Community: Email ewilliamson@wecarechildren.org to be added to our email or mailing lists