The Sensory-Friendly Performance Initiative

2014 Pilot Year Report

Helping all children and their families benefit from the power of live theater.
The Sensory-Friendly Performance Initiative
at Dallas Children's Theater
2014 Pilot Year Report

Made possible by a grant from Autism Speaks
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Executive Summary

What would life be like if the buzzing light overhead sounded to you like a roaring lion? What if the lights going dark in the theater made you feel like you were trapped in a cave? What if, when you saw a flashing light, your body went into convulsions that you couldn't control? What if you were so overwhelmed by these situations that you were afraid of big spaces and crowds? This is life for many of the 100,000+ children in Dallas on the autism spectrum and with other developmental disabilities, and their 100,000+ siblings, and their 100,000+ parents. If you were one of these children, most likely your family would prioritize your safety and forego many community events. Unfortunately, you and your family would miss out on so much.

Drama helps children with autism better understand and respond to social cues, facilitate peer interaction, increase self-awareness and insight, resolve conflicts and solve problems, and foster family cohesion. Yet many children with developmental disabilities (DD) like autism have a low tolerance for crowds, loud noises, darkness, flashing lights, and other similar sensory input. Often, because of these challenges, families that include a child with DD don’t believe the world of theater is accessible to them.

At Dallas Children's Theater (DCT), we have begun to reverse that belief by making DCT an accepting, comfortable, and safe place for children with developmental disabilities. In 2014, we piloted the performance aspect of our Sensory-Friendly Initiative, providing adapted theater experiences to children with autism and others who need a more relaxed, comforting environment and performance. We are thrilled that 833 children with developmental disabilities and their families attended a sensory-friendly performance at DCT in 2014. Not only are families of children with DD often isolated because there are few programs that welcome them with open arms, but also because their budgets are stretched thin. Our reduced ticket prices, funded by a generous grant, were critical to our pilot year success.

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.” Dallas Children’s Theater is lauded in the theater world as a place that innovates and takes initiatives to the next level. In response to the growing demand for the inclusive programming, Dallas Children’s Theater is...
taking a bold stand as a safe place for audiences with different sensory needs. 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 in 2014.

The grant allowed us to learn from and exchange ideas with two wonderful national partners, Nashville Children's Theatre and Orlando Repertory Theatre. Amazing local partners from Autism Speaks; The Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities University of Texas Southwestern and Children's Health Centers; the Neuropsychology Service of Children's Health Dallas; The University of North Texas, including the Kristin Farmer Autism Center, coached us, provided detailed suggestions on ways to adapt each performance, assisted in promoting the performances, and helped us identify volunteers to make each performance successful. We are deeply grateful to all of our partners.

We also are immensely grateful to our friends at Autism Speaks for supporting our request to document this year's work so that we can share our experiences with other arts and cultural organizations interested in similar programming. This funding support has contributed greatly to extending this program beyond year one. We believe it will encourage other organizations to consider their role in serving audiences with developmental disabilities, and that it will pave the way for future funding.

It takes a village to make such a project work. We are indebted to the Dallas Children's Theater staff and actors who brought this project to life.

Our pilot year of three sensory-friendly performances was a resounding success! We engaged so many new families who expressed interest in returning and did return later in the year. They returned because they felt accepted. If you attended these performances, you might have noticed that one young man recited out loud in unison with the actors many of the lines of the book on which a play was based. You might have noticed that a young boy laughed loud and long when one of the characters threw him a ball. Perhaps you noticed that a young girl stood up and sat down, while another rocked back and forth often during a performance. And you would have noticed that everyone supported and accepted these behaviors without question. Because of this accepting environment, we exceeded all of our measurable objectives, including goals for the children's comfort during the performance, children interacting with a person they didn't know, and children's experience of learning and growth.
Quantifiable measures are important. But individual reports also give an important perspective. Parent Jill Rowlett said this: "I LOVE that you are doing this play with sensory integration!!! It gave me a lump in my throat! For those with disabilities and their parents, this is a dream. A place to take our children where they will fit in or at least be understood and accepted is rare... even these days when you think it would not be. That parents can actually share family time out of their homes, without constant tension and worrying how their child will react... or how the public will react, is such a help for so many. I will spread the word. THANK YOU!"

Our fundraising efforts beyond our pilot year also have been successful. We are thrilled to have been able to raise enough funds to mount three sensory-friendly performances for the 2014-15 season. We believe multi-year grants will allow us to fully build out the program and ultimately sustain it longterm.

Having achieved our pilot year goals, we continue to be ambitious going forward. Subsequent year goals are as follows: 1) to integrate sensory-friendly performances into our season longterm; 2) to expand our inclusion efforts beyond sensory-friendly performances; and 3) to share our experience with other organizations and encourage them to initiate inclusion efforts of their own.

We believe that all children and their families deserve to experience the power of live theater. We also believe that children with sensory differences and their families deserve to have as many opportunities to engage in their community as typically developing children have. So we want to do our part to encourage our friends to consider the role their organizations can play in accessibility. We are seeking invitations to speak to organizations about this very rewarding experience and additional opportunities to share this report. Our February 20, 2015 symposium, "Infusion and Inclusion," is designed to share our pilot year experience. The symposium flier is included at the end of the Outreach section of this document.

A PDF copy of this report is available at our website, www.dct.org/sensory/. Additional hard copies are available by emailing dct.community@dct.org.
History 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 innovates and takes initiatives to the next level. In response to the growing demand for the 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 intends to take 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 of time 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. In order to encourage families to take a risk, we offered the first two performances at minimal cost. We have found that the reduced ticket price is an important factor for many, and are working to keep prices as low as we can for future performances.

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.
**Outreach**

In November 2013, we invited several individuals working in the field of autism and developmental disabilities to join an advisory committee to guide us through our sensory-friendly performance initiative. Members included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pat Robbins</td>
<td>Autism Speaks; moved to Equest in 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann Piper</td>
<td>Parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicki Dennis, MHA FACHE</td>
<td>Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities University of Texas Southwestern and Children's Health Centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stormi Pulver-White, Psy. D</td>
<td>Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities University of Texas Southwestern and Children's Health Centers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alison Wilkinson-Smith, Ph.D., ABPP</td>
<td>Children's Health Dallas, Neuropsychology Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haylie Miller, PH. D.</td>
<td>University of North Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren Matthews, MS, CCC/SLP</td>
<td>University of North Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin Stewart</td>
<td>Kristin Farmer Autism Center at the University of North Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen Rossetti</td>
<td>University of North Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theresa Francis</td>
<td>Notre Dame School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda Blake</td>
<td>Dallas Museum of Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danielle Schulz</td>
<td>Dallas Museum of Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neely Holland</td>
<td>Down Syndrome Guild</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the advisory council’s first recommendations was to develop a "social story," which is a pictorial guide for families that explains what happens at an event. With help from advisory committee members, we developed the Dallas Children's Theater first sensory-friendly performance social story for *Go, Dog. Go!* in December and posted it to our website in January 2014. We updated the social story for *Stuart Little* and *Rapunzel! Rapunzel! A Very Hairy Fairy Tale*. The *Go, Dog. Go!* social story is included on the following two pages.

We also provided a Parent Tip Sheet on the website with additional answers to question parents might have. The two-page Parent Tip Sheet for *Stuart Little* follows the social story.

After the success of the first sensory-friendly performance, we continued to reach out and hear from new organizations, therapy practices, therapy groups, and individuals interested in our sensory-friendly programming. Subsequent meetings with the Down Syndrome Guild and Texas Scottish Rite Hospital proved fruitful.

One of our teaching artists went to the Dallas Museum of Art's Autism Friendly day the morning of Saturday, July 12, the same day as our late afternoon performance of *Stuart Little*. She led participants in creative dramatics activities and talked about our programs.
1. When I go to Dallas Children’s Theater to see “Go, Dog. Go!”, 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. There will be activities in the lobby.

3. We might have to go to the Box Office to get our tickets. We may have to stand in line and wait.
4. When it’s time to go into the theater, a Helper in a white shirt will take my ticket.

5. During the show I will sit with my family. There may be some people I don’t know sitting close to me.

6. During the play, the actors will be on stage. Sometimes the actors might come into the audience where I am sitting. It’s ok if I don’t want to play with them.

7. In the middle of the show there will be a brief intermission (break time). During the intermission, I can use the restroom or get a drink of water. There will also be a counter where DCT staff will be selling concessions (snacks). Or I can bring my own snacks from home.
8. When intermission is over, some of the actors from the play will come on stage to read the names of people who have birthdays coming soon. The people can line up in front of the stage and everyone will sing “Happy Birthday” to them.

9. At the end of the show, the actors 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 actors will be signing autographs. It’s ok if I don’t want to get the actors’ autographs.
STUART LITTLE PARENT TIPSHEET

Dallas Children's Theater welcomes all kids and families to our performances, but we know that some families hesitate to bring their children to live theater without knowing how they might react. Our sensory friendly performances are designed to be a safe and accepting environment for children with sensory sensitivities.

HERE ARE SOME POINTS ABOUT THIS PERFORMANCE:

- There is a Social Story on our website that may help you prepare your child for what to expect when you come to DCT to see “Stuart Little”.

- We will have some activities in the lobby an hour before the show. Families are encouraged to come early and participate.

- At the box office, we will have a sign-up list for "Birthdays". If your child has a birthday in June or July, you can put their name on the list. At the end of the show, some of the actors will read the names on the list, inviting those children to come stand in front of the stage. Then the actors and everyone in the audience will sing happy birthday to them.

- The seating for the show will be general seating.

- There will be helpers stationed in the theater and lobby. They will be wearing white shirts and a badge that says “Helper.”

- During the performance, if your child needs to take a break from the show, you can come to the lobby where you can view a live video feed of the show on a monitor or you can go to a Quiet Room.

- The House lights will be partially on during the show so the theater will not be totally dark. Stage lights and sound levels will be adjusted. Ear plugs will be available, too. Children are free to speak and move while in their seats in reaction to the story being told onstage.

- There will be no intermission with this performance.

- Our DCT store will be open before and after the show so you can purchase items if you like.

- When the show ends, actors will be in the lobby. Children can get autographs from the actors if they want to.

- To help us improve our Sensory Friendly performances, we'd like to encourage all parents to complete the brief survey which you will find with your program and to give us any feedback about your experience at DCT.
Special PR Effort and Performance Fliers

Our advisory committee advised us to develop a special public relations effort for our sensory-friendly performances. The strategy targeted organizations, resource fairs, and events that serve children with developmental disabilities. We developed a colorful one-page flier for each show highlighting the sensory-friendly performance. The content was styled as a letter to parents who have passed up live theater because of their child's special needs. Copies of the fliers appear on the following pages.

We sent each flier electronically to advisory committee members. We also provided suggestions for posts on advisory committee members' Facebook profiles, and asked them to distribute. We encouraged people to request printed fliers if they knew of a place that would benefit from them.

On the flier, families are asked to call and make reservations for the show.

Additionally, the flier was distributed through:

- Facebook, with 3,753 views, 82 likes, and 14 shares in the first month
- Twitter
- Email to all schools known to serve primarily students with disabilities, and an established contact with the Dallas Independent School District
- Email to providers of services to children with developmental disabilities
- 4,000 printed copies for distribution
- The Dallas Museum of Art's Autism Awareness Event in late February
Dear Friend,

Have you passed up family theater because your child has different sensory needs? No more! Dallas Children’s Theater is working to make theater accessible for children with developmental challenges and special needs.

Local community members and two partner theaters with experience in developmental challenges are working with us to make Dallas Children’s Theater a safe and welcoming place for children with sensory differences and other disabilities.

On March 1, 2014 at 1:30 pm, we will offer our first sensory friendly production. We invite you to bring your whole family to see the play for only $5 per person. There will be some fun and engaging activities presented before the play, so plan to come as early as 12:30.

After January 30, there will be a "Social Story," available for you to download from our website at dct.org/sensory. A Social Story is a pictorial guide with simple language explaining what children can expect when they come to the theater. Friendly, supportive staff and community volunteers will minimize stress and offer whatever help you may need to facilitate your theater experience.

General production adaptations we are planning so that the play is sensory friendly include leaving the house lights up a few levels higher than for a standard performance and reducing the sound level. We will also offer a "Quiet Room" for children who may need a break from what may be overwhelming sensory input for them.

If you have questions, we are ready to take your call. If you would like to visit the theater in advance, please do. Please make a reservation today by calling 214-978-0110.

We truly look forward to having you as our guest at the theater.

Sincerely,
Robin Flott Executive Artistic Director
Nancy Schaefer Education Director
Artie Olsen Associate Artistic Director
Sandra Session Robertson Senior Director of Communications and Philanthropy

Dallas Children’s Theater is a participant in the Audience Revolution Program, funded by the Davis-Baker Charitable Foundation and administered by Theatre Communications Group, the national organization for the professional not-for-profit American theater.

Austism Speaks is also providing a grant to DCT so that it can document this year’s experience. Other local community partners include the Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities at UT Southwestern, University of North Texas Department of Speech and Hearing Sciences and the Health Science Center and the Autism Center, Children’s Medical Center and the Dallas Museum of Art.
SENSORY FRIENDLY PERFORMANCE
SATURDAY, JULY 12 • 4:30PM
Specifically designed for children with autism, Asperger syndrome, Down syndrome and other sensory processing disorders and special needs.

TICKETS $5 PER PERSON
To purchase, call (214) 740-0051
For more information visit dct.org/sensory

FRIENDSHIP FOREVER!
ENJOYED BY AGES 5 AND UP
By E.B. White
Adapted by Joseph Robinette

The performance will take place at
The Rosewood Center for Family Arts
5938 Skillman St.
Dallas 75231
SENSORY FRIENDLY PERFORMANCE
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11 • 4:30PM
Specifically designed for children with autism, Asperger syndrome, Down syndrome and other sensory processing disorders and special needs.

Rapunzel! Rapunzel!
A very hairy fairy tale

September 19 – October 26, 2014 Enjoyed by ages 4 and up

The performance will take place at
The Rosewood Center for Family Arts
5938 Skillman St. Dallas 75231

For more information visit dct.org/sensory

To purchase, call (214) 740-0051

SPECIAL TICKET PRICE
$10 PER PERSON

More details on the back.
Additional PR

For each performance, we distributed a press release to a wide range of media outlets in Dallas-Fort Worth, an example of which is included on the following two pages.

We placed an ad in the Guide Live, the entertainment weekly tabloid published by the Dallas Morning News, and in Dallas THRIVE Magazine.

We featured notices about the performances on the DCT Blog and sent out information in our E-newsletters.

We developed two blog posts for Theatre Communications Group, and each was posted on their website, and we posted them to the DCT Facebook page, www.facebook.com/DallasChildrensTheater.

Response to our outreach

We received letters of support from a number of our advisory council members, including

- Pat Robbins of the Dallas chapter of Autism Speaks
- Vicki Dennis, Dr. Stormi Pulver-White, and Dr. Alison Wilkinson-Smith of The Crystal Charity Ball Autism Project/Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities at Children’s & UT Southwestern Medical Centers (the only clinic in the nation with disease-specific care certification through The Joint Commission for its diagnostic evaluation and family care coordination services)
- Dr. Haylie Miller of the University of North Texas Health Science Center

Long before the performance, we began receiving responses to our effort. One of the early responses came by email:

"I LOVE that you are doing this play with sensory integration!!!! It gave me a lump in my throat! For those with disabilities and their parents this is a dream. A place to take our children where they will fit in or at least be understood and accepted is rare...even these days when you think it wouldn't be. Parents can actually share family time out of their homes, without constant tension and worrying how their child will react...or how the public will react, is such a help for so many. I will spread the word and definitely see if we can't come! THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU!"

Two staff members from the University of North Texas Kristin Farmer Autism Center, who are members of our advisory council, generated a press release, and an article ran on NT Daily.com on February 26.
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 17, 2014

DALLAS CHILDREN’S THEATER INTRODUCES NEW SENSORY FRIENDLY PERFORMANCES FOR SPECIAL NEEDS AUDIENCES

(Dallas, TX) Through a national grant from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and Theatre Communications Group, Dallas Children’s Theater (DCT) is excited to be able to provide their first season of sensory friendly performances that give children with autism and others who need adaptations the opportunity to comfortably experience live theater with their families.

On Saturday, March 1st at 1:30 pm, DCT will present their first sensory friendly production ever with “Go, Dog. Go!” a family favorite by P.D. Eastman that uses single-syllable words in rhythmic repetition for beginning readers that honors the simplicity of the world around us.

Nancy Schaeffer is the Project Director, DCT’s Education Director and also happens to be the Director of “Go Dog Go.” Nancy states, “I’ve had many parents ask for this kind of programming over the years and finally this seed grant makes it possible for us to offer our first sensory friendly performance.”

General production adaptations being planned so that the show is sensory friendly include leaving the house lights up a few levels higher than for a standard performance and reducing the overall sound level. We will also offer a “Quiet Room" for children who need a break.

Board Certified Clinical Neuropsychologist, Alison Wilkinson-Smith, with Children’s Medical Center Dallas shared her enthusiasm, “In my time at Children’s Medical Center, facilitating a drama-based social skills group for children on the autism spectrum, I have seen first-hand the benefits that drama can have for this population. I also hear feedback from families that they are constantly in search of community programs that are both accommodating to and fun for children with special needs. . . I am excited about the opportunity to support your project however I can.”

The modest grant will enable DCT to produce three shows this year. It is hoped that future funding from local sources will help sustain this important work.
Patricia W. Robbins, the Texas Director for Autism Speaks, said, “This urge to avoid judgment affects family get-togethers, neighborhood gatherings, scouting, worship, school, dance classes, athletics—all the wonderful, enriching activities that other families are able to navigate. So most often, they all stay home. Knowing that organizations, such as DCT, care enough to make special efforts to include them can be life changing! If they find that they can plan and successfully attend a theater performance, JUST IMAGINE!”

Autism Speaks is also providing a grant to DCT so that it can document this year’s experience. Local partners include Autism Speaks, the Center for Autism and Developmental Disabilities at UT Southwestern, University of North Texas Department of Speech and Hearing Sciences and the Health Science Center and the Autism Center, Children’s Medical Center and the Dallas Museum of Art.

Dallas Children’s Theater is a participant in the Audience (R)Evolution Program, funded by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and administered by Theatre Communications Group, the national organization for the professional not-for-profit American theatre.

With the mission of inspiring young people to live creative and productive lives through the art of the theater, DCT looks forward to providing this opportunity to create a positive, fun atmosphere for families with sensory friendly needs. A child with autism who loves theater and the arts will be excited about this new program at DCT and, hopefully, with the transformational experience of theater, it will inspire them to creatively contribute to the world and their community in their own way.

DCT wants to make sure families have no barriers offering a first-show intro price of $5.

**Sensory Friendly Performance Schedule**

- **Go Dog. Go!** Saturday, March 1st at 1:30 pm
- **Stuart Little:** Saturday, July 12th at 4:30 pm
- Fall date to be determined

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

Ticket Prices: $5 per person
Box Office: 214-740-0051


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In February, the National Autism Network alerted us that they added "Stuart Little Sensory Friendly Performance - Dallas Children's Theater" to their nationwide events calendar for the autism community. We were invited to join www.NationalAutismNetwork.com at no cost and post future events.

The day before our first sensory-friendly performance, local ABC affiliate WFAA produced a news story highlighting the Go, Dog. Go! performance.
The North Dallas Gazette published a story on the year’s final performance, below.

Dallas Children’s Theater offers third sensory-friendly performance

Dallas Children’s Theater (DCT) is working to make theater accessible for children with developmental disabilities. Repurposed! Repurposed! A Very Happy Fairy Tale on Saturday, Oct. 11, will offer the third sensory-friendly offering by the theater this season. The show was created and directed by Sue Martin, founder of DCT, and has been well-received by families and children. The performance is designed to be a safe and enjoyable experience for all ages, with reduced sensory overload and increased opportunities for engagement.

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Dallas Black Dance Theatre presents Black on Black

One of the highlights of the Dallas Black Dance Theatre season is the intimate and daring Black on Black series. Up close and personal, Black on Black features original, cutting-edge choreography that is created by the firm and second company dancers of Dallas Black Dance Theatre. Scheduled for Friday, October 17 at 7:00 p.m. in the studios at DBDT, the dancers will take us into their own creative space to experience the art of performance dance from a whole new perspective.

This year’s performance will feature the original work of Alex Longley, Kansas Wood, and Chelsea Williams. Also appearing during the performance will be the return of last year’s audience favorite – Monologues – by Sean Smith. However, Smith presents us with new voices within his usual range of tone in tone.

Joining DBDT for the evening in special guest roles: Scapa Top Company. Under the artistic direction of Kathy Hayfill, Scapa Top Company will bring the spirit of tap dance back to the stage and continue the legacy of the American art form.

____

STEPPIN’ OUT LIVE WITH BEN VEREEN

Sat, Oct. 13, 2014 at 8:00 pm

Broadway legend & star of stage, screen & television, Tony Award winner and Palme d’Or winner

The North Dallas Gazette
A February 20, 2015 symposium, “Infusion and Inclusion,” represents the culmination of our pilot year.
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:

**Go, Dog. Go!**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Attendees Heard About the Performance</th>
<th># of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friend/family member</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notre Dame School</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My son's therapy practice</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dallas ISD</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dallas Morning News</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ad/Ad maybe <em>Dallas Child</em></td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Speech &amp; Hearing Center, UNT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frisco ISD</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren Center</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artie Olaisen (DCT employee)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense-able Gym</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oak Hill Academy</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Handwriting Clinic message board</td>
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### Stuart Little

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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>DMA</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>School</td>
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<tr>
<td>My son's therapy practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Warren Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEROES</td>
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<tr>
<td>Warrior Moms &amp; Dads</td>
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<td>Our Children's House/Baylor</td>
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### Rapunzel

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<tr>
<th>How Attendees Heard About the Performance</th>
<th># of Responses</th>
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<td>Friend/family member</td>
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<td>Flower Mound Elementary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Warrior Moms &amp; Dads Facebook page</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEROES</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Happened to find it on the DCT website</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCT emails or mailing</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Learning
We learned many valuable insights from advisory committee meetings. Committee members alerted us that many parents with intentions to attend the performance will not make it, due to their child's needs that day. During an initial tour of the theater, committee members stressed that the opening statement should include a rule that only actors are allowed on the stage. They suggested establishing a "safe" seating section if children do not want interaction with actors.

Staff training
In January, ten DCT staff members, including box office staff, received training from then Autism Speaks' Director Pat Robbins and Dr. Haylie Miller of the University of North Texas. The pair provided valuable insight about what to expect from children with sensory differences and their parents. They stressed that to truly be inclusive, we must focus on more than just the play – we must address each family's entire experience, beginning with the first phone call. As a result, we develop a Box Office Q & A, which is included as an appendix to this document.

The goal of our effort, the trainers said, should be to minimize distractions in order to promote focus on the dramatic experience. They said that children with autism can get distracted by many things. They may hear the light buzzing or feel a tag scratching their neck to the point that they can't let it go, preventing them from concentrating on something more important.

DCT staff members' eyes were opened to the kinds of issues families face which we perhaps often take for granted. Haylie and Pat told us to expect a wide range of functional levels, including minimal verbal skills. Trainers encouraged us not to use slang such as “take a breath,” because the child literally will do that, and may not process it the way a typically developing child might. They said children on the autism spectrum tend to be very concrete. They said setting rules clearly is a good idea, but cautioned that DCT staff will have to also follow those rules and lead by example.

Our trainers shared with us that some audience members might be very affectionate, and walked us through how to think about handling that affection. They talked about the kinds of questions the parents might ask ahead of time and why. They encouraged us to invite parents to tour the space.
ahead of time if they want to. Haylie stressed the importance of giving children with developmental delays the same experience that typically developing children get, with changes that allow them to be comfortable in the experience. The trainers helped sensitize us to the families' worlds and told us that our actions can present a welcoming and warm change in the midst of their often chaotic lives. The sense around the room seemed to be one of pride for what this effort would mean to these families.

Takeaways included using simple, concrete language (beginning interactions with three-to-five word sentences); being okay with a wide range of behaviors as long as they aren't harmful; and positioning volunteers at all exits to prevent children from leaving unexpectedly. We also learned that the more we can do to support and provide information so that children and parents know what to expect, the more we will relieve what often can be a significant level of anxiety. A parent advisory sheet could advise that earplugs will be available and that it is okay to bring noise-canceling headphones.

While we had originally proposed to offer the first performance at no charge in order to remove any financial barriers to attendance, our trainers strongly suggested that we charge a nominal price so that families feel some investment in the valuable programming. Based on this advice, we decided to go back to our first-year funders and ask for an adjustment to the grant that would allow us to charge $5 per person for the first two shows, ramping up to $10 for subsequent shows with hopes of sustaining the program longterm.

**Theater Partnerships**
Through a generous grant from The Doris Duke Foundation and Theatre Communications Group, we began dialogue with two theaters that already had implemented sensory-friendly performances, Orlando Repertory Theatre and Nashville Children's Theatre. We scheduled visits to each theater in order to experience their sensory friendly performances firsthand.

**Visit to Orlando Repertory Theatre**
Education Director Nancy Schaeffer and Senior Director of Communications and Philanthropy Sandra Session-Robertson visited Orlando Rep in December 2013 to experience their sensory-friendly performance of *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*. Children in the audience were active in their seats, many having brought their special lovie-toy from home, and they clearly loved the experience. It was so heartwarming to watch. One child got overstimulated at one point, and his parents took him out for a short time. They returned and enjoyed the rest of the show. Many children engaged afterwards with the actors, especially Santa, to get autographs. One item of feedback from audience members was that the house lights were too bright. The remainder of feedback was gratitude for the theater offering this special programming.
Visit to Nashville Children's Theatre

Education Director Nancy Schaeffer, Inclusion Project Coordinator Gina Waits, and Marketing Director Trish Long visited Nashville Children's Theatre in April 2014 to see the sensory-friendly performance of *Lyle The Crocodile*. Lobby activities were coordinated by volunteers, as is the theater's regular practice. They also had an information table where their local autism organization was stationed. They had made about 100 tickets available through their local agencies. This grassroots outreach is the marketing strategy they have found to be most successful. There were just over 200 individuals in the audience, so the theater was a little over one-third full. The audience was comprised of families with children on the autism spectrum and families with typically developing children. There was no scheduled intermission, so snacks were sold prior to the show.

Ushers were friendly and helpful, and wore a small square name badge. An usher passed out programs and surveys to families before the show. A staff member gave a live curtain speech, and announced the comfort room/cry room in the back of the theater, and said that the sound levels can be adjusted further in that room. There is a low light on for all shows in the comfort room. The staff member said that audience members were free to react to the show in any way. They held a drawing for a t-shirt and a book, calling out names from a bowl. The children who won were overjoyed. The staff member asked for the surveys to be completed and returned after the show.

The overall sound level reduction was the major accommodation for Nashville's sensory-friendly performance. Also an actor reduced the sound of his whistle blow for a parade scene. The house lights were not adjusted for the performance. A staff member was seated in a pool of light near the stage, preventing a total blackout. When something startling was about to happen, the staff person held up a red light wand. It seemed there were some startling moments that did not receive a light wand indication. Due to the darkness of the theater, we were not able to observe the audience well. However, these accommodations seemed to work well for the audience, and we heard lots of enjoyment. We noticed that a few children and parents exited and returned, and one family was said to have left early. There were no after-show activities.

We enjoyed our experience at Nashville Children's Theatre immensely, and it provided much food for thought about our second sensory-friendly performance.

Advisory Committee Meeting

After the second sensory-friendly performance, we gathered our advisory committee members for a meeting to discuss our progress and some of the requests for adjustments.
Volunteers

We were able to recruit more than 45 volunteers from the University of North Texas, Notre Dame School, Dallas ISD, and Dallas Children’s Theater who helped at one or more shows. We began recruiting volunteers in December to help with our March 1 performance. We sent out an email to all of our contacts with specifics of what we needed in the way of volunteers. We followed up individually with contacts in order to secure the volunteers we needed. The guidelines we provided to volunteers appear on the following page.

We truly could not have carried out this project without our amazing volunteers who were stationed at the facility entrance and throughout the building to welcome and assist patrons as needed. Volunteers also guided craft table activities and made wonderful face paint creations.

In addition to assigned projects, volunteers performed numerous spontaneous "rescues" throughout the year. During one show, a volunteer offered to play with a baby on the floor so that her mother could focus on the theater experience with her other two children with special needs. When one of the other children got up to head out of the theater, another volunteer quickly sat by the remaining seated child while the mom followed after the exiting child. In another instance, a child got excited and jumped up in the aisle for a moment or two. A volunteer calmly stood up and was at the ready, but in this case, no help was needed.

A huge thank you to our 2014 Sensory-Friendly Performance volunteers:

Jaga Archarya       Taylor Gillum       Manon McCollum
Nirmala Acharya    Justine Hamilton     Dr. Haylier Miller
Umesh Bhandari    Taylor Hill         Kimberly Onyia
Ganga Bhandari    Theresa Hill         Stormi Pulver-White
Leah Bellows     Heather Hines         Danielle Rush
Marvin Bellows    Connor Housewright   Hannah Shirey
Henry Bolt       Donshea Johnson       Josh Stein
Elizabeth Bryant  Yoga Karki          Demi Tomasides
Gwen Cassel       Sarmila Khatiwoda     Eileen Wade
Heather Chandler  Oliver Kennedy       Meredith Wagon
Patricia Chaves   Jessica Kennedy      Francesca Wimer
Izzy Desaloms    Kate Langley         Jack Witcher
Sara Do          Jennifer Lawson       Grace Woodmansee
Margot Desaloms   Alex Matthews        Becky Yates
Kennedy Fisketjon  Lauren Matthews      Griffin
Mark Goodloe      Emily McBroom
Sensory-Friendly Performance Tips for Staff and Volunteers

Thank you for helping with our Sensory Friendly production. This show is specifically designed for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Asperger syndrome, Down syndrome and other sensory processing disorders and special needs. For this performance, we are calling you Helpers.

Helpful Tips:
- When helping a patron with ASD, give clear, direct instructions. Speak evenly and calmly.
- Simple “yes” or “no” questions are best. Give patrons time to process questions.
- Some patrons may have a hard time making eye contact with you.
- Some patrons may feel threatened by physical closeness and contact. Do not touch the individual.
- Some patrons might react to overstimulation with frustration or a temper tantrum. If this happens, please let the individual’s caregiver handle the situation.
- Some patrons may need help entering or exiting the theatre, and locating bathrooms and Comfort Areas.

Comfort Areas:
- Patrons can always come to the lobby to watch the live feed of the performance on the video monitors.
- Should patrons need a more confined, quiet space, they can go to the Music Room or Video Room which we are designating as our Comfort Rooms.
- We will have Helpers stationed in the theater and lobby to assist and direct patrons.

Pre-Show Activities:
- Before the show, there will be Pre-Show Activities in the Lobby and Gallery Hallway. Helpers will be available to assist patrons with these activities.

Seating Patrons:
- There is no assigned seating for this performance. Patrons can sit where they want.
- There are some points in the show when the actors come into the house and interact with the audience. The two top rows of the theater will be assigned as an area where patrons can sit if they don’t want the actors to approach them.
- When we give patrons programs we will also give them a survey to fill out after the show. There will be pencils and extra copies of the survey in the lobby.

During the Show:
- The house lights will be on during the performance.
- It is ok for patrons to speak and move in their seats in reaction to the play.

Intermission:
- This show is performed in 2 acts. Act 1 is about 35 minutes long and Act 2 is about 30 minutes long.
- There will be a 15 minute intermission between acts.
- Patrons can use this time to go to the bathroom, purchase concessions (no food or drink allowed in the theater), etc.

Post Show:
- After the show, the actors will come to the lobby to sign autographs.
- We will have Helpers with baskets in the lobby to collect completed surveys.
Production of *Go, Dog. Go!*

We began rehearsals of *Go, Dog. Go!* in January. Several advisory council members attended a rehearsal of the show and gave feedback about how to make the performance sensory friendly. The following sensory-friendly adaptations were made to the performance:

- We offered a deeply reduced ticket price of $5.
- We customized the curtain speech with specially worded rules and an invitation to families and children to feel free to express themselves.
- Overall volume was lowered at the sound board.
- The volume of MC Dog's whistle was reduced by the actor.
- Playing of wood blocks during "Dogs in Trees" song was cut.
- Dropping of large wooden plank was cut; instead actors set it down.
- House lights were set at half brightness for the entire show.
- Flashing lights in both sections of jackhammer were cut.
- Flashing red and green lights on the traffic light were cut.
- Flashing light with the confetti at show end was cut.
- The back three rows of audience were not subject to actor interaction.
- A rehearsal with actors and crew was held to incorporate sensory-friendly adaptations. Actors and crew members were compensated.
- In addition to typical photography props and stand-ins, we developed a hand-held photography cut-out board for children in wheelchairs.
- We designated a Comfort Room for children who become overwhelmed and need a quieter space.
**Production of Stuart Little**

Our second sensory-friendly performance was *Stuart Little*. Advisory Council members attended a show in late June to determine what adaptations were needed.

*Stuart Little* was a very different show than *Go, Dog! Go.* It was noted that the play was more language-based and might not be as engaging for some children with developmental delays. However, the show required fewer customized changes to make it sensory-friendly. Committee members suggested ways to ensure better spacing of pre-show activities to provide a more comfortable environment for families.

The following sensory-friendly adaptations were made to the performance:

- We offered a deeply reduced ticket price of $5.
- We customized the curtain speech with specially worded rules and an invitation to families and children to feel free to express themselves.  
- Overall volume was lowered at the sound board.
- House lights were set at half brightness for the entire show.
- Stuart’s flashlight was moved to search above the heads of audience members.
- A rehearsal with actors and crew was held to incorporate sensory-friendly adaptations. Actors and crew members were compensated.
- In addition to typical photography props and stand-ins, we developed a hand-held photography cut-out board for children in wheelchairs.
- We designated a Comfort Room for children who become overwhelmed and need a quieter space.
Production of Rapunzel! Rapunzel! A Very Hairy Fairy Tale


The following sensory-friendly adaptations were made to the performance:

- We offered a deeply reduced ticket price of $10.
- We customized the curtain speech with specially worded rules and an invitation to families and children to feel free to express themselves. We addressed the mildly scary theme by saying that there are some surprises during the show and that it can be fun to be surprised when you know you’re safe.
- Overall volume was lowered at the sound board.
- House lights were set at half brightness for the entire show.
- Some of the pitch changes in the stepmother's voice were softened by the actor.
- Search lights in the audience chase and storm scenes were cut.
- The back three rows of audience were not subject to actor interaction.
- A rehearsal with actors and crew was held to incorporate sensory-friendly adaptations. Actors and crew members were compensated.
- In addition to typical photography props and stand-ins, we developed a hand-held photography cut-out board for children in wheelchairs.
- We designated a Comfort Room for children who become overwhelmed and need a quieter space.
Celebrate Inclusion Weekend!

We were thrilled to be able to host a Celebrate Inclusion Weekend with our partners from Nashville Children’s Theatre and Orlando Repertory Theatre in support of our first sensory-friendly performance. Our partners saw a standard performance of *Go, Dog. Go!* followed by the sensory-friendly performance. We held two roundtable discussions as well as informal dialogue opportunities over the course of the weekend. Partners also had the opportunity to experience other aspects of Dallas, including another theater performance.

The complete schedule follows the photos.

Photos: Patty Bates-Ballard
Celebrate Inclusion Weekend! Schedule

Friday 2/28/14
9:00 a.m.  Pick up from hotel and transport to DCT - Breakfast
10:00 a.m.  Go, Dog. Go!  Student matinee performance
11:30 a.m.  Tour of DCT’s Rosewood Center for Family Arts
12:30 p.m.  Lunch with local and national partners to discuss what is happening in the field
2:30 p.m.  Field trip to the Dallas Arts District
5:30 p.m.  Return to hotel
6:45 p.m.  Pick up from hotel and transport to DCT Board Member Karen Travis’ home
7:00 p.m.  Dinner

Saturday 3/1/14
Breakfast at hotel - on your own - please charge to your room.
11:45 a.m.  Pick up from hotel and transport to DCT
12:00 p.m.  Box lunch at DCT
12:30 p.m.  Preshow activities begin in lobby
1:30 p.m.  Sensory Friendly show of Go, Dog. Go!
3:00 p.m.  Debrief with local and national partners
4:30 p.m.  Return to hotel
5:45 p.m.  Pick up from hotel and transport to dinner with DCT Staff
8:00 p.m.  Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike by Uptown Players
at the Kalita Humphreys Theater

Our partner theater representatives are listed below. *Indicates they attended the Celebrate Inclusion weekend.

Nashville Children’s Theater

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>*Riley Braem</th>
<th>Teaching Artist</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*Kathryn Colegrove</td>
<td>Managing Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scot Copeland</td>
<td>Producing Artistic Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Alicia Fuss</td>
<td>Director of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brenda Green</td>
<td>Marketing Director</td>
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<td>Rachel Hamilton</td>
<td>Education Program Manager</td>
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Orlando Repertory Theatre

<table>
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<tr>
<th>*Sara Brunow</th>
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<tr>
<td>Gene Columbus</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>*Brian Diaz</td>
<td>Company Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vicki Landon</td>
<td>Development Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>*Jeffrey Revels</td>
<td>Artistic Director</td>
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The Sensory-Friendly Performance Initiative at Dallas Children’s Theater
The response to the weekend from our partners to the weekend was very gratifying.

Jeffrey Revels, Artistic Director of the Orlando Repertory Theatre, wrote this: "Thank you so much and thank you to the entire DCT staff for such a wonderful visit; you were perfect hosts! I enjoyed every minute- seeing the theatre being the number one highlight and then seeing how well-received the sensory-friendly was so wonderful. The show was great, Nancy, and we sure loved that MC Dog! And our field trips were fantastic- The Sixth Floor Museum was something else- I have read the entire souvenir coffee table book now and am collecting all the movies I now want to see (Parkland, JFK, etc.) and Kathryn, I know you are upset at having missed it (!), but the Bush Library was very interesting and so glad I could see it. I had only read Sonya and so on and on before and was thrilled to see it onstage and it was so very well-done; I loved the set! So, thank you, thank you, thank you for a fantastic visit and I am so thrilled that we have all figured out that we need to and know how to serve these young people. Knowing that this was some of their first experience ever with theatre is enough to fill your tank for the whole year- and I bet, they will be back!"

Orlando Rep incorporated several changes as a result of their visit to Dallas Children's Theater. Based on recommendations from an Autism Speaks volunteer in Dallas, they have collaborated with the Orlando Chapter of Autism Speaks, in addition to their existing collaboration with Autism Society of Greater Orlando. Orlando Rep previously had been quite conservative with technical modifications to their sensory-friendly performances. The visit to Dallas spurred conversation about new modification possibilities. They also updated their survey questions with questions from DCT’s sensory-friendly survey. In addition to their social story, they implemented a coping skills sheet, an abbreviated version of the social story intended to be referenced during the actual excursion to the theatre. This was an idea that came out of their visit to DCT.
Performance of Go, Dog. Go!
The first sensory-friendly performance at Dallas Children’s Theater was a resounding success. On March 1, 2014, 301 children with developmental disabilities, their siblings, and caregivers watched Go, Dog. Go! The theater was full of laughing, delighted children.

One young man recited many of the lines of the book out loud with the actors. Another laughed loud and long when one of the dogs threw him a ball. During intermission, we asked the audience how many were here for the first time. Approximately 75% said they were first-timers.

Performance of Stuart Little
We featured Stuart Little for our second sensory-friendly performance on July 12, to a house of 338! This play required fewer customized adaptations than Go, Dog. Go! We continued with the sensory-friendly sound and light adaptations to the performance, as well as providing the customized curtain speech and Comfort Room.

The only customized adaptation for this play was to have Stuart’s flashlight search above the heads of the audience.

Performance of Rapunzel! Rapunzel! A Very Hairy Fairy Tale
Rapunzel! Rapunzel! A Very Hairy Fairy Tale was our third sensory-friendly performance of our pilot year. We were thrilled to have 194 children and family members in attendance on October 11.

We again provided sensory-friendly sound and light adaptations to the performance, as well as providing the customized curtain speech and Comfort Room. Flashing lights and high pitched voices also were moderated.
Pre- and Post-Show Activities

We provided a range of activities and resources in the lobby prior to the sensory-friendly performances. Pre-show activities included the following:

- Clowns
- Face painting
- Craft table
- Photography props
- Information tables

Afterwards, the actors signed autographs and posed for photos.

After receiving feedback from the first performance, we took care to ensure that the activities at subsequent performances were spaced well apart from each other to minimize participant crowding. Stanchions with ropes helped eager children wait their turn to sign autographs. We received some feedback that information tables at our performances are redundant because parents said they have information available at many events already. We did continue to provide information at a table.
Our first sensory-friendly performance audience waiting for *Go, Dog. Go!* to begin.  Photo: Karen Almond

Audience members enjoy the sensory-friendly performance of *Stuart Little*.  Photo: Patty Bates-Ballard
The Sensory-Friendly Performance Initiative at Dallas Children's Theater
**Go, Dog. Go! Evaluation**

One of our partner theaters shared their evaluation survey with us, and we adjusted it to fit the objectives we had laid out in our funding proposal. A copy of the printed survey was distributed to each family at the beginning of the performance as they entered the theater. We also made an online version of the survey available at [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com). The final version of our evaluation survey is included as an appendix of this document.

During intermission, we reminded families to complete the survey. Then we asked children to raise their hands if they were enjoying the performance, and if they would like to come again. We asked volunteers to observe the responses, and to observe the comfort level of non-verbal children in the audience. Results are provided below.

**Go, Dog. Go! Survey and Observation Results**

The survey and theater observations evaluations were overwhelming positive:
- 100% of parents said their child with sensory sensitivities enjoyed the show.
- 95% of verbal children said they liked the experience/wanted to return to see another show.
- 95% of non-verbal children were visibly at ease and/or engaged during the performance.
- 98% of parents said they believed their children were comfortable during the performance.
- 89% of parents said they believed their children grew or learned through the experience.
- 95% of parents said their children had a positive interaction with a person they didn’t know.
- 97% of parents said they would like to come to another sensory-friendly performance.

**Go, Dog. Go! survey comments**

- A VERY BIG thank you for doing this for our family. Your very gifted performers may never realize what a great thing they did but we very much appreciate it. Please tell them thank you and please tell them not only did they entertain but they also made a difference to a little boy and his parents.
- We live 5 minutes away. We’ve never come to see a show due to the price and the risk of our autistic son behaving poorly. The $5 ticket and sensory adjustments allowed us to enjoy a theater show. Thank you!! It was memorable.
- It was great being able to take my child to the theatre without worrying how he may behave in that moment. He did great but you never know and being in an environment where it was okay was beyond comforting to me as a parent. Thank you!
- It is wonderful to know that these children and young adults can enjoy the same theater experience as others, it is so difficult to find activities for families with special needs - it was by far outstanding.
- Thank you. We spend lots of money on various therapies for my son. We have 3 children total...and $20 for a ticket for each child plus an adult is just not in our budget. The lower price allowed all to enjoy! Thank you so very much.

Photo: Patty Bates-Ballard
• Thank you to all involved in sponsoring this event for "special" families! It's wonderful to have some family time at a place where it's ok to be special.
• We are grateful to the DCT for providing this service. The low ticket price was a major factor for us.
• It was so awesome to see something like this done for the kids. Unless we've been to a venue before, it's hard to know if our son will be overstimulated or not...... THANKS SO MUCH, we will be at the next show!!!
• I love how my son was acknowledged by being handed a program booklet.
• The DCT staff were very friendly.
• Our son has autism/PDD & Sensory and it was great. Thanks for thinking of them and offering this.
• There was a boy in front of us having a hard time and it was nice to see the mom get up and have an option to take him to a quiet area, etc. We had such a great time!
• My daughter was happy to find out that the person sitting next to her shared the same name!
• We really enjoyed it and will return for the next show on July 12.
• It's an outstanding thing to offer the special need community.
• She smiled the whole time! She was calm. A+ Please have more!!"
• He loved meeting the dogs and talking to them.
• He was able to enjoy the live performance - his first.
• He sat there the whole time and watched. He smiled, he clapped - he really liked it.
• My child liked it because it was funny and entertaining.
• He loved it and I'm surprised he was excited to go back in after intermission. (I was worried once he walked out he may not want to go back in!)
• It was nice not to worry about "disrupting" others in case there was an outburst. It was nice and quiet, more so than I anticipated.
• They had a wonderful time and loved the interaction with the actors.

Comments about learning and growth
• She learned about colors.
• He was able to see a storybook come to life and it added depth and meaning.
• They learned more colors and how to interact with others
• Exposure to creativity.
• I noticed a lot of children get "scared" or overstimulated the first time everyone started clapping but as the show went on they all seemed to adapt to the applause. It was great!
• The play also met many, many, many of my son's speech and language goals.
• Practiced auditorium etiquette.
• He was able to watch and listen without his music headphones. He usually gets distresed without them.
• LOVED it! My daughter had the best time and sat thru the whole performance. She can't do that at the movies.....
• She was so engaged she stopped leaning her head back!!
• He ran up to the yellow dog to say hi before he got shy.
Comments about additional adjustments we could make to improve our sensory-friendly performances

- A lot of sensory kids are easily overstimulated, and all the activity inside was a bit overwhelming for my little one. So we just kept going outside, which was good, but just something to keep in mind.
- I heard one mom talking that all the activity in the lobby was too much for her child. Maybe have the activities spread out more down the hall where the bathrooms were?
- Provide wheelchair spots closer to the stage. We couldn't see very well over the row in front of us.
- It was very cold in the theater.
- Plastic bubbles were a problem for some.
- No need for information tables. We get it everywhere.
- I felt the sound was still too loud in some instances. My son was holding his ears a lot, but we were sitting in the 2nd row.
- More food/drink choices.
- Well, the social story was great but it had a photo of the dog on the building, and being that it was the first photo in the social story, kind of the most important for success and there was no dog on the roof!
- Allow snacking in theatre (but I think that goes for any kids performance).
- Everyone was very nice, yet my son was sensitive when someone was trying to help at the coloring station. I think it was the direct attention that put him off.

Additional emails after the performance

"Just wanted to let you know that my son had a blast at Go, Dog. Go! yesterday. My mom enjoyed taking him. He loved the clown before the show and then really liked the show. My mom said he laughed a lot. We will definitely go again. My mom said there were a lot of "regular" kids there too. Thanks so much for getting this started! My son went to sleep holding his program with the dog's autograph. So awesome!"

"I was there with my son with Autism/PDD and SPD and we had such a great experience. Thank you, thank you for adapting plays for children with these needs. You could feel the warmth of the staff, actors and audience. The parents were relaxed because no matter what, we were amongst people with compassion and understanding. Truly allows the parents to relax and feel free to enjoy with their child. THANKS we can't wait for the next one!!!"

"I can't thank you enough for helping our family enjoy Saturday's production of Go, Dog. Go! The entire staff is so friendly and helpful. I especially appreciated everyone pitching in to help keep an eye on my younger son while my older one was acclimating himself to the theater in the 'quiet room.' Thank you for taking the time to show us around the theater and let the boys explore the stage a little. Hopefully the next time we come they will feel comfortable and we can actually make it into the theater for the show. :-) I hope that you will continue to have sensory-friendly productions in the future. I will spread the word to other families with special needs children and let them know about this great opportunity!"
Thanks again!

From the Square Pegs online message board:

Hi All,

Thank you so much for spreading the word about the “Go, Dog, Go!” special needs feature. It was awesome! My family had a great time. My son didn’t cover his ears until the finale! The finale included the characters dancing on bubble wrap and a loud blast of confetti, which was not quite low volume. But this was a big success for us. The entire production was so creative. I feel so blessed to witness such creativity and share it with the kiddos. Thank you.

********

I totally agree, the Go, Dog. Go! show was an awesome opportunity and I’m looking forward to the next special needs showing. So glad that Dallas culture organizations are experimenting more with accessibility. Let’s be sure that the group is on the mailing list or that we keep each other abreast.

From Sense-able Gym:

"This is so exciting! I posted your link on both of our FB pages, and on our parent support group page. The response is amazing. I’m so happy you guys are doing things like this. Let me know if you ever have camps for our special need kiddos to attend. I am continually reading about how wonderful drama is for our kids with Autism, and I’m thinking it would be just as exhilarating for many of our other kiddos too!

I’ll get your info posted to our blog, Tumblr, and Twitter accounts too…Please feel free to continue the communication with your programs! My parents really appreciate it!"

Shauna Mable

Thank you so much for offering performances for those with sensory and other special needs. As the mother of a child with physical and developmental (including behavioral) differences/disabilities I applaud you. We are a family of five – three girls, one with CHARGE Syndrome. There are not many things we can do as a family – and you created something we could do together. (My daughter, Emma started attending your camps last year and we love them!) I am also the President of the Board for Chase’s Place School, a Dallas area private school for children with moderate to severe physical and/or developmental delays/disabilities. This is exactly the type of activity our students and families could attend. Thank you for thinking of us...not many do.

Very Sincerely,

Lori Myers
Support
Board member Sharron Hunt made the first significant contribution to the initiative. With learning-different children of her own, she was excited to do her part to get this important effort moving in the right direction.

One family sent a $200 donation to thank us after the first performance, saying, "Please accept this gift in appreciation of your performance on March 1 of GO, DOG.GO! My grandson had a glorious time at his first theater experience, and I was thrilled to let him express much joy in his special way! We will return in July for another experience of a non-judgmental outing. With much appreciation. PS: Slappy and Monday were fantastic before the performance!"

The First Unitarian Church of Dallas awarded DCT’s sensory-friendly performance initiative their First Sunday of July collection. We were invited to speak to the congregation from the pulpit at both services to describe the effort and its impact on children in their own congregation and beyond. The donation totaled $3,149.20.

Dr. Daniel Kanter, Sandra Session-Robertson, Patty Bates-Ballard, and Kory Ballard at First Unitarian Church
Photo: Chuck Goulding
**Stuart Little Evaluation**

The response to July's *Stuart Little* was overwhelmingly positive. We met or exceeded our goals in every area.

100% of parents said their child with sensory sensitivities enjoyed the show.
90% of non-verbal children were visibly at ease and/or engaged during the performance.
94% of parents said they believed their children were comfortable during the performance.
85% of parents said they believed their children grew or learned through the experience.
96% of parents said their children had a positive interaction with a person they didn’t know.
96% of parents said they would like to come to another sensory-friendly performance.

For this evaluation, we asked specifically what specials needs were present. The table below quantifies the answers we received:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Special Needs</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autism/ASD</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensory issues</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADHD/Attention</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Down Syndrome</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stroke</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seizures</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nearsighted –won’t wear glasses</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing impairment</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cerebral Palsy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive disability</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older teens/adults with sensory needs</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No special needs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Audience comments about Stuart Little**

- It warmed my heart to see my 5 year old son with autism laugh out loud at his first play ever.
- Being able to be here and not feel judged for our kids talking or moving about was wonderful. Thank you for doing this.
- I appreciate the opportunity for our entire family to experience theater performances together.
- We enjoyed the kindness and activities before and the whole experience.
- I was particularly interested in seeing the show, being a playwright with Asperger’s with a son with autism.
- The children enjoyed coming to the theater for the first time and want to come back.
- We so appreciate the affordability and expectations. By similar families attending, it’s reassuring that your child isn’t the only one.
- Thanks for the low cost tickets. Therapy and all is expensive; we can afford this!
- My son with Down syndrome and a seizure disorder sat quietly for the entire show and watched the actors with no sense of distress. I cannot tell you the last time I remember him doing that. I was really surprised.
- She was engaged for the entire performance.
- My son enjoys theater. It was nice for him not to have to wear headphones for noise reduction. The helper was very personable and friendly - calling my son by name and interacting. Thanks for considering our kids with special needs and sensory issues!
- My son loves to be included in fun events. And I was more relaxed not worrying if he were to become loud. Length was just right. THX!!
- Great job.
- The staff with crafts and the actors after the show were great interacting with the kids.
- My son shook hands with one of the helpers being kind to him.
- Lobby helpers were friendly and helpful.
- Kept her attention; she didn't scare or startle.
- They loved meeting the characters and asking for their autographs.
- Thanks for letting them meet & take pics after show! He always wants to do that!
- It was wonderful. The narration made drama less scary.
- Loved it!! It was great!! We'll be back for sure.
- Only opportunity since Nutcracker rehearsal to see a dramatic performance. Social story was helpful.
- Love this program. So thankful you are taking the time to do something special for our kids.
- Entire crowd was friendly and accepting. Thank you SO much.
- Thanks for having paper towels in the restroom instead of just the blowers.
- She loved the clowns.
- He has oral sensitivities. I go to this performance so he can wiggle around or stand without being judged by other parents.

Comments about learning and growth
- Every positive experience is a learning experience.
- "Friendship between the bird and mouse." - His own words
- She spoke about the character not really being a mouse, but pretending to be a mouse.
- He realized he can make it through a show.
Comments about additional adjustments we could make to improve our sensory-friendly performances

- Be careful in shows you choose for sensory. Rapunzel is too scary for these emotional kids
- 2 concerns - this show did not have an intermission. While yes it was only an hour, please remember these kids can only sit for maybe 20 minutes at best. 2) I would love to come to Rapunzel but please keep in mind the story content. It is too scary for autistic kids. They are very intelligent and will understand the story, but the wicked witch, dragon, and story line is way too much for my 8 year old to deal with.
- I think a little shorter performance would have helped. Both of our kids lost interest 2/3 way through.
- Intermission
- Bring the clowns in between when we find our seats and the show starts. Kids get so bored waiting before the show.
- The social story could include a bit more about what actually happens during this performance. I wasn't familiar with the story, so was unable to prep him for the fact that there was threatening situations, i.e., cats trying to kill mice and birds.
- I will be hesitant to go to another performance as late as 4:30. My son's sensory disorder is managed better in the morning and the difference between how he was at this show, and the previous performance of Go, Dog, Go! that was at 10:30, was huge.
- Earlier showing (x2)
- More colorful - set too plain
- With attention difficulty, Go, Dog, Go! was more entertaining and kept attention. This one needed more changing and attention getters.
- Pre-show activities were a bit overwhelming for my son with autism
- Loved when more interactive
- Music/sound effects softer
- Still a little loud
- Loud voices
- Maybe dimmer audience
- Less increased lighting would be better; speaker projected visually on side screen would be helpful; projecting rules visibly would be helpful. (For hearing impairment)
- Have a monitor in the Quiet Room
- Not so cold
**Rapunzel Evaluation**

The evaluation for *Rapunzel! Rapunzel! A Very Hairy Fairy Tale* was conducted exclusively online. While we received fewer responses than we did for previous surveys, the response was again heartwarming. We met or exceeded our goals in all but one area, positive interaction.

100% of parents said their child with sensory sensitivities enjoyed the show. 90% of non-verbal children were visibly at ease and/or engaged during the performance. 92% of parents said they believed their children were comfortable during the performance. 87% of parents said they believed their children grew or learned through the experience. 73% of parents said their children had a positive interaction with a person they didn’t know. 100% of parents said they would like to come to another sensory-friendly performance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Special needs present</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified special needs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism/ASD</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensory issues</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADHD/Attention issues</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Down Syndrome</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stroke</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seizures</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nearsighted –won’t wear glasses</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross developmental delay</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive disability + non-verbal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No special needs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Audience comments about Rapunzel**

- Thank you for offering this! I know many families who would never have the opportunity to attend if not for this performance! It also gives those moms and dads a chance to participate in a "normal" activity with their child when their lives are filled with doctor appts, therapies etc.
- I thought the cast did a wonderful job. It was a great performance and I'm so glad we had the opportunity to see it. Special performances for special needs families helps take the pressure off parents. We don't have to be on edge hoping our kids 'behave.' They can be themselves and enjoy the show in their own way. Thank you for providing this opportunity!
- To the clowns: Yesterday, my grandson, Luke, laughed hysterically at you both for a solid 45 minutes. You might remember him. You make him so happy. As laughter is the best therapy, he had a great session! I hope he isn't too aggressive and apologize for his swiping and breaking Slappy’s nose. Hope you will be at all the performances because he thinks you are the best part. Looked everywhere for you at intermission. Thank you for bringing such joy to my little guy.
- We appreciate the choice to attend where her talking or noises would be tolerated.
• Thank you for going out of your way to make my son feel acknowledged and special. We normally have to worry about whether his wheelchair is intrusive. You totally removed that worry, which is a huge blessing.
• I most appreciate the opportunity to bring my child to a performance with other audience members who are nonjudgmental about her behavior. For me this is the biggest plus.
• Just a huge thanks for making this available to our families!
• Appreciate DCT’s effort to include our families in theater experience.
• I lead the special needs ministry at Irving Bible Church, and tell all of our families about this service. I think it’s fantastic!

Comments about learning and growth
• Over the three DCT performances this year, my son has learned to sit quietly in an auditorium, and no longer needs his music headphones to do so. You have no idea what an accomplishment this is. He used to get very upset in auditoriums.
• Yes! This is the first time my son would go up to a character (and he even got autographs). Thanks so much for doing this!!!!
• Just a great activity for him. He’s limited to the kinds of things we can do.
• She sat with friends and enjoyed watching and the intermission.
• He was better at sitting in a theater situation. It helped a LOT.
• Any exposure to public environment helps them grow. The exposures at DCT are next to none.
• It was their first theater experience, so they learned how to bring a story to life!

Helpful ideas for improving our sensory-friendly performances
• I don't know how feasible this is, but reducing the dialogue by about 50% or so would have helped with his attention span, and probably his ability to follow the plot.
• Announce bathroom locations and easiest/quickest exit to access them.
• No speeches before the show. Longer intermission - not enough time to finish snacks.
• Thanks for having a concession stand. A suggestion that may or may not be feasible would be to offer snacks that are natural/organic, additive free, etc. Many of these kids are on restrictive diets so you'll notice parents always carry their own snacks. Costco carries several snack packs of organic items.
• Be sure to always have the clowns ....even intermission would be good.
## Pilot Year Cumulative Evaluation Results

Our pilot year cumulative results could not have been more positive. We exceeded our goal in every area for the year, as reflected in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OBJECTIVE</th>
<th>GOAL</th>
<th>PILOT YEAR RESULTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal children will say they liked the experience / want to return to see another show.</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-verbal children will be visibly at ease and/or engaged during the performance.</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents will say their child with sensory sensitivities enjoyed the show.</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents will say they believe their children were comfortable during the performance.</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents will say they believe their children grew or learned through the experience.</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>88%</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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents will say they would like to come to another sensory-friendly performance.</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Photo: Charles T. Wicker
The Dream Ball

In June, we began planning for a major event to raise awareness of our sensory-friendly performances, as well as raise funding for the continuation of the program. The announcement read:

By order of the King and Queen, Dallas Children’s Theater is convening its royal court of brave Knights and lovely Princesses for a Dream Ball to be held Saturday, September 20, 2014 at 6 PM at the Rosewood Center. The Ball will follow a performance of the season opener RAPUNZEL! RAPUNZEL! A VERY HAIRY FAIRY TALE, and it promises to be an evening of feast, fun, and festivities.

Following the play, Knights and Princesses will have a chance to try their hand at swordplay, play dress up in the beauty room and enjoy an exclusive autograph session with the cast of RAPUNZEL! Then, the Royal Chefs will prepare a meal fit for nobility before everyone takes to the floor for a stately dance. Adults: we've got great beverages for you, too, and a castle on the stage that beckons a family photo!

Children ages 4 to 10 and their parents are invited to attend. Tickets to the Dream Ball are $50 per person and proceeds will support DCT’s Sensory-Friendly Programming. These are specially-adapted performances for children with autism, Asperger syndrome, Down syndrome, and other developmental differences. Please note: This reservation is non-refundable once made. We appreciate your support of Dallas Children’s Theater and programs such as these.

Families with special sensory needs are welcome, and will have access to our VIP Lounge (a quiet, comfortable, and low-distraction area) upon request. The entire event will be produced with sensory sensitivities in mind. http://tickets.dct.org/single/psDetail.aspx?psn=34110

The Knights and Princesses Dream Ball family event was a rewarding success. Not only was the event sold out, but we exceeded our fundraising goal of $25,000 to benefit our Sensory-Friendly Performance Initiative. The Ball and supporting efforts netted $34,000, and there were many smiling faces and jubilant spirits enjoying the night’s festivities. The funds raised cemented our ability to offer sensory-friendly performances of three productions in our 2014-15 season. We received coverage of the Dream Ball online at MySweetCharity.com.

Attendees were effusive:

“We simply loved this enchanting ball! What a joy to see all the children and parents dress up for the ball. Magically perfect in every way!”
“It was the most fun I have had in a long time.. to see the children laughing and enjoying everything was priceless.. the DJ and Dancing at the end was the best..! Loved it.. The food was amazing for buffet and just perfect for all ages.”

**Sensory-Friendly Initiative Video**

At the Dream Ball, we premiered a special video created to explain our Inclusion Project. The video, called *The impact of Sensory-Friendly Programming at Dallas Children’s Theater*, can be viewed on YouTube.

Several families speak in the video about what the initiative has meant to them. While each family has individual and unique challenges, they all agree that DCT’s sensory-friendly performance initiative is a special blessing.

In the video, Dr. Haylie Miller says, "This is a community of families who don't have a lot of opportunities that are tailored to them... (DCT) is a nice, safe space to come to now, where families with kids who have processing difference know that they can come and not be judged. There aren't any looks or sighs or grumbles from the crowd if their child flaps their hands or sings along or yells out loud... This is one experience where a kid with sensory processing differences comes to the theater and is for a moment just like every other kid, and I think that's a really special experience."

Former Texas Ranger baseball player Michael Young says, "I am almost just as happy for the parents as I am for the kids. The parents can come here, take their kids, know their kids are going to enjoy themselves, and be in a completely tension-free environment – where their kids can let their hair down a little bit, and just be themselves – which is basically what the arts are all about."

**Longterm Financial Support**

Our goal is to institutionalize sensory-friendly performances as part of our ongoing programming. Because of the expenses associated with reduced ticket prices and performance modifications, we need to identify longterm financial support for the effort. We planned from the beginning to raise the ticket price from $5 to $10 for the third show in our sensory-friendly pilot year. We made a special effort to help our audience understand that $10 is still significantly lower than our standard ticket price, and we are hopeful that families will be
able to move from the introductory rates we offered to a price that enables the program to be more sustainable for the long term. However, the audience for our third sensory-friendly performance was sizeable, yet significantly smaller than our first two shows. We believe the increased ticket price played a role in the smaller turnout. We are concerned that the increase may continue to have an impact on participation. While the $10 price still reflects a significant reduction in price, we are working to identify funding that will allow us to restore the $5 ticket price so that more families can afford to explore their children to live theater.

We received a significant donation from the foundation of former Texas Ranger player Michael Young for the 2015-16 season. We also are being very proactive with grantwriting efforts, including a request for multi-year support from a local funder dedicated to supporting children.

The project means so much to so many, and we have our fingers and toes crossed that we are not only able keep our sensory-friendly performances going, but able to expand our inclusion efforts in the coming years.

Randall Scott Carpenter, the actor who played Stuart Little, said of his role in the sensory-friendly effort, "This has just been the best experience! Thank you guys for giving me the chance to be a part of this special outreach." We wholeheartedly agree.

**We Did It -- Thanks To You!**
Thanks to our wonderful donors listed below, we have been able to fund at least three sensory-friendly performances in our 2014-15 season.

- Michael Young Family Foundation
- Mickie & Jeff Bragalone
- Ducky Bob’s
- First Unitarian Church of Dallas
- Sharron Hunt
- The March Family Charitable Foundation
- Melinda & Jim Johnson
- The Kinsler Family
- Diana & Tom Klein
- Northern Trust
- Showalter Family Foundation Fund of The Dallas Foundation
- The Swords Family
- Karen & Ken Travis
- Charlene & Vernon Wells III
- Communities Foundation of North Texas
- Autism Speaks
- All Dream Ball Attendees

**2015 Sensory Friendly Performances**
The confirmed sensory-friendly performances of 2015 are scheduled on the following dates:
- *Skippyjon Jones* – February 21 at 4:30 pm
- *Balloonacy* – April 25 at 1:30 pm
- *The Musical Adventures of Flat Stanley* – June 27 at 1:30 pm
The following blog post about our Dream Ball fundraiser was featured on the DCT website:

**We Did It – More Sensory Friendly Shows in 2015!**

It was simply a stupendous night! Our Knights and Princesses Dream Ball family event was a rewarding success. Not only was the event sold out, we exceeded our fundraising goal of $25,000 to benefit our Sensory-Friendly Initiatives! The effort around the Ball netted an awesome $34,000 and there were many smiling faces and jubilant spirits enjoying the night’s festivities.

With little princesses and knights being the order of the day, attendees smiled from ear to ear from start to finish. Following the show, guests had the option of checking out the swordplay room or the princess pampering room, getting one-on-one time with each of the cast members and having the opportunity to pose on stage (not something we usually let showgoers do). They were then treated to a royal dinner and a chance to make their own crowns. There was also a wonderful magician/puppeteer on hand from Amazing Attractions to entertain the little ones while the adults heard more about the effort they were supporting. The night finished off with a Dream Ball dance led by DJ Sir Seth (one of DCT’s teaching artists.) It was definitely a Very Fairy Tale!

The event was to raise funds so that DCT could produce three more sensory-friendly shows in 2015. Why? Children with different sensory needs and their families do attend our productions and many are involved with great success in our arts education programming. Yet many parents do not bring 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 of time 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 want to reverse that belief by making Dallas Children’s Theater an accepting and safe place for children with autism and other developmental and motor disabilities and their siblings. 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.

And because we achieved the goal, we can look forward to another year of shows for families who might not otherwise go out and enjoy live theater. So for 2015, these families can look forward to the following three productions:

![Images of plays: Skippyjon Jones, Balloonacy, and Flat Stanley TYA](image)

We are so pleased to be able to offer these specially-adapted plays for the enjoyment of those with sensory needs. General production adaptations include leaving 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. There will be some fun and engaging activities presented before the play as well.

Special thanks to all of the sponsors and supporters who have helped make these shows possible for 2014 and 2015. It means more to these families than you could ever imagine!
Appendices
Box Office Q & A

Box Office Q&A: March 1st at 1:30pm Sensory Performance of Go, Dog. Go!

Q: How will the March 1st at 1:30 p.m. performance of Go, Dog. Go! be different from other show times of the production?

A: The March 1st at 1:30 p.m. show time of Go, Dog. Go! will be DCT’s first-ever sensory performance. The show itself will be altered to accommodate sensory sensitivities. The house lights will remain on during the performance, stage lights will be toned down, and sound levels will be lowered. Also, DCT will provide earplugs (it is okay for patrons to bring their own, as well), a Quiet Room (a place where patrons with sensory sensitivities can take a break from the show if needed) and other accommodations for patrons with sensory sensitivities.

Q: Is there anything else I should know about that day?

A: There will be pre-show activities in the lobby (i.e. coloring, photo ops, meeting and playing with sensory-friendly clowns, information tables, etc.), and so guests are encouraged to come at least one hour in advance of show time if they can.

Q: How might I learn more about the theater and what we can expect?

Go to dct.org/sensory and download the social story. This document will give visitors a great sense of the flow of the building and what they can expect on arrival day. This page will be live on January 30.

Q: Any key message points and other useful tips for how to communicate with patrons who have sensory sensitivities?

A: The objective of the March 1st, 1:30 p.m. performance is to create a welcoming environment for patrons with sensory sensitivities. Key message points: DCT wants you here, and it is okay to be yourself! That’s why this program has been created especially for these audiences.

Q: Is anyone allowed to attend the March 1st at 1:30 p.m. performance?

A: Let patrons know upfront that this particular show time is being significantly altered to accommodate people with sensory sensitivities. This means lighting and sound are being changed to meet their developmental needs. Also, these audience members will not be asked to leave if their children are loud or distracting. In fact, the production is being created so that they can feel comfortable in expressing themselves.
Q: Are patrons allowed to utilize iPads, cell phones, and/or other related types of technology during the show?

A: Don’t bring this up unless a patron asks. First response should be a gentle, "If your child needs to look at an iPad or cell phone during the performance, please bring them to the lobby." If the patron says they need this device for specific needs (i.e. apps that enable speech impaired patrons to communicate basic needs with loved ones), tell them we will accommodate them.

Q: Can patrons bring their own snacks?

A: Yes, patrons are allowed to bring their own snacks, which they are welcome to eat in the lobby. We generally do not allow food or drink in the theater with the exception of water.

Q: What if a parent asks for additional resources in the DFW community related to sensory/special needs, or asks another question that I do not know how to answer?

A: Transfer it to Nancy Schaeffer or Gina Waits in DCT’s Education department. If they are not around, feel free to refer them to the Autism Speaks website: autismspeaks.org or the UNT Kristen Farmer Autism Center website: autism.unt.edu.

Q: This is so exciting! When will the next show after this one take place?

A: DCT’s next sensory friendly show is scheduled for Saturday, July 12 at 4:30 pm. The show is E.B. White’s Stuart Little. Tickets will again be $5 per person and are on sale now.

Q: Why is Dallas Children’s Theater doing this?
A: This work is a part of our mission to inspire ALL young people to creative and productive lives through the art of theater. Children with sensory sensitivities deserve the chance to experience the magic of live theater as well. A child with autism or another developmental disorder who gets excited about theater and loves the arts will appreciate this new program at DCT and, potentially, it will positively impact their life and inspire them more than we know! That is what we are all about.

Other general tips:
• Keep commands simple.
• Give praise and encouragement.
• Follow the lead of the parents/caretaker.
• Ask “How can I help?”
Evaluation Survey

We are so glad you came! Please give us your feedback to help us improve for the next show.

1) Who did you bring to the Sensory Friendly performance of Stuart Little at D C T and what special needs are present?

2) Did your family member with sensory sensitivities enjoy the show?
   - Yes/Mostly Yes  No/Mostly No  Why or why not?

3) Did the reduced sound, increased lighting, and other adaptations enhance the comfort level of your family member with sensory sensitivities?
   - Yes/Mostly Yes  No/Mostly No  Why or why not?

4) What other adjustments could we make to improve our Sensory Friendly performances?

5) Please evaluate the following:
   - PRE-show activities Helpful/Mostly helpful   Not helpful   Did not use
     - Quiet Room   Helpful/Mostly helpful   Not helpful   Did not use
     - Helpers     Helpful/Mostly helpful   Not helpful   Did not use
     - Social Story   Helpful/Mostly helpful   Not helpful   Did not use

6) Did the child(ren) in your party have a positive interaction with a person they didn't know?
   - Yes/Mostly Yes  No/Mostly No  Tell us more:

7) Did the child(ren) in your party grow or learning something from the experience?
   - Yes/Mostly Yes  No/Mostly No  Tell us more:

8) Would you come to another Sensory Friendly performance at D C T?
   - Yes/Probably Yes  No/Probably No

9) How did you hear about the Sensory Friendly performance?

10) Is there anything else you would like us to know?

Optional: Name________________________________  Email________________________________

You can also complete this survey online at www.surveymonkey.com/link
Thank You to Our Donors!

We would like to thank the following 2014 Pilot Year Funders for helping launch this incredible community service:

Sharron Hunt
Board Chairman