

# Stepping Stones

Volume 1, Issue 3

A Newsletter for Milestones – For Kids' Success

Therapist Owned • Child Centered • Family Friendly

## Come Play With Me

For some parents, their greatest wish is to see their son or daughter interacting appropriately with kids their own age. For the third year, Milestones is offering a program called "Come Play With Me" that can help make this wish come true.

Come Play With Me is a program for 3 to 8 year olds that targets social language skills under the guidance of a speech-language therapist and an occupational therapist. By combining a sensory integration approach with speech-language intervention, therapists are able to assist children in learning appropriate social skills so they can initiate and sustain play with peers.

Dena Seidenfuss, of Elmhurst felt that her son, Chase, age 7, was lacking in the social skills that seemed to come naturally for other kids his age. "He wasn't learning the social skills he needed from his siblings, from school or from me," she says.

After enrolling him in Come Play With Me, Dena noticed positive changes in her son. "We noticed that Chase had

more self esteem when he was engaging with other kids outside the group and he was more willing to start conversations with other kids," she says. "He has also learned how to adapt in a social setting when things don't go as planned." "I also liked this group because I could watch him through the observation window and he was having so much fun," she notes. "This group was a great experience for us."

Come Play With Me meets at Milestones twice a week, for eight weeks over the summer. There are separate groups for the 3 to 6 year olds and the 6 to 8 year olds. There are usually between 4 and 7 children in each group.

"My favorite aspect of this group is watching the kids develop friendships and become confident with their skills," says Kim Chiappini, MA, CCC, SLP, Speech-Language Pathologist.

Kim explained that each session begins with a greeting in the lobby followed by "Circle Time," where the children say hello to one another and ask questions of their peers. Next, they take turns while partici-



pating in a sensorimotor activity that typically involves jumping, climbing, and swinging. Occupational Therapist Angela Truka, OTR/L explains "This helps the children prepare on a sensory level in order to better participate in the play and socialization aspects of the group. Having the sensory – preparatory activities helps with attention and overall regulation."

"We then read the social story that the children have been given, and then move into the play portion of the session," Kim explains. "During the activity, therapists are there to facilitate peer interaction, but will directly intervene when needed to assist the children and help them achieve success."

When the session is completed, the children discuss what they did in group that day, and then say good-bye to all their friends.

Angela suggests that a parent may want to consider enrolling their child in the Come Play With Me program if he or she is having difficulty participating in social settings such as the playground, play dates, school, birthday parties and day care.

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**Inaugural Chicago WALK NOW (Cure Autism Now Walk) raised money and awareness ~ page 4**

## Come Play With Me for children (ages 3-8)

### Participants will learn to:

- Initiate appropriate social greetings
- Initiate and respond to social exchange with peers
- Initiate and sustain play with peers
- Interact spontaneously in a variety of playtime activities
- Use eye contact along with verbalizations

# A Minute with the Milestones Staff

Kelly Smith, M.S., CCC-SLP, Speech Language Pathologist

## What she loves best about her job:

"Getting to work with children and their families and seeing the progress toward the children's goals. I especially love educating parents about the strategies that I use during therapy sessions and seeing them perform these strategies with their child."

## New strategies for kids:

"I am very excited about having the opportunity to use sensory – based strategies in

my treatment sessions. Similarly, I find I am using more oral motor techniques with the children that I work with. Both of these treatment approaches are not widely used by all speech pathologists, but I have seen the positive affects they have on speech and language intervention. I also feel that they have a strong impact on the progression of speech and language therapy."

## Her favorite Milestones story:

"My fondest memory was when I first started at Milestones and began working

with a child who had severe areas of deficit in speech and language. Initially, therapy sessions were difficult, but as time lapsed and I began educating his parents about strategies to use, they began performing the strategies at home. Over time, I began to see a bond strengthen between the parents and the child. I also began to see a growing confidence in the child's attitude which positively affected his speech and language goals. I watched confidence grow in the parents' interaction with their child. Eventually the child was discharged from therapy. I still keep in contact with the fam-



ily and he is continuing to do well. I felt lucky to have been a part of that child's progress, which is one of the many reasons why I chose and love my profession."

## When she is not working:

"In my free time I enjoy reading, spending time with my family, music, attending continuing education courses and raising money and awareness for diabetes research and breast cancer awareness." ○

## Join Milestones Staff at 4th Annual Buddy Walk

The Buddy Walk was developed by the National Down Syndrome Society to celebrate October, National Down Syndrome Awareness Month.

It brings together people with Down syndrome and their invited "buddies"—including the Milestones staff—to promote acceptance and to raise funds for education, research and advocacy programs.

The Buddy Walk is a one-mile fun walk for all ages. The Milestones staff will join the festivities and provide information about services available for young children. Bring a blanket and join the fun!

## Milestones Staff Attends Innovative Autism Conference

The Milestones staff joined some of the most respected researchers, educators, practitioners, and parents at the Autism One Conference May 24-28. The staff says that new research and possible treatments for autism have never been more prevalent. They also recognize that existing methods of working with children are continually being refined and improved. This conference provided information about some of the most cutting-edge and successful treatment interventions occurring all over the world.

## Websites To Visit for More Info:

Buddy Walk – [www.dssupport.net/buddywalk/](http://www.dssupport.net/buddywalk/)  
Autism One – [www.autismone.org](http://www.autismone.org)

## Professional Profiles

### Two Dads Co-Direct "Autism One"

It is amazing what a couple of dads can do. Jim Donnelly and Ed Arranga are the co-directors of **Autism One**, a parent-driven organization focused on education, recovery and hope for families and others living with autism.

The organization is well-known for its annual conference. "Our conference focuses on every aspect of autism and promotes interaction between families and professionals," says Donnelly. "It also helps families new to the diagnosis to get answers from families who have experienced success and recovery."

The Milestones staff attended the conference that was held May 24-28.

Besides the conference, **Autism One** hosts a website and supports advocacy through education about autism.

"Hope is real," says Donnelly. "Our kids can get better. Autism is a medical illness not a mental illness. Seeking proper treatments and therapies can improve the condition for some."

For more information, visit [www.autismone.org](http://www.autismone.org). ○

# Milestones Helping Kids Communicate Better

A combination of speech therapy and play activities has helped to jump-start communication skills for pre-school children who come to Milestones.

About six months ago, Ronalyn Hubert, of Woodridge, took her 18-month-old daughter, Jenna, to the pediatrician because she was concerned that she wasn't talking very much. The doctor recommended that she begin a program to help Jenna improve her language skills.

Jenna started speech therapy in January, and this summer she is attending the Milestones program, "Speech Superstars," where she interacts with other children in her age group to increase articulation skills by focusing on sound development.

Jenna takes her "special blanket" with her to speech therapy so she knows where to sit for each session. "She plays, sings, snacks and has a lot of fun during speech therapy," says Jenna's mom Rona.

"In my opinion, the play-based speech therapy is fabulous," she says. "Even though I know that speech time is work, I doubt that Jenna thinks of it that way. It makes the children work without even knowing it."

Jenna's mother has high praise for Jenna's speech therapist. "I would like to commend Jenna's speech therapist, Miss Melanie," she says. "She has been a great asset to our family in helping develop Jenna's language skills."

Jenna's mother says that sign language has been particularly helpful to her daughter. "It's amazing how a few simple

signs can help you and your child communicate," she says.

She also appreciates the practical suggestions that Melanie provides for the family so they can practice what Jenna has learned in therapy throughout their daily routines.

Lisa Bartik, M.S., CCC-SLP, says that sign language is a good way for young children to communicate because it reduces their frustration level. "It gives them another way to express themselves when they are unable to make intelligible vocalizations," she says.

Pictures and photos of familiar objects and people can also be used to help children express their wants and needs.

"Picture communication has proven beneficial for children with expressive language delays Melanie Pensak, M.S., CF-SLP, says. "It provides the child with an outlet for communication, and at the same time it helps to decrease their frustration. Children can choose a picture of highly-desired foods and toys and hand it to their communication partner as a way of expressing their wants."

Each speech therapy session is designed specifically to address each child's individual goals. Most speech therapy sessions consist of sensory or gross motor activities to help organize the child, followed by play-based therapy. Sessions also address articulation, language, and oral motor activities based on the child's needs.

"Children will become frustrated when they can't tell others their wants and needs," Melanie says. "They want to be active participants in their lives by making choices, and they need good communication models to acquire these skills."

"The role of the therapist is to provide an environment that matches the skill level of the child and enables them to communicate," Lisa explains. "By starting speech therapy at an early age, children can acquire the skills needed to be successful communicators."

To learn more about speech therapy, and to learn if your child might benefit, please contact Milestones—For Kids' Success at 630.792.1800. ○



## Communication Skills: Typical Development

**2-3 months:** early vocalizations begin to occur

**5-7 months:** babbling usually begins

**8-24 months:** jargon occurs (strings of sounds or syllables produced with a variety of stresses: and intonations)

**12 months:** starts to form "true" words around one year of age

**2 years:** child puts 2 to 3 words together and should have about 200 words in the speaking vocabulary

**2 1/2 years:** child has about 250 words in their speaking vocabulary and continues to put more words and phrases together

**3 years:** child uses nearly 1000 different words and is using 3 to 4-word sentences

## Help Your Child Communicate: What Parents Can Do

- Provide your child with as many choices as possible.
- Allow your child to communicate. Give them the time they need to respond.
- Communicate on their level. Talk to your child the way they talk to you so that they understand and can more readily respond. For example, if your child is talking in 2 and 3 word phrases, try using 2 and 3 word phrases to respond.
- Encourage communication through eye contact. A child who has good eye contact is learning to speak by watching your mouth movements.
- Listen, observe, and follow your child's lead in conversation.
- Start reading early and encourage your child to name pictures in books. Books are a great source for improving receptive and expressive vocabulary skills.

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## "WALK NOW" A Success!

Over 2,500 participants braved Chicago's legendary winds Sunday, May 23, to join the WALK NOW Chicago event at Soldier Field. More than \$500,000 has been collected so far, surpassing expectations..

"The people of Chicago came together on Sunday to show their support for families battling this baffling disorder and to raise money and move us one step closer to finding a cure," said Jonathan

Shestack, co-founder of Cure Autism Now.

WALK NOW Chicago also featured an autism community resource fair, including educational resources, therapists, schools and recreational organizations, as well as games and activities for the kids. Milestones—For Kids' Success ran a booth (pictured at right). Thanks to the WALK NOW Chicago sponsors—Exceptional Parent, The Chicago Fire, Oldies 104.3, US 99.5, Camelot Pa-



per, Foresters, BankOne, L. Craven & Sons, and Mayer, Brown, Rowe & Maw—for their support of this tremendous community event. Proceeds from

WALK NOW Chicago will support Cure Autism Now's ongoing efforts to find the causes, effective treatments and a cure for autism. ○

*Do you think  
your child may benefit?*

Free developmental screenings may be scheduled at Milestones – For Kids' Success at parents' convenience.  
Call 1.630.792.1800.

*This article adapted from the [www.cureautismnow.org](http://www.cureautismnow.org) website.*