



Friends of Children with Special Needs

華人特殊兒童之友

FCSN Dream Builders

December 2019

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Friends Coffee & Tea



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Kendra's Journey**

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Stars on Stage Photos

FCSN Performers: Percussion and Color Guard



FCSN Dream Builders

December 2019



FCSN East Bay Headquarters
2300 Peralta Blvd.
Fremont, CA 94536
T : 510.739.6900
F : 510.739.6999

FCSN South Bay Center
1029 S. Bascom Ave.
San Jose, CA 95129
T : 408.725.8000
F : 408.725.8811

www.fcsn1996.org

DECEMBER 2019 NEWSLETTER

Editors

Johnna M. Laird
Roger Leung
Helen Chou
Cherene Wong

Coordinator

Wei-Jen Hsia

Reporters

Helen Chou
Johnna M. Laird

Art Editor

Helen Chou

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YOU are IMPORTANT to be COUNTED in 2020 Census

by Sylvia Yeh, FCSN Executive Business Director

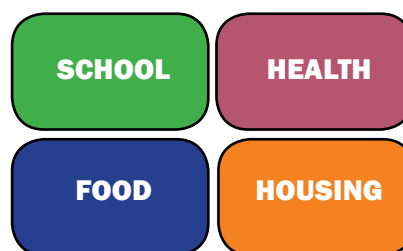
The Census is a population count of America that deeply matters to our community. The next Census count begins March 12, 2020 and continues until July 31, 2020. Census outcomes determine how much federal funding our county receives. Our community loses about \$2,000 per person, per year for 10 years (= \$20,000/p in 10 years) for each person not counted in the Census. An undercount of even just 3% would mean that our community loses \$1 billion over the next decade for programs benefitting the entire community: health care, education, housing, roads, emergency responders, public services, and more. Further, an undercount could cause California to lose a seat in Congress. YOU are IMPORTANT! Be counted in 2020 to secure the future!

FCSN is committed to reach out to as many Asian families with or without special needs in Alameda and Santa Clara counties to participate in the 2020 Census through the following:

- ▶ Educating about the purpose, importance, impact, and benefits of being counted to the special needs community
- ▶ Conducting seminars, workshops, and outreach events for participants in accessing, understanding, reviewing the Census questionnaire as well as guiding and walking through the questionnaire
- ▶ Providing language assistance, step-by-step instructions, and technical support to members to access the Census online and complete Census questionnaire (digital/online or paper forms) accurately.

Who gets counted in the Census?

Every person living in the U.S., regardless of citizenship or immigration status, gets counted in the Census.




\$10B
In annual federal
funding at stake

Census Questions

- Number of people residing in the household on April 1, 2020
- Whether the home is owned or rented
- Sex of each person in the household
- Age and date of birth of each person in the household
- Race of each person in the household
- Whether a person in the household is of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
- Relationship of each person in the household

Are Census responses confidential?

Under current federal law, the Census Bureau cannot release Census responses identifying individuals to the public or other federal agencies, including immigration authorities and law enforcement until 72 years after information is collected.

When will the 2020 Census results be released?

The Census Bureau is expected to announce the new population counts by Dec. 31, 2020.

Stay Tuned!! FCSN will soon conduct Census training and awareness seminars in both Chinese and English to bring awareness of census benefits and impact, promote the census participation, assist and guide families to complete the census questionnaire, and provide technical assistance for online Census response.

參與 2020 年人口普查的重要性

FCSN 執行長 Sylvia Yeh

美國每十年舉辦人口普查，根據人口普查結果來決定聯邦政府資金分配。2020 年即將展開人口普查，日期是從 2020 年 3 月 12 日開始到 7 月 31 日為止。人口普查的結果將決定我們所居住的縣市 (地方行政區) 可以得到多少聯邦政府的撥款。我們社區如果有任何一個人沒有參與人口普查，每人每年將失去 \$2,000 的聯邦撥款 (等於每人在十年中失去 \$20,000 的撥款)。即使只有 3% 的居民沒有參與人口普查，我們整個社區將會在未來十年失去十億美元的撥款，而影響到：醫療健保、教育、住屋、公路、緊急事故處理、公共服務 ... 等資源。此外，人口的低估甚至可能造成加州失去一席美國眾議院的席次。所以您很重要！務必參與 2020 年普查以確保你與孩子的未來！

華人特殊兒童之友 (FCSN) 將積極向居住在 Alameda 郡和 Santa Clara 郡的亞裔家庭 (不論有否特殊兒童的家庭) 宣導與協助他們參與 2020 年人口普查：

- ▶ 宣導人口普查的目的、重要性、以及對社區未來資源的影響。
- ▶ 舉辦說明會、研習會與對外宣傳的活動，讓參與者了解人口普查的問卷問題，如何作答、並回答參與者提出的問題。
- ▶ 提供中文翻譯服務，逐步說明問卷問題，並協助參與人口普查者上網完成填表 或一般實際填表。

人口普查的對象？

不管是否公民或移民的身份，所有居住在美國的人都應該在人口普查中被計算。

人口普查的資料是否保密？

根據目前聯邦法律，人口普查局在收集普查資料後的 72 年之內不得將有關資料洩露給大眾或其他聯邦機構，包括移民局及執法單位。

人口普查的問題？

1. 有多少人在 2020 年四月一日住在此住址
2. 這住屋是自己擁有的，還是租的？
3. 住在此屋子的每個人的性別
4. 住在此屋子的每個人的年齡及出生年月日
5. 住在此屋子的每個人的種族背景
6. 住在此屋子的每個人是否是西班牙語系、拉丁美洲語系？
7. 住在此屋子的每個人之間的關係

2020 年人口普查的結果何時會公佈？

人口普查局將在 2020 年 12 月 31 日公佈最新人口計算結果。

請注意！FCSN 很快將會舉辦人口普查的說明會及研習會，以中文與英文來宣導人口普查的重要性與影響，促進更多人參與人口普查，幫助並教導家庭完成人口普查表格，也提供上網參與的技術協助。



Emergency and Disaster Preparedness: Are You Ready?

by Nayeli Toto, FCSN East Bay Program Director

Fires, Earthquakes, Power Outages, Severe Storms, even Active Shootings. . .so many hardships have happened around us lately. Are you prepared? Do you know how to respond and manage when emergencies occur to protect yourself, your loved ones, pets, clients, or work companies? In October, fierce winds with potential to trigger fires led Pacific Gas & Electric to preemptively shut off power to mitigate wildfire risks in many Bay Area counties (Public Safety Power Shut-Off [PSPS]). A majority of people were unprepared, creating a sense of panic about what to do. Emergencies can happen at any moment. The time to prepare is before an emergency strikes. Will you be ready? Below is a list to start you thinking about what you could need and how to prepare in advance before disaster happens:

- Disaster Backpacks (including Medicine)
- Disaster Supply Kits
- Important Document Back-Up
- Creating Reunification and Communication Plans

FCSN is committed to be more Emergency-prepared by:

1. Developing Emergency Management Plans for fires, earthquakes, power outages, and active shootings
2. Identifying Chain of Commands and Responsibilities
3. Providing Emergency Preparedness Training to Clients and Staff
4. Conducting Emergency Drills Quarterly
5. Testing the Effectiveness of the Emergency Plans
6. Purchasing Survival Kits

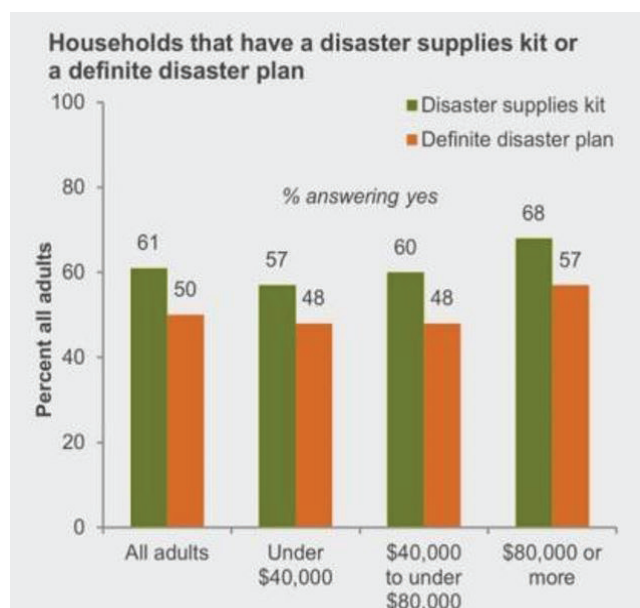
Currently, the FCSN management team has completed Steps 1 and 2. By the end of 2019, we will finalize an Emergency Preparedness Curriculum suitable for individuals with special needs. Starting in 2020, we will provide comprehensive Emergency Preparedness Training to clients and staff on a regular basis. Our clients will be trained in what to do before, during, and after emergencies. Our staff will practice their respon-

sibilities (who is doing what by when) to lessen negative impacts from emergencies. We will conduct drills on a quarterly basis for clients and staff to practice what to do in case of fire, earthquake or active shooting. We will also invite parents to participate in our drills and meet us at the evacuation sites so when a real emergency happens, parents have developed and practiced reunification plans.

Besides getting prepared internally, FCSN will bring Emergency Preparedness Awareness to our FCSN families and community through outreaches and training. FCSN will also apply to serve on our county's and city's Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) through the Office of Emergency Services (OES) so FCSN can be a responder during a major disaster. FCSN has developed the capacity of provide two medium (12-passenger) buses with wheelchair lifts and four minivans with wheelchair ramps. All FCSN staff members maintain valid CPR/First Aid certificates to handle minor injuries.

Making sure we are prepared for emergencies is not something we do once; it's an ongoing undertaking. We must continually evaluate our Emergency Management plans, our training, our facilities, and our community.

Being Prepared saves lives!



FCSN Talent Showcase Set for March 14, 2020

Johnna Laird, FCSN Dream Builders Reporter

Mark your calendars for the Sixth Annual Special Needs Talent Showcase on Saturday, March 14, 2020.

While the Talent Showcase location remains the same at the Santa Clara Convention Center, there is a time change to the afternoon – 3:00 to 5:30 p.m.

Also new this year, the Talent Showcase will increase its presence with social media, appearing on Facebook and on Twitter as well as on FCSN's website.

"We want to promote our event and reach out to a bigger audience as well as attract more interested parties to participate," says Kelly Ko, East Bay Outreach and Enrichment Programs Director. "We want to have one place where people can go in to see pictures and videos from the previous years as well as get information for the current year."

Additionally, the publicity and web presence will help in registration and ticket purchase process.

The Special Needs Talent Showcase has become an annual event that packs the event. Performers look forward to the opportunity for their chance in the spotlight.

"The Showcase provides motivation and encouragement to work hard for something performers really want. This event rewards hard work and provides a platform to shine and reach for the stars," says Kelly. "It gives hope and helps fulfill dreams."

The courage to showcase talents helps break stereotypes, Kelly points out, and bring awareness about disabilities. It encourages others to focus on their talents and abilities rather than their disabilities.

"We are inspired and amazed by each and every one of them," Kelly says.

The event has created a lot of performance opportunities for our talented individuals and opened many doors for them.

Dear Friends of Children with Special Needs,

I would like to thank you, not only for the trophy and the money, but for giving me and others with learning differences the ability to show our talents in that lovely stage. Everybody's performance was beautiful, unique, and fun to watch. To be honest, I did not expect to win, so I would like to thank your generosity, truly. You gave me the ability to shine, and for that, I would also like to thank you. I loved every minute of it. Your staff are very kind, you were kind, and the other guests were as well. I am honored to be able to appear next year. For this, I will be donating a portion of my prize money to you. I want you to be able to help kids like me be recognized!

Thank you so much,

Tyler Ashley-Goldstein

Dear FCSN,

We want to thank you so much for hosting such an amazing event. It was so wonderful to experience such supportive and inclusive organization that allows our kids to shine... the talent and passion each of the performers exhibited is absolute evidence that our kids don't simply have disabilities - they have different and phenomenal abilities! Tyler wanted to donate some of his winnings back to your organization, and in honor of his giving spirit, we decided to match it. It's not much, but hope it helps a deserving individual next year... or whatever else you decide.

Sincerely,

Lisa & Elie

Talent Showcase a Springboard for Opportunities

Johnna Laird, FCSN Dream Builders Reporter

The Special Needs Talent Showcase proved to be a launchpad for musician Tony Nakamoto. A two-time winner, Tony with his solo performance on marimba won in 2018 and was an ensemble winner with Magic Makers, the rock band, in 2015 when he played guitar.

So impressed with his performance that played on YouTube, Tony's job counselor helped to secure a job for Tony at a San Jose music shop.

"There wasn't a direct connection," says Tony's mom, Hiroko, "but Tony's Talent Showcase experience

showed that Tony could fit in an environment surrounded by music and that he understood the need to treat all musical instruments with respect and the care they require."

The job lasted several months, but it did not continue since the shop did not have enough work to keep Tony busy.

"Overall, The Talent Showcase experience has been very positive," says Hiroko, noting that Tony has been part of the showcase every year except for 2016.

"Tony has garnered some well-deserved positive publicity. His accomplishments have demonstrated an ability to perform at a high level, and it also demonstrated his ability to focus and master something that frankly not everyone can do.

"We have a saying, 'Music is hard. If it were easy, everyone would be doing it.' Tony's performances at the Showcase have been an amazing venue to show the world what he is capable of and for that we are grateful."

THE 6TH ANNUAL SPECIAL NEEDS Talent Showcase



**3 PAID performances &
\$500 CASH for the
top 3 finalists & more!**

AUDITIONS COMING SOON!

►► **ENTRY FORMS DUE** ◀◀
January 3, 2020

(First 70 solo / group entries)

Entry forms are available on the website

►► **PRELIMINARY AUDITIONS** ◀◀
January 12, 2020

FCSN Fremont Center

2300 Peralta Blvd. Fremont CA 94536

►► **FINAL COMPETITION** ◀◀
March 14, 2020

Santa Clara Convention Center Theater

5001 Great America Parkway

Santa Clara, CA

Contact: Kelly Ko (510) 739-6900 *3319

SNtalentshowcase@gmail.com

<https://www.specialneedstalentshowcase.org/>

[f https://www.facebook.com/specialneedstalentshowcase/](https://www.facebook.com/specialneedstalentshowcase/)

[t https://twitter.com/sntalentshow](https://twitter.com/sntalentshow)

Nurturing Possibilities Through Art: Kendra's Journey

By Johnna Laird, FCSN Reporter

When case manager Jenny Lin convinced my daughter, Kendra, to take her afternoon art class, she opened incredible doors for Kendra. New to FCSN, Kendra was a less than enthusiastic art student, but Jenny persisted and Kendra blossomed.

At the same time, I was attending Family Seminars that Anna Wang, Vice President of Enrichment Programs and Community Relations, who repeatedly promoted the idea that parents must be the mover-shakers to help their adult children establish themselves in vocations and avocations. I listened carefully as she brought in speaker after speaker, including a parent in Newark who opened an ice cream shop to ensure that her adult son had work and friends. My

husband and I had tried a vending machine business with our daughter but that had not worked out. Before FCSN, we had enlisted Kendra in a few volunteer experiences, but none had led to a passion and none had led to work.

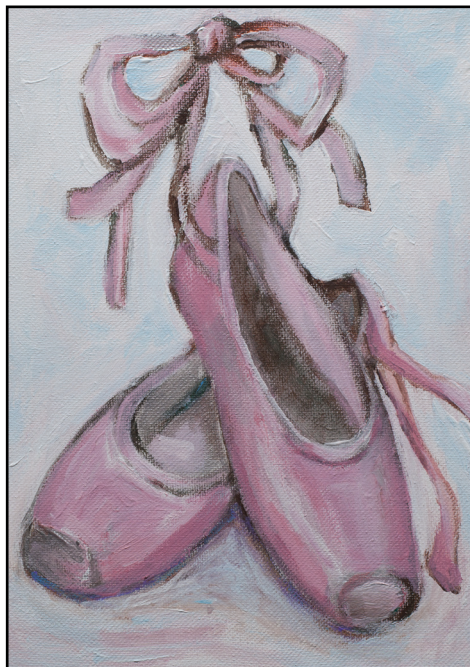
The more Anna talked about the role of parents the more I felt determined to somehow help Kendra. When I saw the poppies that Kendra painted in Jenny's afternoon art class, I saw a possibility – the possibility of turning the painting into a greeting card. I loved the colors and the simplicity of the flowers blowing in the wind.

While making a little pocket money would be good for her, I realized it would be a powerful experience just to have an interest that would

break even. I had no idea the opportunities that this would create. After a couple of false starts, I found a print shop in Santa Cruz that was willing to help, even printing business cards and enthusiastically welcoming me each time I came with a new piece of art work. A friend took a picture of Kendra to go on the back of her cards, giving some credit to FCSN.

When Jenny ended her classes, Kendra continued lessons with Daphne Devine. When Daphne moved on from FCSN to another program, Kendra continued twice monthly lessons on weekends with Daphne.

Events happened so quickly I can barely remember them all. I entered Kendra's work in the Ala-



ameda County Fair with her permission and with the idea of helping to show capabilities. She received a number of ribbons that encouraged her. Olive Hyde, the art gallery in Fremont, published a call for artwork for its holiday show and Kendra entered without my knowing. She was invited to participate in the holiday show and presented 15 different card designs.

Wei-Jen, the editor of the FCSN newsletter, heard about Kendra's paintings and encouraged Friends Coffee & Tea to showcase Kendra's art for three months in spring 2018. Customers bought cards and even though her artwork wasn't for sale two paintings were sold accidentally to a family in Berkeley. With these encouraging responses, we joined the Fremont

Art Association to allow Kendra to sell her cards at the shop in Niles. Two months later, the Art Association called asking Kendra to create a mini-show. Thirty of her paintings went on display and for sale from June to September in 2019. Five paintings sold, and the Berkeley family agreed to lend the paintings they had acquired, a cow and an elephant, for the mini show. A painting that had been commissioned for a family member in North Carolina was shipped back in time for the Fremont Art Association show.

Kendra once again entered new creations at the Alameda County Fair, but this year, there were no ribbons, only the comment to bring back the art work to accompany the cards which we could not do

this year because practically every painting was on display at the Art Association.

Every month Kendra asks, "How much did I sell?" Every sale matters to her. When Hope Church, next door to FCSN, has held its yard sales, Kendra makes sure to sign up. At the last sale, she earned \$20, sitting for four hours to sell 10 cards. But during that time, people came up and complimented on her work. Every time someone says, "I really like your artwork" she feels encouraged, and she beams.

None of this could have happened without FCSN and the village that FCSN has brought together, people of goodwill who reach out to encourage and nurture possibilities.



AMAZING STARTS HERE...

By Rita and Davinder Sandhu, FCSN Parents

It's been about two and a half years since our son, Vishal, started with FCSN W.I.L.L. (WORK, INTEGRATE, LEARN, LIVE) Adult Day Program in San Jose. Wow! What an amazing and unique place it is!

After Vishal completed his post-secondary program of public education at age of 22 years old, we started looking for the right program suitable for him. We wanted to find a place where, first and foremost, he would be happy, and secondly, where his special needs, in regards to his limited communication and social skills and his sensitivity to loud noises would be understood and addressed.

We visited many adult programs, and none of them seemed to match our basic wishes. As a result, Vishal stayed home for four months. Even though we did things with him non-stop, I still felt that he missed the routine of getting out of bed and having a purposeful day. Then finally and luckily, we came across FCSN, and the nurturing environment of this place gave us the best vibes. We decided to give it a try. Now after two and a half years, we still enthusiastically say that this is the best thing that happened to us.

FCSN's staff--every single one from the administration to actual hands-on instruction--are so dedicated. They go above-and-beyond to help clients reach their potential. They apply individualized and innovative approaches to help clients accomplish their goals. As a result, Vishal

is now more present and responsive, and he shows more interest in other people and tasks around him, which makes me incredibly happy. Vishal has also become more tolerant of loud noises with the constant help from FCSN staff members who integrate him into noisy situations little by little and give him a quiet task when they think he has had enough of noisy environments. This gradual weaning built his trust with staff. To my surprise, he even participates in FCSN's Percussion Ensemble class now and enjoys learning to play loud and energetic rhythms.

FCSN's W.I.L.L. program offers person-centered planning and tailored services to each unique client. It is a diversified and comprehensive program where the clients learn

to work to their abilities, integrate into their communities, learn new skills, and live fully to their own potential. They are given the opportunity to plan their weekly schedules with their instructors who provide them with choices and tasks that build their sense of empowerment and confidence. FCSN also provides many enrichment programs, including after school and family gatherings on the weekends. The possibilities are endless here.

FCSN takes so much stress off our shoulders. We'll forever be grateful for what FCSN does for special needs individuals and families. Thank you for giving Vishal a place to grow, learn, have fun and be himself.



Vishal (wearing the white shirt) and his family

CLIENT SHARING

A NEW ME

By Laurence Wu, FCSN Client

I joined FCSN Tailored Day Services (TDS) Program after I was fresh out of high school in 2019. My parents wanted me to find a job and take some classes at Ohlone Community College, but I was not sure what I really wanted to do. Since I have never worked in my life, I doubted who would ever hire me so I attended FCSN TDS sessions to work on my people skills and general technical job skills. I received one-to-one coaching service from my trainer who is very patient, listens to me, and helps me figure out what I truly might enjoy doing.

My TDS trainer helped me to explore several job fields, and I realized that I have a passion in food services. She then helped

me to obtain some volunteer work, so I could gain experience to land a job. At the volunteer work, my trainer coached me on how to complete job tasks and work with other people. In addition, with her on my side, I registered and studied for the online course. I passed the test and earned the Food Handler's Certification!

The experience I gained was added to my resume. FCSN also helped me to pursue Paid Internship Program (PIP) funding with Regional Center and establish the employment opportunity with Gonutz for Donuts in Fremont. Through I certainly did not expect to make donut decorations at a donut shop, I truly love what I do! Now, I receive job coaching services from FCSN,



so I can get familiar with my job assignments at my worksite. I look forward to going to work every day and earning \$\$\$!

A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR ME

by Charles Zachary Dodge
FCSN Client

I initially joined FCSN Supported Employment Program (SEP) for the purpose of improving my interview skills and increasing my work experience. But from working with my trainer, I realized that I wanted to learn and improve even more things, like my general social skills, handyman skills, and computer skills. I eagerly tried all the different sessions that FCSN SEP offered. My favorites so far are cashiering at FCSN Snack Bar

every Thursday and learning computer skills in SEP's newest class of the Job Club every Monday: Microsoft Excel Series. I am an avid contributor, and my trainer says I'm doing excellently! Through working with FCSN various trainers, I was able to add more skills to my resume which I hope will lead me to getting a job very soon.



CLIENT SHARING

Feeling Alive Again

By Junbo Shi, FCSN Client

I moved to the United States with my parents in 2000 from Nan Jing, China, when I was 10 years old. It was quite difficult for me since I couldn't speak English and didn't know what to expect. I attended Special Ed classes in middle and high school. I graduated in 2009. After that I just stayed at home for nine years until I started FCSN W.I.L.L. (WORK, INTEGRATE, LEARN, LIVE) Adult Day Program in 2018. I feel I am alive again!!

In high school, life was difficult because of homework and bullies. What I found easy were recesses. The school gave too much homework which was too hard for me to finish. Some people were mean to me at times. They teased and bullied me. I don't remember much because I don't want to remember those bad things. I remember fighting back during some incidents. Other times I ignored them. However, I do remember having friends from high school, four or five. I remember Steven who used to hang out with me during recesses. After high school, I lost contact. I don't know where my friends are or what they're doing.

After high school, I asked my dad if I could go to community college, but he said it may be too difficult for me. That's the beginning of my nine years stay-at-home life. At first, it was fun watching TV all day long or running errands with my parents. But year after years, boredom crept in, and I was miserable. My doctor suggested I see a psychologist. The psychologist

said that I had been staying too long at home doing nothing. He helped us to get connected with San Andreas Regional Center. After a few months of the intake process, my social worker referred me to FCSN's Day Program.

Since joining FCSN in March 2018, my teachers have taught me a lot of things. I have learned to work hard, be active, and respect my friends. I feel that the relationships I have with people have gotten much better! I have more friends now, and I am very happy to hang out with them every day. We talk about a lot of things, share laughs, and have so much fun eating and doing things together. I also have been busy learning new things through FCSN's prevocational training opportunities to sharpen my skills for future jobs. I volunteer

at Tzu Chi Center to do general cleaning; Morley Park to rake and shovel leaves and grass; Evergreen Community Center to clean the windows; Farmers' Market to sell the organic handmade soap that we make at FCSN; and Meals on Wheels to deliver hot meals to the elderly. I also receive food services training. The most exciting activity is Wednesday's Farmers' Market. I go there with my peers and teacher to sell FCSN skincare products, plus promote FCSN programs and activities. Vendors are very nice and friendly to us. I made some new friends. They give us big bags of fruits or produces to share in the program. I feel alive and productive for the things I do for the community.

Besides the volunteer work, I also participate in many fun classes



FCSN offers: Zumba, ASL, Cooking, Computer, Basketball, and Swimming. I like the activities because they are fun. I get tired sometimes, but I still enjoy them. The people are really nice to me, especially the teachers.

What made me proud the most is that I got hired as a janitor at FCSN South Bay Center in August 2019. I always wanted to work hard and earn money. The center is beautiful, and I like to help keep it clean. However, I worried that I might fail. FCSN arranged a job coach who patiently teaches me what and how to do my job effectively. He lists the job tasks and teaches me step-by-step to get the work done. He encourages me to try my best and not give up. I can clean the mirrors, the toilets, the counters, and mop the floors really well now! What I need to improve on is sweeping the floors neatly. Sometimes I forget which spots I've finished cleaning. I also need to work on finishing my job on time or earlier, especially when my VTA ride arrives earlier than expected to pick me up. Looking into the future, I hope to work at Friends Coffee & Tea shop one day.

My life has changed dramatically since attending FCSN Adult Day Program. There are so many opportunities for me to work, integrate, learn, and live. That's why I am having so much fun at the W.I.L.L. program!

"SPECIAL" NEEDS POEM

They say that I have "special" needs,
and while that's partly true,
the needs that matter most to me
are the same ones you have too.
I NEED TO BE ACCEPTED.
I need friends that make me smile.
I need a chance to learn and grow,
feeling valued all the while.
Sure, I need some extra help
and some things I can't do,
But I hope you'll see beyond all that ...
Inside, I'm just like you.

- April Vernon



VOLUNTEER

A Meaningful Volunteer Experience



By Chris Wong
FCSN Youth Volunteer

When I volunteered for the first time for landscaping with a diverse group, I had no idea what a fun, meaningful experience I was about to have. A number of people participated in the project to help increase the landscaping and natural beauty at the South Bay Center in San Jose: FCSN staff members, Adult Day Program and Independent Living Service (ILS) clients, parents, siblings, and community partners, including the West Valley Rotary Community Corps and the City of Campbell. It was such an unusual group but we demonstrated good teamwork.

The scope of the work was impressive. Bob Carlson from West Valley Rotary Club gathered donations from Home Depot and materials from City of Campbell. Bob Siudinski, a City of Campbell Park Staff member, and Press Abella, a retired landscaper, taught the group proper ways to plant (We all learned something new that day! I can no longer use “I don’t have a green thumb” as an excuse

when my plants die). FCSN staff organized the event, recruiting clients and family members to volunteer. Work was distributed across participants, and thanks to the great job done by those organizing the event, everything ran smoothly from the start.

When I arrived, I was told that the goal was to completely clear the front and side planters of weeds and put in the plants that are now there. At the time, the task seemed daunting. It seemed that three hours would simply not be enough. I thought that just clearing the weeds would take more time than that. Nonetheless, we all started pulling out weeds. It was a tiring endeavor, but everyone remained jovial. After FCSN clients were shown what to do, they worked as hard as everyone else and were quite effective at their designated tasks. To save money and promote recycle-and-reuse concepts, we cut out cardboard to lay on top of the soil rather than buy expensive weed block. Cutting a hole in cardboard was not easy because of the card-

board’s thickness. Afterward everyone helped in the planting of lavenders and other purple-ish plants. Before we knew it, the job was done. With time to spare! We rested and consumed sandwiches and goodies prepared by Friends Coffee & Tea. Always a coffee person, I ventured outside my comfort zone and tried the iced fresh fruit tea and lemon basil drink. Both were delicious!

This experience is a fantastic reminder of the ability of those with special needs. If we do our part to enable them, teach them and support them, they work diligently like any one of us and to great effect. Give yourself a chance to work with them, volunteer. You will be amazed and uplifted.



Interview with Roxana Chiu, Friends Coffee & Tea

By Helen Chou
FCSN Reporter

Stepping into Friends Coffee & Tea provided me with an immediate refuge from the busy traffic of South Bascom Road. Nestled in a corner of FCSN South Bay Center, the cozy and elegantly decorated coffee shop seats 18, and I can clearly see the care and thought that went into designing every inch of the store. Floor to ceiling shelves line the back wall, displaying ceramic wares, art works and soap gift sets.

Behind the counter, store manager Roxana Chiu and another staff member are busy setting up the store. Roxana brewed me a cup of Friends Coffee & Tea's Signature Strawberry Rose Tea. I was impressed by the fragrant floral aroma and the warm fruity tones of the tea. Roxana proudly explained that all their coffee and teas are made from high-quality ingredients. The strawberry and rose jam I tasted was made from fresh berries; no artificial sweeteners or commercial syrups were used. I sat down with Roxana Chiu for this inter-

view to understand the mission and vision of Friends Coffee & Tea.

When Friends Coffee & Tea opened a year ago, I was very excited to learn that the store aims to provide working opportunities for special needs individuals. How did the idea come about and what was it like to start a business catering to special needs job training?

Roxana Chu (RC) : The idea to establish Friends Coffee & Tea originated from several intentions. Many of our clients have talents in art, ceramics, Lego construction, soap making. We at FCSN wanted a space to display and sell their creations; moreover, since FCSN is a family-based organization, we wanted to have a space for families to sit down and chat over a cup of coffee. This led to the idea that since we would be running this cafe ourselves, we can use this as a skill-training site for our FCSN clients and help them build job skills to transition to find employment in the community.

In 2015, FCSN acquired the South Bay building on South Bascom Street. In 2016 remodeling of the building was completed and the FCSN South Bay Center allocated a space to serve as cafe. In 2017, FCSN approached me to take on the role of store manager, and it was only then that I started to research and prepare for the cafe. With a limited budget of \$50,000 and no experience running a cafe, I had to do everything from laying out store displays, designing recipes that will go on the menu, coming up with a business name and logo, purchasing equipment, and applying for permits. We had a soft opening in February 2018 and a Grand Opening in April. It has been 1.5 years since we opened for business, and we are constantly re-evaluating our business model and making changes as needed. For example, we didn't purchase an espresso machine at the beginning because we were concerned that the high-pressure and the heat from the equipment might be too dangerous for our clients to

(continued on page 16)



(continued from page 15)

work around in this compact workspace.

Now we are thinking to upgrade with an espresso machine to attract more customers. The challenge is that our power capacity is insufficient to operate commercial equipment. There are many challenges that present themselves as our business evolves, but we do keep in mind that change is a normal part of doing business.

Question: How does Friends Coffee & Tea train and employ special needs individuals?

RC: Operating a coffee shop involves multiple components that provide different learning opportunities for individuals with different abilities, such as management of inventory and supplies, food handling and safety, equipment operation, cashier registering, customer interface, daily operations, and cleaning. The idea of making coffee seems simple, but even after training for a year, it is difficult for a special needs individual to master each task independently. Even making a drink from our menu is challenging for our clients to do on their own since our drinks are uniquely-designed with special ingredients and each drink might take as many as ten steps to complete.

We are currently training four clients from FCSN Adult Day Program. They come in a couple times per week and work different shifts. After receiving training in a supporting role for a couple of months, they may

be able to fetch the correct ingredients for specific drinks and clean up afterwards. However, making a drink all on their own is still a challenge given that swiftness and accuracy is difficult for them to control. In order to successfully learn skills, they need to have the discipline to come in everyday and practice. We observe them for about 3-6 months and determine if they are able to master the skills. Depending on the individual's abilities, some are not able to work independently even after training period. We may suggest that they try something else such as cleaning or daily operations. The best-case scenario is for them to "graduate" and confidently go out and secure a job in the community. We do have one higher functioning individual through Regional Center. He comes to work three times a week. He is able to make salads and sandwiches and a couple of drinks. After six months of training, he is the first special needs staff we have hired. Most of the higher functioning individuals receive job training during their post-secondary years and are able to find jobs after they graduate.

FCSN has many creative parents who have good ideas that can provide opportunities for our clients. The soap gift sets displayed in our store is another example of a business idea designed by a parent. Yet even the simple act of making soap is a challenge for some individuals, measuring the exact amounts, pouring into the mold with a steady hand, and keeping the materials clean, all require supervision.

Our cafe also serves as a venue to display works of art by several special needs artists. Recognizing the talents of special needs individuals is important for bringing awareness to the community. Moreover, the sale of the goods help supplement the overhead of running the cafe. Currently, Friends Coffee & Tea is showcasing Austin's handmade ceramic mugs and wares, and art by Kendra, Van-Hai and Jinko. Clients of FCSN ADP also help in the production and packaging of gift sets such as the soap gift set and tea sets. These high-quality goods are perfect for gift giving during the holiday season. More importantly ADP clients experience a lot of pride knowing that people buy the products that they made with their own hands.

Question: What are the short-term goals that you would like to see the store achieve in the next year?

RC: Our immediate goal is to break even. Due to our location being in a light foot-traffic area, we currently are not attracting enough customers. Getting more customers and generating more revenue is definitely one of our short-term goals. It is challenging to operate a business here in the Bay Area where rent is high, and we don't generate enough business to cover the costs. We would like to have a sustainable program so that we may operate in the long run, train more people, and serve the community. In addition to selling drinks and snacks, we also sell bakery goods by Andersen Bakery, as well as sandwich lunch sets. We make

deliveries* to nearby businesses as well. Our food and drinks are not only unique and high-quality but also very reasonably priced, so those who have tried us often come back as regular customers. We have very high ratings on Yelp and we also have good Facebook reviews. But our customer base is not wide enough, and a lot of our customers don't even know that we are associated with special needs. We need to promote the message that Friends Coffee & Tea serves the special needs community through training programs, and our cafe serves as a window for the outside community to see what our special needs individuals can do and to get to know us better.

Question: What is your long-term vision for Friends Coffee & Tea?

RC: In 10 years, I would like to see Friends Coffee & Tea continue to serve as a skills-training and employment launchpad for even more special needs clients. Our mission has always been for this to be not only a place where people from the community come to enjoy drinks and snacks, but also to serve as an information hub where special needs families can gather and exchange information. My hope is that Friends Coffee & Tea can serve as a bridge to bring people in the community to get to know special needs individuals and support them to be active participants in our community.

*Lead time for lunch catering is 48 hours, please call or email the store number to place an order.

(408) 725-8811

or email coffeeshop@fcsn1996.org



OPPORTUNITIES PROVIDED BY FRIENDS COFFEE & TEA

Friends Coffee & Tea provides many opportunities for special needs clients to get on-the-job training.



Store Opening : Daily 4 - 5 clients from ADP

Morning work shift : Daily 5 clients from ADP

Afternoon / Weekend youth volunteers :

5 special needs youth coming to help at coffee shop

WEP (work empowerment program) :

15 students learn how to clean coffee shop and how to make drinks for coffee shop

Artwork Display : Artwork from 6 students are showcased periodically



Soap / Hand Cream Team : 10 students from ADP help make and package soap/hand cream products

Lego team : 12 people create Lego artwork for sell to the public



Cookie team : 10 students are involved with baking cookies for sale

Open Music Fun Event :

Saturday afternoon - 10 students. Once a month all special need students get to have a chance to perform with all different musical instruments, singing and dancing



Moonlight Café : This special event is held once or twice per year, 12 FCSN special needs students train to be waiters and waitresses and learn to take orders and serve drinks to customers

FCSN Overcomes Challenges for Clients to Take College Courses

By Johnna Laird, FCSN Dream Builders Reporter



With community integration as an on-going focus for special needs clients at Friends of Children with Special Needs, Eastbay Day Program Manager Vivian “Wei Wei” Largusa culminated two years of hard work to enroll seven FCSN clients at Ohlone Community College on the Fremont campus.

Limited hours when clients were available during FCSN’s Day Program and Ohlone’s regulations posed challenges that at times seemed insurmountable.

“For the past two years I have been in contact with individuals from Ohlone where we were trying to figure out a way for our clients to take courses. Courses offered during the allotted times for clients to attend turned out to be courses that some clients had already taken,” said Wei Wei, explaining part of the challenge. Plus the college has new regulations limiting the number of times that students can enroll in classes, and no exceptions are made for students with special needs.

When FCSN surveyed clients, a number of new clients expressed interest in enrolling in classes even with few offerings. Exercise classes received the greatest interest among courses.

Beyond the hurdles posed within Ohlone’s regulations, FCSN encountered slow responses from clients and families. “It was difficult in some cases getting commitments from families and clients. Sometimes clients were interested, but we did not receive timely responses back from families,” said Wei Wei.

The seven students enrolled in a cardio class, integrated with other students and without any modifications.

ADP Clients Learn To Grow Microgreens

Interview with Vivian Chao, EBADP Manager FCSN
By Helen Chou



What is the story behind the Microgreen Project?

Around June 2019, John Chu, one of our FCSN parent volunteers, pitched the Microgreen Project idea to our directors. Since a successful microgreen harvesting cycle occurs about every two weeks and can be accomplished with resources here at the Eastbay FCSN center, he concluded that a Microgreen Project could provide tasks that FCSN clients could be trained to do. Once FCSN can produce regularly and in a larger scale, then we can start to

produce for local farmers markets or sell to families and friends, or even businesses in the community. FCSN directors and staff decided this is a project that we could readily embrace.

What types of microgreens are experimenting with?

We have experimented with cilantro, peas, sprouts, wheat, and basil.

What is the client involvement in this process?

Our aim is to involve the client every step of the way. They choose which types of plants to grow, seed preparation, setting up stations, watering and caring for seedlings to receive adequate light, and harvesting the microgreens. We ask the ADP clients, especially those involved in the gardening section, what they would like to grow, and we vote. We then go to the gardening store as part of the process for them to select the seeds. Clients plant from seeds. Then plants are grown in planter boxes. Gardening

The cardio class is the first of what Wei Wei intends to be an on-going program of enrolling FCSN clients in Ohlone College courses.

“Our clients who are attending are very proud and excited to be taking Ohlone classes. They have already been talking about what courses they may want to enroll in next semester,” says Wei Wei. Another challenge, she adds, is finding similar classes that interest clients.

“I love it,” says Diane, one of the participants. “It gives me a chance to lose weight and increase my heart rate. The coach has helped a lot using weights.”

Meghan is equally enthusiastic: “It’s awesome learning things. I’m getting muscles and it’s helping me get into a dress for the wedding,” where she is a bridesmaid. “There are lots

of tests, but they are okay.”

“It’s nice to be around other people on the college campus,” says Kendra, who likes the variety of participating in the Tuesday-Thursday cardio class from 11 a.m. to 12:30. “I like the teacher. He is really nice. He wants everyone to pass and earn an A. I got 5 out of 5 on one quiz and 4 out of 5 on another. We do weights and the treadmill and the bike. He teaches how to build more muscle and lose weight. Some stretches are good. I think they are improving my balance.”

As long as there’s sufficient client interest shown in taking courses, Wei Wei plans to continue courses at Ohlone. Client interest will determine the type of courses chosen. “We need at least four clients to sign up for a course to have at least

one group for the class,” she says. “We need four clients to justify the expense of having one staff member present with them in the class. The staff member is there to assist clients, encourage, help understand directions and assist with any necessary modifications.

“We also want to consider classes that may not require outside course work as our staff will not always be available to support clients with homework,” she explains.



clients maintain the plants. Currently clients are growing sage, thyme, lavender, rosemary, green onions and strawberries.

Right now, we are still working through many challenges. Let’s say we are in the experimentation phase. Unfortunately, a lot of the seeds are not sprouting. This leads us to evaluate and figure out how much moisture and sunlight each kind of plant requires in different stages of growth. Then we make adjustments to increase the project’s success. We are taking copious notes of our trials and errors to make sure that we are ready to start growing in preparation for selling next year. When we start-

ed this project, we thought it was supposed to be very easy to grow, but unfortunately it is not as easy as it seems. Despite the challenges, we want to continue because I do think that this model could definitely become successful for our clients, something our clients could really get a handle on. We eventually want to get them involved in purchasing items for planting, preparing the seeds, growing the plants, harvesting the produce, and getting the plants for sale at farmers markets.

How are the clients responding to this project?

Although we currently are not producing enough to sell at farmers

markets, with the little bit we have produced our clients have used the microgreens in their recipes. We have ILS (Independent Living Skills) cooking classes once a week, and clients use the greens in their salads and sandwiches. Our clients are seeing the value of caring for the plants and enjoying the end results. Harvesting what they have grown themselves and being able to use the greens in their cooking provides a satisfaction to clients.

What is your short-term, immediate goal? What is on your wish list?

Our goal is to start the process of growing to sell microgreens next

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Microgreens cont'd from p.19

year. Currently we have invested around \$500-\$700 in seeds and supplies. Although I think we have everything that we need for now in terms of material, it would be helpful to have expert consultation to guide us in increasing our success rate. Another issue that we face is that the microgreens need to be tended daily. However, our ADP clients only attend classes Monday through Friday, so we also need to iron out the schedule so that the plants receive attention on weekends. Right now we have some staff and clients from SLS (Supported Living Services) come by and help us every once in a while to spray, keeping the plants moist rather than drying out. But we need to figure out a better way for a sustainable, consistent system in which the greens are being taken care of.

What is your long-term vision for this project?

In the long run we would like to produce enough for a small stall and sell to the public at the farmers markets. Eventually, we would like to start a small business for our clients. Through this project our clients can have jobs and earn some sort of income, similar to Friends Coffee & Tea at the South Bay Center providing training and work for our clients. Right now we don't have a structure for this, but this is our vision. We know we can definitely train our clients. If we are successful here in the East Bay, then we can set up a similar venture for the South Bay Center.

New Musical Avenues for FCSN Performers

Johnna Laird – Dream Builders Reporter



When the Tri-City Band Corps, a 300-member student-run performance and marching band based out of Mission San Jose High School in Fremont, reached out to FCSN to launch a special needs color guard team, a new door opened for special needs individuals.

FCSN welcomed the opportunity to launch its first Color Guard and Percussion Teams in November 2018. FCSN's Color Guard and Percussion Group is now entering its second year after receiving standing ovations during exhibitions in Concord and San Jose late last winter.

The award-winning Tri-City Band Corps contacted FCSN as a way to give back to the community while also increasing its team's competitiveness. In a competi-

tion, an East Coast band with a special needs percussion section and color guard won top honors. Tri-City Band Corps sought to start a similar special needs percussion section and color guard on the West Coast.

FCSN held try-outs in November 2018 and received an overwhelming response from clients, with nearly 50 auditioning.

Initially, the color guard faced challenges with flags that proved too heavy for some clients to maneuver deftly, and they were discouraged. Anna Wang, FCSN's Vice President of Enrichment Programs and Community Relations, reached out to Annette Odello, who had launched the Blue Devils Special Needs Guard in Concord nine years ago. Annette, who marched for a num-

ber of years with the Blue Devils as a twirler and drum major in the organization her parents organized in 1957, immediately embraced FCSN clients interested in color guard.

Annette volunteered to travel the 680-corridor weekly to work with FCSN's color guard. Annette replaced too-heavy flagstuffs with lighter ones and complex dance maneuvers she broke into basic steps to make them easier to memorize. Annette brought joy to clients' faces as she lightened the physical burden and structured for success.

In October 2019 Annette was

recognized by San Francisco television channel KPIX with a Jefferson Award for her volunteerism in Concord and Fremont.

"Our goal is to give our kids improved self-esteem and confidence," says Anna. "I think being able to perform in front of 3,000 people and be applauded, having the audience sing along as they perform, is a real confidence booster. The kids enjoy being in the spotlight and excelling in what they do.

"It's another kind of brilliance and offers clients another opportunity to step into the spotlight the way the Special Needs Talent Showcase provides. With the color

guard, there's the opportunity to work on hand-eye coordination and the entire gross motor skills. And movement is always good. There's also the chance to perform and join in parades, to be proud of these skills and do the things that regular people do," says Anna.

The percussionists are led by long-time Mission San Jose High School music instructor Monica Kraft who works with the 16 FCSN percussionists, who breaks music into easier steps. Student members of the Tri-City Band Corps assist FCSN performers, helping them to follow through with instructions so they play their portion of the music. Percussionists perform three times throughout the year.



Fully Integrating into Local Communities



ities. In addition to meals, FCSN clients and staff also provide daily wellness checks, making sure that seniors and disabled individuals are safe, alert and cared for. FCSN also partners with Tzu Chi Foundation where volunteers prepared toiletries for senior care facility victims of Woolsey Fire.

For more than a year FCSN clients have generated in excess of 1800 hours at Campbell Park Projects. Their abilities surprised a lot of people. With support from the FCSN staff, not only did clients help beautify local parks, they participated in special projects like repairing picnic tables and benches. They sanded and painted new planks of wood and assembled them together. Some parents told me that they were very surprised to see their adult children being so capable using electric drills and tools. One of the most rewarding moments for our clients was their invitation to City of Campbell's Volunteer Luncheon on May 1, 2019, and receiving recognition for outstanding volunteer work! Our clients told others how proud they

by Vivian Chung
FCSN South Bay Program Director

FCSN W.I.L.L. (WORK, INTEGRATE, LEARN, LIVE) Adult Day Program in San Jose offers a variety of innovative skill training for clients to learn computer skills, practice healthy lifestyles and independent living skills, engage in prevocational training, and participate in life-enrichment clubs. FCSN also arranges community outings for clients to choose from, based on their interests and preferences. Community involvement includes Timpany Aqua Aerobic, San Jose City College, local parks, and museums, among others.

To offer a variety of volunteer experiences for clients to choose from, FCSN diligently establishes collaborations and partnerships with community that include: Meals on Wheels, the Girl Scout Office, community centers, City of

Campbell Parks, and many more. FCSN clients participate in schedule planning with their support staff and choose what they want to do.

FCSN clients and staff have made great differences to the community through volunteering. For example, FCSN has participated in the Meals on Wheels Program since 2010. FCSN clients deliver hot, nutritious meals two days a week to seniors and adults with disabil-



were being invited, and took lots of selfies. They were very excited! FCSN filled two tables at the luncheon!

Besides devoted volunteer work, FCSN clients also truly integrate into the community. For example, a group of four clients along with a staff member volunteer at Mayfair Community Center to stuff event fliers into monthly activity catalogs, organize a storage room, and clean gym equipment. They are welcomed to join classes Mayfair Community Center hosts. Earlier this year, our clients proudly received volunteer recognitions from State Senator Jim Beall. Through fruitful volunteer work and integration in the community, FCSN clients give their talents, become productive, build self-confidence, make new friends, create meaningful lives and gain happiness as contributing community members.

Two years in a row, FCSN Percussion Ensemble and FCSN musicians have been invited to perform at Make Music Day hosted by Bascom Community Center along with other community music groups. They have performed, enjoyed music of other groups, and had a great time dancing. This is another inclusion experience where FCSN clients come as equal, community partners.

Deepest appreciation goes to the supportive community partners, parents, FCSN's diligent staff and clients for creating another fruitful year for FCSN's South Bay Adult Day Program.

People's Choir

FCSN Singers Part of Larger, Integrated Community



by Johnna Laird
FCSN Dream Builders Reporter

Community integration as equal partners for special needs individuals, standing side-by-side to meet an objective, can be challenging to find.

People's Choir in Fremont offers that opportunity. Now in its second year, the choir is open to anyone and several FCSN participants join in on Tuesday night practices, periodic performances, and social potlucks. The choir does not require any musical note-reading.

Sponsored by Mission Peak Chamber Singers, the choir is free without charge to participants. Rather than the special needs participants being a group unto themselves within the choir, they blend well with other members.

"Some of the FCSN kids are self-propelled and talk to people around. All FCSN kids seem to be happy and enjoy the environment. I hope to see them explore and find their own connections," says Anne Chiang, who joined the choir. She is mother of Andrew Chiang, who had participated in a San Jose

music program and now participates in the People's Choir.

Anne describes the choir as having a mission of "building a joyful, vocal and involved community through song. Singing is not the purpose, the connection between people is.

"Everyone is unique and special in this world. We need to learn to respect each other," adds Anne. "The choir is a perfect setting, as we are not singing alone, we become a gel when singing together.

FCSN Executive Business Director Sylvia Yeh, a member of Mission Peak Chamber Singers, says People's Choir members have truly accepted FCSN clients.

"When I see community people singing in the choir, they accept our clients even singing off tune or off a half a note, there's no one showing 'my goodness' on their faces.

"Music is important," says Sylvia. "It touches your soul."

"This is truly community integration," she adds.

PAST EVENTS

Summertime and the Season Was Fun-Packed for FCSN Campers



Johnna Laird
FCSN Dream Builders Reporter

Summer 2019 turned out to be a season of activity for 150 FCSN young people who signed up for FCSN summer camps and programs.

Music and drama camps returned as did swimming, basketball, badminton, and the afterschool program. New to the summer lineup was dance and LEGO camps. A high school youth volunteer who tutors in piano led the two-week dance camp. She initiated a simi-

lar dance camp in winter 2018.

Music camp celebrated its 13th year, having started in 2006 in the East Bay and then headed to the South Bay in 2011. In 2015 Music Camp returned to Fremont. Drama Camp, with its version of *Jungle Book*, marked its eighth year with Kathy Hebert again directing a compressed-schedule production of a Friday and a Saturday rehearsal followed by the show on Sunday.

Afterschool programming continued through the summer, and this fall had a growing class of 18

students. The afterschool staff, mostly new this year, is contributing fresh ideas for the curriculum. Volunteers are enriching the program with LEGO Robotics, computer, and science activities.

The summer festival—an event packed with fun activities that also provides outreach to families to inform them about services available to families with special needs—attracted more than 350 participants to Central Park and Lake Elizabeth in Fremont. The event is now in its third year.

Nearly 175 people participated last June in what has become known as the Disneyland of Camping, an overnight on 40-acre Yin's Ranch, an hour from the Bay Area. The experience offers fishing, swimming, hiking, grassy lawns for games, indoor and outdoor basketball courts, a handful of animals to view, and an opportunity to camp overnight both inside or outdoors. Nearly 125 people spent the night and 50 came for the day at Yin's Ranch. This is an FCSN tradition



that began more than a decade ago, offering “camping with safety controls.” C.C. Yin, an immigrant to the U.S. arrived in 1964 with \$100 in his pocket and barely speaking English, donates the camp to FCSN for a weekend annually. Yin, an engineer with entrepreneurial spirit, opened the first of 32 McDonald’s in 1984,

Kelly Ko, who oversees summer programming and enrollment, says the most excitement and reward for the hard work “is seeing students have fun and learn new skills. When they do things they love, their faces show it. These programs provide an opportunity for our special needs individuals to partake in various activities that showcase their abilities rather than their disabilities.”

Summer programs are nearly six months away, but Kelly says sign-ups for 2020 will begin, starting in April. Will there be new offerings? Since parent involvement plays a huge role in FCSN’s programs, there are plenty of opportunities for parents to suggest and help create a camp or activity that their loved one and others will enjoy, Kelly says.



Enjoy 40 acres of fun at Yin’s Ranch in Vacaville! It is like camping at Disneyland or a world-class resort that is nice, safe and secure. Our families have the option of indoor and outdoor camping. When meal time comes, every family cooks their own favorite dishes and share with everyone. It beats the best buffet anywhere. During the day, there are great activities, sports and games, indoor swimming, relaxing under the trees, nature walks, and fishing. In the evening, enjoy night hiking and roasting marshmallows.



Dream Achievers Continue to Break New Ground



by Johnna Laird
FCSN Dream Builders Reporter

The Dream Achievers Band, now in its eighth year, crossed new borders this summer, performing for the first time in Canada and in the fall for a presidential candidate who carries a special place in his heart for autism.

For a concert sponsored by the Fountain of Love and Life, a Chinese Catholic organization, the three-piece band performed at 3:30 p.m. on August 10 for special needs families and workers followed by a 7:30 evening concert open to the general public. Each performance attracted about 350 attendees. With its repertoire of more than 150 songs, the band entertained with a variety of music from jazz and classical to rock and hip hop to hymns and Chinese music.

Jia Mei, the mother of pianist Alice, says she and Alice were “thrilled by the warmth and enthusiasm of the host when we arrived.” Toronto offered new experiences, says Jia. “Alice was amazed by the subway ride in downtown and loved the beautiful view of downtown Harbourfront Center and Harbourfront Square Park.

“Concert day gave us all an emotional impact when we experienced the love, courage, and excitement of the audiences, the volunteers, and the hosts. Local media covered the event and the band’s performances became an icon, bringing awareness of the special needs community,” says Jia.

For Greg, exuberantly enthusiastic about the band, Toronto stands out as the best concert he has ever played. “Everyone loved us!” he says, noting that the afternoon concert was packed with more special needs families and the evening concert crowd danced even more than the afternoon audience.

Greg considers his guitar a gateway to the world. “It’s my greatest pleasure,” he says. The trip to Toronto meant the group toured Niagara Falls. Greg, known at FCSN as the

trainmaster, of course worked in a trip to the Toronto Railroad Museum. “That’s where I can be found, making friends with the Canadian trains!”

In October, the band played at a fundraiser in Los Gatos for United States presidential candidate, Andrew Yang, who has a son with autism.

The candidate gave a 20-minute speech and then sang with the Dream Achievers, “rockin’ out” according to one published post on Facebook. The band and the singer came together for the first time on stage without a joint rehearsal.

“It felt like a rock show,” says Greg.

Kathy Hebert, Greg’s mom, found the event, which drew 250 to 300 people, to be fun: “This was the first time I’d been at a political gathering with a candidate for president of the United States. It was fun to get caught up in the hoopla and momentum of the event!”

Dream Achievers has performed about 75 times in 2019 and band members Laurence Wang and Greg Hebert also sang the national anthem during the summer at an Oakland A’s game.



Stars on Stage

Dec 1, 2019





Stars on Stage

Dec 1, 2019



Friends of Children with Special Needs

Headquarters: 2300 Peralta Blvd., Fremont, CA 94536 T: 510-739-6900 F: 510-739-6999

South Bay Center: 1029 S. Bascom Ave., San Jose, CA 95129 T: 408-725-8000 F: 408-725-8811

www.fcsn1996.org Email: administration@fcsn1996.org