

UNIONDALE HERALD BEACON



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JULY 18 - 24, 2024

\$1.00



Kids were excited, and a bit confused, to see Brandon Ellis wearing Chex Mex the snake as a hat.

Kelsie Radziski/Herald

Campers delight in day of animal fun

By KELSIE RADZISKI

kradziski@theherald.com

Bugs, a rabbit and a collection of reptiles from the Center for Science Teaching & Learning, in Rockville Centre, visited the children at the Academic Explorers Day Camp in Uniondale last week.

The interactive lesson on land animals, on July 11, was led by Brandon Ellis, a science teacher at CST&L. The campers, who ranged in age from 6 months to 10 years, were excited to learn about the animals and what makes them special.

"I feel that we are inspiring

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Supporting kids with special needs

By KELSIE RADZISKI

kradziski@theherald.com

The Association for Children with Down Syndrome's Early Intervention Clinic offers special-needs kids under age 5 from across Long Island services and support.

"It's the happiest place in the world," said Jane Shimkin, director of early intervention for the association, which is headquartered in Plainview.

The program offered home-based services before the coronavirus pandemic, sending physical, occupational and speech therapists to the homes

of children with special needs.

But because of the health risks the pandemic created and the impact the isolation had on children's development, Shimkin pushed to open a clinic where they could receive in-person care once it was allowed. It opened in Plainview in September 2020, with staff and students wearing masks and taking necessary safety precautions, and it has grown since then.

For Long Island families who could use the clinic but may not be able to travel to Plainview, there is van transportation service to and from the

facility.

Maria Wasilewski, who lives in Uniondale, is grateful for the van service, which she uses twice a week for her sons. "I can't even describe how perfect it is," she said of the clinic. "I can't imagine going somewhere else."

One of the first babies to come to the clinic was Francis Wasilewski, Maria's son. He received care from the professionals in the clinic until he aged out at 5, and now, at age 6, he is preparing to begin first grade. Maria said she struggled to find the care he needed during the pandemic, and is appreciative of the opportunity the clinic gave Francis.

"If it wasn't for Jane and the clinic, we wouldn't be getting services for a very long time," Maria said.

Now her younger son, Michal, 3, is receiving occupational and speech therapy at the facility. Both boys, she said, love the place.

The clinic offers services ranging from physical and occupational therapy to group play and story time. There is even a new "splish-splash" area outside.

The emphasis is on communication and family training, so parents or guardians always know what is going on inside

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ACDS golf outing in Hempstead next Monday

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the classroom and during therapy sessions. Each child has an individualized plan of services and support.

Alexandra Di Zoppola-Brown, an occupational therapist who has been working at the clinic for three years, said she appreciates the constant communication and collaboration between the staff and the families.

"We're always working towards

achieving goals so that (the kids) are developmentally doing the things they should be doing," Di Zoppola-Brown said.

Jolie Abel, a teacher assistant in Shimkin's class for 2-year-olds who has been at the clinic for nearly two years, has worked with people with intellectual disabilities for over 30 years, and said she loves working clinic with the children.

"I've worked with adults but I'd never worked with children, so I was really excited to see where it all starts," Abel said. "I love it here."

In order to operate the clinic and the transportation service, Shimkin explained, the ACDS rely on grants and fundraisers such as its annual golf outing, scheduled for next Monday at the Hempstead Golf and Country Club. The event will feature not only an afternoon of golf, but also contests on the course, including a \$10,000 hole-in-one prize, and unique raffle prizes like a signed New York Islanders jersey.

The funds raised by the outing will benefit the ACDS Foundation by helping to "support lifetime programs serving people with developmental disabilities and their families," according to a news release.

For information on tickets for the golf outing and sponsorship opportunities, call (516) 933-4700 or email development@acds.org.



Kelsie Radziski/Herald photos

Matthew Padilla Perez, 2, played with toy cars in the Association for Children with Down Syndrome's class for 2-year-olds.



Maria Wasilewski with sons Francis, 6, left, and Michael, 3, in the ACDS's occupational therapy gym.

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HOW TO REACH US

Our offices are located at 2 Endo Blvd. Garden City, NY 11530 and are open from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

MAIN PHONE: (516) 569-4000

- E-MAIL: Letters and other submissions: rbethany@herald.com
- EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT: E-mail: rbethany@herald.com
- SUBSCRIPTIONS: (516) 569-4000 Press "7" E-mail: subscriptions@herald.com Fax: (516) 569-4942
- DISPLAY ADVERTISING: (516) 569-4000 Ext. 249 E-mail: rglickman@herald.com Fax: (516) 569-4643
- CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING: (516) 569-4000 Ext. 286 E-mail: ereynolds@herald.com Fax: (516) 569-4643

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