The Sensory-Friendly Program Initiative at Dallas Children's Theater Report on Years 2 & 3 2015/2016

Made possible by The Crystal Charity Ball
The Sensory-Friendly Program Initiative at Dallas Children’s Theater Report on Years 2 & 3

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The Sensory-Friendly Program Initiative
at Dallas Children's Theater
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Executive Summary

Thanks to the generous support of The Crystal Charity Ball, the third year of sensory-friendly programming at Dallas Children’s Theater has reached amazing new heights. 2016 saw record attendance at sensory-friendly performances, both for a single show and for the year. The list of performances included A YEAR WITH FROG AND TOAD; HANSEL AND GRETEL; THE MIRACULOUS JOURNEY OF EDWARD TULANE; BALLOONACY; THE BFG (BIG FRIENDLY GIANT); PINKALICIOUS, THE MUSICAL; SEUSSICAL™; and A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS. We also introduced our first dedicated sensory-friendly theater class, called Blue Pegasus Players. This year, we measured outcomes on a deeper level, and our findings were heartwarming. Our pilot year report of 2014 documented the implementation of the initiative, and this report offers information about new aspects of the initiative.

Origins of the Project

In late 2013, Dallas Children’s Theater (DCT) began to research and test aspects of a sensory-friendly performance initiative that would provide theater experiences to children who need an adapted production due to different sensory needs, and their families. According to Children’s Medical Center Dallas (Now Children’s Health), there were 100,831 Dallas County childhood developmental disabilities cases in 2012, a number that has been growing for at least a decade. The disabilities include autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, seizures, hearing loss, and blindness. We are deeply appreciative of The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and Theatre Communications Group for the grant that allowed us to pilot our journey toward inclusion of all children at our theater.

Since 1984, DCT has been inspiring young people to creative and productive lives through the art of theater. DCT is the largest children’s theater in the Southwest, and has been honored by TIME Magazine as “one of the top five family theaters in the nation.” Every year, DCT serves an average of a quarter million children and adults through a critically-lauded mainstage season, a national tour, and an extensive Arts-in-Education Academy program.

From innovative and edgy teen productions dealing with issues like bullying, dating violence, eating disorders, learning differences, and alcohol abuse, to a nationally-recognized touring company that travels to an average of 26 states and 52 cities each year, Dallas Children’s Theater is lauded in the theater world as a place that

Photo: John Deryberry
innovates and takes initiatives to the next level. In response to the growing demand for inclusive programming, Dallas Children’s Theater is taking a bold step in the furtherance of this tradition. While many theaters also are beginning to add sensory-friendly programming for children who require adaptive learning, Dallas Children’s Theater has taken a more comprehensive approach – one that will be of significant benefit to theater colleagues around the country, as well as other community organizations that seek to be viewed as a safe place by these audiences.

Children with different sensory needs and their families have attended our productions and many are involved with great success in our arts education programming. Yet many parents have not brought their children with special needs to our productions because their children have a low tolerance for crowds, loud noises, darkness, flashing lights, and other similar sensory input. The requirement to remain seated quietly for an extended period is very difficult for many children. Often, because of these challenges, families that include a child with special needs don’t believe that the world of theater is accessible to them.

We are working to reverse that belief by making Dallas Children’s Theater an accepting and safe place for children with autism and other developmental disabilities and their siblings. We strive to be a place where we focus on our common humanity.

When families have safe places in the community where they experience acceptance, such support can increase their optimism about their ability to manage their situation and their sense of control over the disability – two important assets that increase quality of life. To encourage families to take a risk, we strive to offer performances at minimal cost. We have found that the reduced ticket price is an important factor for many, and we are working to keep prices as low as we can.

Our goal is that children with developmental disabilities such as Autism Spectrum Disorder and Down syndrome, as well as children with hearing, visual, and mobility challenges, will find live theater enjoyable and reap its many benefits, where they previously may not have been able to do so.

### 2014 - First Pilot Year Summary

The pilot year venture into making theater accessible for children with developmental disabilities was wonderfully successful. Children with developmental delays like autism, Down syndrome, and hearing or visual impairments in the DFW area had three opportunities to attend a live children’s theater performance modified just for them. Two grants helped fund sensory-friendly performances of GO, DOG. GO!; STUART LITTLE; and RAPUNZEL! RAPUNZEL! A VERY HAIRY FAIRY TALE. We exceeded our outcome goals in every area. A detailed report of our pilot year experience and outcomes is available [here](#).
2015 - Second Pilot Year Summary

In 2015, we focused on securing more funding with the goal of institutionalizing the sensory-friendly initiative at Dallas Children’s Theater. We built a profile for the program through the documentation supported by our initial grants, which facilitated the application process for The Crystal Charity Ball. In this interim lean year, we made the commitment to go forward with three sensory-friendly shows, confident that we would receive more funding. In the end, we offered four sensory-friendly performances: SKIPPYJON JONES, BALLOONACY, THE MUSICAL ADVENTURES OF FLAT STANLEY, and FANCY NANCY: THE MUSICAL. Our continued outreach did produce excitement among funders, and we experienced a domino effect. As a result of media coverage and interest generated through The Crystal Charity Ball application process, we were contacted by and received funding from Bloomberg Philanthropies and Communities Foundation of Texas.

Parent Troy Camplin wrote a touching blog post, republished by Autism Speaks and featured in The Chronicles of Higher Education, that captured the way BALLOONACY helped his son, Daniel, practice empathy.

![Daniel interacts with the red balloon held by the Old Man of BALLOONACY. Photo: Patty Bates-Ballard](image)

Institutionalizing the Program

Dallas Children’s Theater makes standard modifications to each sensory-friendly show:

- A relaxed, welcoming environment pre, during, and post show
- House lights up slightly
- Sound down 30%
- Actor audience interaction “safe” zone and warning about interaction
- Whistles and high-pitched sound levels reduced even further
- No repetitive flashing lights
- Reduced range of lights in the performance hall
- Haze & fog at reduced levels using non-chemical dry ice
- Social story, show synopsis, and parent tip sheet
- Face painting, clown engagement, coloring, and other activities before the show

We relied heavily on our community-based Advisory Council for the first two years of the initiative to guide us in adjusting the performances for children with different sensory needs. With turnover and shifting needs, we now have fewer active members. We are happy to say, though, that we believe we have achieved one of our important goals of institutionalizing the understanding among our staff about how to adapt a performance to make it sensory friendly.
Crystal Charity Ball Grant

In February 2015, The Crystal Charity Ball named Dallas Children’s Theater as a 2015 grant recipient of $564,400. The generous three-year grant allowed us to more than double the number of sensory-friendly performances for 2016, 2017, and 2018. The grant also provided for the purchase of equipment to allow better customization of sensory-friendly shows, and funds classes specifically designed for children with developmental disabilities. Everyone at DCT is deeply grateful to the women of The Crystal Charity Ball for acknowledging this community need and for the work they did to fund it.

The Crystal Charity Ball presentation team from Dallas Children’s Theater: Sandra Session-Robertson, Nancy Schaeffer, Robyn Flatt, Kory Ballard, Patty Bates-Ballard, Sharron Hunt, Carol March, Karen Travis
Photo: CFT staff
Sensory-Friendly Performances

Thanks to the generosity of The Crystal Charity Ball, Dallas Children’s Theater produced eight sensory-friendly performances in 2016. Total performance attendance in 2016 was 1,747, nearly three times the attendance of the previous year. While attendance was strong for every performance, we saw a major increase in attendance toward the end of the year, and the last show of 2016 set a new attendance record for sensory-friendly shows. Attendance for SEUSSICAL™ on October 15 was 316, and A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS brought in a record high 369, even with a light rain outside. These plays featured well-known characters, and we are curious about how attendance will run for upcoming shows that are less well-known.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2016 PLAYS</th>
<th>DATE AND TIME</th>
<th>ATTENDANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A YEAR WITH FROG AND TOAD</td>
<td>February 20 at 1:30 p.m.</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HANSEL AND GRETEL</td>
<td>March 12 at 4:30 p.m.</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE MIRACULOUS JOURNEY OF EDWARD TULANE</td>
<td>April 9 at 1:30 p.m.</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BALLOONACY</td>
<td>April 23 at 1:30 p.m.</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE BFG (BIG FRIENDLY GIANT)</td>
<td>May 14 at 1:30 p.m.</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PINKALICIOUS, THE MUSICAL</td>
<td>July 2 at 4:30 p.m.</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEUSSICAL™</td>
<td>October 15 at 1:30 p.m.</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS</td>
<td>December 3 at 1:30 p.m. light rain</td>
<td>369</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Photo: Karen Almond
Attendance for 2016, the first year of The Crystal Charity Ball grant (1,747), was nearly three times the attendance in 2015 (663), our second pilot year, because we had just four performances.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2015 PLAYS</th>
<th>DATE AND TIME</th>
<th>ATTENDANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SKIPPYJON JONES</td>
<td>Feb. 21 at 4:30 p.m.</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BALLOONACY</td>
<td>April 25 at 1:30 p.m.</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE MUSICAL ADVENTURES OF FLAT STANLEY</td>
<td>Jun. 27 at 1:30 p.m.</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FANCY NANCY: THE MUSICAL</td>
<td>Oct. 17 at 1:30 p.m.</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Performance Outcomes

For each year of our sensory-friendly initiative, outcomes have exceeded our expectations. We make improvements continuously, and our outcomes reflect those improvements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OBJECTIVE</th>
<th>GOAL</th>
<th>2014 RESULTS</th>
<th>2015 RESULTS</th>
<th>2016 RESULTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-verbal children will be visibly at ease and/or engaged during the performance.</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents will say their child with sensory sensitivities enjoyed the show.</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents will say they believe their children were comfortable during the performance.</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents will say they believe their children grew or learned through the experience.</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents will say their children had a positive interaction with a person they didn’t know.</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents will say they would like to come to another sensory-friendly performance.</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey Comments

Caregivers offered a great number of positive comments.

“This was life changing for our family to be able to go to this show. We recently moved from Raleigh, North Carolina, and despite having a lot of Broadway-style shows, we were never able to go. Your theater was one of the reasons we chose to move to the Dallas area, and we have already purchased tickets for every future sensory show that were available. THANK YOU!!!!”
- Daniel Matthew

“It’s so comforting for me and my children to feel welcomed at a theater: no angry looks from other parents when my child is restless or vocalizes, and not being asked to leave because our presence is a distraction to other audience members. All society and public places should allow for children (with or without disabilities) to be as they are, permitting both physical accommodations and an atmosphere of understanding and acceptance. But until that becomes standard, it is a great treasure to have the DCT welcome me and my family to these sensory-friendly performances. Inclusive, adaptive, budget-friendly cultural experiences should be a priority for every children’s venue - and I’m proud to have our local DCT lead the way.”
- Julie Ross
“We are so grateful to have the opportunity for our grandson to see these wonderful plays in a setting thoughtful of sensory sensitive kids and where the staff understands and even celebrates the different ways he may respond. The staff at DCT went out of the way to roll out the red carpet for everyone. Each Sensory Friendly play we attend is building his social skills and broadening his experiences.”
– Cheryl Devoto

“My son typically will not participate in the arts and crafts. The dream jar project was fascinating to him since it was easy (no fine motor like drawing) and he instantly recognized it was part of THE BFG. He talked about the dreams in the book with the person managing the craft. I think it also helps my other son to appreciate there are other kids like his brother. He never gets the opportunity to see other special kids.”

“Thank you so much for this performance. It was a great experience for my children. The last time I took my son to a children’s play and he squirmed and verbalized his fear at the scary part (he said "I want to go home"), there were very rude responses from the people around us (even though it was Matilda and the majority of the audience were children). We had to leave early. I felt he did very well for a child with autism but have not attempted another live performance since then. I felt he would enjoy a play or musical, but was afraid of the negative responses if his behavior was not perfect. This time we all made it to the end of the show! However, my favorite part was the look on my cousin’s face after the show. She is an older mom who loves the fine arts, and went to performances often as a professional working woman. After having kids, both of whom have special needs, she had not been out much, and has not taken her children to any live performances. A Charlie Brown Christmas is literally the first time in 4 years her kids have sat still(ish) for an hour. This is the first time she has seen that it is possible to get out as a family and share the theater that she loves with her sons with special needs. We both appreciate the reserved seating so her hard-of-hearing 2-year-old could hear some and be close enough to feel like he was part of the show. Thank you for your patience with her other son with sensory issues. She was so excited, we immediately began planning to attend a future show, maybe an ASL. We both feel like this positive experience(s) will help them learn how to behave in future live performances, but also in other public settings such as school, church and other daily interactions. Thank you for this safe and supportive environment.”
– Sarah Beadle MD

“My daughter LOVED it... she was leaning forward in her seat the entire time. She is unable to go to movie theaters, as there is stimulation overload. The Children's theater is the only place I have been able to take her somewhere to watch a program where she is able to sit thru the entire performance. I
have been with her when she literally tried to go under the seat to get away from the stimulation at other venues.”
- Cathy Monroe

“Viewing quality live performances is an incredible experience. We wouldn't have the experience without the special sensory performances. This was our first time at the Theater, and all of our kids really enjoyed seeing the costumes and meeting the cast. They also REALLY liked the bubbles that were incorporated into the show. Thank you!”

“He looooved it! Being allowed to wiggle and comment without reprimand made all the difference. The lighting was dim enough to help him focus, but bright enough to allow him to move around fearlessly. He was mesmerized by the characters, particularly during song and dance numbers. The snail was his favorite character and he even cried when he was available for the meet and greet following the show.”

“It was her first time to a play because I had always been afraid to take her, so she didn't quite "get" what a play was (which made her anxious and nervous). But she quickly understood the concept once it started and was very engaged in the show. Having this successful outing allowed her to experience something new without feeling bad about herself, anxious, and out-of-place.”

Photo: Sandra Session-Robertson
Improvement Suggestions

We also received suggestions for improvements. Our sensory-different patrons had some trouble navigating the lobby to get autographs after plays. One parent recommended some roping to delineate the lines, and another suggested moving the main character into the adjacent wing to relieve congestion. We left the main character in the lobby and implemented roping around that line, which seems to have resolved the problem.

While most of our young patrons love the clowns who engage children before the performances, one caregiver asked that we not position the clowns on the path to the quiet room because some children are afraid. We easily made this adjustment.

More than one parent commented about the Quiet Room being too stark to comfort a troubled child. We submitted grant proposal to Autism Speaks for funding to replace the humming fluorescent lighting and other changes to make the Quiet Room more comfortable. Funding for these modifications has not yet been identified.
Cumulative Performance Evaluation Results

Dallas Children’s Theater has measured outcomes of the sensory-friendly initiative from the start. However, the support of The Crystal Charity Ball allowed us to invest in a deeper, more comprehensive evaluation process in 2016. Key to our efforts were our “Crystal Charity Ball (CCB) Families,” 10 families who agreed to attend every show they could and give detailed feedback after each show. We were particularly interested in cumulative growth as children attended shows regularly throughout the year. We conducted a brief orientation with families before the first show. We asked families to complete an online survey after each show they attended. Periodically, the survey asked very in-depth questions on a range of possible improvements. We stayed in touch throughout the year.

Three of our CCB Families

Photos: Sandra Session-Robertson

Examples of Cumulative Growth

Most of the CCB families have been able to document real growth in their children as a result of attending sensory-friendly performances regularly. Here are some of our families’ comments.

“Now we almost take it for granted that Sophie can behave and enjoy any type of show. Our whole family just loves coming to DCT. It feels like home. We feel accepted and know that we will be thoroughly entertained. Great job!” – Natalie Olszewski

“Our son WANTS to participate in the pre-activities before the show and has developed an interest in the puppet show (he loves to pretend - doesn’t quite get that he needs to be hidden while he makes his puppets talk). And we were able to stay for the first act and our son did NOT get up and run down/crawl through the isles!!!!! That is such an improvement!!” – Jada Hill

“Billy's learning how to greet more appropriately. He's much more motivated to attempt to greet others. (Greeting others is still an area of severe deficiency for him.) He's getting experience not being able to buy everything he wants at the gift table.” - Wanda Sedlacek

“TJ feels so important coming to these shows, it makes him feel normal and included in entertainment parts of our society.” – Tina Puckett

“Even though our daughter often feels judged, she doesn't recognize when she is judging others based on their behaviors. It is helpful to be around other people with special needs so she can practice the acceptance she yearns to receive from others.” - Myra Koontz
Firsts

Many of our CCB families have experienced a first or done something new that can be attributed to attending sensory-friendly theater. Here are some of the examples shared by our families:

- “While shopping, Timothy said, ‘Mom, I have to tell you something . . . you look funny in a bathing suit.’ He sang it, just like in the song from *Frog and Toad*. He told the joke at an appropriate time and with the correct tone; it was wonderful! I was so glad to see him incorporate something from the show into our everyday life. It was so neat to see him attempt a joke, even!”
- “She went up to a person in a costume without fear. This is a HUGE and dramatic change for her.”
- “He is singing along with lots of songs now.”
- “She is making up her own songs.”
- “We have felt increased confidence to try new outings...we started going to Six Flags, we even bought season passes! And this June we are going to try Disney World.”
Family and Community Connections

CCB families tell us that attending plays regularly makes them feel like they are more connected to each other and to their community. Here are some of their comments:

“Our daughter feels so special attending a show that is geared toward people with her needs. She loves seeing the other kids and interacting with the characters after the shows. It’s great for our other kids to do something with her that brings her this joy.”

“We feel like we are with our ‘peers’ in a location we can rarely find. There are very few places special families can go and be around other special families. This is AMAZING.”

“It is so comforting to see other families walking similar paths!”

“It’s wonderful, and unusual, to feel community support.”

Photo: Patty Bates-Ballard
CCB Family Measurable Outcomes
Cumulative results from the CCB Family surveys were extremely positive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of caregivers who identified aspects of growth in their child as a result of attending several sensory-friendly shows</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interest in going to the theater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease in preparing to go to the theater and/or other places</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease in new social situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease interacting with people the child doesn't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiation of social interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to empathize in new ways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General social skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to use or understand humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to tolerate or participate in audience settings (movies, church, ceremonies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease in crowded spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensory tolerances (such as sound, light, and touch)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of abstract ideas such as love, friendship, danger, inclusion, loyalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspects of cognition such as language comprehension, problem-solving, and decision-making</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of caregivers who agree with the statement, after attending several sensory-friendly performances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Sensory-Friendly performances meet the needs of my child(ren) with different sensory needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sensory-Friendly performances meet the needs of the other members of my family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sensory-Friendly performances have therapeutic benefits beyond entertainment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child has had a &quot;first&quot; (such as shaking a stranger's hand or creating a joke for the first time).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our family has felt a greater sense of community support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our family has felt a greater sense of community inclusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our family has experienced increased family connectedness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our family has felt a greater sense of optimism about our ability to manage our situation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Video Interviews
In addition to utilizing the survey feedback to improve the program, we also asked our CCB Families to be interviewed on video about their sensory-friendly experience. We utilized survey feedback to help us customize video interview questions that will help us get the word out to more families who can benefit from our sensory-friendly programming. We conducted two CCB Family video interviews in 2016, with the remaining interviews scheduled in 2017.
Caregiver Support

We continued to develop and offer social stories for each sensory-friendly show, and to offer our parent tip sheet with information on intermission and other pertinent items.

In response to requests, in the spring of 2016, we began offering a brief synopsis of each show. Parents and caregivers wanted to be able to prepare their children for any parts of the play that might trouble them, and the synopses have been very well-received.

Starting with THE BFG (Big Friendly Giant), our research assistant created a show synopsis that went to audience members in advance.

The show synopsis for A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS and the social story for HANSEL AND GRETEL – our first sensory-friendly puppet show – are featured on the following pages.
A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS
Based on the television special by Bill Melendez

Synopsis
One Act (55 minutes)

Charlie Brown, Snoopy, and all your favorite Peanuts characters come together to retell a classic story about finding the true meaning of Christmas.

It's almost Christmas and the kids are enjoying the season. Well, everyone except for Charlie Brown. While the others ice skate, throw snowballs, and receive Christmas cards, Charlie Brown is feeling depressed about the holiday.

Even Snoopy, dressed as Santa, is getting in on the fun. The kids catch snowflakes on their tongues (although Lucy informs the group she only eats January snow), create a snowman, and throw snowballs at a can (which Linus eventually knocks down with his blanket). But, in spite of all the merriment, Charlie Brown is still sad about Christmas.

Charlie Brown decides he needs to talk to someone about his sorrow. He goes to see doctor Lucy. Lucy, after happily accepting his money for her service, asks Charlie Brown what he fears. He reveals that he's feeling down about Christmas. Lucy's remedy? Charlie Brown needs involvement and she finally convinces him to direct the Christmas play.

Much to Charlie Brown's dismay, Snoopy is decorating his doghouse for Christmas in an effort to win prize money. Meanwhile, Linus and Lucy are attempting to craft the perfect letter to Santa Claus. And, reluctantly, Charlie Brown even helps his little sister, Sally, write her letter to Santa.

It's Charlie Brown's first rehearsal as director of the Christmas play. However, things quickly go awry. As Charlie Brown tries to give direction, the other kids just want to dance. When Lucy hands out parts, many of the kids complain or fight. And even Snoopy causes trouble during the rehearsal. Frustrated, Charlie Brown decides (and the others agree) that the play needs a Christmas tree to give it "the proper mood."

With Linus in tow, Charlie Brown goes off in search of the perfect Christmas tree. He thinks he finally finds the right one, although Linus is not sure the others will agree. It's just so small! But, Charlie Brown is convinced it's perfect.
Back at the rehearsal, Lucy is trying to get Schroeder to play the right version of *Jingle Bells* while Snoopy just enjoys the music and dances on the piano. When Charlie Brown shows up with his little tree, he quickly realizes Linus was right. Everyone mocks his tree! Disappointed, he begs for someone to tell him the true meaning of Christmas. Linus takes the stage and recites the story of Christ’s birth. He says “that’s what Christmas is all about.”

Motivated by Linus’s performance, Charlie Brown decides to go home and decorate his tree. He’s going to show everyone that this *is* the right tree for the play. But, when the tree collapses from the weight of just one ornament, Charlie Brown sadly mopes away. Little does he know that the rest of the Peanuts gang has followed Charlie Brown home. They agree the tree isn’t that bad and help decorate it. Charlie Brown returns to find Snoopy and the kids have fixed his tree. For the first time, Charlie Brown seems happy. He invites the audience to join in as the whole gang sings Christmas songs.

Finally, Charlie Brown and all the kids share a story about World War I flying ace Snoopy and his Christmas battle with the Red Baron. But, this battle ends when Red Baron and Snoopy declare a Christmas truce.

**Notes:**
- This play is filled with music and singing. Some of the characters play instruments such as handbells and a saxophone. A three-piece band remains onstage throughout the entire performance.
- There is a snowball fight during the play. A rogue snowball may come your way.
- Actors skate around the stage and through the audience.
SOCIAL STORY

FOR DALLAS CHILDREN’S THEATER’S
HANSEL AND GRETEL

1. When I go to Dallas Children’s Theater to see “Hansel and Gretel”, I will see a sign that says “Rosewood Center for Family Arts”.

2. When I enter Dallas Children’s Theater I will be in the lobby.

3. There will be activities in the lobby.
4. We might have to go to the Box Office to get our tickets. We may have to stand in line and wait.

5. When it’s time to go into the theater, a Helper in a white shirt will take my ticket.

6. During the show I will sit with my family. There may be some people I don’t know sitting close to me.
7. During the play, the puppets and puppeteers will be on stage.

8. Here are the puppeteers with puppets. In the play, you will see the adult dressed in a black outfit so that your attention is drawn to the puppet.

9. At the end of the show, the puppeteers will bow and the audience will clap. If the clapping is too loud, I can cover my ears.
10. When the show is over, everyone will leave the theater. In the lobby, the puppeteers will be signing autographs. It's ok if I don't want to get the puppeteers' autographs. The puppets that they are holding are fragile so I should ask if it is okay to touch them.
**Sensory-Friendly Performances on Tour**

For 30 years, Dallas Children’s Theater has conducted a national tour with one of our season’s popular shows. As word spread about our sensory-friendly performance initiative, we began to receive requests for sensory-friendly performances on our tour. The 2016-2017 National Tour, MUFARO'S BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTERS: AN AFRICAN TALE, performed two sensory-friendly Performances in 2016.

In September, a sensory-friendly performance of MUFARO'S BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTERS: AN AFRICAN TALE was provided in Fort Worth, Texas at the Scott Theater for an audience of 150 (Presenter - Imagination Fort Worth). In October, a sensory-friendly performance of MUFARO was offered in Cleveland at the Ohio Theater for an audience of 700 (Presenter - Playhouse Square Foundation’s International Children's Theater Festival). The Playhouse Square Foundation said that the performance was extremely well received, and they hoped that Dallas Children’s Theater could bring another sensory-friendly performance during a future tour engagement in Cleveland.

In previous years, we offered sensory-friendly performances in Everett, WA at the Everett Civic Auditorium (Presenter - Village Theater Pied Piper). Those shows are listed below:
February 2016 – THE BFG (Big Friendly Giant)
March 2015 – THE MUSICAL ADVENTURES OF FLAT STANLEY
February 2014 – STUART LITTLE

![Photo: Karen Almond](image-url)
Sensory-Friendly Classes – The Blue Pegasus Players

In 2016, The Crystal Charity Ball grant allowed Dallas Children’s Theater to begin offering dedicated sensory-friendly classes. This year, we conducted a pilot dedicated sensory-friendly educational spring drama workshop, held two summer camp sessions, and offered one fall academy session.

Students in these classes learned to better identify emotions, support one another, and many other important skills. One of the surprises was how much the students enjoyed touring Dallas Children’s Theater. They visited the performance stage, backstage, dressing room, puppet theater, puppet studio, costume shop and storage, and prop shop and storage. Students displayed great interest in the facility by asking numerous questions, and instructors excitedly adapted the curriculum to respond to students’ interests. Each class culminated in a performance; some with puppets and a shadow screen before an audience, and others with students performing memorized lines and movements. In 2016, we served 31 students in the classes, and 41 additional students and 36 adults attended the end of session performances.

Instructors and staff involved in implementing this new programming participated in three inclusion training programs in early 2016. More detail on the training is provided later in this report.

In April of 2016, the instructors and staff began preparing for the pilot workshop. They prepared resources such as:

- Social stories specific to acting classes at Dallas Children’s Theater
- Bean bag ("safe space")
- Polyvinyl mats (place markers for students)
- Fidget toy collection
- Emotion card
- Small whiteboards
- Large white board with “picture schedule” magnets
- Sand timers
- Blankets

While our teachers are not specially certified or licensed to teach students with special needs, the two lead instructors have experience teaching theater classes at Notre Dame, a Dallas school that provides education for children with intellectual disabilities. These instructors used past experiences along with knowledge gained from inclusion training to carefully select appropriate activities with clear, simple instructions and a high level of engagement to maintain each student’s attention. The activities required social skills such as eye contact, voice projection, response to cues, understanding emotions, displaying appropriate emotion, and group interaction.

Based on the students’ interests and the ideas we elicit from them about character and story line, we created an original play for them to perform on their final day of class. Some students needed an assistant or teacher to walk them through their part on stage, and some were able (with narration and cues from the lead teacher) to perform on their own.
Five students, ranging in age from 8 to 16, enrolled in the four-session spring pilot workshop (April 21st-May 12th). The classes were held on Thursdays from 4:30 pm until 6 pm (with a ten-minute break about halfway through class). The daily class schedule followed the same basic pattern every day, with an introduction, theater games, break, and more activities, like performing skits or creating puppets. The following is a sample schedule from the workshop:

- Introduction/Welcome
- Question of the Day – Would you rather go sledding on a cold day or swimming on a hot day? (Standing in a circle, each student is asked the question. Informal discussion about the answer is encouraged.)
- Circle time (theater games):
  - Name game (Instructor points at students in random order and student must respond by saying his or her own name out loud.)
  - Elephant, Rabbit, Jello (Instructor points at students in random order, says “Elephant,” “Rabbit” or “Jello,” and the selected student and two closest students must work together to form that thing.)
  - Affects (Instructor utilizes an emotion card that illustrates nine basic emotions to play various games, such as demonstrating emotion when shown, passing emotion, etc.)
- Activities:
  - Pay the Rent (Skit involving tenant, rent collector, and rent payee)
  - Introduction Interruption (Skit involving an introducer and person being introduced)
  - Break
  - Puppet making

Blue Pegasus Players learn about the art of puppetry. Photo: Brooke Hinson
On the last day of the spring workshop, the student put on a showcase for family and friends. “Our Spectacular Show” was scheduled for the last thirty minutes of class. Students showed off the puppets they created, portrayed different characters behind a shadow screen, and demonstrated some of the activities they had learned in class (like *Introduction Interruption* and *Pay the Rent*).

Following the successful pilot workshop, Dallas Children’s Theater continued offering sensory-friendly classes throughout the rest of the year. Two summer sessions were offered for two different age groups, and were scheduled like a typical summer camp (every day for one week). The first, for ages 8-12, was held June 20-24 and the second class, for ages 10-16, was July 5-8. Both classes were scheduled for three hours in the afternoon (1-4 pm).

Some of the major changes from spring to summer included:

- Dividing the students by age. The summer sessions were comprised of students aged 8-16, but those ages were divided over the two weeks (with some overlap, and 10-12-year-olds could choose either session).
- The amount of class time. Because these classes were in the summer and were condensed to a week, the staff increased the amount of each class time from 90 minutes to three hours.

**Summer**

During the summer, the classes were similar in structure to the spring workshop. But because the classes met for a longer amount of time during the day, the instructors had the time to adjust the class content toward that particular group of students’ interests. In turn, these adjustments drove the last day of class presentations. This flexibility led to two very different summer sessions. During the first summer session, for example, the instructors focused on the students’ interest in puppets. During the course of the class, the students built sock puppets and learned puppetry arts. During the last day of class show-and-tell, the instructors interviewed the puppets with the students voicing their puppets. The show also included a comedy skit and songs. In the second session, many students showed interest in movies. They were each allowed to pick a favorite movie or character to portray, and those characters featured prominently in the final day performance entitled *Movie Trailer Madness*.

**Fall**

In the fall, the inclusion staff chose a special name for the sensory-friendly classes: Blue Pegasus Players. See page 31 for how we settled on this name.

In preparation for the fall class, the staff made several adjustments based on feedback from parents as well as from the instructors and staff involved in executing the sensory-friendly programming. Changes included:

- Condensing the age range. The staff decided to offer this class for 13-16-year-olds due to the responses from previous classes and interest level in future classes, as well as instructor input. Although this class was intended for teenagers, the staff plans to offer classes for other age groups in the future.
• Amount of class time. This class was 75 minutes in length (compared to 3 hours in the summer and 90 minutes in the spring). Obviously, this class would be different in length from summer (due to the nature of a summer camp), but in general the feedback indicated the need for a shorter class time.

• Number of class sessions. The staff scheduled this class for six weeks (two weeks longer than the spring session and an extra session or two more than the summer). This timeframe preserved the ability to create a performance with the students, despite the reduced class time.

• Parent communication form. One of the requests from parents in previous sessions was better daily communication. The staff created a form that included the question of the day (for parents/families to utilize as a talking point with their child), information regarding the student’s demeanor during class as well as what that student in particular did during class (was a supportive audience member, creatively expressed myself, initiated contact with others, or was interested and engaged in the material), and a space for the staff to share little stories about the student.

Our daily parent communication form. Photo: Jessica Colaw

• Updating the online parent survey to include questions regarding the new parent communication card as well as a comment area regarding improving communication in general.

• Updating the student evaluation with new areas of measurement.
The Sensory-Friendly Program Initiative at Dallas Children’s Theater Report on Years 2 & 3

How Did Blue Pegasus Players Get Their Name?

Pegasus is the mythological winged horse. This seemed perfect as the Pegasus is often depicted in flight - soaring. Also, according to legend, everywhere Pegasus struck his hoof to the earth, an inspiring spring burst forth. What could be more appropriate since we are hoping to inspire the students and then hopefully, they will inspire others? And of course, the Pegasus is a very familiar symbol in the city of Dallas.

The color blue represents harmony, unity, security, and confidence in almost every culture. We want the students to take chances and be creative, like a soaring Pegasus, and at the same time we want them to know that they are in a safe environment that allows them to do that. And we hope our classes will help build their confidence - not just confidence to get in front of an audience and perform, but confidence to deal with the many issues in their challenging lives.

The fall Blue Pegagus Players (BPP) session itself was structured the same as previous sessions. However, with the older students (most of whom were returning from previous sessions), the instructors were able to create a grander last-day student performance. On the first day of class, the instructors led the students in a brainstorming session. The students were asked to give ideas for themes and characters for the performance. With the students’ input and involvement, the instructors created *The Wizard of Ah-has* and each student had a role in the production. The majority of the classes (in particular, the last few weeks) focused on workshopping the performance. The instructors worked towards helping each student be successful in his or her role, often making adjustments while rehearsing (even up to the last rehearsal the last day of class). Some adjustments included:

- The instructors added lines to the script when a student was having difficulty remembering to do something (for example, “and then the student picked up the prop”).
- For students who needed help with reciting lines, the instructors verbally prompted.
- One student was having difficulty staying focused when she was not performing (sitting “off-stage”), so after discussion, the instructors gave her extra responsibilities during the performance (sound effects) to keep her engaged.

Throughout the fall BPP session, the instructors and staff continually worked towards adapting the class in response to the needs of each student. The instructors and staff gathered after each class to discuss what worked/what didn’t work during the day and what changes needed to be made to better serve the students. They also stayed in touch with some parents through email to better understand certain students. For example, for a student who was nonverbal during class, the staff contacted his mother to gather information about his likes so that they could give him picture card options during brainstorming sessions and he could be a part of the conversation. The staff also informally (and formally in the
survey) checked with parents regarding their responses to the new parent communication card. The responses were overwhelmingly positive and many expressed their appreciation with this new form of communication.

**Repeat Attendance**

Over the course of 2016, many students attended more than one session. Of the 23 students served in this sensory-friendly program, approximately a quarter were repeat students (13% attended two sessions and 13% attended three sessions). And, based on survey responses, parents continue to express interest in enrolling in future sessions.

**Visual Aides**

To try to help students better understand and read emotions, staff created a Resource Emotion card. They also used hand-held mirrors to let the students study their own faces as they tried to recreate the emotion they see in the picture. Then, while rehearsing or doing an exercise, staff constantly reinforced this idea by asking the student, "What emotion would your character be feeling now?" Staff showed them the icons and asked them try to make the same face.

Another helpful visual aide was a schedule board. Many children on the autism spectrum crave structure, and the schedule helps them understand the planned order of events for the day. However, sometimes there was a need to deviate from the planned schedule.

If a schedule change was needed, staff announced to the students that the class was going to make a change, and said loudly, "CHANGE IS GOOD." The students quickly learned the phrase. Subsequently, when we said, "We have to make a change, and what is change?" students answered, “CHANGE IS GOOD.”

**Caveats and Sensitive Areas**

Dallas Children’s Theater does not have any special needs experts on staff. Our typical classes feature one teacher and one assistant for 15-18 students (sometimes more students if they are teenagers). For Blue Pegasus Players, we have more teachers and assistants – usually four to five teachers/assistants for 8-12 students.
We currently are not equipped to work with students with profound disabilities. To date, our students have been able to go to the restroom on their own and have not had special medical devices. So, we have not had any special aides or caretakers in the classroom with any of our students (although we would be open to having caretakers present, if needed). Students do have a variety of functioning levels - some students on the autism spectrum, some with Down syndrome, some with other cognitive/developmental disabilities. Some students have been able to learn basic lines and sing songs, while others are not verbal and need a DCT helper when onstage. With plenty of assistants in the classroom and by keeping the classes small, we have been able to serve students at these varying need levels.

We don't promote our BPP sessions as drama therapy. We are honest with the parents about the experience and abilities of the teachers working with the students. Many parents say their children have plenty of therapists in their lives already, and they just want their child to have fun, learn a little about presenting themselves onstage, gain some confidence, and get a chance to be creative and feel good about themselves. Parents most frequently-stated goals are "I want him to interact with his peers better," and "I'd like her to understand emotions and how to read another person's emotions." Since drama is a collaborative art, we promote interaction by using standard basic acting exercises. And then, as we develop a script, the rehearsal process itself is an interactive process.

Upon enrollment, we have a delicate discussion with parents about their child's special needs and unique sensitivities, likes, dislikes, etc. We then create a profile of the student for teacher reference to help them plan their lesson accordingly. Questions asked on the enrollment form include:

- Parent’s Goals for Student
- Child’s Interests/Favorite Activities
- What makes your child happy?
- What does your child do when they are upset, frustrated, or overwhelmed? (What is the progression pattern?)
- Are there particular situations or scenarios that might frustrate or upset your child?
- What should we do when your child is upset? What makes him/her feel better and calmer?
- Behavioral or learning strategies that work best, including phrases used by parents or teachers or any accommodations that will allow us to better communicate with the student

**Individual Student Observations**

There were nine students in the fall Blue Pegasus Players session, ranging in age from 14 to 16. Six students (Johann, Caroline, Palmer, Kathy, Sai, and Dennis) had participated in previous sessions.

**Anissa (16, autism)**

Anissa was a new student. She seemed particularly engaged during music time (especially when the class did repeating patterns/repeat-after-me songs). She played the “Dorothy” character in the final day performance and seemed very proud of her costume and role. Anissa was Johann’s classmate and she, in particular, continually supported and encouraged him. She was flexible and a student that could be called on as a “helper” or leader in the class.
Caroline (15, developmental delay)
Caroline was a repeat student. She had a busy schedule and missed several days of class. However, when she was present, Caroline participated enthusiastically. She also improvised a lot on stage (miming the actions she thought her character would do). During rehearsal, she mimed quite a bit, and when she was in front of the audience on the last day, she mimed even more, seeming to feed off of the audience encouragement.

Dennis (14, autism)
Dennis often expressed how excited he was to be at Dallas Children’s Theater for his third session. He seemed to enjoy talking with the instructors and other students, and by the last day of the session had gotten comfortable with initiating conversations. Dennis had great participation and was quick to offer suggestions and contribute to a conversation. Dennis’s mother mentioned how much more comfortable Dennis seemed going to class this third session than he had the other two, and she believed it was the repetition that allowed him to become comfortable.

Ethan (16, different sensory needs)
Ethan was a first-time student in the fall. He was often very quiet and seemed to not be paying attention, looking off in to the distance and talking to himself. However, he listened well enough because he was able to participate in class conversations and often knew the answers no one else knew. Ethan seemed to enjoy class discussions, especially when the class brainstormed about his character (Thomas Edison) and how to include him in the final performance. Ethan participated in acting activities, but it wasn’t until he was portraying Thomas Edison that he truly became engaged performing. At the beginning of the session, Ethan didn’t talk much to instructors or students, but by the end of the session, he was talking more. On the next-to-last day, one instructor made a fun noise on the piano and Ethan gave her a thumbs-up, as if to say, “Good job.” That hand signal represented one of the first times he was seen initiating communication with an instructor.

Johann (16, nonverbal)
Johann was a repeat student, and the instructors knew to prepare some picture cards for him to utilize during class (although he can talk, he had not talked in the summer class). Knowing ahead of time that Johann may not engage easily in the class, the staff had asked his mother for ideas of characters he liked and printed a few examples of those to show him and potentially help him engage during the first class brainstorming session. After the first class, the instructors and staff discussed what more could be done to engage Johann and decided to introduce more picture cards and a white board for him to write on. As the session went on, Johann grew more comfortable and communicated more nonverbally. The instructors continued to work on ways to include Johann, like making his writing on the white board part of the performance and giving him his name written on a card so he could participate in the name game without verbally saying his name. Other students in the class encouraged Johann when he did participate, erupting in applause when Johann utilized his name card to participate in the name game. Johann’s family was noticeably excited to see Johann in the final day performance. His mother hugged his helper/instructor and thanked everyone. Johann attended a sensory-friendly performance of A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS in December, after the fall BPP session had ended. When he was greeted
by an inclusion staff member, he immediately said “Snoopy.” This was the first time he’d spoken to that person, and one of the few times any of the staff had heard him speak. We were ecstatic!

Kathy (16, Down syndrome)
Kathy attended her third session in the fall. She had lots of energy and sometimes lost focus on what was happening in class. The instructors discussed several times how to help engage her more, and came up with the idea to give her sound effects to make during the performance. She seemed proud to have the extra responsibilities and stayed engaged during the performance, following along in her script and making the sound effects. Kathy also often chose the same answer or responses to questions or requests. For example, during Question of the Day, Kathy always chose “both” as her answer, and seemed to enjoy the attention that choosing that answer brought about. At every session, the instructors would encourage and give her time to pick one choice. After a few classes, after saying “both,” Kathy would actually choose one of the answers. Eventually Kathy chose one answer without first saying “both.” In general, Kathy’s willingness to participate and engage in the class greatly improved over the course of the fall session as the instructors adjusted their techniques and patiently encouraged her.

Kiari (14, autism)
Kiari was excited for her first session at Dallas Children’s Theater. She loved participating in class activities and enjoyed talking to her classmates. She loved being silly during music and repeat-after-me songs, and seemed to enjoy learning a “clowning” handshake that she and an instructor showed off to the class during break one day. Kiari seemed to love the songs in the performance, often improvising hand motions. Kiari had difficulty remembering to pick up props/do things on stage, so the instructors said lines to help her remember and be successful during the performance.

Palmer (16, cerebral palsy)
This was Palmer’s third session at Dallas Children’s Theater. In a previous class, he sang a SEUSSICAL™ song during the end-of-session performance, so instructors invited Palmer to sing that song after DCT’s sensory-friendly performance of SEUSSICAL™ in October. At the class following the performance, the instructors, staff, and some of the Blue Pegasus Players that had attended that performance congratulated him on a great job! During the fall session, Palmer continued his interest in singing, although he didn’t seem to be as interested in singing when he wasn’t onstage, during music class. He was also a very focused performer and took direction from the instructors well. He really transformed himself in to his character, Joker, any time he was onstage. He was also a very good stage partner, looking the other students in the eye and reacting to them. Palmer’s mom expressed how much they liked the new parent communication card. Like any teenager, she said Palmer would answer “How was your day?” with a one word answer like “fine.” But, with the communication card information she could really ask more questions and have a better conversation with him.
Sai (16, nonverbal and sensory sensitivities)
Sai was a repeat student. Before the fall session started, the instructors discussed how to get Sai involved in the class because he was nonverbal, easily distracted, and had not participated to a great degree in the previous session. On the very first day of the session, Sai participated in the music activity, clapping the “pitter-patter” pattern with an instructor. Although his participation had been minimal in the summer session, his initiation of clapping in the first fall class greatly thrilled the instructors who had him previously. Throughout the course of the fall session, Sai continued to engage more in the music portion than in any other activity. He engaged in the music most enthusiastically when there was a pattern or rhythm activity. The instructors also utilized the picture cards with him. On the first day of the fall session, he needed a picture card and verbal cue in order to do anything like stand up, sit down, etc. But, by the end of the fall session, he often only needed the verbal instruction.
Sensory-Friendly Class Outcomes

To evaluate the pilot spring sensory-friendly session, Dallas Children's Theater asked teachers to complete a paper evaluation for each student. Additionally, a research intern completed detailed observation evaluations. A link to an online survey went out to parents and caregivers with broad questions. Answers to those questions helped us design a more specific survey for subsequent sessions.

Skills Measured

The staff utilized multiple evaluation methods. First, a student evaluation was completed by a staff member on the first and last day of the session and measured four different skills:

- Understanding of nine basic emotions
- Initiates contact with other students
- Supports and encourages other students
- Demonstrates expressiveness and uninhibited body movement

Students also were demonstrating the skills more frequently by the end of the session. The skills above were appropriate for the students in our first two sensory-friendly sessions. However, staff found that they were too advanced for some students in subsequent sessions. Moving forward, staff adopted two additional skills to evaluate:

- Asks questions and/or speaks in front of the group
- Voluntarily participates in classroom activities

An online parent survey asked the following:

- On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your child’s experience in DCT’s classes?
- Have you noticed any improvements in your child’s social functioning? If so, what?
- What was the most helpful aspect of the program?
- What was the least helpful aspect of the program?
- How do you think DCT’s classes can be improved?
- Would you recommend this program to other parents of children with similar challenges?
- Additional comments:

Finally, the staff informally evaluated, documented, and brainstormed regarding challenges and ideas for class.

Staff-Observed Outcomes

For the staff-observed outcomes, our goal was for students to improve in at least two measures. All students improved in at least two measures. Most students improved in all of the measures. The charts on the following pages detail our findings.
**Blue Pegasus Player Outcomes**

**Skill areas that experienced improvement:**

![Diagram showing skill areas with bars for each area.]

- Understanding of nine basic emotions
- Asks questions and/or speaks in front of the group
- Initiates contact with other students
- Supports and encourages other students
- Demonstrates expressiveness and uninhibited body movement
- Voluntarily participates in classroom activities

**Student Improvement**

- 33% of students improved in two skills
- 33% of students improved in three skills
- 33% of students improved in four skills

**Caregiver Outcomes**
## OBJECTIVE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental Feedback</th>
<th>2016 GOAL</th>
<th>2016 RESULTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents will say their child felt excited or comfortable about coming back to camp each day.</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents will recommend this program to parents of children with similar challenges.</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents will say their child had a positive social experience at DCT.</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents will rate their child's experience in DCT's camp at 8 or above.</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents will report signs of increased self-esteem as a result in participating in the camp, for example, initiating conversations with others about the experience.</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents will report improvements in their child's social functioning since the camp.</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents will report that their child is using more imagination or creative expression, or is more creative in solving problems.</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chart of Feelings

**Positive Experience?**
- Yes
- Mostly Yes

**Feeling about camp each day**
- Excited
- Comfortable
- Reluctant

**Improved social functioning?**
- Yes
- Mostly Yes
- Mostly No
- No
Caregiver comments about the Blue Pegasus Players program:

- My son felt comfortable and the staff seemed to understand needs. Everyone was so kind and caring. It was a very nice experience and one we would certainly do again. My son loved seeing the sets and backstage.
- The most helpful aspect of the program was role playing and thinking about how others feel.
- Providing an opportunity for children who want to participate in acting to do so despite their challenges.
- Thank you for offering a program that met her special needs. Please organize such programs for special needs more often.
- I was impressed from what I observed during the performance, in particular the way in which the kids were assisted and still participated no matter their challenges.
- Since this is his third program at DCT, he has an increased level of involvement. The repeat programming with the same group of performers and teachers makes a big difference.
- Being part of a group of people on stage - improved confidence level.
- Getting to work on a production and perform it on stage – such a feeling of accomplishment!

A Blue Pegasus Players class performance. Photo: Brooke Hinson
FALL CLASSES
NOW ENROLLING
Blue Pegasus Players

A creative dramatics program for young actors with unique minds, talents and imaginations.

Work with DCT professionals using theater techniques to enhance creativity in each student. Classes designed for youth with autism, Asperger syndrome, Down syndrome and other sensory processing disorders and special needs.

FOR STUDENTS ages 13 - 16
OCT 7 - NOV 11
Fridays: 4:15pm-5:30pm
[6 weeks]

$85

ENROLL TODAY
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Special thanks to the donors to The Crystal Charity Ball, Bank of America, The Alben and Jack Pratt Foundation, W.P. & Dubh Lene Foundation and Anonymous for their support of DCT’s Sensory-Friendly Initiative.
Audience & Patron Outreach

With the start of our 2017-2018 season in fall 2017, we redoubled our efforts to market both our performances and dedicated classes directly to providers of services for children with special needs.

Events

The table below lists events we attended and shows the number of youth and adults reached.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Youth</th>
<th>Adults</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dallas Museum of Art</td>
<td>10/1/16</td>
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<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>DISD Special Education Dept. Workshop</td>
<td>10/12/16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISD Special Education Dept. Workshop</td>
<td>11/3/16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge Air For Kids &amp; Friends</td>
<td>11/12/16</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>KidsCare Therapy Networking</td>
<td>11/16/16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rays of Light Shine Expo</td>
<td>2/25/17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Assistant Jessica Colaw spreads the word about our sensory-friendly initiative. Photo: Event patron
Hand-delivered Flyers

A mother who has been an active sensory-friendly patron developed a flyer that we hand-delivered to 30+ service providers asking them to distribute program information to their clients and patients. These marketing strategies seemed to correlate with increased attendance at performances.
SENSORY-FRIENDLY PERFORMANCES
Specifically designed for children with autism, Asperger syndrome, Down syndrome and other sensory processing disorders and special needs.

SEUSSICAL™
Music by Stephen Flaherty
Lyrics by Lynne Ahrens
Book by Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty
Co-Conceived by Lynn Ahrens,
Stephen Flaherty, and Eric Idle
Based on the works of Dr. Seuss

OCT 15, 2016 – 1:30PM
Recommended for ages 5 and up

A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS
By Charles M. Schulz
Based on the television special by Bill Melendez and Lee Mendelson
Stage Adaptations by Eric Schaeffer
By Special Arrangement with Arthur Whitelaw and Ruby人参

DEC 3, 2016 – 1:30PM
Recommended for ages 5 and up

JUNIE B. JONES IS NOT A CROOK
By Allison Gregory
Based on the books Junie B. Jones Is Not a Crook
DCT’s NATIONAL TOURING PRODUCTION
JOHN STEPTOE’S
MUFARO’S BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTERS:
AN AFRICAN TALE
Adapted for the stage by Karen Alien
Music and Lyrics by S-Ahui Rasa

FEB 18, 2017 – 1:30PM
Recommended for ages 5 and up

KATHY BURKS THEATRE OF PUPPETRY ARTS’
JACK AND THE BEANSTALK
Adaptation, Original Songs & Lyrics by S. Wolf

MAR 4, 2017 – 4:30PM
Recommended for ages 4 and up

TOMÁS AND THE LIBRARY LADY
By Pat Mora
Adapted for the stage by Jeni Lou González

MAR 25, 2017 – 1:30PM
Recommended for ages 7 and up

BLUE
By Jason Catlett/Mood

APR 29, 2017 – 1:30PM
Recommended for squinny tudders
and their families

ROALD DAHL’S
JAMES AND
THE GIANT PEACH
Adapted by David Wood

MAY 13, 2017 – 1:30PM
Recommended for ages 5 and up

Dallas Children’s Theater is working to make theater accessible for children with developmental disabilities.
If you have questions, we are ready to take your call.
If you would like to visit the theater in advance, we welcome you!

Call (214) 740-0051 to purchase tickets
Research Assistant

The Research Assistant position plays a critical role in the sensory-friendly initiative. This individual assists with outcome evaluation for performances and classes, organizes and conducts video interviews, staffs outreach events, and works closely with the project documentarian. Brooke Hinson was hired as Research Assistant in December 2015, and she completed her assignments in August 2016. Jessica Colaw took on the mantle of Research Assistant in August 2016.

The Research Assistant attends all performances and classes, and makes note of anything significant or interesting that occurred including, but not limited to, the pre-show activities available, interactions between audience members and the cast or volunteers, and the number of times the quiet room was utilized. The following are two examples of observation notes:

THE BFG (Big Friendly Giant) Observation Notes
By Brooke Hinson, Research Assistant
May 14, 2016
Pre-show activities: 12:30pm
Performance time: 1:30pm

Six of our CCB Families attended THE BFG (Big Friendly Giant). It was held in the Baker Theater. In response to several parents’ requests for more detailed information about each story, a synopsis was created as an added resource. The synopsis included the length and basic content of each act and the length of the intermission.

Face painting was moved to the main lobby at a smaller table. Nine-year-old Kaitlyn went immediately to the table and said, “I never miss a chance for face painting!”

In the side lobby, a creative craft company called Oil & Cotton created a dream jar station – children were allowed to create their own dreams just as the BFG captures dreams in the story. Children were guided by a talented craftswoman, who suggested starting with a puzzle piece because “All dreams start with a question”. She encouraged children to create a story as they chose different items to fill their jar, fostering creative thinking. She also encouraged tactile exploration, assuring children it was “important to touch everything.”

Nine-year-old Ava was attending her fourth show of the season, and willingly participated in face painting for the first time. She not only tolerated the experience, she found joy in it – requesting a green heart on her hand and shouting “I love you!” when the heart was finished.

The vibrant colors, varying settings, exaggerated movement, and age-appropriate content (giants, bullies, queens, school) made this performance especially memorable for our sensory-friendly audience. There were numerous moments in which the entire audience was lost in genuine laughter, children and adults alike – the whizpopping dances surprised parents as they tried not to laugh without success. The whole crowd waved goodbye as BFG left to return to his motherland at the end of the performance. Ava stood up to cheer and clap after the show, and grabbed her grandpa’s hands to dance in the aisle.

The quiet room was used four times throughout the performance.
SEUSSICAL™ Observation Notes
By Jessica Colaw, Research Assistant
Saturday, October 15, 2016
Pre-show activities: 12:30 pm
Performance time: 1:30 pm

The first sensory-friendly performance of the 2016-2017 season was the musical SEUSSICAL™ performed in the Baker Theater. Eight of the CCB families attended the performance. Each family that was in attendance received a DCT “Recipe Book” to record special stories about their family’s experience with DCT’s sensory-friendly programming this season.

Some guests began arriving earlier than the pre-show activities started. One child, his mother, and a therapist arrived at approximately 12:15 pm. The mother and therapist took the child on an informal tour of the theater, helping him adjust to this new setting (they informed me that this was their first time at the Dallas Children’s Theater). In the puppet area of the lobby, the therapist utilized puppets for an emotion check-in with the child. This group stayed the entire pre-show, show, and post-show for autographs.

Pre-show activities consisted of face (or hand) painting, Seuss inspired crafts (like Horton elephant ears, the clover flower with a “Whoville” speck, and finger puppets of Dr. Seuss’s beloved characters), and the sensory-friendly clowns, Slappy and Monday. The clowns stayed down the hall away from the main lobby. They were accessible to any child or family who wanted to interact, but out of sight from the main lobby activities (and any child who didn’t want to see a clown).

One mother, upon entering the lobby, exclaimed “this is so cool!” when a volunteer pointed out all that was offered. She and her son did just about every pre-show activity as well as interacted a good deal with the clowns. She expressed how thankful she was to the clowns and volunteers.

Many children who didn’t want to participate in the pre-show activities did enjoy the puppet area. At any given time, there were a few different groups crowded around the puppet theater.

The vast majority of the audience was new to Dallas Children’s Theater (based on hands-up when Nancy Schaeffer asked about first-time visitors during the curtain speech).

During the performance, the audience seemed very engaged. One boy (preschool age) jumped up and shouted “yay” throughout the play (during exciting parts, like when Horton was rescued by Gertrude). During a scene that incorporated bubbles flying around the audience, even the few children that I noticed hadn’t been interested in the play became very interested. One child near where I was standing had not paid much attention to the play at all until the bubbles appeared and from then on he was engaged and excited.

During intermission, one family approached me as they were leaving and the mom said “I think he did well for his first show. We’ll try again for Charlie Brown.” Some other families did choose to leave during intermission as well, but the vast majority of the audience remained for the second act (approximately 10-20 people left during intermission).
After curtain call, the audience was treated to a special performance from one of the Blue Pegasus Players. Palmer Lee, who has participated in several sensory-friendly workshops at the theater, sang a song from Seussical on the stage. About a third of the way through the song, the audience started clapping along to encourage him. He added kicks and hand motions as the song progressed. When he was finished, the audience erupted with applause. Palmer stood with the actors during post-show, giving autographs to his fans.

The lobby was packed during autograph time. So many families stayed, despite the noise and crowds, to get autographs from each of the actors. At times, the Cat in the Hat’s line was all the way out the front door. The lobby was filled with sounds of “thank yous” and “congrats” on good performances. One mother stopped me as I passed her to say “thank you, we had a really great time. Such a good show!”

The quiet room was utilized by two people during the performance.

Media Coverage
Kate Stoltzfus wrote an article, Work As Play, on behalf of the Chronicle of Higher Education. Her story focuses on playwright Barry Kornhauser, author of BALLOONACY. She found us through the blog post of Troy Camplin, whose son has autism, and who wrote this beautiful tribute about their experience attending the play BALLOONACY, which we developed into a short video.

Photo: Patty Bates-Ballard

YouTube screen capture
We continued to promote performances through press releases as well.

*American Theatre*, the publication of Theatre Communications Group, featured Dallas Children’s Theater and our sensory-friendly programming in their article, “20 Theaters You Should Take Your Kids To.”

*The Dallas Morning News* and *TheaterJones* now list the sensory-friendly show for each of our productions they review.

Along with honors from *The Dallas Voice* for our production of *THE MIRACULOUS JOURNEY OF EDWARD TULANE*, we received a *special citation* for providing sensory friendly performances for kids with special needs.

*TheaterJones* noted in their *delightful review* of Kathy Burks’ HANSEL AND GRETEL that the show was our first opportunity to offer a sensory-friendly puppet show.

*Photo: Sandra Session-Robertson*
The Dallas Observer published a story on our sensory-friendly program in October 2016.

Dallas Children's Theater Accommodates Autistic Children With a Slate of Sensory-Friendly Shows

BY KATY LEMIEUX

The next sensory-friendly performance by Dallas Children’s Theater is A Charlie Brown Christmas on December 3.

YouTube screenshot of A Charlie Brown Christmas

We were thrilled that Dallas Children’s Theater also made the Observer’s list of Best of Dallas Arts and Culture in 2016.

In just the three years since we started our initiative, we have seen the arts community embrace sensory-friendly programming. Indeed, a new website, Spectrum Arts, is devoted to keeping up with the growing list of theaters offering sensory-friendly performances.
DFWChild.com lists our upcoming shows, including sensory-friendly shows. **Thrive Magazine** this year featured our programming as well.

SayYesToDallas.com lists Dallas Children’s Theater as a resource to parents and caregivers of children with special needs.

The Intellectual and Development Disabilities Needs Council of Tarrant County tweeted about our sensory-friendly shows.
**How Families Found Us**

In our after-show evaluations, we asked how families heard about the performances. The following table represents the responses we received for each performance:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Attendees Heard About the Performance</th>
<th># of Responses in 2015</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friend/family member/other parents</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet/Website</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazine</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RISD email</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rise School</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapy - our therapist/OT</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrive Magazine</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Attendees Heard About the Performance</th>
<th># of Responses in 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ad/Dallas Child ad</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center for Children with Autism</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childs Path</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Crystal Charity Ball</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dallas print publication - a feature on sensory monthly events</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCT web site; workshops; previous performance</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISD/DISD Parent Center</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Down Syndrome Guild of Dallas</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail from DCT</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook/Facebook group</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Worth Child</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend/family member/other parents</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From TXU</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet/Website</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazine</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notre Dame School</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous patron, newspaper</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rays of Light email or verbal info</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Needs magazine / Thrive Magazine</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapy - our therapist/OT</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These responses demonstrate the importance of word-of-mouth recommendations.
Model Sharing

Dallas Children’s Theater offered an *Infusion and Inclusion Symposium* in February 2015 to share with our colleagues the results of our pilot sensory-friendly year and assist them with building their own sensory-friendly models. Attendees included Amon Carter Museum, Autism Speaks, Brookhaven College, Capers for Kids, Dallas Arboretum, Dallas Heritage Village, Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas Zoo, Imagination Celebration Fort Worth, Nasher Sculpture Center, Kimbell Art Museum, National Educators in Blindness & Low Vision Services, OldRed.org, Perot Museum of Nature & Science, Richland College, The Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza, Therapy 2000, TWU School of Occupational Therapy, University of South Carolina, and UNT Health Science Center.

We provided each attendee with a print copy of our [pilot year report](#), which continues to be requested and downloaded from our website. We are so pleased to see such significant interest in the work we are doing to make arts and culture accessible to children with different sensory needs.

As a result of attending this session, TWU Professor Tina Fletcher created a graduate student project. TWU graduate students helped the Dallas Arboretum and Amon Carter Museum to create social stories for their patrons with different sensory needs.
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2015

Dallas Children’s Theater
Rosewood Center for Family Arts
5938 Skillman, Dallas, TX 75231

Infusion and Inclusion workshop - Focusing on the how’s and why’s of creating and presenting sensory-friendly programming for arts and cultural organizations.

1:30 pm – Arrive and lunch

1:00 pm – Welcome
Rebeyn Baker Platt, Executive Artistic Director, Dallas Children’s Theater
Nancy Schauffer, Education Director & Associate Artistic Director, DCT

Understanding your Audience
Haylie L. Miller, Ph.D
Pediatric Research Associate, Dept of Physical Therapy,
UTI Health Science Center

Arts Based Learning
Peter Duffy, Ed.D
Head of the MAT Program / Associate Professor, Theatre Department,
University of South Carolina

Inclusion and Access
Amanda Blake
Head of Family, Access & School Experiences, Dallas Museum of Art

Staff Preparation
Danielle Schulz
Teaching Specialist, Dallas Museum of Art

Program Examples:
Performance Accommodations ______________________ Nancy Schauffer
DMN programs _____________________________ Amanda Blake and Danielle Schultz
Other paths to Inclusion __________________________ Haylie Miller
Discussion / Next Steps __________________________ Everyone

4:00 p.m. – Adjourn

Please RSVP to Gina.Waits@dct.org. Let her know if you can attend Friday’s workshop, Saturday’s performance, or both days.
Presented free of charge and lunch is provided on Friday!


SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2015

Dallas Children’s Theater
Rosewood Center for Family Arts
5938 Skillman
Dallas, TX 75231

See Inclusion in Action!

SKIPPYJON JONES
Book by Linda Dachery
Music & Lyrics by Nick Martin
Enjoyed by ages 4 and up

3:00 p.m. – Pre-show activities

4:30 p.m. – Sensory-friendly performance of Skippyjon Jones
Specifically designed for children with autism, Asperger syndrome, Down syndrome and other sensory processing disorders and special needs, this performance features general adaptations including lowering the house lights up a few levels higher than for a standard performance and reducing the sound level. We also offer a "Quiet Room" for children who need a break. After all, every child deserves a chance to enjoy this new musical adaptation of Judy Schachner’s beloved book. Skippyjon Jones is a rambunctious Siamese kitten with big ears and an even bigger imagination. When his loving but acquisitive mother puts Skippyjon in timeout, he starts to daydream. His imagination takes him far, far away to Mexico, where he Pretends that he is a swashbuckling Chihuahua named Skipito Friquito. This silly, sweet tale celebrates the power of imagination. As Skippyjon would say...much fun!

This multi-level, multi-faceted program is made possible for all participants through the generosity of:

- Communities Foundation of Texas, Robert Henry Middleton Family, Joe Brooks, Diana and Tom Klein, Autism Speaks, Michael Young Family Foundation, BTWSPVA Advisory Board
Nancy Schaeffer, Associate Artistic Director and Education Director at Dallas Children’s Theater, presented information on the sensory-friendly initiative in Cleveland at the Theater Communications Group’s conference in June of 2015. She was a featured speaker on the Audience (R)Evolution: Sharing and Prototyping Strategies panel.

Model Stretching
Nancy traveled to England’s On the Edge Theater conference, where she attended a workshop and saw an innovative show by Oily Cart. The show challenged accepted definitions of theatre and audience by creating a multisensory and highly interactive production for the very young and for young people with profound and multiple learning disabilities. Oily Cart has experimented with inviting audiences to taste bread baked live on stage, to sing along with hip hop DJs, or dance with colorful balloon flowers. As children are encouraged to participate in activities, they can actually have an impact on the direction of the storyline. Nancy’s blog post, “The Artistry in Service,” which describes her thinking about how to bring these experiences to Dallas Children’s Theater audiences, can be found on the following page.

Nancy also traveled to Trusty Sidekicks at Lincoln Center in New York City and to the Seesaw Theater Inclusive Theatre Festival at Northwestern University in Chicago to learn about the sensory-friendly efforts of several children’s theaters.
“The Artistry in Service”
By Nancy Schaeffer

It is a joy and a privilege to watch a child watch a live performance. I do it over and over again. I hear children laugh, I see them smile, and then I and listen as they discuss their favorite parts of the play, making their way through our lobby and gallery. I see them lean forward in anticipation and sometimes get very still when something especially interests them. And I watch parents and teachers watch their children too. It’s what I do. I am lucky.

And when parents of children with vision or auditory challenges come to visit us they often ask for accommodations- an ASL interpreter or the opportunity to sit close to the stage. And we happily grant these requests. The actors, directors, and designers all want to share their art with these children in the best way possible. We want to watch them watch.

And then when parents started asking us to adapt our plays for children on the Autism spectrum we hesitated a little. We wondered how, but not why. And then we took a big leap into the world of adapting our art to serve. Mainly we realized that our plays were artistically sound and we could make the adaptations and still keep the integrity of the art. And we watched these children be welcomed into a place that had not always been seen as a place for them. These kiddos have laughed and danced and delighted in the work in a whole new way. And we watched-often shedding a little tear or two.

But sometimes I watch a child who is still on the outside; a child who is still not being served by this adapted work. I watch a parent who is frustrated that their child is not being reached by a wonderful piece of theater. I sometimes see them slip out of a performance- or not even make it in the door. The parents are generally very appreciative of our efforts. But it just wasn’t for this child, this time.

And I wonder how we serve.

So, I am watching others in the field. Tim Webb from Oily Cart in England is the recognized leader in creating work for children on the Autism spectrum and for children with profound and multiple disabilities. The work is multisensory. It is rich and immediate. It is beautiful and mesmerizing. There is artistry. Watching a play like THE LIGHT SHOW or UP AND AWAY with Trusty Sidekicks at Lincoln Center is mesmerizing. I watch the performers of course. But I mainly watch the audience. I cannot take my eyes away from them as I observe their rapt attention and immersion in a piece of theater that was created just for them.

I am trying to keep an open mind and heart as I think about how to expand this work. These multisensory performances are generally done for six to eight children with disabilities at a time. How do we reach more of these children, how do we create a process that is sustainable, how do we add this type of programming into an organization that already has so many new initiatives and not enough resources? How do we not?

I was describing my experiences with these performances to a colleague who has a child with multiple disabilities. I told her that each child was surrounded by talented artists who sang to them by name, rubbed lotion on their hands, and fanned them gently. I said, “Imagine how Kory would react?” She started to cry. I watched and I knew- we will have to try.

Blog Post for Leadership U  December 16, 2016
Staff Training
In 2016, staff members received training from three different providers to help deepen their knowledge of and ability to serve audiences with different sensory needs:

- Autism Treatment Center - Monday, February 29 and Tuesday, March 1, 12:00-3:30
- Texas Woman's University's School of Occupational Therapy - Friday, March 4, 9:00-12:30
- Imagination Stage - Thursday, March 10 and Friday, March 11, 9:00-5:00

Ninety-six percent of staff respondents to training evaluation surveys found the training programs helpful, and ninety-four percent said they have used information they learned in the training sessions.

Carolyn Garver and Mariel Fernandez, Autism Treatment Center
Dr. Carolyn Garver, PhD, and Mariel C. Fernandez, MS, BCBA, from the Autism Treatment Center in Dallas, delivered a presentation on Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA). They defined and described ABA for the staff as well as demonstrated how to use ABA techniques during class to bring about behavior changes in students with autism. In addition, they discussed the need for crisis/emergency planning because “safety is your number one priority” in the classroom. A DCT staff member reported being able to use information from this training almost immediately when she was able to calm an autistic child in class through praise and focused activities.

Tina Fletcher, Texas Women's University
Tina Fletcher EdD, MFA, OTR, from Texas Women’s University’s School of Occupational Therapy, presented information to the staff from an occupational therapy perspective, and got DCT staff involved.
She discussed sensory processing as it relates to individuals with autism. She also demonstrated how to set up a sensory room, something TWU does at various autism outreach events around Dallas/Fort Worth. Dr. Fletcher emphasized the importance of making the sensory events a welcoming environment for children and their families.

One staff member commented, “The training was memorable because they broke us into groups as patrons. One person in each group played a patron with a sensory or physical challenge. The second person was the parent and the third person was the DCT representative. For example, I wore goggles that gave me very limited and distorted vision. We went outdoors to experience the challenge of getting into the building, we explored different areas inside the building and we tried to do one of the theater’s preshow activities. Then we switched parts so that everyone got to experience the different roles.”

Dianne Nutting, Imagination Stage
Diane Nutting, Director of Access and Inclusion at Imagination Stage in Bethesda, MD provided an inclusion training seminar on March 10 titled “Everybody Plays! Inclusion in the Theatre Arts Setting.” Topics included the importance and benefits of inclusion, techniques and resources for setting up an inclusive environment, scaffolding class curriculum, supporting positive behavior and communicating with schools/families. Neurodevelopmental disorders, and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) were stressed. Imagination Stage has been offering creative dramatics classes for students with special needs for many years and is one of the leaders in this area.
Suggested general accommodations:

- Schedules
- Transitions
- Choices
- Taking Breaks (allow “safe space” for breaks when needed)
- Multiple entry points (visual + verbal cues)

Suggested Student Inclusion Supports:

- Picture Schedules
- Social Stories
- Activity Scripts
- Task Cards
- Fidgets
- Timers
- Creative student-specific solutions (sticker charts, point systems, etc.)

Diane Nutting returned on March 11 to present Accessibility and Inclusion 101. The training covered defining disability, creating an accessible and inclusive environment, and Person-First Language. It included an exercise in which staff rated our organization on a number of inclusive strategies. This training not only imparted new knowledge, but it also gave staff members dedicated time to connect with each other on the subject of our sensory-friendly initiative. As a result, staff not directly involved in the day-to-day functions of the initiative requested more regular updates about the initiative. In 2016, we implemented quarterly team meetings with the staff members with primary responsibilities. We became more intentional about communicating with the entire staff about the initiative.

One staff member remarked, “I have a tendency to just help a person. So, asking the person first if they needed assistance was great to know.”

Key Sensory-Friendly Program Staff with Diane Nutting  Photo: Patty Bates-Ballard
Where Do We Go From Here?

In January 2017, we entered the second year of our three-year grant from The Crystal Charity Ball. The 2017 sensory-friendly performances are:

JUNIE B. JONES IS NOT A CROOK
JACK AND THE BEANSTALK
TOMÁS AND THE LIBRARY LADY
BLUE
ROALD DAHL’S JAMES AND THE GIANT PEACH
MUFARO’S BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTERS: AN AFRICAN TALE
GOOSEBUMPS THE MUSICAL: PHANTOM OF THE AUDITORIUM
FROSTY AND FRIENDS
A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS

The 2016 student matinee show was so successful that in 2017, we will offer matinee performances of THE VERY HUNGRY CAPERpillar SHOW and BLUE, in addition to the weekend family-oriented sensory-friendly performances of these shows.

Also in 2017, we will invite typically developing students to participate in Blue Pegasus Players academy classes. We believe that both groups of students will benefit from learning about drama together.

In 2018, we look forward to the opportunity to produce a play with actors from Blue Pegasus Players for a general audience.

Future Funding

We have begun to look toward funding that will allow us to continue the program beyond The Crystal Charity Ball grant, which will conclude at the end of 2018. Our commitment is strong, and we want to have ongoing funding in place so that we don’t miss a beat heading into 2019.

Invitation

We continue to look for opportunities to share our growing sensory-friendly programming knowledge bank with our colleagues. Please schedule a visit to learn more about the benefits and joys of offering sensory-friendly programming.