

the [★] Achiever

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LITTLE STEPS ON A VERY LONG ROAD

Like any other six-year-old boy, Kevin Pech doesn’t really like to do school-work. Like any other six-year-old, Kevin loves the playground, the computer and looking at books. And like any other six-year-old, Kevin sometimes has difficulty communicating exactly what he needs.

Kevin was diagnosed with developmental delays at 19 months. His parents immediately sought therapy and treatment at the Achievement Centers for Children. Before he was two, the diagnosis was redefined as autism and he received occupational and speech therapy at home; then began attending preschool for children with autism at the Achievement Centers when he was three.

Now in the K–2nd grade autism program, Kevin is in a classroom with seven other children with autism, a lead teacher, two aides, an occupational therapist and a speech pathologist. At first

Exchange Communication System (PECS) and the DynaVox, an electronic communication system. By using the DynaVox’s touchscreen to select customized symbols in the correct order, Kevin is able to “talk” with pre-recorded words.

“Kevin is a really smart kid,” says his teacher, Erin Baesel. “Last week, Kevin was sitting on the floor in a group and became agitated. We brought him the DynaVox and he quickly selected the icons to say, ‘I want juice,’ and then went and sat at the table to drink his juice. Oh, he’s definitely a smart kid with a mind of his own!”

“I love the blended methodologies that the Achievement Centers uses,” says Eileen Pech, Kevin’s mom. “The teachers and therapists meet regularly and work together to share objectives, goals and strategies. If Kevin is responding well to one particular strategy in



glance, it looks like a typical schoolroom, clean and cheerful with tables and chairs and cubbies and shelves crowded with books, games and activities. But the classroom is clearly arranged with small, distinct areas to help the children focus on a particular activity.

Kevin is sensitive to noise and wears headphones most of the time to help block out sounds. His level of comprehension is significant, but he is nonverbal and communicates using the Picture

the classroom, the teachers and therapists will adapt it to other areas to try and improve his progress and we’ll try it at home. He’s learning, yes, but I’m learning too.”

“Kevin is taking little steps on a very long road. He’s a tortoise, but he’s getting there,” says Eileen. And if the delighted smile on Kevin’s face is any indication, Kevin’s mom is right when she says that her son loves coming to the Achievement Centers.



Achievement Centers for **Children**

Message from the Executive Director

Patricia W. Nobili, MSSA



HIGHLAND HILLS

4255 Northfield Road
Highland Hills, OH 44128
216-292-9700

LAKEWOOD

14587 Madison Avenue
Lakewood, OH 44107
216-521-5050

CAMP CHEERFUL

15000 Cheerful Lane
Strongsville, OH 44136
440-238-6200

For information and referrals
216-292-9700

Visit our website
www.achievementcenters.org

If you would like to be removed from the Achiever mailing list please notify us in writing at: The Achievement Centers for Children, 4255 Northfield Road, Highland Hills, OH 44128.

DEAR FRIENDS OF THE ACHIEVEMENT CENTERS FOR CHILDREN,

Recently, the father of a child with a disability described some of the issues faced by parents when they learn their child has a disability. He referred to a poem by Emily Perl Kingsley, about a family who is planning a trip to Italy. The family spends a great deal of time preparing for the trip, learning some of the language, studying maps of the country, and dreaming about all the wonderful experiences they will encounter on their trip to Italy. With excited anticipation, they are anxious to begin this wonderful adventure. But as they get off the plane, they are startled to find out they have landed in Holland. How is that possible? This was not where they were supposed to go—they know nothing about this strange land. What about all the dreams they had about Italy? They feel lost, disappointed, angry and even frightened.

The father then beautifully expressed how this poem is such an accurate reflection of what a family goes through when they learn their child has a disability. He continues, saying the poem explains that after a while, the family is able to see the beauty and wonder in Holland. Although very different from Italy, the family begins to see that Holland offers different dreams, yet still with meaningful, wonderful experiences and learning, along with the unknown and sometimes very challenging paths of this unexpected land.

The father then went on to say he feels the Achievement Centers for Children is like the tour guide who meets the family in Holland when they get off the plane. Qualified guides can improve and enhance a foreign trip because they understand the land, the anxieties, the challenges and surprises involved when traveling down an unknown path. The Achievement Centers is here so that when a family's plane lands in Holland, they can be met by caring people who have a great depth of knowledge and understanding of this unknown land called Holland.

So to that father we say, the Achievement Centers for Children will continue to do everything we can to meet and assist as many families as possible when their plane lands in Holland and they venture out into unfamiliar territory.

We are so grateful to each and every one of you who support us in meeting those planes and assisting families. You help us to make the journey in Holland the best that it can be.

Very sincerely,

Patricia W. Nobili, MSSA
Executive Director



ACCREDITATION and LICENSURE The Achievement Centers for Children's programs and services are licensed and accredited by many entities, including:

American Camping Association

Certified Medicaid Provider

Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities

Cuyahoga County Early Intervention Collaborative member

North American Riding for the Handicapped Association

Ohio Department of Education

Ohio Department of Health

Ohio Department of Human Services

Ohio Department of MR/DD

Ohio Department of Mental Health

United Way Agency

Numerous agreements with area universities and colleges

NEW! HIGH ROPES CHALLENGE COURSE AT CAMP CHEERFUL

Construction begins March 5 on the high ropes challenge course at Camp Cheerful! The high ropes course is a custom-designed, professionally constructed, fully-accessible activity structure for children and adults with and without disabilities.

One of the most advanced challenge course systems available, the universally accessible 50' high *Tango Tower* incorporates two climbing walls, over a dozen ropes activities and more than ten low initiatives, including rappelling devices and cargo nets. Multiple vertical elements create more than 35 unique ways to get to the top. To descend, climbers are lowered on a rope or can glide down the zip line. A hydraulic zip wire system raises and lowers participants, ensuring safety and comfort.

Staffed by professionally trained facilitators, the high ropes challenge course at Camp Cheerful offers children and adults of all abilities the opportunity to experience new heights of adventure while gaining confidence, building relationships and having fun. Camp Cheerful will follow the Association for Challenge Course Technology (ACCT) Challenge Course Standards, inspecting each piece of equipment before and after each climb.

Designed and built by Experiential Resources Inc. of Bloomington, Indiana, the high ropes course is made possible by the Catan family, tireless advocates and generous supporters of the recreational programs at Camp Cheerful.

The high ropes course is available year-round to residential and day campers, corporate groups, nonprofit organizations, scout troops, schools, universities, birthday parties and other groups. "Open Climb" days will also be offered so family and friends can join in the fun. Sessions range in length from 40 minutes to four hours and are priced accordingly. Participants must be at least 5 years old and weigh 40 pounds.

To learn more about our new high ropes course and reserve time for your group, contact Lisa Krall, manager of camp programs, at 440-238-6200.

Get Acquainted With Us on April 19, 2007

Join us at our Highland Hills location on Thursday, April 19, 8:00–9:30 AM to find out why we're so passionate about the children and families we serve. Enjoy a continental breakfast while learning about the services and programs we provide, meet our executive director and some of our staff members, and then tour our beautiful facility. To reserve your seat, contact Deborah Osgood, Director of Development and Marketing, at 216-292-9700.



CAMP CHEERFUL HEADS TO BROWNS STADIUM

Ten campers and six staff from Camp Cheerful enjoyed the December 24 Browns vs. Buccaneers football game, despite the chilly weather and the final 22–7 score.



With tickets donated by the Cleveland Browns Department of Community Relations, the group took part in the warm-up and pre-game activities on the home side

of the field, received official NFL logo pins from the referees and savored food, beverages and snacks in their game suite while cheering on the Browns—alas, to no avail!

INFOCUS *K-2 Autism Classroom*

Suddenly, autism is everywhere. It's a front-page topic, from the Centers for Disease Control's shocking statistic that 1 in 166 children is diagnosed with autism, to the blue puzzle piece lapel pin from the nonprofit organization Autism Speaks on the tuxedos of celebrities at the Golden Globe Awards. And with the passage of the Combating Autism Act by the US House of Representatives, there's no doubt that autism awareness has arrived.

A Blended Methodology

The Achievement Centers for Children began its Preschool Autism Program in 1999, after seeing an increase in the number of children with autism receiving therapeutic and educational services. The program expanded to include a K-2 classroom in 2005. Using a blend of six major research intervention methodologies, the Achievement Centers developed a custom program that has proven to be extremely effective. Designed to accommodate each child's individual learning style, the program incorporates both one-on-one opportunities and small group ratios in order to provide close attention to both skill needs and behavior management.



"I really like the flexibility of a blended methodology. If we're not seeing great results from one type, we'll try another until we find one that works," says Eileen Pech, mother of a child in the K-2 autism classroom. Different therapy methods are used to address different problems.

Professional Staff

The autism K-2 classroom serves a maximum of ten children. Taught by a special education professional and two aides, the classroom staff also includes an occupational therapist, a speech/language pathologist and a music therapist who provide more than two hours of direct therapy services for each child every week. A physical therapist also provides services as needed. A social worker provides consultation to the staff and coordinates a support group for parents of children with autism.

"We truly accept our students with autism for who they are—focusing on their abilities and strengthening their weaknesses using a variety of therapeutic models," says Scott Gossett, Autism Program Coordinator.

Classroom Routines

The classrooms maintain a regular daily schedule to help the children know what to expect. Many children with autism find it difficult to transition from one activity to another and a routine is helpful. The classroom is arranged in distinct areas for specific activities. The areas are small to provide a feeling of security to the children and help them focus by limiting outside stimuli.

After the children arrive in the morning, it's Circle Time, where the children gather in a small, close area and sing a welcome song, talk about the calendar, and who's at school today—typical classroom activities. The teacher

and an aide sit with them and encourage participation and appropriate behavior. The children can be unpredictable and the staff is flexible yet firm in their expectations.

Throughout the rest of the morning, the students focus on daily living skills and educational goals and objectives by working in specific areas of the classroom. These areas are set up for independent work; work with a teacher; play areas; sensory exploration, where the children discover textures such as uncooked rice, sand and snow; and vocation assistance, where they learn tasks such as setting a table or getting the mail. The occupational therapist and the speech/language pathologist are in the classroom during this time, working with the children individually and in small groups. After lunch, the day continues with time in the gym, which helps with motor skills, and another rotation through the classroom work spaces. As the day winds down, the children again gather for Circle Time, where they review the day's activities and happenings and then it's time to get ready to go home.

Opportunities for Success

The autism programs at the Achievement Centers are based on the philosophy that successful intervention for young children with autism requires intensive and consistent programming. "All the recent attention in the media underscores the importance of early intervention," says Dr. Jennifer Harris, Manager of Education at the Achievement Centers. "The more society understands about autism, the greater the opportunities for the children with autism."



ACHIEVEMENT CENTERS FOR CHILDREN SPECIAL EVENTS



17th Annual A Most Excellent Race



Need some inspiration to stick to that New Year's fitness resolution? Start training now for the 17th Annual A Most Excellent Race, set for Sunday, June 25, 2007, at Beaumont School in Cleveland Heights. Individuals and teams can participate and support the Achievement Centers for Children in a 5K run, 10K run, 10K Wheelchair Competition, a 5K Fun Walk and the Camp Cheerful Classic. For more information, visit <http://race.achievementcenters.org> or call Maggie Musnuff at 216-292-9700 ext. 226.

Sparkle, Shimmer & Shine

One of Cleveland's most dazzling black tie events took place on November 11, 2006, at the InterContinental Hotel, and partygoers raised an astonishing \$430,000 to benefit the Achievement Centers for Children and the McCormick Tribune Foundation, a fund of the Cavaliers Charities. Sparkle, Shimmer & Shine 2006, chaired by Tim Lathe, honored Eaton Corporation's CEO Sandy Cutler.

Special thanks to the scores of volunteers who worked tirelessly to coordinate the evening, solicit donations and create hundreds of themed baskets for the silent auction. Kudos also to our Platinum Signature Sponsors, listed below, for their generous support.



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A Fine Finish for Our Fall Festival

The 14th Annual Camp Cheerful Fall Festival was bigger and better than ever, with more than 300 in attendance. With entertainment from Eddie and the Edsels, a silent auction and raffles, the event netted more than \$29,000 to support various programs at Camp Cheerful. Special thanks to our friends in Strongsville for their dedication in making the event a rollicking success!

WOW! Top Honors for the Child Development Preschool Program

The Child Development Preschool program at the Achievement Centers for Children was recently honored with the state's highest award for excellence in early childhood care and education. The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services—Bureau for Child Care and Development, the state agency responsible for licensing and promoting high standards among Ohio's child care centers, recognized the Achievement Centers' excellent preschool program and ongoing commitment to children with a Three-Star Step Up To Quality Award.

Step Up To Quality is a voluntary rating system for early care and education centers. Participating centers can earn awards by meeting an extensive list of quality benchmarks. Experts say these benchmarks improve the growth

and development of potential in children. The rating system also gives parents a useful tool for selecting quality early childhood programs.

Award criteria includes a lower staff-to-child ratio in the classrooms and administrators and lead teachers must



have degrees in early childhood education, specialized training on Ohio's Early Learning Content Standards, and 15 hours of child development training annually.

To find out how to enroll your child in our award-winning Child Development Preschool program, call Brenda Palinkas at 216-292-9700.

DID YOU KNOW?

- There are many ways to support the vital work and mission of the Achievement Centers for Children. We receive funding through a variety of sources including contracts and insurance, however, one of our most important sources of financial support is the Greater Cleveland community. Charitable donations from individuals, corporations and foundations make up approximately 25% of our annual budget.
- As a non-profit organization, these funds are essential to help keep our programs and services affordable and reach as many children with disabilities and their families as possible.
- Donors can sponsor specific programs or provide general operating support. We will work with you to find a match between your interests and the needs of the children we serve. Are you interested in making a financial gift? Would you like to help with one of our upcoming special events? Call Deborah Osgood, Director of Development and Marketing, to discuss the many ways your gift of time or treasure can make a difference.



We need you to help our riders saddle up and take the reins!

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

We're looking for horse lovers age 14 and up to help with the Therapeutic Riding program at Camp Cheerful. Therapeutic riding is individualized horseback riding lessons used to help riders age four and up with special needs achieve a variety of goals based on their strengths and abilities. Program volunteers are needed to assist with leading horses, walking alongside riders during lessons and doing barn-related tasks. Call Cory Ramsey, Volunteer Coordinator at 440-238-6200, ext. 225, to assist with this fun and rewarding camp program.



Superheroes and fairy princesses roamed the halls on October 31, as the preschool class went Trick-or-Treating.

Thanks to our community supporters!



Employees of Howard Wershbale & Company, a CPA and consulting firm in Cleveland, visited our preschool program on December 19 to donate a new play kitchen set to the classroom. Brandon Miller, Gloria Wilson and Marianne Wesolowski also brought each child a wrapped gift of art supplies to take home. After everyone enjoyed juice and

cookies, the three helped our preschoolers craft a snowman from marshmallows and pretzels!



ADULT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES NOW OFFERED

Regardless of age, living with a disability can be challenging and may increase feelings of stress, anxiety, sadness or frustration.

The Achievement Centers for Children now offers counseling for adults with special needs, in addition to our counseling services for children and teens with disabilities. Staffed by experienced licensed clinical social workers, the sessions can provide emotional support and help identify practical solutions to difficult issues. Individual counseling sessions are available at Lakewood, Highland Hills and other convenient community locations. Most insurances, including Medicaid, are accepted.

For more information about the new counseling services for adults or any of our family support services, contact Robin Webber at 216-292-9700.

IS YOUR CHILD NEWLY DIAGNOSED WITH AUTISM?

The Achievement Centers for Children is offering a two-part Parent Information Series for parents of children newly diagnosed with autism. The sessions will take place the Achievement Centers' Highland Hills location, 4255 Northfield Road, from 6:30-8:00 PM on Tuesday, March 20 and Tuesday, March 27. The cost for both sessions is \$10. Topics include diagnosis of autism, next steps, early intervention services, intervention and treatment methods, supportive services, and IDEIA law. For more information and to make a reservation, contact Stephanie Kaler at 216-292-9700 or stephanie.kaler@achievementctrs.org.

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About the ACHIEVEMENT CENTERS FOR CHILDREN

Founded in 1940 as the Society for Crippled Children, the Achievement Centers for Children provides a wide variety of rehabilitation, recreation, education and family support services for children with disabilities and their families. We serve over 3,000 children with disabilities and their families each year.

Our mission is to work with children with disabilities and their families to strengthen abilities and create opportunities for lifelong achievement in society.

The Achiever is published by the Development Department of the Achievement Centers for Children.

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Contributors: Patricia W. Nobili, Deborah Osgood, Jill Stefancin, Lauren Steiner



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ACHIEVEMENT CENTERS FOR CHILDREN

Services by Location

The Achievement Centers provides services through a variety of locations, including schools, day cares, homes, and at the Achievement Centers' three facilities. The following is a list of services according to location.

On-going Home visiting (offices at the Highland Hills location)

Early childhood mental health counseling; Early intervention program for children ages birth to three with special needs; Home-visiting services for at-risk children, ages birth to three; Day Care Technical Assistance Program (TAP)

East/Highland Hills

Child Development Center day care for children with and without special needs; Preschool for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder/PDD-NOS; Kindergarten through second grade for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder/PDD-NOS; Social work and counseling; Physical, speech and occupational therapy; Champ Camp (summer day camp program); Parent support groups

West/Lakewood

Preschool for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder/PDD-NOS; Social work and counseling; Physical, speech and occupational therapy; Parent support groups

South/Strongsville/Camp Cheerful

Social work and counseling; Recreational Activities; Residential and day camp programs; Therapeutic Riding; After school programs