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A Message from Good Shepherd Center's Executive Director

Time Keeps Moving On

Working at Good Shepherd Center is always exciting as the staff here are constantly finding new ways to support those that receive our services. In fact, the two things that make me most proud to work here is first, that whenever a person reaches out to us with a concern, they need help with that we do not have a program to address, the staff here all take the persons name and contact information and brainstorms with each other for resources that might meet the persons needs. The second item is that if enough people need support in a given area where little help exists, we take a long look at the possibility of offering that service in the future. In other words, we are here to meet the ever-changing needs of the community.

This past year we continued to amend our agency by bringing on new staff to newly developed position such as our new Outreach Coordinator. This person attends community events such as parent nights, carnivals, festivals, college events and such to assure that the community better knows of the services we offer and bring back new ideas we should consider. We also hired a new Development Director who is busy building on past events and developing new events to assist fund the work we do each day.

Our biggest development over the past year was the acquisition of property in Oak Forest where we plan to provide space for growth in numerous areas. The original architectural drawing will take some time to accomplish as we raise the needed funds so we will build out the site in steps. When the building is completed, it will finally provide the agency with a permanent home after 60 years of renting space from others.

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ACORN Academy Students Explore Hands on By: Gina Szpur

This year, our after school and summer learning students had lots of hands on experiences. Through Grant funding provided by the Flossmoor Service League, Acorn Academy were able to upgrade their classrooms with educational materials that would enhance their learning skills inside and outside of the classroom. Furthermore, Students were given opportunities to venture out into the community for an inclusive summer full of activities.

Continued on Page 2

Brendan McCormick Continued



When fully built, the site will have 150+ children in classrooms, thus increasing our service capacity by 84. It will also have space to develop and implement job development and placement for adults with special needs to secure jobs in the community. The latter being a need that has grown out of our Waiver program where we now serve over 100 young adults to improve their lives.

This fall we will host another strategic planning process to gather input from all of our stakeholders which include our Board of Directors, staff, funding resources and most importantly our families. This strategic plan will provide us with a snapshot of where we want to be in three, five, and even ten years down the road. Once the details of this project are known, we will send out an email invitation to all on our email list so if you are interested and have not received an email from us in the past year, then please contact me at bmccormick@gscenr.org to make me aware and I will be sure to add you to our list.

We have a long road ahead of us, but I am confident the support of our community will help drive us to our forever home.

Brendan P. McCormick

Acorn Academy Continued

Through these activities, our young learners gained knowledge and appreciation for the great outdoors with visits to Lincoln Park Zoo, Midlothian Water Park, Waverly Creekside Park and more! We made new friends and had new experiences. We had picnics, read books, took walks, and played on our playground. The best part was getting wet on hot summer days!



We had a fun filled summer!



A Message from Good Shepherd Center's Associate Executive Director

Let's Create JOY!

I was recently struck by a statistic that recently came across my desk from the Early Childhood Mental Health Consultants that serve the child care programs in our area and overall Illinois. It stated that 53 percent of parents take one day a month off from work to deal with the mental health of their child ages from one year old through 12 years old. This bit of news was a stressor for me. Then I thought about the children and families that we interface with that I had to dig a little deeper to figure out what I could learn to share with you all. It got me thinking what can we as a collective community take notice of and begin to build more happiness and joy to the children in our lives.



Maggie Keane

We want the kids in our life to be healthy and happy. We know they can't be happy all of the time, but are there things we can do to help kids be happier? They are actually simple and the health benefits of following these tips have outcomes that impact the health of the child and the parent alike. I like to call it the happiness factor.

Research Shows that Happiness Can:

- Lower blood pressure
- Build a strengthened immune system
 - Reduce pain
- Improve educational outcomes
 - Improve sleep
- Increase life-expectancy



Here are Seven ways to Cultivate Happiness into the Lives of Children

1. Encourage strong friendships. Children who have strong social connections are more likely to experience positive emotions. Although friendships aren't always easy, having shared experiences helps to create a sense of belonging and purpose. Work with kids to build the kind of connections that are most meaningful to them.

2. Take time to be kind. Being kind to others improves our mood. Show the children in your life the power of kindness by doing something for a family member, friend, neighbor or teacher. Have them join in or think of someone they would like to show kindness to. Consider getting the whole family involved in the kindness challenge. If children see you being kind they will often follow. Plus, it will make you feel better too.

Maggie Keane Continued

3. Use mindfulness. Mindfulness is the practice of stopping to think about the present moment instead of thinking about the past or future. Try to stop and appreciate the moment you are in. You can practice during dinner, while taking a walk outside or while reading a good story together. Focus on enjoying the moment.

4. Acknowledge good things. Gratitude is good for mental health and can keep us from getting caught up in what's not going well. Work with your child to say things you're grateful for such as a caring family, completing a difficult school assignment, friends or finding a new favorite song.



5. Set goals. Research shows having purpose and meaning in life help improve our happiness. When we have goals to work toward, we feel motivated to persevere and work toward that goal. Help children set short-, medium- and long-term goals, and then set up steps along the way. The older they are, the more children can think about what they want to accomplish. For younger children, setting a goal for the next 30 minutes and then celebrating when they achieve it will give them an immediate boost of positive emotions.



6. Move your body. There's a strong connection between physical and mental health. Exercise helps release certain endorphins in the brain which elevate your mood starting shortly after you finish your exercise. Just 30 minutes of moderate exercise, like a brisk walk, dancing, family bike ride or anything else that gets your heart rate elevated, will produce positive effects.

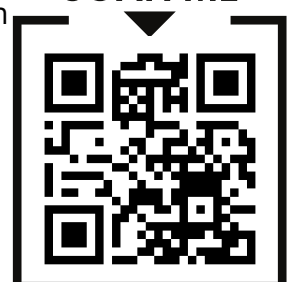


7. Tell a joke. Researchers have shown that smiling and laughing communicate to your brain to experience positive emotions. Telling silly jokes, watching a funny family-friendly show or just doing something that makes us smile will help to improve your mood. With older kids, take turns sharing funny memes or video clips.

Teaching kids to consistently engage in these seven activities, will create a pattern for them to follow into adulthood. Happy people create their own happiness! It is really something we have to work on these days as life continues to get more complicated. It could be as simple as go back to that old saying we have to spend time to stop the and smell the roses or the smell of a crisp fall day!

Research from Kids Mental Health Foundation

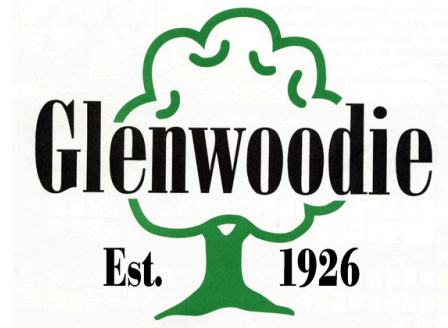
SCAN ME



2024 Golf Outing



This year's event was held at Glenwoodie Golf Club in Glenwood, IL. Guests enjoyed the day outdoors. The day concluded with a delicious pot roast meal.



Upcoming Events

Good Shepherd Center is proud to become a partner of SchoolLinks, a platform that connects students to volunteer opportunities. So, how does it work? Non-for-profits, like Good Shepherd Center, creates volunteer opportunities on the shared platform for students to view. Good Shepherd Center is contacted by the student interested in volunteering and in return receives services hours. Good Shepherd Center has created several "Dining Out" benefits at local restaurants for students to volunteer at by sharing events on their social media or sending flyers to their family and friends. The events will be posted on our social media too, so everyone will have an opportunity to help "Feed Good Shepherd Center" by attending a "Dining Out" benefit. Here are some area favorites that are already scheduled through the end of the year.



11th Annual Fashion Show

Ahoy Mateys! Captain Jack Sparrow here!

Get ready to set sail on Saturday, November 9th, as Good Shepherd Center heads to Treasure Island at Idlewild Country Club for a fashion show you won't want to miss. Shipmates of all ages will showcase their latest fashions from the seven seas and merchants will be on deck to sell their goods and textiles during this year's Fashion Show. With me, I bring a treasure chest of unknown contents, a trunk of Drog (wine) from the vineyards of the world, and "Messages in a Bottle" which hold a fortune telling or gift from one of the merchants. So, what are you waiting for? Weigh Anchor and Hoist the Mizzen and purchase your ticket to Treasure Island!

*Yours truly,
Captain Jack*



Upcoming Events

To make the fashion show a resounding success, we are seeking sponsorships and donations from generous individuals and organizations like you. Your contribution will go a long way in making a positive impact on the lives of children with disabilities and their families. The funds raised will be utilized to provide essential services such as therapy, assistive devices, educational resources, and recreational opportunities tailored to their unique needs.

To buy tickets or sponsorships, please scan the QR below to be directed to our event platform. Interested in being a vendor or model at this years show? Please feel free to contact me directly at gszpur@gscenter.org.

In good friendship,
Gina Szpur
Shipmate, Development Director

SCAN ME



Join us for a celebratory breakfast with
the big guy, himself!
Salem Lutheran Church
18324 Ashland Ave.
Homewood, IL 60430

SCAN ME



RSVP with Gina Szpur at gszpur@gscenter.org,
708-985-3728 or scan the QR code.

SAVE THE DATE SAVE THE DATE SAVE THE DATE

**Strong Children Strong Communities Conference Presents:
Nurturing Legacies: Sharing Stories that Shape the Child Care Landscape.**

We invite you to an interesting and inspiring panel presentation of four child care professionals who will share their story about what influenced them to continue in Early Childhood and plant their seeds which have nurtured the future the child care in the lives they touched. A conference designed with YOU in mind. This conference is for you, and all about you, and the work you do on behalf of children and families.

March 1, 2025

7:30a.m.-4:00p.m.

Moraine Valley Community College Palos Hills, IL

Early Bird Registration begins December 16th , 2024.

Everyone who registers before January 10, 2025 will be included in a special early bird raffle and still be part of the general raffle.

No refunds after February 1, 2025

Would you like to be a part of something extraordinary?

Are you seeking new and exciting friendships?

Are you looking for something fun to do?

Volunteering for us may be your answer!

Becoming a Volunteer for Good Shepherd Center is rewarding. We are always looking for Board Members and volunteers to help host events, raise awareness, and help raise funds. If you are interested in making a difference in the lives of those in your community, reach out to us today.



Glenwoodie Golf Club
 Silver Lake Country Club
 Jeff Withgott
 Benito Bustamonte
 Chipotle
 Homewood Disposal Services
 Brendan & Lorraine McCormick
 The Chicago White Sox
 Hillgrove Tap
 Huck Finn's Oak Lawn
 Windy City Thunderbolts
 Mary Ellen McLoughlin
 Steve Koziol
 Fountain Hills Golf Club
 David Kupiec
 Doris Sweeney
 County Claremen's Association
 The Family of James and Marilyn Tyler



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 Kenwood Liquors
 Knights of Columbus Fr. Perez
 Sweeney Family- In Memory of Patrick Sweeney
 Stanicek Family- In Memory of Gretchen Stanicek



Would you like to be on the list above?

Here's how: Sponsor one of our events, make a donation through our annual appeal, leave a legacy gift through Planned Giving, donate an item to our auction, or attend one of our fundraisers.

Did you know that creating a reoccurring gift will get you a **FREE t-shirt** and it will help Good Shepherd Center forecast growth in addition to providing stability? It's true! Here's what your reoccurring gift will do for the children at Acorn Academy:

- \$50 a month will provide educational materials
- \$30 a month will provide outdoor play and garden equipment
- \$20 a month will provide arts & craft kits
- \$10 a month will provide Transportation for field trips

Your monthly gift means a lot to the children at Acorn Academy.

Reach out to Gina Szpur to find out how to set up a convenient reoccurring gift that will provide necessary funds throughout the year.



Meet

the new Development Director



In late April, we welcomed Gina Szpur to our team. Gina has an extensive background in development which include capital campaigns, donor relations, event hosting, and grant writing, to name only a few of her talents. She has worked in the non-for-profit sector for over 20 years and created the first Great American Big Wheel Race in the State of Illinois to benefit charities in our community.

Gina wears many hats and not only in fundraising. She is the owner of “Infinite Sound & Vibration Holistic Healing, LLC” where she is a Reiki Master and certified sound and vibrational practitioner. She is a historian, having authored two books, “Digging up the Dirt, the History of the Will County Poor Farm and the Mysteries of the Potters Fields” and a paranormal book under the pen name, Corey Michaels, titled “Lost Souls, the Possession at Winchester Grove”. The latter of the two catching the eyes of marketing executives at MGM Studios for a possible silver screen feature! Stay tuned for this one!

Gina is also an amateur Paleontologist and the owner of “Dig into the Experience Fossil Tours”, a tour service she began in 1999 for those seeking adventure while looking for prehistoric life. When Gina is not nose deep in historical records, climbing hills of Braidwood’s strip mines searching for the mysterious Tully Monster, or raising money for an amazing cause, you can find her working in her Victorian garden creating natural remedies like her ancestors. When we say Gina wears many hats, we mean that literally too! Gina has over 40 hats in her collection and you can see many of them in the autumn months.

Gina has two adult children, four step children, and one granddaughter. Gina and her husband Lee, also run two Airbnb’s along historic Rt. 66. She has two dogs, “Dash” her therapy dog in training, “Snickers” and a cat named “Tippea”.





Serving Children and
Families Since 1963

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Know that your support
will make a huge
difference in the lives of
children and families with
special needs.

Thank you for being steward of giving
to Good Shepherd Center and joining us
in advocacy for Children!