

July 2021



SAINT CATHERINE CENTER FOR *Special Needs*

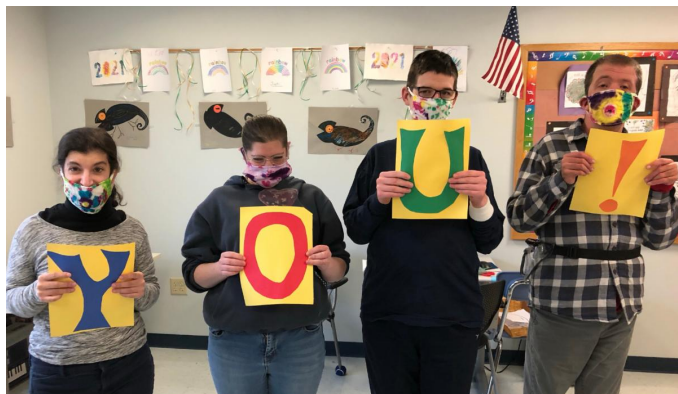
Dear Friends of Saint Catherine Center and Saint Catherine Academy,

“It’s going to require patience, flexibility, and a lot of creativity.” Looking back on the past year, all three of these qualities came into play. But most importantly, we had **the power of community** supporting us and propelling us forward, evident each day in the joy we saw in the students and young adults of Saint Catherine Center.



We showed great resilience as we implemented a re-opening plan that launched summer school 2020 for Academy students and a staggered re-entry for our adult participants. Excitement resonated throughout the building as friends and colleagues reconnected after months of separation and virtual programming.

The year was not without its challenges. We managed health concerns; we mourned the loss of one of our own; we supported virtually those who were unable to return in person. We missed the energy and talents of our volunteers. Because we were limited to onsite programming, we missed our activities and experiences in the community.



But we discovered untapped artistic creativity; we explored new places using technology; we celebrated simple joys in weekly prayer service, Zingo games, and raucous recesses. Reading with adult participants became a daily activity and exercise on the treadmill, bike, or power walking added social and recreational opportunities for everyone.

We are eternally grateful to you—our community of supporters, our families, our donors, and our staff. Collectively, **you lifted us up** and carried us through the year. As we move forward, we hold you in our hearts and look ahead with faith that we are stronger today because of the power of the Saint Catherine Center community. Thank you for sharing your strength with us.

With gratitude,

Helen C. Burland

Helen C. Burland
Executive Director

"Seeing the World Differently": High School Students as Mentors

Five teens from local high schools have assisted in Academy classrooms this summer. "With most of our students attending summer school, we needed some help in the classrooms," said Eric Spencer, Principal. "We have a good relationship with Notre Dame High School here in Fairfield and they promoted the internship opportunity." Three students were accepted, as well as two others from Ansonia and Masuk High Schools.

As "typical peers," the interns have been modeling appropriate behavior and conversation. "It's been great for Vinny, interacting with someone his own age," said his teacher, Jim Winebrenner. "Michael's been a great role model."

The high school students, all of whom will be seniors in the fall, have gained valuable work experience. They have also learned about the challenges and joys of having a disability, and how to accept others who are different from themselves.

Anna and one of the interns, Kaylee, both enjoy music and drama. "It was fun to watch them converse," said Amanda Stote, a teacher who joined the Academy summer staff again this year. "I can see how the connection is helping to build Anna's confidence." Amanda added that, after playing basketball and other sports with the student interns, Philip and Fabricio have both been more motivated to follow the rules.

The students have all reported a positive experience. Michael said one of his favorite moments was when Vinny, Philip, and Fabricio hugged and said how much they cared about each other. "It warmed my heart... This is a fun program... that these kids can grow in a community together."

Kayla, whose mother Natalie works in the Adult Program, noted that "each student is remarkable in their own way," and that the experience at Saint Catherine has led her to understand the importance of individuals with



Summer School Interns L-R: Michael Pinedo, Kylee Faulkner, Kayla Thelwell, Kaylee Daniele, Lucas Crowell



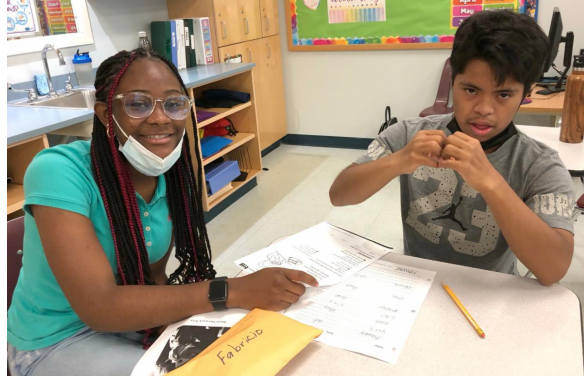
disabilities having the same opportunities as others.

Lucas and Kaylee felt similarly. "Being at the Academy has helped me see the world a bit differently," Kaylee said. "To understand that not everyone can learn or understand at the same pace, but everyone... has empathy and much to give to others."

Kylee, another intern, worked as a volunteer at the Academy a previous summer. Based on her experience, she has decided she would like to work in special education. "She was able to switch gears easily and meet the needs of my students," said Joanne LaPorta. "She's a natural."

"The people here are all so kind," Kylee added. "Through the group activities I have come to know and adore all of the students."

"The interns have been great with our students," said Spencer. "They are kind and caring. I hope to continue this program in the future."



Saint Catherine Center Awarded \$500,000 from The Inner-City Foundation for Charity & Education

In October 2020, The Inner-City Foundation for Charity & Education in Bridgeport announced that it would be sharing its entire endowment with Fairfield County nonprofits when it ceased operations this year.

Saint Catherine Center is thrilled to be the recipient of a \$500,000 grant from this endowment to fund the Inner-City Scholarship for an Academy student. Income from the endowment will be used to continue the legacy of the Inner-City Foundation Scholarship.



Since 2005, the Foundation has been an invaluable partner in the growth and sustainability of the Academy, supporting scholarships for numerous Academy students from districts unable or unwilling to fund outplacements. "The future of the Center is bright, due in large part to organizations like The Inner-City Foundation, who partnered with us along the way," said Helen Burland, Executive Director. "The establishment of this named scholarship, to be awarded in perpetuity, is a powerful and fitting final chapter to the Foundation's work. We are so grateful."



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