



## SAINT CATHERINE CENTER FOR *Special Needs*

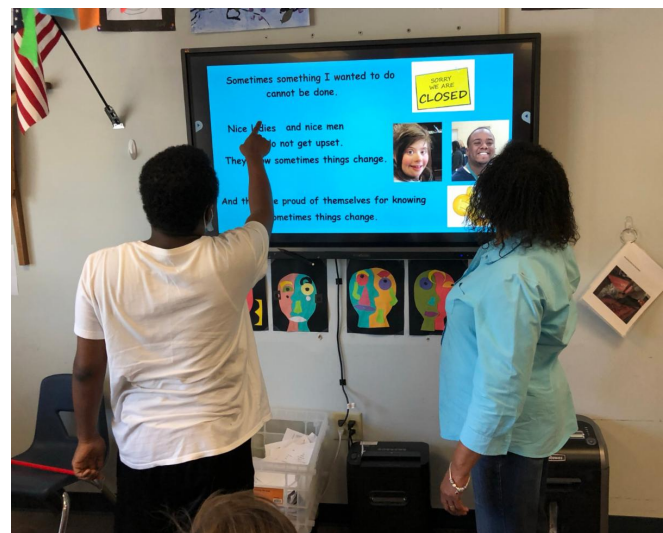
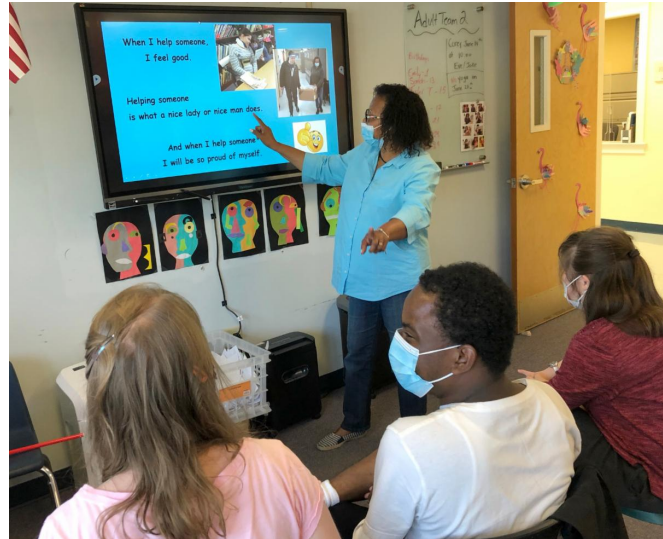
### *Social Stories: A Simple Strategy that Works*

*"I can do things without help."* So begins the morning slideshow in Team 2's room, a social story illustrated with photos of adult participants accomplishing tasks on their own, such as brushing their teeth, combing their hair or putting their lunch bag away. The narrative also touches on the themes of patience and waiting one's turn, helping others, accepting that sometimes plans change, and the importance of using words to express feelings. Seeing photos of their peers and talking about it together emphasizes positive behavior and independence.

Staff in both the Academy and the Adult Program use social stories as learning tools to help students and adults adjust to a new routine or experience, work through an issue, or change a behavior. The narrative uses positive language to offer cues and appropriate responses to social situations by using examples from a first-person point of view.

"We talk about the story and apply it to other situations, and it's working," said Sonia Vielot, a Team 2 staff member. After a few weeks of viewing the slideshow on a daily basis, Eve is able to wait a little longer for her turn, and use her words when she's upset. Jessie is also getting better at using words to express herself. Ronald can tell the group about the many things he can do by himself, and he understands better how not to interrupt when someone is talking. Repetition and encouragement have reinforced the positive changes.

Academy teachers also use social stories with their students. When Briana had an issue with hitting others when she was frustrated, her teacher, Mrs. LaPorta, wrote a short narrative naming Briana's friends, how her friends and teachers like it when she is nice to them, and how she earns the reward of her favorite song when she doesn't hit. Briana was able to change her behavior and show a greater sense of self-control, and there were fewer

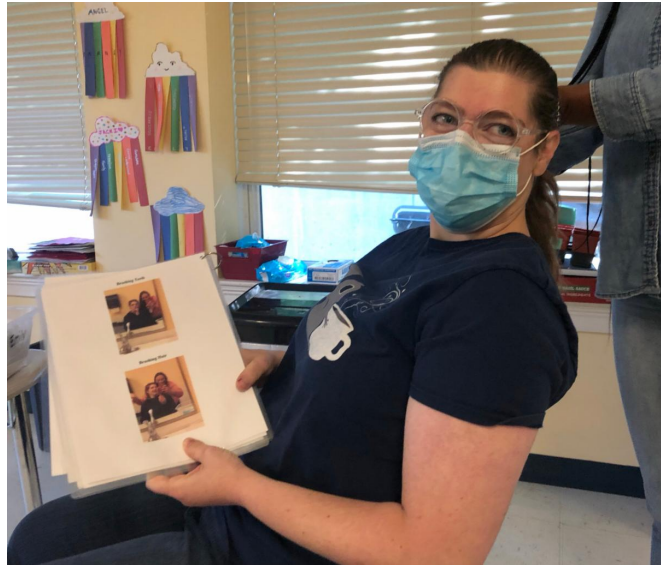


disruptions in class. “It’s a simple strategy,” LaPorta said, “but it works.”

Social stories can take many different forms, from a simple step-by-step pictorial or story created for a particular individual, to the slideshow that Team 2 views together on the interactive board.

“Sometimes too much spoken instruction can become confusing or distracting,” said Brady Cronin, Director of the Adult Program. “Then simple visuals, like a picture schedule, can help individuals follow a sequence of events.” Emily’s daily schedule is a series of photos of herself doing various activities and she is able to direct herself to the next activity with minimal prompting. Jake has also learned to put his lunch and backpack away using a series of photos of him doing each step of the process.

“Used in the right way, social stories help our students and adults become more independent,” Brady said. “That’s what we’re striving for.”



## Wrapping Up the School Year



While 2020-21 was a challenging year due to restrictions of the pandemic, being able to offer our programs in-person for the entire year made a tremendous difference to our students. As the school year winds down, here are a few comments from our teachers:

*Sr. Cheryl Driscoll:* “The students were very responsive to whatever was asked of them. They are a caring and happy group!”

*Joanne LaPorta:* “It was a learning curve to teach on Zoom, but I really enjoyed bringing our virtual students together with my in-person students each day for Calendar time and Science and Social Studies. Everyone worked together to make it happen—staff, parents, and students.”

*Patty Loh:* “There’s been so much growth in my students this year in the area of reading. Over the past few years I’ve adapted the Wilson Reading Program to meet their needs, and they’ve made tremendous progress in



decoding and the acquisition of sight words. And it's been a pleasure to welcome two new students. Saint Catherine Academy has become their home."

*Jim Winebrenner:* "My first year teaching at the Academy has been a great experience. I've loved getting to know the students and other staff. A big highlight for me was going to Mass with the students on Ascension Thursday. It was so great to be together in-person."

*Eric Spencer, Director of Education*

"We met the challenges of the year together as a team—with coordination, mutual support, and a lot of good humor. I'm very proud of our staff and students."

The students had some comments, too: "I liked using the computer to sing songs, and I liked all my artwork." *Anna*

"I really liked music. We really did a good job." *Trinity*

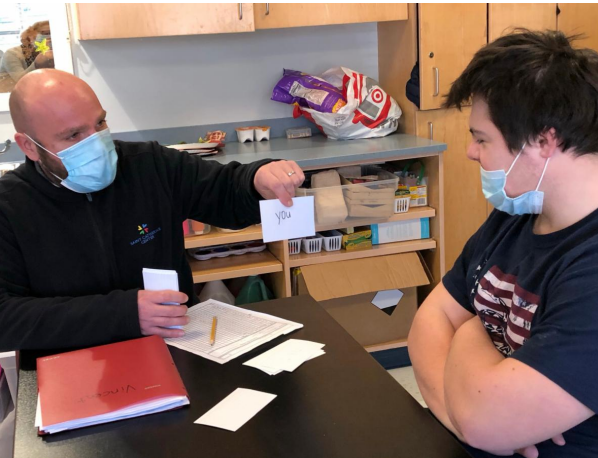
"I liked learning about penguins." *Fabricio*

"I liked recess best. I love to swing." *Antonio*

"I liked all the library books, and sharing cookies with my friend Fabricio." *Philip*

All in all, it was another year of learning, growing, building relationships, and having fun together. We are grateful for the gifts of each other.

[Enjoy a slideshow of our end-of-year cook-out at Lake Mohegan](#)



## *How Our Garden Grows*

In early May, students folded seeds in balls of moist cotton and put them in the fingers of latex gloves, watching them begin to grow, and planted them outside in our garden. Get ready for beans, basil, radishes, and more!

[View some photos](#)



## Academy Website Gets a Facelift

We hope you'll take a moment to visit [Saint Catherine Academy's](#) "refreshed" website.

Let us know what you think!



## *It's Not Too Late to be Counted!*

We thank the many generous donors who have supported us so far this year.

There is still time to [make a gift](#) before our fiscal year ends on June 30th.

Your gift to the Annual Fund supports our many activities and the individualized attention that helps each of the young people we serve become as independent as possible.

