

May 2024



SAINT CATHERINE CENTER FOR *Special Needs*

Playtime for All Blessing of Our New Playground

On Wednesday May 8th, Saint Catherine Center witnessed a heartwarming celebration as the community came together to bless our newest addition at the Center—an accessible and inclusive playground. Led by Board Member Monsignor Robert Weiss, the event marked a significant milestone in the Center’s journey toward inclusivity and ensuring that every individual, regardless of ability, has the pleasure of play.

Laura Grozier, Executive Director, welcomed everyone and thanked all those who made this possible. “We are so grateful to all those who supported this project. Lori and Frank Mercede’s generous donation in honor of their daughter Jacki, provided the cornerstone for the construction of the playground.”

As Monsignor Weiss imparted blessings upon the playground, his words resonated deeply, asking for the space to be filled with laughter, socialization, and safety. He also said God was shining down on us because the rain stopped and the sun came out. It was a touching reminder of the Center’s unwavering commitment to creating environments where children and young adults with special needs can find a sense of belonging and happiness.

The blessing ceremony was a collective effort, with students, young adults, Board members and parents joining Monsignor Weiss in blessing each piece of play equipment with holy water. Together, they blessed the playground with spiritual significance, a strong sense of community, and shared purpose.

As the blessing drew to a close, there was a sense of gratitude and optimism among all those present. The playground will be something all will enjoy for years to come.

[Click here for more photos.](#)



Showcasing Abilities

Saint Catherine Center's First Talent Show



Saint Catherine Center lit up the stage with its first annual talent show, showcasing the remarkable abilities of our students and young adults. Hosted by Principal Eric Spencer, the event was a celebration of ability, creativity, and inclusion.

The festivities kicked off with a burst of energy as the students and young adults took center stage. From heartfelt performances, to hilarious comedy, the show had something for everyone!



Sr. Marilyn's class was the first to take the stage with a spirited song and dance, wearing matching pig costumes as they charmed the audience. Not to be outdone, Adult Team 1 delivered an equally impressive performance with a call and response song and dance number, getting the entire audience to join in.



The stage came alive with the voices of students and young adults as they sang along to their favorite tunes. Anna captivated the crowd singing a heartfelt rendition of Demi Lovato's "Let It Go," while Ian and Frank performed the same song with a rock and roll twist.



Laughter filled the room as Patrick R took the stage with his comedy routine, sharing his famous jokes. His comedic timing and silly jokes left the whole room smiling. The show continued with more wonderful performances showcasing unique talents and personalities of each performer. Natalie delivered a soulful solo performance of "Don't Stop Believing." Patrick N maintained the momentum singing "Worldwide" by Big Time Rush. His energy was electrifying! Ryan, Donte, and Vishnu also dazzled with their special performance to the song "Can't Stop the Feeling," their dance moves and vibrant stage presence left the spectators cheering.

As the show drew to a close, Sr. Cheryl's class took center stage for the final performance with their lively rendition of the "Cotton Eye Joe" dance. Their infectious energy left everyone on their feet applauding.

This talent show was a wonderful celebration of the incredible talents and abilities of our students and young adults. "We are immensely proud of each and every performer, and we can't wait to do it again next year!" said Eric Spencer, Academy Principal.



Communicating with Confidence Speech Therapy at Saint Catherine Academy

At Saint Catherine Academy, speech therapy isn't a one-size fits-all solution. Each student's journey to effective communication is unique, reflecting the diverse abilities and challenges each student may face. Speech Therapy is not only about enunciating words; it's about finding each student's voice to unlock the power of expression. "Everyone has words and feelings in their heads, some people just say them differently," says Meghan Weinberger, MS, CCC-SLP, speech-language pathologist.

For some of our students, speech therapy revolves around honing in on conversational skills and mastering the art of asking and answering questions. Their sessions focus on building confidence in social interactions, navigating group discussions, problem solving, and understanding the nuances of language through engaging activities and targeted exercises such as social stories. They learn to express themselves fluently, connecting with peers in meaningful ways.

For another student, our dedicated therapists employ targeted strategies to strengthen their narrative skills, sequencing, and recalling past events. Through the use of *WH questions*, inquiries such as who, what, where, when, and why, they engage in dynamic discussions, piecing together the details of past experiences and constructing a narrative. With each session, they gain confidence in storytelling abilities, a key element in conversations, allowing them to interact meaningfully with the world around them.

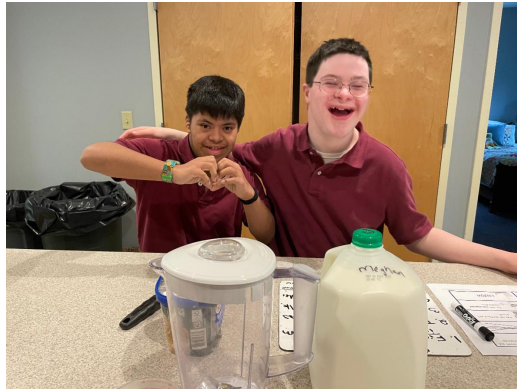
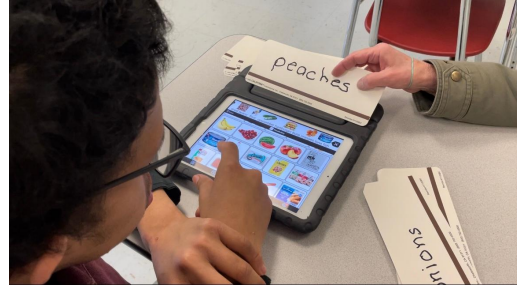
For other students who are primarily non-oral communicators, speech therapy takes a different path. Some students often rely on an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) device, a technological tool that empowers them to express their thoughts and needs. These students work with therapists to refine skills with the AAC device, practicing



navigating the system and using vocabulary. With each session they are able to grow in independence through using their device as powerful a tool for self-expression.

Speech therapy goes beyond the words; it fosters confidence, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging. For many students, the ability to communicate unlocks doors to friendship, self-advocacy, and participation in all aspects of life. "The end goal is authentic, functional communication. Our students work on using communication to increase their connections to their academic, social and work experiences," says Taylor Bird, MS, CCC-SLP, speech-language pathologist.

At Saint Catherine Academy, speech therapy isn't just a service; it's a lifeline for students on their journey to communication and beyond. Through personalized interventions and innovative strategies, we are empowering every student to find their voice.



Make plans now to join us
at the McClinch Family Center at St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Trumbull.
Invitations will be mailed in August.

THANK YOU TEACHERS & STAFF!



Teacher Appreciation Week
May 6 - 10, 2024



Happy Teacher Appreciation Week! We recognize our amazing teachers and teaching assistants for their hard work and dedication. Thank you for all that you do!



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