



The Belle Center

A nonprofit serving children with disabilities
and their families



eNews: Summer 2009

Dear Friend of The Belle Center,

At The Belle Center, we focus on the abilities rather than the disabilities of our children. This issue, we celebrate our preschool graduates and Parker Soffer-Kanefield, a remarkable alumnus. You'll be touched by Parker's story and his beloved presence within his school and community!

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Congratulations to our preschool graduates!

The Belle Center is so proud of our preschoolers who are moving on to kindergarten this fall. We are excited that all of the graduates will be included in regular education classrooms so that they can continue to learn and play with their typical peers. With their many gifts and unique personalities, the children will enhance their classrooms at their parochial, private and public schools—just like every other child who begins the "big school" experience with them. The Belle Center wishes our graduates fun and success as we send them out the front door that will never close behind them.

[Read more about our preschool](#), and please contact [Kate Hannon](#) at 314,862.7306 if you are interested in enrollment.

Alumni success story: Parker Soffer-Kanefield

"What I most remember about The Belle Center," declares Lois Soffer, "is the first time two therapists visited my baby, Parker, at our home. Minutes after they met Parker, one was kissing him and telling me how beautiful he was. I had never experienced this kind of loving attentiveness of a professional toward my son. It was so beautiful to see The Belle Center fully embracing Parker!"

This visit began The Belle Center's journey with Parker, Lois and her husband Andy Kanefield. At age two, Parker began attending our preschool and making friends with kids of all abilities. From kindergarten on, Parker continued to be in regular education classrooms in his Clayton public schools. Parker just finished seventh grade at Wydown Middle School, where he is a straight-A student. This spring, his art teacher, therapist and classmates noticed Parker's talent at painting. In a gesture that shows the power of inclusion, the school hung Parker's colorful paintings in a hallway. It was an art exhibit solely showcasing Parker's work!



Parker also fully participates at his synagogue, where he has tons of friends. He made his Bar Mitzvah on June 6, and his older

brother, Perry, shared a moving story about Parker with the congregation:

"One time Parker and I were walking on the street and we saw this big guy in a motorcycle helmet and studded leather jacket. Parker ran up and gave him a big wet kiss on the nose. The guy melted like a hot knife through butter. Parker can make anyone smile. Everyone he meets likes him. He has more friends than anyone I know."

The Belle Center congratulates Parker for all he has accomplished in his 13 years! To help create a bright future for a child like Parker, [donate to The Belle Center today](#).



Golf tournament raises staggering amount

The Belle Center is grateful for our supporters who helped us raise \$100,000 for our children with disabilities and developmental delays! With the economy, fundraisers like golf are more important than ever as we keep our services affordable for families. We hosted our 17th Annual Margot Schenk Memorial Golf Classic on May 11 at Lake Forest County Club. [Check out photos from golf, and see a full list of sponsors.](#)

Graduation becomes a RIGHT for high schoolers with disabilities

Did you know Missouri high schoolers with special needs often missed out on graduation with their classes? Now, thanks to Gov. Nixon's signing of Kaitlyn's Law (House Bill 236) on May 14, students with disabilities won the right to participate in graduation, even if they continue job training and transition services through age 21. The bill went into effect immediately, enabling ALL high school graduates to receive the recognition they deserve. The Belle Center applauds this bipartisan effort, which you can read about in this [press release](#).

Autism research & legislation

Researchers are constantly uncovering new clues about autism, which is the fastest-growing developmental disability. The University of North Carolina recently discovered [interesting differences between the brains of toddlers with and without autism](#). A [TIME article](#) explores a genetic discovery that might help explain why boys are four times more likely than girls to have the condition.

In other autism-related news, the Autism Treatment Acceleration Act of 2009 (ATAA) was recently introduced to Congress. This legislation will provide increased federal funding for services, treatment, support and research for autism. If passed, it will also require all U.S. insurance companies to provide coverage for evidence-based, medically-necessary autism treatments and therapies. [To find out more about the legislation and to support the bill, visit Autism Votes](#), an initiative of Autism Speaks.

Enjoy "Sensory Friendly Films" at AMC West Olive 16

Thanks to AMC Entertainment and Autism Society of America (ASA), families impacted by autism and other disabilities can enjoy movies like everyone else! Their nationwide "Sensory Family Films" program provides safe, accepting environments for people with autism and other disabilities to enjoy the movie theater experience. Since people with autism can be sensitive to loud noises, the movie volume is lowered. Audience members are also encouraged to move around, dance and even talk during the movie. [Read about the program and find movie times.](#)



Self-defense classes for people with special needs

Protect yourself or your loved one by checking out The Respect Center's fitness and self-defense classes for people with special needs, ages 14 years and older. You can enroll at any time, and the cost is \$40/month. Classes begin with running, jumping and lifting weights, and end with strategies on protecting yourself in dangerous situations. For more information, contact The Respect Center at 314.427.5425 or at www.respectcenter.com.

FREE lifetime parks passes for people with permanent disabilities

U.S. citizens or permanent residents with permanent disabilities can receive free lifetime passes to national parks and federal recreation lands. For more information, [visit the National Parks Service's Web site](#) and scroll to "America the Beautiful – National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass – Access Pass."

About The Belle Center

The Belle Center is a nonprofit organization that provides early intervention services for children with disabilities and developmental delays, as well as their families. Founded in 1984, The Belle Center's preschool program is the Midwest's first full inclusion preschool where children with and without disabilities and delays learn and play together. Our mission is to ensure that all children with disabilities and delays are fully included in school and community life. The Belle Center's three programs annually serve more than 300 children with special needs and their families. We also support an additional 150 families through advocacy services and referrals.

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