

Telling Our Story

A gift to be preserved—
The Therapeutic Nursery
at the JCC



CONGRATULATIONS! YOU'RE A NEW PARENT. You relish every little smile, sound, movement and milestone your little munchkin makes. From rolling over and smiling, to babbling, forming first words and walking, most children follow a similar path. But what if your child doesn't?

Many children who might thrive from early intervention fall through the cracks of the current educational system simply because their advanced cognitive skills prevent them from qualifying for the special services they need. Without the right support, they often go on to "fail" in typical schools since they are unable to play and socialize with their peers or regulate their behavior. Thankfully, this was not the case for Spencer - and his parents, Jessica and Eric, credit the Therapeutic Nursery at the JCC.



"Our son Spencer is a bright, high-functioning boy who taught himself to read at the age of two. But as a mom, I began to notice that he was struggling. He had epic meltdowns and experienced epic sensory overload. When we had him assessed, we were told it was nothing, that he just needed more socialization.

On his first day of Pre-K, he had a meltdown that was so intense that when we left, I had to stand with him in the parking lot for nearly an hour because he was flailing around so frantically, I couldn't even walk him safely to the car. I felt completely distraught and alone," shares Jessica.

As chance would have it, a woman who witnessed the meltdown, recognized Spencer's behavior as similar to her own son's. She stopped to empathize with Jessica and ultimately shared information about her son's incredible pre-school, the Therapeutic Nursery at the JCC, which changed her family's life. Encouraged, Jessica brought Spencer for a visit, "It changed our entire family's life as well. The staff and other parents understood what we were dealing with in ways no one else could. The teachers had the expertise to help us improve our own communication with our son, and we became a part of a community of other parents, who became our closest network of support."

"I will never forget the first time I saw Spencer play successfully with other children, or the first time we dropped him off at a friend's house for a playdate. And it is all a credit to the amazing staff at the Therapeutic Nursery who know how to unlock the potential in children like him."

"It is highly unusual to find a program that can meet the needs of children like our son," adds Spencer's father Eric, a songwriter and musician, who recently recorded a CD, *Hidden Gold*, and donated all the proceeds to the Therapeutic Nursery. "The Therapeutic Nursery is the answer for any child with this kind of struggle. Parents and children get a wealth of attention and learn how to cope and adapt. The staff's ability to provide early intervention is key. Even though it's never too late, the earlier issues are recognized and addressed, the better the long-term prospects and the more likely for a child to mainstream without the need for ongoing intervention."

Today Spencer, who is 10 and in the fifth grade, is a joyful, loving and mature child. He has a gift for math, is thriving in an advanced 7th grade math class, loves to read, likes anything related to computers or video games, and, with the social, emotional and behavioral skills he received at the Therapeutic Nursery, he is also able to make friends wherever he goes—though his best buddy is sweetly the first friend he made at the Therapeutic Nursery.

Spencer got the intervention he needed. But what if no one was there to help kids like him? Where would they go? As Jessica says: “For us, the Therapeutic Nursery was a beacon, with the added benefit of being located at the JCC in a large, embracing community where we could be included. This place is a gift—and it needs to be preserved. There’s nothing else of its kind out there.”

“Our program really helps children reach their best potential by teaching them how to play,

interact socially and modulate their emotions and behaviors,” says the school’s director Lois Mendelson. “Many of our students, who have traveled across the country and as far away as Israel to attend, have gone on to college, graduate school and exciting careers as physicians, engineers, journalists, and computer specialists. These are great successes and we are proud of all our students and their accomplishments. Today, with state funding for special education drastically cut, it is families like Jessica and Eric’s, and community friends that support scholarships, who make all the difference.

This year is the Therapeutic Nursery’s 20th anniversary. To mark this special time, we will be hosting a benefit in Spring 2016. We look forward to celebrating our accomplishments and it is our hope that through the event we will be able to raise the funds needed to ensure that we are here to help families like Spencer’s well into the future.”



The Therapeutic Nursery at the JCC is a nationally-recognized program for bright preschool children, ages two to six, with a variety of developmental challenges, including high functioning autism. For more information on the Therapeutic Nursery or how to support its award-winning program, contact Lois Mendelson at 201.408.1497 or lmendelson@jccotp.org. Spencer's father's CD can be purchased at drakethebard.com/buy-music, proceeds go to support the Therapeutic Nursery.

tributes

Looking for a way to mark a special occasion such as a wedding, anniversary, bar/bat mitzvah, or a birth of a child, or to honor someone’s memory? Make a donation to an individual endowment fund in their honor! All gifts over \$18 are recognized with a card to the recipient and listed in this publication. For more info or to make a tribute please contact Fran Koszer at 201.408.1404 or visit jccotp.org and click “Donate.”

21ST CENTURY FUND

From The Kollender Family to Lisa and Mark Spivack in memory of Shirlie Levitin with deepest sympathy

From Randi and Michael Kollender to Dana and Jim Adler in memory of Mike Adler

AL & SUSAN WHITE HOLOCAUST EDUCATION FUND FOR YOUTH

From Dorothy and Harold Lu to Susan White in memory of Al White

ARLEEN & CHUCK WAYTE SCHOLARSHIP FUND FOR FAMILIES IN NEED

From The Zagin Family to Elizabeth Youngman in memory of her beloved mother Alice Youngman

From Amy and David Zagin to Dana and Jim Adler in memory of Myron Adler

From Amy and David Zagin to Jodi and Mark Epstein, Mazel Tov on the birth of their grandson Oliver

From Amy and David Zagin to Robin and Alan Miller, Mazel Tov on the birth of their granddaughter Lily Jade

From The Zagin Family to Lisa and Mark Spivack in memory of her beloved mother

BARBARA AND SEYMOUR "CY" LESLIE MEMORIAL FUND FOR MUSIC AND THE PERFORMING ARTS

From Sharon and Neil Danzger to Carol Leslie, Mazel Tov on the birth of her granddaughter Hannah Rose

From Sharon and Neil Danzger to Janet and Lior Hod, Mazel Tov on Samantha and Ben's wedding

From Lisa Beth and Greg Meisel to Carol Leslie, Mazel Tov on the birth of her granddaughter Hannah Rose

BERNSTEIN-SLOTE MEMORIAL FUND FOR SENIOR COMPUTER LITERACY

From Bob and Carol Slote-Bernstein to Albert Burstein in honor of many years of community service and friendship

From Bob and Carol Slote-Bernstein to Joseph Eisner and Family in memory of Naomi

CAMP DREAM STREET-PEARL SEIDEN SUMMER PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN WITH CANCER AND OTHER BLOOD DISORDERS

From Millie and Sy Graye to Pearl Seiden in her honor

From Debby Bacharach and Family to Peter Bence and Family in loving memory of his mother

CHUCK GUTTENBERG CENTER FOR THE PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED FUND

From Helene Schwartz to Shelley Levy in memory of her mother Edith Greier

DEBORAH AND LAWRENCE SCHWARTZ FUND FOR YOUTH HOLOCAUST EDUCATION IN MEMORY OF LOU SCHWARTZ

From Pam and Roni Dersovitz to Debbie Schwartz, Mazel Tov on Zach and Sarah's marriage

DOR L'DOR EARLY CHILDHOOD FUND

From Pam and Roni Dersovitz to Robin and Alan Miller, Mazel Tov on the birth of their first granddaughter

ELEANOR & EDWARD EPSTEIN CAMP TIKVAH SCHOLARSHIP FUND FOR HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

From Eleanor and Ed Epstein to The Levere Family, sincere condolences on the loss of their father Bernard

From Eleanor Epstein to The Trachtenberg Family, sincere condolences on the loss of their beloved father. Their father and mother were true community builders and they are missed

From Ruth and Arthur Reich to Eleanor Epstein in honor of her new great grandchild Oliver

From Eleanor and Ed Epstein to Bruce Youngman, sincere condolences on the loss of his wife Alice

ERIC LANGBAUM FUND FOR ARC SPECIAL EVENTS

From Lee Langbaum to The Adler Family with sympathy on the loss of Myron Adler

From Lee Langbaum to Ellen and Harvey Berenson, congratulations on the birth of their grandson Ezra Stone Berenson