



Friends of Children with Special Needs

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FCSN

VOICES



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- ▶ SNTUTORING :
1:1 Virtual Tutoring Matches
- ▶ Many Sharing Articles from
Clients, Parents, Staff, and Volunteers!
- ▶ Virtual Fundraising Events and
Talent Showcase





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President's Message

Dear FCSN Families and Friends,

I hope you are doing well during this tough time. The COVID-19 pandemic has lasted for almost a year now, and the number of confirmed cases has continued to climb. Even though a vaccine is on its way and beginning to be administered, we may not be back to normal for a while, so please be patient. If you need any support, please contact our family support representative, Dora Chou. You can email her at dorac@fcsn1996.org, or use LINE/WeChat to contact her.

During the past six months, FCSN was able to continue to host our annual events online. We held a virtual annual meeting in June, a special needs talent showcase in August, and a virtual fundraising gala in November. We also have online classes for our adult day program and enrichment program. Our flexible subject tutoring classes have become quite popular, and we have received positive feedback from many families. We may continue this class online after the pandemic, since some students learn better in an online format.

FCSN receives a lot of support from our community, and in turn we try to give back to the community as well. The FCSN board has recently approved an emergency relief fund and a college scholarship fund. FCSN staff and clients in need of financial support may apply for the emergency relief fund. Any college or graduate student whose major is human services-related is eligible to apply for the college scholarship fund, although FCSN volunteers will have priority in receiving the scholarship. These two funds are currently a work in progress and will become available in 2021.

To serve our families better, the FCSN board has established the Site Search Committee and the New Program Committee. Our East Bay adult day program has reached its capacity limit, so the Site Search Committee is in charge of looking for a new location. Since the new site may become our future headquarters, we are hoping to find a 15,000-20,000 square foot building in either Fremont or Milpitas. The New Program Committee is working on an adaptive skill training program which will aim to serve more severely-disabled individuals. This is a new area we are exploring, and we have high hopes that it will be successful.

2020 has been a stressful year, to say the least. Please do your best to stay well and take care of yourself and your loved ones. Our staff and volunteers have worked very hard to make FCSN even better. With all the help we have, and all the effort we have put in, I believe 2021 will be a bright year for FCSN.

C. K. Lee
FCSN President

FCSN COVID Crisis Management Plan

As COVID-19 infected numbers surged in November, we at FCSN developed our COVID Crisis Management Plan for clients who currently receive in-person supported living services. We defined four tiers in the plan:

Tier 1- Exposure to someone with COVID-19;

Tier 2- Displaying symptoms of cold, flu or COVID-19;

Tier 3- Confirmation of COVID-19 positive; and

Tier 4- Hospitalization and Discharge Plan

In each tier, we list out detailed plans, implementation steps, preventative strategies and communication channels to protect our clients, staff, and community. We also hosted staff training and parents' meetings to address the Crisis Management Plan. The management plan received positive responses from parents and staff, saying they felt relieved with detailed steps at each tier.

In response to the urgency of COVID-19 outbreaks, we have formed a COVID Crisis Team and trained members to take care of a client if tested positive. We also have established self-testing resources for our clients and staff who receive/provide in-person services. For vaccination, we applied for the COVID-19 Vaccination Program through Pharmacy Partnership for Long-Term Care Program. We will be partnered with Walgreens Pharmacy that will host immunization clinics at FCSN EB and SB Centers. Walgreens will create the essential processes to safely and seamlessly deliver and administer the vaccine to our clients and staff as soon as the vaccine becomes available.

By preparing for the worst circumstances, FCSN is implementing and practicing the best strategies to keep everyone safe. Please join us in maintaining a practice of "Remain Positive and Test Negative," so we can reunite sooner in person in 2021.

Sylvia Yeh
FCSN Executive Business Director

Introducing FCSN Voices, FCSN's Online Newsletter



By Isabella He and Ryan Liu

“As soon as our organization was established in late 1996, we started working on the printed FCSN newsletter, and we published the first issue in January 1997,” FCSN Voices advisor and FCSN co-chairperson Jim Chiao said. “The newsletter reported announcements, organizational updates, and articles from parents and volunteers, and it helped to grow and bring our organization together. Today, 24 years later, I see FCSN Voices being a huge extension of the FCSN newsletter, with all the power that comes with the digital platform.”

FCSN Voices, formerly known as FCSN Blog, was started five to six years ago with the publication of personal stories from our clients in the Adult Day and Living Programs. About three years ago, Jim took over the blog to broaden its scope

and report on the latest news and events from all sections of FCSN. Next, three months ago, FCSN's Volunteer Director Linmei Chiao received an email from youth volunteer Ryan Liu, who wrote that he could help to improve the blog with more personal and detailed stories. Jim was extremely receptive to the idea, which is how Jim and Ryan first got connected. Two weeks later, our tutoring coordinator for SNTutoring Isabella heard of the news and decided to join the team. Around the same time, Jim was talking to Wei-Jen Hsia about recruiting youth volunteers for the printed FCSN newsletter, and he learned that Helen Chou, an editor, was also interested in bringing our newsletter online. The speed at which we were able to put this team together was simply amazing. Within weeks, we had a talented working group, and soon, we were publishing at

least one article a week. After many weeks of discussion and publishing articles, we decided to change the name of the platform, and FCSN Voices was born.

The name FCSN Voices was chosen to allow the voices of the special needs community to be heard, which consists of special needs individuals, their families and friends, and volunteers and professionals who have dedicated their time and effort to improve the lives of those in the community. Our goal is to share information about FCSN programs and events, inspirational stories on special need individuals, and personal accounts of volunteer initiatives.

FCSN Voices publishes at least one new featured article every week. Our team currently consists of five core members in addition to a growing team of volunteer youth report-

ers. We are open to contributions from all members, staff, and volunteers, as we believe that everyone has a unique story that can make a difference in someone else's life. We are constantly searching for fresh voices or new dimensions to include in our publication, so we can cover a wider scope and reach a broader audience. We hope this will be an important platform for FCSN to share our dream of building a community for children and adults with special needs. We look forward to the day when all special needs individuals are fully embraced by the communities they live in, and they can become an active part of those integrated communities. We hope that FCSN Voices will play an important role in reaching that goal.

Follow the FCSN Voices to stay tuned with new stories and events! If you have something to share, please contact our editors.

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"As an adult volunteer for FCSN, I hope that FCSN Voices will reach out and touch the hearts of many individuals and inspire them to become involved with FCSN. By sharing stories, events, and perspectives from our large community, FCSN Voices could provide readers with an idea of the joy and fulfillment one feels from being part of FCSN's welcoming family. I hope it will give potential volunteers some ideas of how they can use their unique skills and voices to support FCSN—for example, by contributing to this publication!"

FCSN Voices Advisor, Wei-Jen Hsia

Relay for Our Dream

By Johnna M. Laird, FCSN Voices Reporter and Editor

The pandemic forced FCSN to abandon its traditional fundraising campaign despite 2020 being the 19th year of consecutive, annual fall galas.

“There were just too many obstacles,” says Anna Wang, FCSN Vice President, recalling the decision to find a new approach to an in-person event. Relay for Our Dream, a virtual event and gala, developed during summer 2020, three months into the pandemic.

“We didn’t even know how to do virtual fundraising,” she says, with a laugh, amazed at how a team of volunteers launched a campaign patterned after the American Cancer Society’s Relay for Life, a fundraising built around teams involving family and friends.

By November 7, the day of the gala, FCSN had reached its goal of \$250,000 through generosity of FCSN families, friends, and supporters, along with strategic planning to secure two competitive grants. The evening of the gala, designed as a celebration, more donations were made, and FCSN raised another \$10,000.

Using its large-scale Zoom experience from hosting the annual Family Day event virtually the first week of June with more than 500 participants, FCSN began planning for virtual fundraising.

“With the Family Day event, we had no idea of the level of engagement,” says Anna. “In some cases, all we could see were names with video blocked. Were people still there? Were they walking around their kitchens getting something to eat instead of listening in?”

To raise money, Anna said the team knew it needed commitment, engagement, and a multi-pronged effort that culminated the night of FCSN’s Gala, rather than relying upon Gala as the fundraising event. The Gala team adjusted its planning schedule, meeting weekly.

A cancer survivor who had participated in American Cancer Society’s Walkathon Relay for Life, Anna suggested Relay for Our Dream. “We needed everyone to feel involved, to feel part of the team to make FCSN’s fundraising successful. We were depending on our families and friends for FCSN to survive

the pandemic. We needed a lot of people to relay our message and donate to help FCSN reach the finish line.”

The Gala team began weekly messaging to more than 1,000 email subscribers. Forty-five teams fundraising teams formed with about 10 team members each. Youth volunteers at seven local high schools and a university also created clubs at seven local high schools and a university, contributing to the fundraising effort.

“It is so important for us to have wonderful young people embracing and welcoming our kids,” says Anna, “gaining practical experience working with our loved ones.”

By late summer, FCSN had learned about Gannett Foundation’s program to leverage donations to nonprofits. In the competition that began September 21 and ended October 16, Gannett offered up to \$9,000 bonus donation to the nonprofit attracting the most online donors; and Gannett offered another \$25,000 for the nonprofit receiving the largest, on-line dollar donations.

Having some experience purchasing on eBay, Anna realized that FCSN needed to have the highest amount in the final moments before the competition closed at 9 a.m. to receive the \$25,000 cash prize.

“If you really want an item, you give your best shot in the last few seconds,” Anna says.

At 8:58 a.m., FCSN fell to third place, competing with 364 nonprofits.

“Sylvia (FCSN Executive Business Director) and I were watching the numbers online. It was nail-bit-

ing to see us slip to third,” says Anna, armed with her phone and a list of FCSN donors she counted on for last minute contributions. Three large donations at 8:59 a.m. pushed FCSN over the top. Anna’s fingers were flying through texts and phone calls of “Now!” and “Donate Now!”

“I had the strategy, but you can’t tell me this was not God’s doing. Tens of thousands of dollars were thrown in during the last half hour. We beat the next highest nonprofit by \$1,100. Every penny donated

helped FCSN,” she says.

“I truly believe 2020 was difficult for everybody. Our biggest blessings have been our clients, staff, friends, and family sending their love. We cannot thank everyone enough and God. Through these hard times, we can still build the community with love, hope, and respect for our children’s future and families’ peace of mind. We could not sit back and have a pandemic tear down what has taken 25 years to build,” says Anna.

Relay for Our Dream



FCSN 2020 Fundraising Gala

By Ryan Liu, FCSN volunteer and Tech Editor for the FCSN Voices

FCSN Gala has always been one of the most important events in FCSN's agenda each year. Featuring talented performers, a recap of FCSN's great events and efforts to help the special needs community, and a chance to donate and help FCSN develop new programs and maintain current ones, the FCSN Gala fosters an understanding of FCSN's herculean efforts to help the special needs community. While this year's FCSN Gala could not be conducted in-person, the hard work of the Gala organizers ensured that this important event could still take place. This year, FCSN Gala was organized by the gala committee, which is led by FCSN Co-chair Yee-Yeen Wang, and event co-chairs Jason Hwan and Peter Chen.

This year's FCSN Gala featured a plethora of exciting events. Before the official Gala started, a preview was shown, highlighting the resilience of volunteers and FCSN's clients through the pandemic as they strove to find new and innovative ways to help one another.

My fellow volunteer and FCSN Voices editor, Isabella He, coordinates the brilliant SNTutoring (previously Flexible Subject Virtual Tutoring) program with FCSN's Linmei Chiao,

Mannching Wang, and Yvette Ying. This program allows volunteers to tutor in any subject they feel comfortable teaching virtually and has facilitated FCSN's consistent support of its clients. FCSN is extremely grateful to its coordinators for organizing this program and its volunteers for always putting 110% to help their students reach for the sky! Short video clips of FCSN's Friends Coffee and Tea shop were also shown. FCSN's Friends Coffee and Tea shop provides professional job training to special needs individuals, preparing them to succeed in any field they choose to pursue.

The Gala began at 4 pm with a short clip of the FCSN Percussion club, whose rousing and coordinated music provided a great start to

the main portion of the Gala. Then, we had gala event chairs Jason Hwan and Peter Chen kick off the event by introducing M.C. of the event, Matt Keller. After he went over how to donate and support FCSN's efforts, some highlights from the amazing FCSN Special Needs talent show in August were shown.

Events like the Special Needs Talent Showcase leave a great impact on their audience. Viewers can appreciate the wide array of talents special needs individuals possess, and special needs individuals get to show their talents to a wide audience. Your support, whether you donate or volunteer, helps us conduct these events and even expand on the events in the future!



The FCSN Percussion Club, which began the Gala with a rousing performance



Peter Chan and Jason Hwan, the FCSN Gala Event co-chairs, introduce this year's event to the audience

Next, a raffle drawing for three door prizes donated by FCSN's community took place. The three door prizes offered in the raffle were a Chromebook, Apple watch, and Nintendo Switch. This raffle helped us bring the community together and also have fun by giving away awesome prizes.

The Gala also presented a short recap of the various learning opportunities offered by FCSN during the pandemic: cooking and life skills classes, lego classes, exercise classes, trivia competitions, along with COVID-19 safety training. In addition, FCSN's wide range of technology helped us ensure that everyone had a chance to participate in classes. Your donations and support help us continue providing these awesome opportunities!

Next, Nancy Bargmann, the executive director of the Department of Developmental Services, a vital part of California's special needs

community, spoke about her experiences with FCSN and applauded FCSN's safe, efficient response to the COVID-19 pandemic. She emphasized that FCSN's community must remain strong through this pandemic in order to preserve FCSN's mission and success. While the pandemic entails many restrictions, it is through the efforts of volunteers, organizers, and community that FCSN has continued to expand during these tough times.

FCSN's Executive Business Director Sylvia Yeh emphasized the impor-



Mrs. Lindsey Bargeman speaks about how her company and FCSN have remained strong during the pandemic.

tance of raising funds during this event, and VP Anna Wang talked about the Gannett Foundation's fundraising efforts and the fundraising competition they sponsored.. This year, the fundraising is extremely vital because of the unexpected challenges that FCSN faced during the pandemic. Next, Anna highlighted the winner of FCSN's school fundraiser competition, hosted to honor the involvement of youth and young adult volunteers, who play a large role in FCSN's success.

Next, FCSN's Limin Hu introduced special guests: California State Assembly member Kensen Chu and Evan Low, Fremont Mayor Lily Mei, and TECO Directors General Ming-Chi Lai and Roy Yen. Evan Low presented FCSN with the State of California "Non-profit of the year" award which was accepted by FCSN Co-chair Jim Chiao. This award means a lot to FCSN, and Jim expressed gratitude towards our staff and volunteers.

Albert Wang then introduced the following speakers: SARC Exec. Director Javier Zaldivar, RCEB Exec. Director Lisa Kleinbub, Managers of State Council on Developmental Disabilities David Grady (Central Coast) and Sheraden Nicholau (Bay Area), who all highlighted

FCSN SPOTLIGHT

the importance of supporting the Special Needs community through these tough times. We also saw a short clip from our presenting sponsor CC & Yuhling Han Foundation.

At the end of the Gala, FCSN had raised over \$24K at the event alone. Together with the donations from previous weeks, FCSN has reached its donation goal of \$250,000 dollars! This is a great achievement and FCSN thanks everyone who donated, provided their service, or volunteered during the pandemic. You have helped FCSN maintain its dream to help the special needs community and even expand and develop its programs, and all of your efforts are immensely appreciated. If you missed the Gala but would still like to donate, you can use this link to do so: Friends of Children with Special Needs – Acceptiva. Thank you for your support!

FCSN Gala 2020 Challenges and Opportunities

by Jason Hwan, Gala Event Co-Chair

FCSN is dedicated in its effort to support special needs individuals and families. However, we cannot succeed without collaboration with the community and help from our volunteers. Usually, FCSN hosts a special event, like the FCSN Gala, to highlight what we have achieved and recognize those who have contributed to our success.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we will not be able to host the Gala event as before. However, through the FCSN Gala committee's creativity and modern technology, we are able to turn the challenges into an opportunity. For the first time, the 2020 annual fund-raising Gala will be an online virtual event to highlight our pandemic response and our accomplishment.



The Gala's main theme for this year is "Relay for Our Dream", which is not just a slogan, but also highlights what we do differently this year. FCSN, in fact, started the fundraising campaign in August through a series of promotion activities, with the intent to connect to as many as people as possible. With the virtual event, we are no longer limited to geographical location. The goal is not just to achieve the \$250,000 fund-raising target, but also to reach out to potential volunteers, donors, and supporters who can be the driving force in the future.

During this difficult time, many businesses have cut back and reduced their services. However, FCSN continues to do our best to provide services and help our clients and families. We appreciate your precious support whether it is in the form of donations, volunteering, or collaboration. On the behalf of the Gala committee, I sincerely welcome you to join our "Relay for Our Dream" Gala event and become a part of FCSN's big family!



A thermometer visual representing the donations FCSN received during the Gala

Youth Volunteers Participate in FCSN Annual Fundraising Gala

For the 2020 FCSN fundraising gala, youth volunteers were invited to participate in fundraising and for the event for the first time in FCSN history. FCSN school clubs at UC Davis, Irvington High School, James Logan High School, Piedmont Hills, and BASIS Independent Silicon Valley, and Mission San Jose High School helped fundraise for FCSN. We are excited to announce that UC Davis FCSN Club is our top contributing FCSN school club this year and our winner of the \$200 prize!



UC Davis FCSN Club's story

By board members of UC Davis FCSN Club

Firstly, we would like to thank FCSN for the opportunity to write about our experience fundraising for the FCSN gala! We are incredibly proud to have raised a total of \$657 for FCSN and its cause.

The board members at FCSN (UC Davis) have all had their own unique experience fundraising and each member has provided his or her own testimonial regarding the experience.

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Dear UC Davis FCSN Club officials and members:

I would like to congratulate you on winning the \$200 prize as the top FCSN Club team for the FCSN 2020 Fundraising. There was a total of 6 FCSN Clubs from different local schools who participated. UC Davis FCSN Club won both awards for "Most Funds Raised" and "Most Members Participated."

This is the first time FCSN youth volunteers were invited to help in the annual fundraising and were invited to join FCSN 2020 Gala. FCSN values young volunteers' involvement, not just in working with our special needs individuals, but also in understanding FCSN's operations, culture, and spirits. FCSN hopes the fundraising and the Gala experience, along with all other volunteering experiences at FCSN can benefit you as you move on to build a bright future for yourself, and in turn, benefit the community at large.

Congratulations again! Hope the prize can help your club grow, and work with FCSN to help special needs individuals and their families to find love, hope, respect, and support!

Sincerely,

Linmei Chiao

Director of FCSN Volunteer Support Department

Isabella He

Leader of FCSN Clubs

FCSN SPOTLIGHT



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Erica Chiu (President)- It was a new experience for everyone since this was my first time fundraising online. We knew that it would be difficult to encourage people to donate to our cause, so our board decided to create an incentive for people by using a “bingo” method where if people donated a certain amount, they would be able to cross out a box on the grid! We even shared the method with our fellow FCSN clubs. Our response for the fundraiser was great, and we really think the bingo incentive worked well. We’re super proud of being able to win the prize for raising the most money for FCSN. We hope that we can continue to raise more funds for FCSN so they can do even greater things for the special needs community!

Ember Hung (Vice President): Although I had no prior experience with FCSN, I was enthusiastic to join and take part of establishing a branch at UC Davis. For an entire school year, way back before coronavirus, I was assigned to a classmate with special needs. I learned to collaborate with him with an abundance of patience, establish a reward system, and how to understand him as a person and a friend. Remembering how challenging that was to do in person, I hope that through FCSN, I’ll be able to help more children with special needs and volunteers succeed during these tough times.

Sasha Afroz (Financial Officer): When I first heard about the fundraiser, I was initially thinking of

ways it could be done online as we couldn’t have bake sales and other in person fundraising methods. The fundraising process was interesting to do online because we didn’t have the ability to gather together and raise awareness. However, it was amazing to see how we were able to utilize social media to raise funds for an important cause. Creating a fundraising page, informing friends and family about FCSN, and posting on Instagram were amazing ways to contribute to the cause.

Julia Pan (Public Relations Officer): It was really exciting to be able to participate in hosting the FCSN fundraiser and give back to the special needs community by raising awareness and growing support. I have volunteered within the special needs community since high school and it is an honor to be able to contribute positivity. I can’t wait for more opportunities to further support children with special needs through volunteering events and fundraisers!

Ayushi Ambekar(Public Relations Officer): The prospect of volunteering, at first, was quite intimidating since we couldn’t conduct the fundraiser in the traditional way. Yet, I was quite determined to help FCSN in any way I could. The process was

incredibly fun and in general a very rewarding experience!

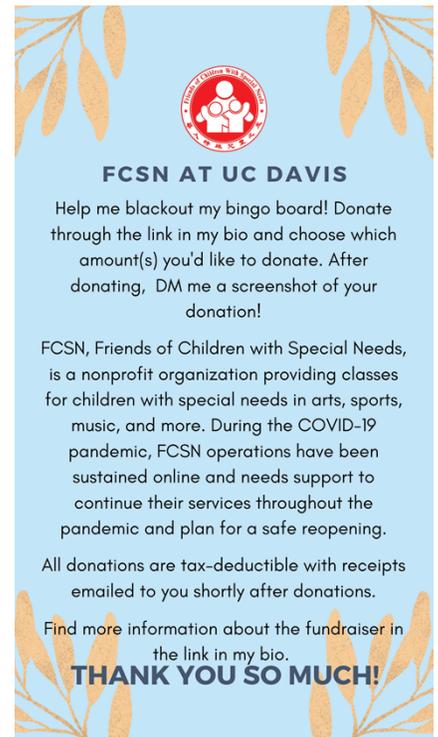
John Falcon (Secretary): I have never been heavily involved in a fundraiser before. That is until I became secretary of UC Davis' FCSN club and needed to step up as a leader. I wanted to do some good for the organization by spreading awareness about children with special needs while simultaneously fundraising money. Our club decided to host our own fundraiser where each officer posted an informative cover on our social media pages which explained what FCSN is and why we were raising funds for the nonprofit organization. We also posted a bingo sheet that displayed the different amounts of money that people can donate. To my surprise, my bingo sheet was filled up within a few hours, so I decided to post another one which also filled up completely! I am so appreciative of those who donated and am grateful to have been helped raise money for children in need

Catherine Chen (Creatives Officer): We came up with the idea to make a bingo board as a fun way to fundraise. It was a super-effective way to reach out to a lot of people to donate money and raise awareness for special needs kids. I feel like



it is super important for programs to still be available and running for the special needs community during the pandemic and it is really cool to see our online communities support FCSN!

Isa Asuncion (Social Media Coordinator): To fundraise for FCSN, our board members decided to utilize our social media platforms. We created bingo sheets and an informational graphic on the mission of FCSN to post on our Instagram stories which was super effective in spreading the word to family and friends, and it made the donation process easier. I'm so proud of our club for raising funds to help support FCSN! I know this support



will help the organization continue its programming, which is especially important during these times of uncertainty and isolation.

Gia Han Dang (Social Media Coordinator): For fundraising for FCSN, it was quite hard to get people to donate, but the experience of letting people know about what the club aims to support was good. People saw my posts for donations, and some people reached out and asked about the club. I believe that I did my best to educate people about the special needs community, and fundraising was just the beginning to what our club has to offer."

2020 FCSN Special Needs Talent Showcase

By Kelly Ko, FCSN East Bay Outreach and Enrichment Programs Director

The Special Needs Talent Showcase, launched in 2015, has become a highlight for FCSN and many of our talented individuals with special needs as well as for those who support this event year after year.

This competition motivates and encourages our special-needs individuals to work hard for something they really want to achieve. It brings hope and helps fulfill dreams of being in the spotlight. It also plays an integral role in bringing awareness to others about the special needs community, dispelling stigma and stereotypes and opening up employment opportunities.

Audition for the 2020 competition was held at the FCSN Fremont Center back in January, and the final competition was scheduled for March. Usually, this event attracts an audience of 600 people at the Santa Clara Convention Center to watch all the talented finalists compete for the top three spots. Unfortunately, this year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we had to postpone the competition, with hopes of rescheduling and hosting the event within a few months at the convention center; however, the pandemic continued with no end in sight. Not wanting to disappoint the finalists who auditioned back in January, we hosted this competition live



via Zoom on August 22--something we had never done before.

Planning the event live via Zoom was a new idea to us, so it posed some challenges. After all, the atmosphere of a virtual meeting differs greatly from that of a live competition at the Santa Clara Convention Center, packed full of enthusiastic audience members. How do we drum up excitement during a Zoom event, we wondered? How do we keep the attendees engaged throughout the event? How do we get all the finalists to perform while social distancing? How do we make smooth transitions throughout the show? Those were just some questions swimming in our heads, but soon, many ideas developed among the talent show committee team.

A main concern we faced was how to make sure finalists could perform safely for the competition.

After much thought for the safety and health of our finalists and families, we decided to pre-record the finalist performance ahead of the Aug. 22 competition. Each finalist individual or group was asked to come to the FCSN Fremont Center at a certain date and time to be recorded by the talent show committee. To ensure fairness, final performances were recorded only once. Those videos were broadcast during the live show.

After two months of hard work planning and preparing for the event, it was finally showtime. The show started with a video introducing the 10 finalists. The ever-popular master of ceremonies, Matt Keller, invited Anna Wang, event chairwoman, to say a few words.

Matt introduced this year's incredible judge lineup. Besides returning judges from previous years (Chris

Showerman, Hollywood actor; Kansen Chu, California Assembly member; Mimi Kwan, ABC-TV Channel 7 Vice-President of Community Affairs and Nancy Bargmann, Executive Director of Department of Developmental Services,) the panel included two new international judges: Jude Morrow from Ireland and Angela Inkyung Sohn from South Korea. Jude Morrow, diagnosed with autism at age 11, is the author of Amazon best-selling memoir “Why Does Daddy Always Look So Sad?” and Angela Sohn is founder and conductor of the On-nuri Sarang Chamber of Orchestra.

When the competition began, Matt introduced the finalists individually and spoke with each prior to the video performance broadcast. The 10 finalist performances included:

- Julian Huang and Alice Jen with a piano duet of “Sebra Dance” by Aran Khachaturian
- Frank Prenot’s Drum and Vocal on “We’re Not Gonna Take It” by Twisted Sisters
- Yeah Jin Choi with the Korean Traditional Fan Dance
- Christian Magoon singing “Can’t You Feel the Love Tonight” by Elton John
- Bob Gao on piano playing “Piano Sonata in C Major K.545” by Mozart

- Resonance, singing acapella t “All My Loving” by the Beatles
- Greg Hebert with jokes
- Blue Devils Color Guard with “This is Me” by Keala Settle
- Brennan Magoon singing “So Happy Together” by The Turtles
- Galactic Orchestra playing Rocky’s theme song “You’re Gonna Fly Now.”

All finalists did a fantastic job with their performances, and FCSN couldn’t be prouder of them and the effort they put into their performances.

For the first time in FCSN’s talent show history, the audience had the opportunity to rate each performance and choose their favorite performance at the end.

The performance with the most votes received the first-ever People’s Choice Award that included a trophy and \$100 cash prize. Allowing voting encouraged the audience’s sustained engagement and excitement. Attendees were all active and enthusiastic, generating more than 300 encouraging, positive comments posted in the Zoom chat.

When the final performances were completed, Matt sent the judges to decide the top three winners and the winner of the Showmanship Award. As the judges deliberated, audition videos of the 10 honorable mentions were broadcasted. Usually, honorable mentions have

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Audrey and her family



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the opportunity to perform their audition pieces on stage at the Santa Clara Convention Center; instead, their audition video was broadcast. The honorable mention performances entertained the audience and were fun to watch. A tear-jerking moment occurred during this segment with a memorial video played as a tribute to one of our honorable mentions, Audrey Chu, who passed away in March 2020 at age 17. She had auditioned for the talent show for the past four years and finally made it as an honorable mention this year. Her passion for singing, dancing, and acting was evident in her dance performance, and she will always be remembered.

Matt introduced special guest, Stephen Prutsman, a pianist, composer and arranger described as one of the most versatile musicians of his time and a talent show audition

judge, to present Piano Awards that he provides annually. These are presented to all piano finalists and honorable mentions. Five awards went to performers Alice Jen, Julian Huang, Bob Gao, Darren Ko, and Brandon Wong.

Finally, for the moment that everyone was been waiting for, the judges returned from deliberations, the winners' list in their hands. Maintaining suspense, Matt spoke with judge Chris Showerman, who shared a few words about this year's illustrious finalists. Afterward Matt welcomed Angela Sohn to announce the winner of the Showmanship Award, Christian Magoon, who received a trophy and \$100.

The People's Choice Award, presented by Kansen Chu, went to Julian Huang and Alice Jen. They received a trophy and \$100. Finally, the top three competition winners were announced by the remaining

judges. Mimi Kwan announced the pianist duo Julian Huang and Alice Jen. Then, Nancy Bargman announced acapella group Resonance. Jude Morrow announced singer Frank Prenot. These top three winners each received a trophy and \$500. (Insert photo 3 of Julian and Alice)

The Special Needs Talent Showcase ended successfully with more than 200 computers logged in and an estimated audience of 500 to 600 people watching the event since many families logged on with one computer for multiple family members to watch together. After the show ended, FCSN uploaded the event video onto YouTube; it received another 200 views.

Following the talent showcase, FCSN received wonderful feedback from attending families. One comment read that the event was "medicine for the soul" during this time while another said that the showcase gave hope of overcoming the pandemic together. FCSN is delighted that this event was able to bring so much joy to participants and everyone watching, bringing people together.

To watch the entire Special Needs Talent Showcase on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y569DK5lk28&t=3s>.

Please visit our website: www.specialneedstalentshowcase.org for more talent show information.

Frank Prenot wins FCSN's 2020 Annual Talent Showcase

By Jessica Yu, FCSN Voices Reporter



Since age 15, Frank Prenot has been receiving rousing, crowd applause through drum performances. In 2016, he branched out musically, practicing and performing vocals.

This year, he moved into the winners' circle at the 2020 annual Friends of Children with Special Needs Talent Showcase for his individual performance and for his performance in the acapella group, Resonance. Frank began performing first with a church band before becoming more active in a scout band. Now, he plays in the Music Camp Band and Galactic Orchestra.

Frank first participated in the talent showcase in his middle school years, sometime during sixth grade, encouraged by his parents. "My mom discovered FCSN (Talent Showcase) when I was diagnosed with autism. I originally said no, but

my parents signed me up. I was a finalist my first time in 2017, and have been every single year since then," Frank said.

Since first joining FCSN, Frank has participated in the annual summer music camp where he accepted the position of drummer. The annual music camp gives those in FCSN a chance to play in a band; Frank has been in it since 2016. In both 2017 and 2018, Music Camp Band participants went on to become one of three winners in the Special Needs Talent Showcase.

His 2020 rendition of "We're Not Gonna Take It" by Twisted Sister featured Frank on both drums and vocals. He chose his song because of its message to bullies, and Frank stands by the message of speaking out and not taking abuse from anyone.

It didn't take him that much practice to perfect his winning entry, explains Frank. "I would listen to my garage band file a lot, sing along, and air drum to rehearse."

His acapella group, Resonance, one of the other two talent showcase winners, performed The Beatles' song "All My Loving."

"It's been a lot of fun working with (fellow band members) Greg, Tony, and Michael. Somehow, we were always able to find a way to make it in the end. I'm really proud of those three guys and what we've done together," said Frank.

Winning the showcase was exciting for Frank; he was thrilled to have won in two areas. "I live next door to a couple who wear hearing aids. I bet they could've heard me screaming. I was just ballistic with joy when they announced my name," he said.

Deeply touched to see the results of his hard work recognized in this tangible way, Franks says winning has only pushed him to continue pursuing music with diligence. The experiences in the showcases over the past couple of years have taught him to active embrace opportunities, he says, and encountering criticism from other people no longer slows him down. His experience with FCSN has also helped him become more outgoing with other people, especially people with similar special needs. "I used to try to avoid other people on the spectrum, but now it's a lot easier for me to be friends with them," Frank said.

Frank wants to keep expanding his musical horizons in the future. "I play drums and sing, but maybe next year I'll try entering with just singing, or with the Galactic Orchestra. I'm looking forward to whatever comes to mind with me."

FCSN's Talent Showcase was designed to encourage people with special needs to reach for the stars, and Frank plans to do just that.

Resonance: An Acapella Group That Instantly Came Together

By Kathy Hebert, FCSN Parent



When Resonance formed in the summer of 2018 at the FCSN Music Camp, the group knew it was something special. Singing tenor, Michael Erhardt has a variety of interests which include watching movies, building Legos, and playing VIP soccer for several years.

Frank Prenot sings lead and is the drummer at the FCSN Music Camp. He has sung the National Anthem at a Stockton Ports baseball game. Singing baritone Tony Nakamoto loves the harmonies created in the quartet. Greg Hebert sings bass and loves his day program at FCSN. He can tell you anything about trains you ever wanted to know!

For the 2020 Special Needs Got Talent Showcase, Resonance

participated in the auditions and was thrilled to make the Finals. In preparing for the Finals in March, only one rehearsal was held in person before COVID-19 hit and then, as we all know, everyone went shelter-in-place. That was our last rehearsal together as social distancing and wearing masks is difficult to do in a quartet. We opted to use the recording from the auditions in January as we felt it was really good!

As their coach, I am so proud of these boys and love working with them! The talent these boys have is so impressive because singing acapella is not easy to do! Michael, Frank, Tony and Greg thanks for the joy you bring to others!

The 7th Annual Special Needs Talent Showcase in 2021 will be held LIVE virtually via Zoom.

Auditions are scheduled for April with the final competition in June.

Entry forms are available, starting in February with an April 2 deadline. Since FCSN is hosting virtually, the event is open to special needs individuals from all over the US (and the world) to audition to showcase their talent and reach for the stars.

Please check our website, www.specialneedstalent-showcase.org/

for contest information, entry and forms. We look forward to seeing everyone's talent in 2021 and making this our best talent showcase ever.



Friends of Children with Special Needs presents...

THE 7TH ANNUAL VIRTUAL
SPECIAL NEEDS
TALENT
Showcase



February 1, 2021

ENTRY FORM AVAILABLE ON OUR WEBSITE
WWW.SPECIALNEEDSTALENTSHOWCASE.ORG

April 2, 2021

ENTRY FORM DUE
(FIRST 70 SOLO / GROUP ENTRIES)

April 17, 2021 (4-6 PM PST)

PRELIMINARY AUDITIONS VIA ZOOM
THE ZOOM CAMERA SET UP INSTRUCTIONS
WILL BE SENT AFTER THE REGISTRATION

April 18, 2021 (2-4 PM PST)

June 26, 2021

FINAL COMPETITION
VIA ZOOM

PRICE: \$10 PER SOLO/GROUP ACT

\$500 CASH
FOR THE TOP 3 FINALISTS & MORE

- This year's talent showcase will be held virtually.
- All auditions will be done **LIVE** virtually through Zoom.
- Accept online registration and credit card payment only

For different form of payment or more information please contact:
✉ sntalentshowcase@gmail.com ☎ (510)739-6900 ext.3319
🌐 www.specialneedstalentshowcase.org

Providing Life-Skill and Job Training Through Turtleworks: An Interview with Sherry Meng

By Sara Kuang, FCSN Youth Volunteer and FCSN Voices Reporter



Six distinctly different smiling turtles serve as an engaging logo for a new embroidery business that opened in 2020 to train and employ special needs individuals.

Turtleworks in Campbell, celebrating its first anniversary in January 2021, developed as the brainchild of FCSN parent and entrepreneur Sherry Meng. Sherry opened the embroidery company with a mission to help young, special needs adults “break out of their shells, one stitch at a time” and find employment.

As the mother of a special-needs child, Sherry is painfully aware of the lack of employment for people with disabilities. The vast majority of adults with special needs in America are either unemployed or underemployed. Seeing this need over the years volunteering with FCSN, Sherry has developed a passion for creating meaningful work for special needs individuals.

During her work with FCSN that started in 2009, Sherry created Life Skills and Job Training classes. Later, as director of the South Bay Enrichment Programs, she created two work-re-

lated projects: handmade soaps and lotions (now sold in Friends Coffee and Tea) and colorful napkin holders and candy dispensers built from recycled Legos.”

The enrichment job training program’s success inspired Sherry, but it also made her painfully aware of the lack of job opportunities outside FCSN.

“I’ve worked in FCSN for almost 10 years with special needs young adults, and there’s no place to go after high school graduation. It’s hard to find the optimal job/work program that focuses on their strengths and talents, so they usually stay at home with no goal and purpose. This creates a lot of stress for the individual, the family, and the community. It is easy for mental health issues to develop. Special needs individuals, just like everyone else, need to be able to leave the house and have a job to have a healthy life,” she said.

Even when young adults with special needs land jobs at established companies, often they experience a lack of support, training, and individual attention needed to keep and

maintain the job, she says.

Looking to expand opportunities for special needs young adults, Sherry made the decision to quit her job at FCSN and establish Turtleworks, focused on a quality product with outstanding customer service, provided by individuals with special needs trained to do the work.

Turtleworks provides a range of embroidered products from aprons





to totes and cinch bags to blankets and towels as well as clothing items that include T-shirts, Polo shirts, sweatshirts, scarves, and outerwear, among other items.

Turtleworks has already provided gifts and products for functions to support the FCSN community. Sherry has made free birthday shirts for FCSN clients and shipped across the Bay Area to provide a sense of caring and connection during the pandemic. Sherry has also started partnering with Stanford's Neurodiversity Project and SN Inclusion to increase job training opportunities and soft skills training for individuals with special needs.

In the future, Sherry plans to offer logos for FCSN as well as other local companies. Her business plan calls for personalized gifts for birthdays, baptisms, weddings, and other special occasions. Eventually, she envisions expanding to other locations throughout the Bay Area, once her

job training model proves successful in the South Bay.

Launching a new business is challenging enough, but Turtleworks began weeks ahead of the pandemic. Sherry started the business without even knowing how to operate the embroidery machine herself. She received only five hours of training before the technician left, a result of COVID-19 restrictions.

"I was so scared and even after three weeks, I still didn't know how to turn on or operate the machine. I didn't even know anybody who was learning embroidery, so I basically had to find teachers and classes online to learn this new skill myself," she recalls with a laugh.

Social distancing has been both a blessing and a curse for Sherry. The pandemic has provided abundant time to gain hands-on experience, attend embroidery webinars, increase business management skills, and work on advertising for training classes and products. Social distancing has meant she has been unable to open full-time training classes.

Turtleworks' spacious facility in a West Campbell suite accommodates six trainees. During 2020, Turtleworks trained two special needs individuals and employs one special needs worker. Sherry expects to train six individuals with special needs in 2021. At this time, Turtleworks adheres strictly to the social-distancing mandates and Covid-19 cleaning standards.

Training includes five courses, with each course taking about three months to complete. Sherry estimates a year is needed to acquire all skills, depending upon a person's

function. A 10-class training costs \$350. Training includes soft skills such as time management, collaboration, and online shopping as well as marketable skills in graphic and art design, advertising, and machine maintenance, among others. Sherry says Turtleworks has posted free training videos on the website.

Those who attend the training can expect to learn embroidery-related jobs that include trimming fabric, cleaning, packaging and delivering products. Sherry hopes the skills she teaches will not only help special needs individuals thrive as Turtleworks employees but also translate to life and job skills for positions in other companies as well. In the future, she plans to consider seeking regional center status for training in tailoring, internship and self-determination programs.

To encourage Turtleworks' success and employment for special needs young people, Sherry hopes FCSN supporters will consider visiting the website for gifts and clothing.

For more information on the employment training program or about the embroidery products, Turtleworks can be reached through its website: turtleworks.co or by phoning (408) 888-7785; or through email: turtleworks2020@gmail.com. The shop is located at 1622 W Campbell, Suite 107, Campbell, CA 95008.



FCSN Shines at DDS Symposium

By Johnna M. Laird, FCSN Voices Reporter and Editor

FCSN was honored to be featured by California's Department of Developmental Services (DDS) among thousands of services providers in a fall 2020 four-segment symposium featuring outstanding alternative and innovative service providers for special needs children and adults during the pandemic.

The hour-long FCSN program featured 21 slides and seven, short video presentations, less than two minutes each, that showcased 275 weekly classes offered to 300+ children and adults with special needs and their families.

Highlighting programs for children that FCSN has continued to provide, FCSN Executive Business Director Sylvia Yeh discussed: ASP, Enrichment Programs, and One-on-One Flexible Subjects. For adults, Sylvia talked about ADP, SLS, ILS, SEP, TDS and transportation services. For families, Sylvia pointed out respite care, increased seminars, mentorships, family support and outreach, plus the new employment training program, Friends Coffee & Tea.

Sylvia also highlighted the new online tutoring program, launched with FCSN youth volunteers in response to pandemic; on-going enrichment programs that include the Lego Club and the Toastmasters' Club; a new student council launched during the pandemic; and

a range of innovative classes, including cooking on line, art instruction, current events, and language arts comprehension.

In the presentation which also involved Anna Wang, Sylvia emphasized the adaptability of FCSN's staff to learn new technology skills, to modify existing curriculum and innovate new courses and to begin offering five hours daily of day programming to FCSN clients after only two weeks of Shelter-in-Place.

Sylvia noted that FCSN staff made key decisions that contributed to success of programming during the pandemic, including: one Zoom link for each program, simplifying access for clients; breakout rooms to facilitate support at levels to meet client needs; freedom for clients to choose the classes they want to attend and have voice in classes that are offered; a range of platforms for clients to access; technological support including computers and hotspots for clients who need them; advance schedules sent to consumers and parents; and follow-up phone calls and in-person delivery of class materials tailored to clients' interests and skills.

DDS assigned FCSN a November 4 symposium presentation date, three days before FCSN's annual Gala. Sylvia recalls that she worked every night until midnight for two



weeks straight. Sylvia used skills she was learning in the 10-week Train-the-Trainer classes, taught by high student Eric Zhu to FCSN's staff to boost graphic art and design skills. Sylvia says it was exciting to have an immediate, real-world application of the skills.

DDS received more than 200 positive comments about FCSN's presentation. "The presentation provided confirmation that even a pandemic cannot stop us from adhering to our mission. We found a way to continue living our mission, providing services virtually," says Sylvia. "The positive comments were a pat on the shoulder for the work our staff is doing."

Anyone interested can find the presentation at:

<https://tinyurl.com/ycrldhax>

Anyone interested in seeing the slides, go to:

<https://tinyurl.com/ya8pvvz9>

SNTutoring: From 13 to 160+ 1:1 Virtual Tutoring Matches

By Hillary Chang, FCSN Voices Reporter

Since the launch of the SNTutoring (Special Needs Tutoring) program in March, the program has expanded from a pilot program with just 13 students to more than 160 matches in just six months. The SNTutoring program, previously known as the Flexible Subject Virtual Tutoring Program, originated from a FCSN volunteer's concern about the effects of the shelter-in-place directive on special needs students.

When students first shifted to remote learning, many special needs students had their routines interrupted and daily activities stripped away. FCSN program coordinators agreed that a one-on-one tutoring program would offer structure in the students' daily lives and the specialized attention could make up for the disruption in their schedules.

As a result, FCSN South Bay Volunteer Coordinator Mannching Wang set up a month-long pilot program to test the idea. After the first 13 students involved in the pilot program were surveyed, the program revealed a 100% percent satisfaction rate, with all parents interested in continuing with their matches. Due to the success of the pilot program, coordinators Linmei Chiao, Mannching Wang, Yvette Ying, and Isabella He developed the SNTutoring program with the mission of enriching the

lives of FCSN students by fostering friendships between volunteer tutors and special needs students.

The SNTutoring program offers a year-round virtual program that supports students interested in a variety of academic and non-academic topics, ranging from STEM, drawing, and board games to music and sports. Among the program's most popular subjects are piano, reading, and math, which cumulatively account for more than 100 matches. Registrations are ongoing, and session dates and subjects are completely flexible—meaning the student's parents and the tutor can set up all logistics based on their own preferences. Once program coordinators discover a volunteer and a student with common interests, Tutor Coordinator Isabella He matches students and tutors together in the interest of forming life-long friendships. After a decided match, Parent Coordinator Yvette Ying connects the parents and tutors together, and the tutoring journey begins. What differentiates the program from other FCSN programs is the option for parents to tailor classes to their student's preferences. Parents often work with the tutor to customize classes to their child's learning abilities or interests, changing classes to match their child's learning abilities or degree of difficulty. Throughout the program, Program Supervisor

Mannching Wang routinely performs check-ins by reviewing feedback forms from both parties to assure the quality of each session. Program Lead Linmei Chiao ensures that the program maintains its high quality tutoring sessions and facilitates communications between coordinators, parents, and tutors.

Over the six months since the program began operation, the program has achieved a lot of success. The program coordinators have all received positive feedback from parents and students regarding the program. In fact, more than half of the students enjoy the program to such an extent that their parents have requested multiple tutors for their children.

The SNTutoring program's success lies in the youth volunteers' dedication and the students' eagerness to learn. With both parties' enthusiasm, volunteers and students have both heavily benefitted from the program. The program has enabled volunteers to form a bond with their students and witness their students grow session by session, as coordinator Isabella He explains, "the volunteering experience is one of the most meaningful experiences, because the bond [tutors] form is a direct bond that [they] can't really get at other programs and organi-

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zations.” Similarly, the program has helped students remain socially active during the pandemic, while making up for the typical classes and in-person instructions students now lack. By establishing routine into the students’ weekly schedules, the program brings more consistency back into their lives.

With all of the advancements in the SNTutoring program, program coordinators aim to carry on the program’s mission of guiding FCSN students by teaching them how to build upon their strengths and improve every day, while also giving youth volunteers the opportunity to transform lives and witness steady growths in their students. As the program continues to grow, program coordinators are committed to tailoring sessions to accommodate the needs of each special needs student and strive to ensure each special needs student has the attention and support needed through his/her classes by following up more frequently on initial connections and hosting more regular check-ins. Program coordinators also work to improve the matching process by implementing an automated database to track matches more efficiently. Linmei Chiao said, “With such rapid growth within such a short timespan, we hope to see many new faces join the program, along with the already familiar ones.”

“I think we are a really good team. Everybody works together so well, and we have different strengths and weaknesses. I am a Co-Founder of FCSN, and FCSN started in my living room, in my basement, in my house, so it is really natural for me to see all of these children as my children. For two years now, I have helped as the Director of the Volunteer Support Department of FCSN, so I have become inspired and touched by all the volunteers—not only are the special needs students like my children—all of the volunteers are like my children, too.”

Linmei Chiao, Program Lead

“I cherish this opportunity because I get to know the parents, and I get to see their names. I have another role as the Co-Director of the South Bay Enrichment program, where we are supposed to come up with meaningful lessons for the members. Occasionally I will see a demand that is not fulfilled by this SNTutoring program, so I can come up with a new idea for a group lesson or something similar, so we can address that issue. This [program] really opened my eyes so I can see the demands and see what is available, and I have used the volunteer talent bowl to find teachers for new classes we offer, so it has been working well for me. I really enjoy this team, and I have been learning from everyone.”

Yvette Ying, Parent Coordinator



“My duties in the SNTutoring program are checking parents and tutors’ feedback, supporting them, and making sure our students can benefit from this program. To make sure the tutoring quality is met, I observe the classes, contact parents/volunteers, listen to their concerns, and try to meet their needs as much as possible. The happiest moment is when I see our special needs students building a strong bond with their tutors, and the students and the tutors are both growing when they work together.”

Mannching Wang, Program Supervisor

“I would say working on this program is one of the most rewarding experiences I have had. Linmei, Mannching, and Yvette are the best team of coordinators I have ever worked with. Just seeing the appreciation from the parents and the students is very heartwarming. From the volunteers, I can see a lot of growth in terms of their volunteering and their experience with this program. A lot of my personal friends are also involved in this program, and they text me telling me how impactful the program has been on them and the bonds they have formed with their students have been incredible to see. It has just been very great being a program coordinator, and I am very thankful to be working on this program and seeing it grow.”

Isabella He, Tutor Coordinator

More Than Just a Tutor, Learning with My Student at FCSN

By Jackie Wong, FCSN Youth Volunteer



Hi! I'm Jackie Wong and I have been a tutor for the 1:1 Subject Tutoring program for two months. I tutor drawing, and since the beginning of July, every week's session has been so rewarding.

I found out about this program at FCSN through the club at my school, and I immediately took interest in it. Joining the program was very appealing because I had complete control over what I wanted to teach and when the sessions were, which meant I had no trouble implementing it into my schedule! The coordinators were also very accommodating and were able to clear up any questions that I had, making the process of starting to volunteer very seamless and stress free.

I was soon paired with my student and set up with a way to contact the parents. Before the first session, I asked questions that I felt

would help me get to know her and help make the transition to the first class easier. Once I began volunteering, I immediately bonded with my student. I viewed these tutoring sessions as a time to draw and have a conversation with a friend. Every week, I learned a little more about her through our conversations, while simultaneously helping her build her social skills! Her excitement and the smile that I saw on her face every time I showed her what we were drawing that day never failed to warm my heart and really made me glad I had decided to become a tutor.

Since becoming a tutor, I have learned how important it is to ask questions from the start. When I was first paired with my student, I knew very little about her, so I did not hesitate to ask her parents all the questions I had in order to know as much as I could and prepare for our first session. For example,

I asked for examples of her past drawings, so I could have an idea of her skill level and what she enjoyed drawing. Also, I find that being flexible and open during the session helps tremendously. Sometimes, your student will have different ideas about what they want to learn or do that day, so it is important to listen to what they have to say and improvise what you had planned that day accordingly. Asking for their suggestions and feedback at the end of the class is also very helpful to consistently form interesting lessons that they will continue to be engaged in.

To be able to work so closely with a special needs student is such a rewarding experience because you are able to positively influence them, as well as witness their progress every week—not only in the subject you are teaching, but in their growth as a person. You can tell that they look forward and appreciate the sessions you have with them, and that motivates you to continue to work hard as a tutor, as well as in other aspects of your life! I have gotten just as much out of this tutoring experience as my student, and I am grateful to be a part of this program.



My Family, My Passion, My Love

By Sara Kuang, FCSN Youth Volunteer



The mere mention of the acronym opens a very special place in my mind where warm snapshots of my childhood reside. Vignettes from the years I spent as a joyful, eager member of their Drama and Music Camps, and Saturday Gatherings cascade over relatively recent memories of being a volunteer at those same programs. I've been a member of FCSN for 13 years now, three of them as a volunteer, and every time I walk into the building, the feelings of love and happiness that emanate from each person is truly something I won't trade for anything else in the world.

Friends of Children of Special Needs serves to love and support special needs individuals of all ages and walks of life. The doors of this close-knit community are flung wide open to every family

with special needs children here in the Bay Area with numerous programs lovingly designed to enrich children and nurture them into successful, confident members of society. FCSN provides job training, life-skills classes, and even housing for adult clients to truly ensure all individuals with special needs find and utilize their own potential to the fullest.

Not only does FCSN give tremendous opportunities to the special needs community it serves, the nonprofit also provides unique, life-changing experiences for its volunteers as well. I've made close friends with so many of the people here and I truly consider the forever youthful program coordinators and founders to be part of my extended family. Every single special needs buddy I was paired up with

to teach and support also taught me invaluable lessons in patience, endurance and love. I cherish each moment I had with every one of my buddies, even the difficult times, and it still astounds me now how vibrant and joyful they all are. I remember how much of a workout I had trying to catch up with a buddy racing up and down the halls in excitement. I remember staying with my buddy in the quiet bathroom throughout an entire Saturday Gathering trying to comfort her through the bathroom stall door as she struggled with sensory overload. But I also remember laughing with my buddy as we both danced wildly to "Can't Stop the Feeling" and the overwhelming pride and joy I felt when my buddy called to me "Jie Jie!" ("Big Sister!") as she came running to envelope me in a hug.

The strength and fortitude that the children with special needs and their parents have will always inspire and humble me. One buddy that I helped was most striking in her perseverance. I met her at a Saturday Gathering when my scheduled buddy was absent. I was moving to help my fellow volunteers with their buddies when I noticed her, a wheelchair-bound woman sitting at the far end of the arts and crafts table alone with her caretaker. The woman had lachrymose eyes and gray-

ing hair and was struggling to follow along with the craft we were making. I had never seen her at our program before, nor had I experience in helping older individuals, but I sidled over anyway to make her feel welcome. I helped and interacted with her all throughout the other classes as well, doing my best to make her feel loved and comfortable by talking about my week and asking her about her favorite activities; she always replied with dancing. It was evident that she was deeply passionate about it. When we spelled out our names together with blocks, played hangman, or drew on the white board, she would spell out “dancing” or try her best to draw a stick figure twirling. By the end, we were both smiling and enjoying each other’s company and we took a picture together as well. I found out later from a program coordinator that she had been the dancing teacher at FCSN many years ago until a motor neuron condition confined her to a wheelchair. I was at loss of words. I could not fathom how she could still derive joy from dancing and attending the very programs she had helped to coordinate before. At that moment, I realized the depth of courage and strength that the families at FCSN had and I was struck by

how they could all still smile and love despite such struggle. I understood what a vital haven FCSN was and gained a deeper level of respect than I had before for all the buddies I helped, their families, and the program founders for creating such a nurturing, vibrant community for special needs. It truly was a momentous experience and I’m still very humbled today.

I can confidently say that I have a lifelong love for the special needs community everywhere. Through volunteering at FCSN, I’ve seen hope and joy as I’ve never seen anywhere else and I consider my experiences as a member and a volunteer to be one of the most rewarding I’ve ever had in my life.

FCSN has shaped my character in the most prominent and profound ways and because of my involvement, I’m firmly determined to advocate for the special needs community as much as I can. My love and passion for FCSN and the special needs community spurred me to co-found a branch of FCSN at my high school with friends and join a college research team on autism. I will never stop speaking out for and lifting the special needs community up in everything I do.

Thank you so much FCSN for the wonderful memories I’ve made over the years. Here’s to many more.



Sara (first left front row) and her twin sister Anna

VOLUNTEER SHARING

Youth Volunteer Trains FCSN Staff in Graphic Design

By Johnna M. Laird, FCSN Voices Reporter and Editor

A Harker Academy high school senior who came to FCSN to teach computer skills one-on-one to special needs clients found himself this fall with a classroom full of FCSN staff members, eager to learn graphic design.

Eighteen FCSN staff members met weekly over Zoom for 10 weeks in a Train-the-Trainer class developed by Eric Zhu with the goal of improving presentations and direct instruction to clients.

Zhu, the instructor, used the seven-lesson enrichment program that he developed for his FCSN students as his foundation and then added additional projects and concepts. He adapted his training for a larger class.

Starting at FCSN in 2019 teaching a Microsoft Office enrichment program, Eric soon became a lead volunteer. As a lead, he designed his own graphic design course. Word spread of his talents, and he was recruited to work with staff.

The greatest challenge for this high schooler working with adults came as a result of teaching an entire class of teachers with a range of skill levels, requiring individualized instruction.

“I would have to explain everything in detail but also add some nuance for those more advanced to understand,” said Eric, adding that

accomplishing this skill is extremely helpful, especially when then teaching this graphics course to special needs students who demonstrate a large variety of skill level.

Eric was surprised by how terrific the questions were that came from FCSN’s staff and the willingness to explore new features, spending time beyond homework assignments to create their designs.

“A number of staff members did not see themselves initially as creative, but their work showed them exploring their creativity,” said Eric.

Executive Business Director Sylvia Yeh said clients will begin benefiting from the training in January as FCSN rolls out new courses. Yeh used the training for her 21-slide presentation as part of FCSN’s presentation in Department of Developmental Services’ four-part

symposium on alternative services during the pandemic. Parents participating in the December meeting on December 16 had an opportunity for an unveiling of the skills. She also presented the “Graphic Design” Train the Trainer Model at the meeting: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Otv_x1b3bQ

Eric came to FCSN in 2019 after recognizing the need to share his computer knowledge with special needs students, bringing both learning and fun. “I have always wanted to give back the knowledge I have to make a difference in a community.”

Upon graduation from Harker next spring, Eric plans to attend college and major in computer science or computer engineering. He is considering a minor in graphic design.



FCSN Online Birthday Partying!

By Connor Chen, FCSN Youth Volunteer



2020 has truly been a rollercoaster of emotions. Due to having to quarantine during COVID-19, many of us have not seen some of our friends and family since early March. And although the year has been difficult, causing us to experience emotions such as boredom or sadness, we have explored numerous solutions for keeping in touch with our close friends. One solution that I came up with was virtual birthday parties, which I thought would be a fantastic way for the FCSN members to interact with their friends and family and have some fun through a wide variety of activities. So far, our parties have included both stationary activities as well as fun moving activities to stay active! These include Simon Says, Freeze Dance, Bingo, Pictionary, and many more. Typically, we received around thirty participants per party, all of whom enjoyed the events very much.

Preparation for the parties took a

lot of work though! It included an introductory meeting, dry runs to get a feel of the party, and hundreds of emails being sent back and forth between the volunteers and organizers. Additionally, for each party, we tried our best to come up with new activities for the participants. These new activities often took a long time to think of and required creative thinking. For example, my team created a virtual scavenger hunt, which was a convenient alternative to a traditional

in-person scavenger hunt. In addition to planning these activities, we had to design survey forms and polls for the FCSN members attending the parties. Through these polls, we learned the participants' preferred party dates and favorite activities so we could tailor the parties to their preferences. In addition, my team set up a website, which contained information about the parties as well numerous games and stories for the members to enjoy. Although this was not an easy task, my team truly enjoyed carrying out this project and had tons of fun interacting with the FCSN members! This has been an extremely memorable experience, and I would like to thank my team for making this project so successful through their hard work. I would also like to thank FCSN for this opportunity which has been the experience of a lifetime. Finally, I would like to thank all of the FCSN participants for attending these events, as without you, none of this would have been possible.



VOLUNTEER SHARING

The Pelicans of FCSN Singing and Dancing Group

By Mary Pelican, FCSN Friend and Volunteer



Johnna Laird wrote a lovely review of my life for The Tri-City Voice April 17, 2018, when I was being recognized as The Volunteer of the Year for the CBC's (Citizen's for Better Community's) Spring Celebration. She was interested in my quote, "I don't do anything I don't want to do, and I enjoy giving back to the community." After I was recognized for my volunteerism spirit, she wanted to meet me for coffee. She was intrigued by my self-titled name, the Ambassador of FUN Mary, which is printed on all my business cards. I told her I had two rules: 1. FUN ALWAYS and 2. NEVER WORRY OR STRESS.

She knew that I have directed an elementary choir at Ardenwood Elementary School for many years and enjoy singing and performing with children. She asked me If I'd be interested in singing with the

adults that live at the FCSN facility on Peralta for an hour a week. I was immediately interested in her suggestion because I have met many of the residents who live in the apartments behind the FCSN Community Center while attending the FCSN Gala. I easily relate to all types of children and adults. I began meeting with the adults and their care givers in October 2018.

We met weekly until COVID-19 created physical distancing and sheltering in place. During that time I have experienced great satisfaction bringing my fun-loving joy of singing and dancing to them. I'm flexible and try to engage these young adults in participating and laughing at our mistakes. The adults enjoy songs with choreography and movements. I'm amazed at how well they participate and how much they enjoy seeing me every week. They really enjoy dancing! I've taught them some line dances, a flash mob, cha, cha, cha, East Coast swing, a waltz, and free-form dancing. I really like working with these young adults because everyone is authentic and real and so appreciative!

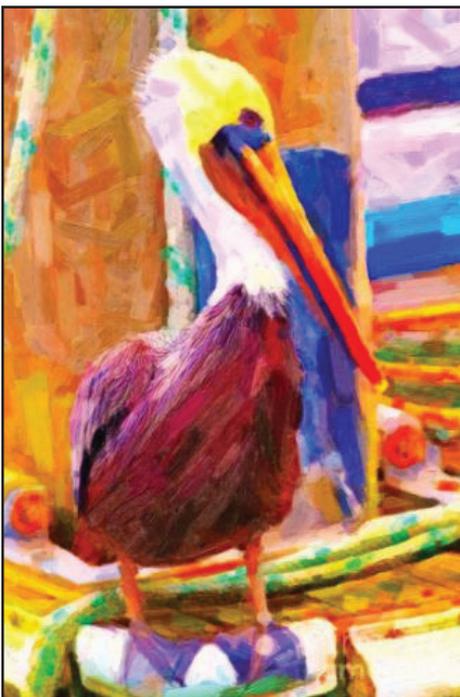
I feel very comfortable around their different personalities, dispositions, and disabilities because we





all have gifts and talents to share.

I keep meeting with them weekly because they have become like family to me, and I look forward to showing up and bringing something new and different to share each week. I like routines, so I've missed my Wednesdays from 3:30 P.M. -4:30 P.M. with them.



The Pelicans of FCSN Cheer

We are the Pelican's of FCSN.
Our team is very Good.
We've got team spirit
You can see and hear it.
Everyone strives for good.

We're true to you red and blue
In all we say and do.
Our spirit is so tough
'Cause we've got the right stuff.
Cheer for the Pelicans of FCSN!



Cooking with Friends

By Luna Chen and Jessica Yu, FCSN Youth Volunteer



FCSN's cooking class project first started in June 2020. Since its first session, the class has covered a variety of recipes and cooking techniques. So far, these have included homemade ice cream, spam musu-

bi, pizza bagels, quesadillas, potato croquettes, and much more.

The virtual class is conducted over Zoom on Saturdays from 12:05 to 1:05. The project leaders are Luna Chen and Jessica Yu. Luna and Jessica are currently juniors at BASIS Independent Silicon Valley and Mission San Jose High School, respectively. They both decided to teach the class out of a love for cooking and teaching.

Currently, the class is ongoing and will likely continue into 2021. On a typical week, recipes are planned in advance and sent out a week before each class. Participants learn not only how to make the recipes, but

also the cultural background and some fun facts about the foods. During class, Luna and Jessica go through cooking fundamentals which will help students learn essential skills for future projects. Their wish is to communicate that cooking is not only a life skill, it can be very fun as well. The recipes are usually relatively easy, and they can be replicated or improved upon. Although the class is in unison, the students are able to work at their own pace and can sometimes even swap out certain ingredients for their own preferences.

"We've seen lots of improvement in our students. From just novice recipes to trying some of our more complicated dishes such as

Teaching Virtual Dance Classes at FCSN

By Andria Luo, FCSN Youth Volunteer

Hello! My name is Andria and I'm currently a sophomore at Mission San Jose High School. Since September of this year, I have been co-teaching a virtual dance class here at FCSN. Every week, we meet up over Zoom to exercise and learn choreography, which helps to make up for the lack of physical activity resulting from the shelter-in-place. We start the class with icebreakers so the students can get to know us and each other better and then head into a 20 minute warmup before starting choreography. We also leave time during water breaks and at the end of class to talk so everyone can feel more comfortable as time goes on.

I've been dancing ever since I was really little, so I was super excited to have the opportunity to help teach this class. Although I was nervous at first, we started off smoothly thanks to the guidance of our wonderful mentor, Chyler Quivetis, and I quickly got used to talking in front of the class. Our students are all incredibly fun to work with and their efforts in participating during class time help to create an engaging and lively atmosphere. I can see how hardworking they are and it's really nice to see everyone having fun doing the exercises and dances we choreograph for them. This class is such a joy to teach and I look forward to it every single week.

Through this program, I've learned a lot about how to interact with other people, especially individuals with special needs. I've learned the importance of paying attention to details as well as being able to make impromptu changes to previous plans. Also, I've learned how important it is to ask lots of questions to make sure no one is too confused and to address any issues that may pop up. In order to make the students as comfortable as possible, we try to come up with ways for them to participate both verbally and nonverbally. For example, students have the option to respond to questions with a thumbs up/thumbs

potato croquettes, our students have made a lot of progress in a very short span of time,” said Jessica Yu. The students also see improvements in their techniques. “It helps me improve my cutting skills and cooking skills,” said Kevin Choi.

From this point on, Luna and Jessica are looking forward to continue teaching the class. The class is not only a great opportunity for FCSN students to develop their cooking skills, but it also allows for students to interact with each other. “My favorite part of the class is when the students are done cooking, and every student shares their own take on the recipe with each other,” said Luna Chen.

down or making an “X” with their hands if they don’t want to respond. We also tried to incorporate some of their favorite songs into our playlists to make class more fun and familiar for them. Helping the students feel comfortable is one of our top priorities teaching the class and we’ve learned to be more flexible and patient as time goes on. It’s been an amazing experience teaching this class and I hope to continue learning and growing with these wonderful students!

Above and Beyond Learning

Janet Butt, SBWILL Parent

My son Allen is a happy-go-lucky kind of fellow. He enjoys attending FCSN’s W.I.L.L. Program in-person on a daily basis and has built many interpersonal relationships over the years. When the pandemic hit and he was asked to stay home, his world suddenly turned upside down. Allen and my family had to learn to navigate around the new norm.

I help Allen every step of the way. I sit in class next to Allen every day as he has difficulties with communication since he uses American Sign Language and is partially deaf in both ears. I participate with Allen in all the activities FCSN W.I.L.L. program offers. It can be from Cooking to Yoga to Crafting classes. Both Allen and I have conquered all the classes together, and Allen has learned many things he may not have learned from in-person instruction. Allen now independently logs onto his Zoom classes and has learned to navigate the mute button quite well!

The staff at FCSN’s W.I.L.L. Program has provided a variety of classes that addresses some of the challenges I may face as a parent to help my son with special needs. The program has diligently worked on designing a virtual program that provides the best fit for all their consumers.

Allen now practices the hand washing routine without reminders, wears a mask anytime he is outside of the house, can cook simple meals, has number recognition with 1:1 correspondence, and many more skills.

For this, my family is forever grateful for endless hours the FCSN staff has put in. Our main goal for Allen is to continue to practice daily living skills; and we are pleased to see the variety of classes the program offers. During this time of uncertainty, it is reassuring to see the level of consistency the FCSN staff provides.



PARENT SHARING

On Stay-At-Home for Kar

Shirley & Chie Poon, SBWILL Parents



"Tomorrow is Monday. School is closed. Please go to bed, Kar."

or

"Tomorrow is Saturday. No school. Please go to bed, Kar."

There it goes every night as we, Kar's parents, make sure he is comfortable and snug in bed. He, in turn, dutifully vocalizes a reply, acknowledging he got it.

March 16, 2020, was the last program day at the South Bay Bascom Center of FCSN. But Kar vividly remembers the vibrant gathering of peers and teachers, and the lunch-hour gaiety. Most nights prior to a weekday, he invariably fetches his backpack, signature cubical lunch box and bag, and states in his silent way he is ready and wants to go to the program.

Closure of FCSN's day program has affected everyone, Kar is no exception. However, we strive to maintain his good health, overall safety, and rich enjoyment of life as best as we can. Other than healthy meals, he exercises. He saunters outdoors in our company to experience the sights and sounds of the community and to synthesize sunlight for vitamin D. At home, he listens to music of his choice and gets leisure time in the backyard, in fresh air and tranquility, including swimming, weather permitting. Of utmost importance is aerobic exercise. He treadmills with our guidance. A few months ago, he

Overcoming Adversities Through Love & Dedication

Lori Hasty, SBWILL Parents



My son, Gregg Hasty, attends zoom classes with FCSN South Bay W.I.L.L. (Work, Integration, Living, Learning) Day Program and, like so many others, looks forward to when FCSN will re-open and he can see everyone

in person. It has been hard on everyone not to be able to go anywhere or see anyone.

Gregg is legally blind and has exceptionally low-hand skills. I attended classes with him to keep him focused, retype the reading to larger font, put out real money for math worksheets, and help him use the iPad icons that are too small for him. The hardest class for Gregg is yoga. He works through it by modifying it "his way." He frustrates when shared

screen context is too small for him to see or read.

Since I spend so much time in classes, it has given me a rare opportunity to get to know some of the clients and teachers better which normally I do not have that opportunity. It has been really fun at times hearing what is said.

The amount of work that everyone at FCSN puts in to support for our special needs community is outstanding. Gregg looks for-

was reluctant to step on the treadmill. One of us stood behind him and ensured that he paced safely on the tread belt. He has come a long way! As of now with music in the background he treadmills 28 minutes at 3-degree incline and at 2.2 mph, which is comparatively strenuous and faaa...ssst for him, with no interruption or desire to step out. Lunch follows the treadmilling, so, there is strong incentive for him.

But living at home with us 24/7 has obvious shortcomings. FCSN, however, came up with a splendid alternative – virtual classes. At lunch time

and ZOOM time for Kar, he gets to see companions, mingle virtually, and hear pseudo-random joyful conversation. Of utmost stimulation to him is when his friends and some of his teachers enthusiastically say,

“Hi, Kar!”

It makes him feel like he is hearing a proclamation over the fiber-borne waves,

“Hi there, you are not alone, we will be seeing you in person soon.”

It really invigorates him and enlivens his hope to await another day. The

exercise sheets, custom-designed for him and personally delivered, have also been a good medium for him to learn fine motor skills and improve cognitive power.

We appreciate the special efforts of FCSN management and staff in continuing the Adult Day Program in an alternative way and alleviating the stay-at-home monotony of many a client and teacher. We hope the end is in sight and everyone gets to enjoy the togetherness at the South Bay Center.

ward to his classes and being with his peers. It has become the new norm for now.

Even though my house is not as tidy and paperwork stacking up, plants are going unplanted, we all know we need to focus on what matters more, our children. Thanks to all our wonderful staff and their dedication.

Adapted to the New Norm

Hua & Lucy Gao, SBWILL Parents



With the shelter-in-place in March, our son Bob became very confused initially. Many thanks to the virtual classes designed by FCSN W.I.L.L. Program in South Bay, he has been glued on them every day, in the morning and afternoon, five hours each day.

When he sees those familiar faces on Zoom, he is so happy. We are so impressed that he has adapted to the virtual classes so quickly. He likes Body Percussion, Cooking class, and all other classes. Besides WILL program, FCSN also offers private lessons with volunteers, and those are also excellent. FCSN’s virtual training has become his daily routine now, and he really has learned a lot from them. On the weekend, he keeps saying: “We will have virtual classes on Monday.” FCSN WILL staff and management team have done a lot of work to organize these classes! Many thanks to you all for the hard work!

CLIENT SHARING

Learning Without Boundaries Through FCSN Tailored Day Services (TDS)



By Mariah Laguna

When the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown started, I was pretty sad because I had to leave my apartment and be safe with my family. I couldn't really go out and have fun like I used to. I want to have fun, and it was boring staying at home doing nothing much but then I started to take zoom classes for my day program called LIFE (Learning, Integrating, Friendship, Empowerment) for 5 Days Per Week. When I'm out of the house I usually go shopping or have some fun at my family's house but I still wear a mask and bring hand sanitizer with me to stay safe.

In the afternoons I take wonderful Interpersonal skills class with my TDS teacher, Ms. Kristen. She teaches the class on how to get a job and be professional while you are working. Also I take a fun stretching/meditation class with

Shobha because when I work out with them in class it burns my calories for eating too much food, haha, and when I meditate in class, it really puts me on a relaxation mood because it gets rid of my stress. Lastly but not least, I take nutrition class with Cathy because I'm learning how to eat healthier and it's good to be healthy.

By Angela Sison

To stay safe during the coronavirus pandemic, you should wash your hands and stay home. If you plan on going outside, you should wear a face mask in order to protect yourself. The "Staying Focused" class of FCSN TDS has helped me because I get to exercise in my own house and not have to go to a gym. The meditation afterwards helps me relax after exercising. We had our virtual Halloween celebration that made me feel much safer than celebrating outside. The gratitude meditation for Thanksgiving helped me relax after exercising. In "Interpersonal Skills" class I learned how to get out of a building safely in case of a fire emergency. In "Nutrition" class I learned that fiber slowly raises your blood sugar unlike carbohydrates.

By Tori Fuentes

The COVID 19 pandemic has been so much more different now with me doing online classes for my community college. Because I miss

all of my friends from high school and coaching Special Olympics to visit them. I just wish we could see each other pretty soon. Through FCSN TDS, I learn from online classes and also, I learn Interpersonal skills because these will help to teach how to get the job training. All of the classes I did not learn before at my ROP. I remember I did volunteer for my jobsite. The "Staying Focused" class is helping me out with exercises and meditation. It helps me a lot to relax and feel much better. The "Nutrition" class helps me to eat more vegetables and learn nutrition facts.

I love being in FCSN and hanging out with clients who are now my friends at FCSN. I learned new fun activities like the Halloween party on Zoom, celebrating our birthday movies with popcorn, and helping me to prepare for a good job later on. I really appreciate and enjoy learning lots of new things at FCSN. I have the best coaches: Ms. Claire and Ms. Shobha; and the best teachers: Ms. Kristen and Ms. Cathy. I learn a lot like money math, communication skills, and job training skills.

By Nirali Ghandi

Since coronavirus came, we were in the order of shelter-in-place. Stay at least 6 feet from others and always wear a mask and have hand sanitizer on hand in case. Try not to touch anywhere on the face without handwashing. For a few days, I have been bored and lonely at home and having nothing to do.



I started taking zoom classes with FCSN Tailored Day Services (TDS). I enjoy and learn a lot from the classes:

Social Grace:

For the dressing I know, because I know how to do that on my own. For hygiene, I brush my teeth two times a day. I do use my proper table manners. The etiquette is when you are eating, try not to talk. Swallow, then talk. It shows good etiquette and the table manners.

Understanding US currency and counting money:

I have been taking 'Understanding Currency' for a few days now, so I am learning how to count money out of coins.

I feel strong and brave.

FCSN Virtual Group Classes

Every Tuesday at 2:30 I have a session called "Staying Focused". When I do the workout, I am out of breath and I feel good. It makes me stay active.

It makes me laugh and it is good to laugh it loud.

I feel relaxed.

Every Monday I have a session at 2:30 p.m. It is called "Interpersonal skills". I learned about English at Work video, the Powerpoint, the resume and also being professional while working.

Every Friday I have a session at 1p.m. I learned about everything from carbohydrates to sodium to sugars and the daily values etc. It is called nutrition.



My Very Own Busy Life During Shelter-in-Place

Alan Hwan, SBWILL Student

Because of COVID-19, I cannot go to FCSN anymore. We have to follow the shelter-in-place rule. I still do exercise every day. I'd like to share with you what I do.

Every morning, I attend 10:00 to 11:00 exercise class conducted by FCSN South Bay W.I.L.L. (Work, Integration, Living, Learning) Program. It is a virtual class. They include Zumba, yoga, and stretch, walking and dancing. I have a lot

of fun exercising. I like them a lot. I also have exercise class twice a week with my friends. At weekend, I go hiking with my family.

Besides exercise, I also attend a few ADP virtual classes, like Reading, Money Management, and Lego class. You should try them. They are fun. I also have Toastmasters and Chinese class through FCSN Enrichment Program on Saturdays. I believe you have found out that I am busy every day. But I still have plenty of time enjoying myself



like watching my favorite YouTube videos, chatting with friends on Messenger, playing video games, and, of course, my favorite musical instrument, piano.

Although we have to shelter-in-place,, we still have a lot of things to do. Why don't you share with us what are you busy for?

Fun Exploration Beyond My Comfort Zone

Angie Wang, SBWILL_JLS Student



For the first three months in quarantine, I was so scared in the beginning because of the Coronavirus, and didn't want to join the virtual day program classes because of not being confident enough to navigate the Zoom features.

I only wanted to attend my ILS (Independent Living Skills) sessions. During ILS, I got to read and draw with my trainer, Miss Emily. Miss Emily chose some news articles regarding COVID for me to read and helped me know how to avoid the virus and protect myself properly. In addition, I also learned a lot about the presidential election. I really enjoy reading with her. The more I learned, the more I wanted to get. I thus started to read a newspaper in Chinese every morning and watched TV news in the evening with my dad and aunt. I feel it's very interesting to follow up with the up-to-date news. Reading gives me knowledge and confidence.

Drawing has been my most favorite. I like drawing very much. It reduces stress and pressure from COVID. Miss Emily taught me how to sketch instead of coloring that I used to do. It has given me a lot of fun. I have improved since the beginning. I wish I could have drawing class every day!

In mid-June, I went back to work at TJMaxx. I was a little scared in the beginning due to the coronavirus. However, I learned from watching the news and reading news articles about the virus that it is safe as long as I am wearing a face mask and have gloves on, and stay six feet away from my coworkers while in the back room working. When I experienced my first working day, I felt a lot better knowing there are janitors who clean up the break room and bathrooms often and hand sanitizer is provided for us. I was especially glad Ms. Darlynn was around and watching over us all the time there.

After the first six months, I became more willing to attend W.I.L.L. (Work, Integration, Living, Learning) Day Program classes because I started slowly getting the hang of using the Zoom features and learned how to turn my mic and camera on and off throughout my ILS classes. I ended up liking the classes, and the teachers made it fun for me to learn. My friends are always happy to see me and asked me to join more often. I felt more confident attending the virtual classes and have become friends with others I don't interact with much at the center.

My favorite classes have been Travel Club and COVID Class. I enjoy traveling to different countries, but due to the virus, I am unable to travel and the Travel Club allows me to travel to many places virtually. The COVID Class has taught me how to stay safe from the virus which eased my anxiety. Through this class, I got to play games and quizzes to learn more about the virus, which has been fun.



Working at TJX

Weepy, yet Happy Moment

Karina Peña and Family



Up until March of 2020, I had the same routine for over 10 years. I attended my program at FCSN three days a week, attended a church group monthly, and took small vacations throughout out the year, including my favorite to Disneyland. I liked my routine, because it helps me to understand my days of the week, when holidays are, and when I can expect parties with my family to celebrate birthdays and other special occasions.

Like everyone else, my world radically changed in March 2020. At first, I did not understand what was happening. I could not go to my program anymore; there were no church groups, and upcoming parties were cancelled; I could not go out anymore. I missed seeing my nephews and our family dinner parties. I missed the program and would ask about the FCSN bus.

I was told people everywhere were sick, and I had to be extra careful. If I wanted to see family members, we all had to wear masks and keep our distance. I could not eat with my entire family anymore, and there were no trips to Disneyland. My dad's big April birthday party in Las Vegas was canceled. I saw my doctors on the computer screens instead of going to medical offices. When the bus stopped coming to pick me up, I was confused and frustrated because I thought it was just me that could not go to FCSN anymore. What had I done wrong?

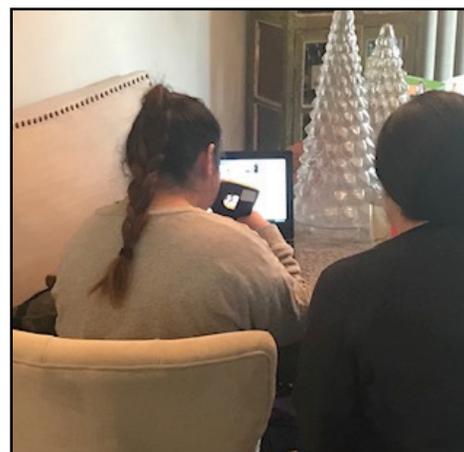
A few weeks later, when my sister placed a computer in front of me, I first thought we were going to play a game or watch a movie. When I started seeing some familiar faces, I squinted, looked closely, and was amazed to see people I recognized. I saw Ms. Maria, Ms. Diana, and some of my friends. I noticed that they were not at FCSN but in their own homes. I started to understand that my program was not only closed for me. I became a bit weepy, but happy at the same time. Seeing my friends and teachers helped me realize that I was not alone. We started playing games, and I was able to participate and enjoy my classes.

I look forward to the program and seeing everyone on my computer screen. Art continues to be my favorite. I gather my papers, markers, and look closely at the screen



to follow along, with help. I like requesting songs for the sing-alongs. I also like playing Hangman where I practice the alphabet.

My life is quite different now than it was 10 months ago. I have a different routine and when I ask if and when I will go back to my program, I am reminded that we all need "special medicine" and not to be "sick" to go back. I am thankful that my family and I are healthy, and I feel fortunate because I know not all families are this lucky. My life may be different right now, but I am thankful I have my friends and family to help me stay healthy. I now know that we need to "wait" to get through this.



Karina participating in FCSN class.

CLIENT SHARING

Adventures in FCSN Virtual Learning

FCSN EBADP/LIFE Students



“There are so many favorite Zoom classes that I like offered by FCSN: Reading and Math although sometimes it’s too easy for me. I also love Drawing Class and Art, particularly the coloring. Dancing online with my teacher and friends is fun, but I can’t do a lot because of my ankle problems. I also enjoy Current Events Class, and I learn something new every day. I have fun in Yoga, and I feel so relaxed. I love Disney Sing Along class, too. I love almost everything!”

Cindy Chua

“I cannot go to FCSN because of COVID-19. I use Zoom instead. I remember now the meeting ID. When I cannot switch to a breakroom for Reading, my mom helps me. I like Yoga, Reading, and Hangman games. I do not like Math. Last Friday, we had Wordsearch and Wheel of Fortune instead of Sing Along. Though I like the games, I miss Sing Along class more. Every day I walk for one hour. My aunt gave me a step counter. This morning I walked 2,000 steps.”



Thomas Vo



“I like Zoom classes because I can see all my friends and instructors on my computer. I like to share all my stuff in my room on Zoom. I like to do exercise in my room and listen to music. I like to stay home so I can be safe from the virus. I like to do show and Tell on Zoom.”

Jessie Castaneda

“Because of the COVID-19, we cannot go to FCSN anymore, so I have been taking classes on Zoom. I like the morning exercise with the teachers and my friends. I like Math, Life/Social Skills, especially the Reading classes, I like that very much. I also like watching videos at lunch time. I get to see my teachers and my fellow students too. But I prefer going to FCSN and I am looking forward to when things get back to normal like before with the same Day Program because I am a part of the client group. Yes, I am looking forward to going back to FCSN!”



Felicia Hopkins

“At first, Shelter-in-place made me feel sad because I thought that FCSN would close forever. I also felt sad because I thought I was never going to see my roommates, friends, caregivers, and teachers ever again. I was very disappointed because I didn’t get a chance to celebrate my birthday this year, but then I realized it’s okay because I can always make up my birthday party later.

While Sheltering in Place every day, I’ve been running at Coyote Hills and Don Edwards Park for four hours, 13 miles a day when it’s not raining. I also attend the Zoom classes of Day Program and SLS. On top of my busy life, I also attend People Choir’s Zoom practices every Tuesdays from 7-9:30pm. For my free time, I watch my favorite TV shows like American Idol, The Voice, The Wall, and Ellen’s Game of Games. I have been asking my parents to allow me to go back to work. They have said that I must get my vaccine shot first, which I hope will be soon.



Back in May I participated in a live YouTube video with some puppeteers because that week was 30th anniversary of the death of Jim Henson, creator of The Muppets. I met The Muppets on a website called www.galaxycon.com. On the website Galaxycon, I can do Questions and Answers with famous people in the entertainment industry. I’ve also been thinking about my future—possibly getting married and give my parents grandchildren while they are still healthy. Recently, I found a new girlfriend, and I’m very happy with her. The only problem is that she lives in another country and hopefully one day after the pandemic, I can go visit her with my family and possibly plan for our future.”

Andrew Chiang

“This year has been difficult for me at FCSN. Because of COVID-19, I can’t see any of my friends like Juanita and my boyfriend Zach and my family. It’s hard for me not hanging out with Zach as we used to do, and I was very sad I cried that I was not able to celebrate Thanksgiving with my family.

I am even sadder that Christmas is coming, and I can’t see my family or my honey because of the pandemic. It’s sad to tell my family “I love you” and give them a virtual hug over FaceTime. I tell my boyfriend “I miss you and I love you” and give him a virtual kiss over FaceTime, and Zach gives me one back. We wish so much that we can do this in person. During the pandemic, as an essential worker, I still work at Safeway. My colleagues have become my family. I’m working on Christmas this year from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. I have a big brother at Safeway, and his name is Nicholas. He watches out for me. Also, I watch Baywatch; that show makes me happy.”



Tatiana Gudjohnsen



“ It has been such a long time sheltering in place. It seems almost to be the norm now. Chris is very grateful for his Zoom classes with FCSN LIFE (Living, Integration, Friendship, Empowerment) Program. He likes getting to know the community. He is happy about some of the things we do during SIP. He was able to play on his new PS4 and master some of the games. He painted a flower pot for his brother for Christmas. He is very proud of it. Chris really enjoys his chats with FCSN teacher Patty Chou. We as a family are taking many bike rides and walks together, so some exercise is getting done!

Although he lost his last day program at the airport (unrelated to FCSN), Chris is certainly looking forward to moving into his apartment at FCSN. Getting to know the staff and other students through the Zoom classes has been wonderful for him. We hear him singing and laughing a lot. He is a little sad that his staff from the airport has not contacted him at all, and he misses her.

He will be glad when we can eat in a restaurant again and go shopping, although he has mastered shopping on Amazon! Our family celebrations have been limited, so we can all stay safe. We all look forward to the time when we can move about more freely. Chris is really looking forward to moving into the FCSN family.

We wish everyone at FCSN and their families a safe, healthy and happy Christmas and New Year.”

Christopher Studendorff and Debbie (Mom)

“ I love attending almost all Zoom classes offered by FCSN each day, including classes on Saturday and Sunday. When I am not on Zoom classes, I enjoy working on art and crafts like knitting projects, coloring books, and making cards. Once in a while, I help my dad on house projects and work in the yard. I am happy to be home with my family. “

Gideon Chan

P.S. from Gideon’s parents, Jenny & Wayne, “We trust that all is well with you and your family. Thank you very much for all your care for Gideon during this pandemic time. We hope you and your family enjoyed happy holidays and enjoy a prosperous New Year!”



Our Clients' Voices Matter

Monica Gonzalez, LIFE Program Coordinator



The year 2020 was a period of great change for everyone. Shelter-in-place, especially, brought a lot of change not only among the lives of our clients, families, and staff but also within both the ADP and LIFE day programs as well.

We began Shelter-in-place back in March with really no idea how we could bring our normal, daily program to our clients at home. Everything about our programs had to change within a very short period of time. Our programs had to adapt to the new cycle that the Shelter-in-place order thrust upon us with most of our staff having little to no experience in using applications such as Zoom or Google Drive.

After much trial and error, we were finally able to provide Zoom

classes to our clients on a daily basis. Although the beginnings of Zoom classes were more error than trial, eventually all of our staff and clients were able to get the hang of technology and the new changes to the program.

One of the newest changes to hit the EBADP and LIFE Day Programs was implementation of HCBS on a more regular basis. For those that don't know, HCBS stands for Home and Community Based Services and one of the biggest goals of HCBS is for clients to have a voice and a choice not just on the material they learn in their day program but also on how they learn it. HCBS has been a part of both EBADP and LIFE classes since before the Shelter-in-place order, however, it has become a daily part of the online Zoom classes.

Since the beginning of November, however, I began taking on the newest HCBS role as well. Part of my role in HCBS is to provide clients with opportunities to voice their opinions, concerns, or even their ideas on how their program should function.

Back in July we started our very first Client Council where clients gathered together on a weekly basis to discuss concerns within their programs. Currently there are two Client Councils for the East Bay Day

Programs and one Client Council for South Bay. Since July, clients have continued to meet weekly to discuss new class options and plan for upcoming holiday parties. The Client Council members play a very important role in deciding which classes they want to see implemented into their programs.

As someone who works closely with HCBS goals, I find client choices are constantly at the forefront of my mind. Even though the year 2020 was quite devastating for most and forced difficult changes for many, it also provided FCSN as a whole with the ability to adapt and grow. Implementation of HCBS and Person-Centered Planning (PCP) on a more regular basis has allowed for our Day Programs to better adjust to individual clients' needs.

All clients in our day programs receive the opportunity to have their voices heard. At the end of class, they can inform their instructors on what they liked or disliked about the class. If they choose to do so, clients can also send an email to Program Coordinators or instructors with specific concerns or ideas for classes and online activities. Clients can also vote on different topics during in-class or online

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STAFF SHARING

CARING CAN NOT BE QUARANTINED!

Yahui Cathy Yang, SEP Job Coach



What a year 2020 was!

I am so grateful that I am freely-able to work, breathe, and live under this circumstance. The pandemic has led many of us to face a mountain of obstacles. I personally have been through unemployment, unexpected diagnosis, and a terrible bill loss. Sometimes I felt a wave had not settled, and another wave rose again. Making peace with troubles is not an easy coping situation, however, compared to others, I am

lucky enough. At least I have a home to shelter.

During the shelter-in-place order, whenever I stopped by FCSN, there has always been staff there. I truly appreciate the management team's hard work. They have tried so hard to keep our program running smoothly and providing wonderful remote services to our clients. I can tell that all of the staff put in extra efforts to prepare good, quality curriculum, so our clients can grow and

develop to achieve their potentials.

I admire that some of our staff have been willing to take risks to job coach our clients who are essential workers. I am always looking forward to having a Zoom class with our clients once a week. I can feel that the clients like to see each other. Although they can't give each other a real hug, I can see they care about each other just as they do when they see each other in person. Missing each other is the hardest part for them at this moment.

Because of COVID-19, I am learning to let go of things over which I have no control. At the same time, I am learning to embrace change, embrace technology, and embrace challenges. These have not come easily. I know there will still be bumps in the road, but learning to let go and embracing the new norm have given me better focus and peace of mind. Hence, I am spreading a little joy to all of you, because CARING CANNOT BE QUARANTINED! May this article find you and yours in good health and spirits.

Our Clients' Voice Matters

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surveys. Online surveys are sent to the guardian's email address.

The 2020 pandemic's widespread disruption allowed HCBS to become a natural part of running the day programs and training clients and

staff in the meaning and activation of person-centered programming.

It is my hope that we at FCSN can use this unprecedented time as an opportunity to eventually become a complete PCP program in the future, where clients choose not only which classes, they wish to attend

but also which instructors they wish to have and what specifically they would like to learn within each class. Some goals in life may seem a little hefty but if the year 2020 is an example, even through adversity, anything is possible.

My SLS Days with Becky

Phyllis Tung, SBSLS Case Manager

“Wow! Who was that girl dancing to the song “Little Apple”? She was so talented!” asked by my two kids when we watched 2019 FCSN talent show together nine months ago when I just joined FCSN. My friend suggested that I check out FCSN event videos to get myself speeding up to learn about this special needs community. That’s the first time I saw Becky on stage and quickly learned her name. Nine months later, fate brought us into each other’s lives. She is my client now in Supported Living Services (SLS)!

I still remember the first day I met Becky in person. Becky was a little bit shy and reserved a lot of her feelings. As time went by, we found that we shared a lot in common. We both like to laugh. Whenever we see something funny, we laugh and laugh and can’t stop until one of us says “Ok, ok we should stop laughing!” We both like to dance. Every Thursday morning in ADP exercise, we join stretches followed by JUST DANCE. Becky likes to do choreography and invites me to follow along. I like to dance around her and encourage her to duet dance with me. We also like to make art and crafts together. We created a Pumpkin Princess decoration, a Christmas tree decoration, a Little Indian doll, and window pendants for which we have fun memories.

Besides these fun and beautiful times together, we have focused on building independent living skills.



3 staff (L-R, Phyllis, Ann, Sophia) supporting Becky (middle) 24/7

Cooking, house chores, daily disinfecting, personal hygiene, and social and emotional wellbeing are included in our daily schedules. Not only are these life skills helping her, but they also help her experience something new, to discover potential opportunities and possibilities for her life. For the first time, Becky hosted a virtual birthday party on her own on 12/14. We talked about what we needed to prepare for a birthday party – a guest list, a song list, a game list, a birthday cupcake, and invitation cards. With staff’s help, Becky wrote down her guest list, a total of 15 people including family members, friends from both South and Eastbay ADP, and staff. Becky researched online and found two games that she really liked. Becky also browsed YouTube to find four JUST DANCE songs. She even picked an Evite invitation herself!

It’s a fun and unforgettable experience for both her and staff. After her virtual birthday party, I could tell that she was different inside out. She is full of confidence and willing to try new things, to take new challenges in her life!

Due to COVID-19 situation, there are three support staff members - Ann, Sophia and myself to cover Becky’s 24/7 schedules. Having a dream client is a blessing. Having a dream client and a dream team to work with at the same time are beyond double blessings! Ann and Sophia are fun, kind, and energetic persons willing to walk extra miles for Becky. Besides helping to host a virtual party for Becky, we three also held an in-person celebration for Becky’s birthday. Sophia brought a cupcake and we stood around Becky and sang “Happy Birthday”

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for her. I was deeply touched by my SLS staff's loving gestures.

Ann, Sophia, and I didn't really know each other before joining this team. Along the journey, we went through some ups and downs and a few deeper conversations regarding schedules and work ethics. But in the end, we all know we have a simple goal: "What is best for Becky?" Each one of us has strengths as staff members. We work not only as a team but also as a family to support each other. It's our belief that love, patience, collaboration, and friendship provide solutions in SLS.

When asking Becky what do she most enjoys working with support staffs, she smiled and said: "I enjoy cooking with my staff; my staff trains me very well, so I think I can be a chef in the future. Please call me Chef Becky!" When asking Becky what her birthday wishes were, she paused and said: "I want to thank my case manager Phyllis, teacher Sophia, and my teacher Ann. They are very cute. I know they love me very much, and I love them, too!"

Nine months ago, when I joined FCSN, I was thinking to love, support and have impact on our clients.

Along this journey nine months later, I surprisingly find myself actually being the one who is also loved and supported by our clients. After only two months with Becky, I found my life and Becky's life changed for the better; both of us have found the best version of ourselves.

Mahatma Gandhi once said: "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." I modify this to fit my life: "The best way to find myself is to lose myself in the service of our SLS clients."

Still on the Job: Together, We Become Stronger

Shobha Prabala, SEP Job Coach

Due to the global pandemic that developed in March of this year, the FCSN office was temporarily closed. Initially I thought it was going to be just for two weeks but soon realized it would take much longer.

Our Supported Employment Program (SEP) team quickly transitioned to virtual Zoom meetings and brainstormed ideas on how we could ensure the safety of our SEP/TDS clients while continuing to serve them. (TDS- Tailored Day Services)

We reached out to all our clients via phone to ensure their wellbeing and had one-on-one training sessions with them to explain COVID-19 precautions and safety tips.

FCSN provided N95 masks and gloves that were quickly distributed to all clients and job coaches who were working in the community.

By April FCSN management and our team developed a curriculum with three virtual group classes that provided our SEP/TDS clients with much needed interaction and learning. Clients were happy to see each other once again via Zoom and to continue with their workshops.

Since April, we've developed various programs for our clients that have kept them engaged and well-informed. We've also had some fun virtual activities for Halloween and Thanksgiving to keep our clients uplifted during these tough times.

I feel extremely blessed and privileged to be a part of such a wonderful FCSN team. It humbles me to work with colleagues who are so willing to serve and keep their clients' best interests in mind.



Remembering Yumin

Jim Chiao, FCSN Parent and Co-Chair



Let's take a moment to remember our friend Yumin, who was a part of FCSN's first group of youth volunteers. He passed away on Oct. 26 at the age of 38 after fighting cancer for the past 2 years. Yumin's family was one of FCSN's founding families in 1996, and Yumin joined as a youth volunteer in 1997 when FCSN first started our biweekly family gathering in San Jose. He had a warm personality that naturally attracted people. He was a model volunteer and a big brother to our kids with special needs. After he graduated from Harvard Graduate School, he continued to help FCSN at various

functions such as emceeding at our Family Day events. He touched so many people during his life. He will be truly missed.

The following is an article that Yumin wrote as a youth volunteer in 1997. He said it best when he wrote "I realize when I come here, I come as a friend of these children and not a volunteer. We can call ourselves maybe not an organization, but a family of people who support each other, help each other, and show others that we care." From his own words, it's easy to see why Yumin was loved by everyone.

"A Family of Friends" by Yumin Yeh

Written in November 1997

The little boy was, I estimated, six years old, not more than seven. His hair was short and black, like most people here. His mom stood nearby, who held onto his hand and habitually turned her head to look at her son. He was crying heavily. I looked on, curious about this boy and my first bi-weekly meeting at Friends of Children with Special Needs. Strangely, I saw him glance upwards toward his mom and then run. He rushed off toward the nearest light switch and repeatedly shut it on and off. On. Laugh. Off. Laugh some more. He turned his head slightly as if the world was on

a 45-degree slant. His mom walked over with a bland expression that was anguished beyond restoration and dragged him away.

Meanwhile, the child, oblivious to his mom, continued staring and putting his hand on his head as if to ponder some imponderable thing. My heart wrenched at the sight of this, realizing that this boy was not only abnormal but severely handicapped. I later learned that this boy was autistic and did not behave like this until he was two or three. My first experience at this loving organization created an everlasting memory.

I consider myself and my family normal. Well, normal to a certain extent. What I mean is that we have nobody in our family that has any special needs. So, you ask, what is my family doing in an organization like this? My mom was a part of the group of people that initiated this club. My brother and I both participated and saw this organization grow. I joined this organization because of the urgings of my mom, who wanted me to experience the differences in this world. I retaliated, not wanting to waste my time, but later learned to appreciate what my mom did for me.

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“A Family of Friends” by Yumin Yeh

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My role as a youth volunteer (otherwise known as the Dolphin group) at this organization is not to idly stand and watch, but to actively participate in the lives of the children. Currently, I am assigned to the Frog group, which consists of about ten children, aged five to six years old. They vary from regular children whose siblings are handicapped to severely disabled children who require discreet attention. I went to this organization every two weeks expecting something different. I learn more about each person I come in contact with, knowing I've woven a little thread in the simple fabric of their lives. No matter who or how I am helping, my appreciation for this organization and understanding of children with special needs increases.

Before my introduction to this organization, I did not realize what kind of people this world really contained. My knowledge of the wide spectrum of different people with different handicaps has expanded greatly. There are people of almost every kind of need here. Among the children that have autism and cerebral palsy or even the undiagnosed, there are an enormous amount of people with different needs. Some need help walking while others need help in communicating. While I can help with these needs, that is not why I am here. Not only do I help physically, but I also offer my

presence and emotional support. Though there are innumerable kinds of disabilities, they all have one need: love.

The assistance I give, although a learning experience, is also an invaluable emotional experience. My spirit grows in response to what I learn about each child. In the organization's name, Friends of Children with Special Needs, or FCSN for short, there is a particular word that stands out. Not children, or special needs, but friends.

What exactly are these friends? “Friends” in the dictionary is defined as one who knows, likes, and trusts. The definition does not mention anything about people with special needs but only people who one knows, likes, and trusts. And that is exactly why I choose to be here. I want to be someone who is known, liked, and trusted by children with special needs.

Our relationships between us as friends is what makes this organization so unique. Our group is not a specialized group where only children with special needs meet, but an organization of people of all kinds, coming together as a group to help each other. The difference between this organization between other organizations is that we are not volunteers. We are not workers who are idly doing what other people tell us to do. We are friends. We are a community of people, recognizing what each person's special need is, and then looking past them. We are friends.

I realize that when I come here, I come as a friend of these children and not a volunteer. We can call ourselves maybe not an organization, but a family of people who support each other, help each other, and show others that we care.



Positivity and Silver Lining Through SIP

Maria Campos, EBADP Program Coordinator

This year was unbelievable! Unexpected things happened and required that we at FCSN adjust everything to challenges we were experiencing. Looking for the positive things resulting in my life, I see:

- **Learning to Use Zoom** to offer our clients activities that make them happy and busy. It was good that FCSN continued to offer services to our clients; we immediately started phone calls, emails and getting in touch with our clients; then, we opened the online classes, and it was wonderful to see their smiles and happiness; singing, dancing and interacting with them filled my heart with joy.
- **Multitasking at Home and for Work.** At the beginning it was very difficult to adjust with my work, my husband's work and my son's school meetings as we all worked from home; after a while, I learned to take advantage of my multitasking skills. It took patience, love, and understanding from my bosses and my family, but everything on my list was crossed daily. Things on my lists were done!
- **Appreciating more** the natural world, sunshine, every flower, every park, every little moment with my son and my husband. Reading about so many people

sick and going to heaven was very sad and encouraged me to appreciate every minute of my health, my life, and my loved ones.

- **Time for Health and Fitness.**

Working from home with the lockdown helped me to be more careful about my diet, going to the grocery store really fast and directly to the healthy food area; waking up early to go to empty stores and empty parks allowed me to enjoy the morning song birds. I was finally able to go for walks in my neighborhood after working on my laptop for hours.

- **Container Gardening.** I have a small patio that I started to

decorate with beautiful little plants that brought me joy and made me feel like I was nurturing them like a mother. I love my little plants, and I feel so happy when they are growing and blossoming, like if they were my daughters!

I feel grateful for all the blessings we have received; for our clients, for FCSN, for the jobs we have. We are sad for all the people who have left us because of the pandemic, they will be in our hearts and memories forever. When I think about everyone in the FCSN family, I hope these months have brought something positive to your life, even in the middle of difficult times.



New Challenges Become A New Norm

Vivian Largusa, EB Day Program Manager



2020 was a year filled with different challenges and blessings. Working at FCSN for almost a decade, I find every year brings new learning experiences and memories for the books. When COVID 19 started to take root in early 2020, I was personally blissfully unaware of the challenges that FCSN was facing at the program.

As a new mother, I was instead facing different challenges at home: being awake at odd hours, calming a newborn baby, and worried about baby catching a cold (not COVID). It was definitely a big change to return to work at FCSN after materni-

ty leave. I was expecting to adjust to spending time apart from my baby, adjusting to returning physically at work and managing my own level of fatigue as all new mothers do. The FCSN I returned to was vastly different than the one I had left before my baby was born.

Like for everyone else, implementation of Sheltering-in-Place changed much of my normal day to day life. Instead of returning to work as I knew it, I instead jumped into a brand new work environment. Our day program team had pivoted to provide virtual classes and alternative services to our clients.

Job Coaching During the Pandemic

Darlynn To, SBWILL Teacher



Job coaching is a uniquely rewarding discipline within the special needs community but is also one that carries its own challenges on any given day. As a job coach, I provide a sense of protection and flexibility for my clients to perform their jobs appropriately and safely. I also must work to prioritize things that my clients require even more than their education and training: their physical and emotional safety.

When the global pandemic struck, retail stores remained open. My clients working at TJ Maxx were

well aware of our global pandemic. Through weekly Covid-19 classes, and education from both instructors and family, they understood the virus's severity; however, applying their knowledge to real-life situations in the workplace proved challenging. Fortunately, I have the support of my clients' coworkers and supervisors at TJ Maxx who make their working experience as safe, and normal, as possible.

I would never argue that the novel coronavirus is a good thing, but one may admit that there are a few

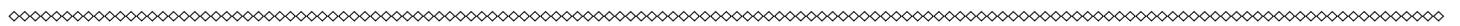
STAFF SHARING

As I joined them, I realized how much change was occurring and the impact of these changes for our clients. Although I saw many familiar faces on Zoom classes, I also noticed that there were plenty of faces that were not present. In the months since we started Shelter-in-Place, our team has worked tirelessly, making changes to our virtual programming, modifying our class options, and continuously adjusting to fit the needs of our clients and staff.

As the months continued, and we were still unable to re-enter our normal programming, I was heartened to see that the efforts of

our staff resulted in an increase of clients attending our program. FCSN made efforts in lending out iPads to clients who did not have the technical capabilities of joining our virtual classes and arranging hotspots to improve the quality of streaming materials our staff share with our clients. We began to see familiar faces many that we had not been able to greet in months. As we continued, we saw more and more of our clients join our classes. It continues to be rewarding for our staff to know that their effort and care impacts the lives of our FCSN family.

I am blessed to work with such a strong team that puts the needs of our clients at the forefront of everything they do. I was worried about the emotional, mental and even physical impact sheltering-in-place may have on our clients. But now, I am relieved to see that our clients are resilient. They continue to teach us how to stay positive, how to be flexible and how to care for each other in these trying times. In many ways, they continue to educate us when we are not expecting it. I know that when we return to our before-COVID-19 routines, ours will be a stronger, tighter-knit family than before.



silver-linings that came out of this pandemic year. Communication, for example, was a big skill that my clients worked on improving. Being able to communicate effectively is perhaps the most important of all life skills. Being social was easy, but to be mindful of others during these trying times was an obstacle. To be able to pass information to other people, and to understand what is said to us was a task of its own. A simple "Excuse me," to let others know that they are going to be within 6 feet or to raise their voice at an appropriate tone and

pitch to grab someone's attention has earned my clients so much praise and positive remarks.

Aside from communication, being more independent was another skill my clients worked on. As a job coach, I was challenged with how to guide my clients while observing social distancing. My clients, seeing the difficulty of needing guidance while being safe, pushed against the grain, and diligently tried their best to work on their own and problem-solved before asking me for help from a distance.

I am so proud to see how much they have flourished in such a short amount of time.

They were absent from work for a few months due to Shelter-In-Place; however, I have witnessed a spike in improvement in less than half a year. As scary as a global pandemic may seem, being their job coach has brought a sort of normalcy back into my life. Because of my clients, I can confidently say that I enjoy being able to work with them out in the community.

My Experience During “Shelter-in-Place”

Robert Yang, SBWILL Teacher

Shelter-in-place was a challenge to all of us. At FCSN, most of our roles in the Day Program have changed. For me, I was assigned to plant care, materials delivery, virtual lunch time with the clients, and sometimes morning social and exercise.

I take care of plants at our South Bay Center and the Community Garden Plot at Morley Park. From March, the weather has been very good. I went to FCSN and Morley Park to water plants and use tools to remove weeds.

I am also assigned to deliver learning materials to clients who are unable to join the online classes. I appreciated the management’s decision to offer support to our clients through the materials that my co-workers prepared. Due to this, I believe the clients, parents, and staff are closer than usual.

Besides my material deliveries, I also spent extra time to engage with our clients to keep them connected and stay healthy. For example: Whenever I deliver materials to Sean, we will do some exercises outdoors and practice English. One time, Sean, his father Mike, and I looked at photos and watched videos about Sean’s

younger years. It was a very happy experience to see how far he has grown. When we take walks to the park, Sean walks ahead and leads us around the ponds to watch the swimming ducks. He is very happy to go out and do exercises with me instead of staying at home during this Shelter-in-Place period.

I also visit my client, Popo Lee. When Popo has his lunch, he gets a computer next to him. Popo’s parents prepare a lot of toys to keep him busy. When Popo is doing fine, he can eat a lot. But then, he will turn to the cycle that he has very minimum of food intake. Popo’s parents plan to convert the garage for Popo so he can

have his own space- living room, dining room, kitchen, bathroom, and bedroom. It should be completed by Christmas time. That’s really a wonderful Christmas gift to Popo.

I really look forward to FCSN reopening and life returning to the way it was. When I go to the South Bay Center to water the plants and gather materials for delivery, I often see Eric who comes to the Center every day to see whether we are still closed. He asks me when FCSN will reopen and when he doesn’t need to wear masks anymore. So, I know I am not the only one. Everybody longs for FCSN to reopen as soon as possible!



Robert (L), Popo (wrapping Robert) & Sean (R)

I LOVE FCSN

Wendy Hoang, EBADP Teacher



Wendy (L) and her daughter

As a mother of a 19-year-old special needs daughter, I wanted to understand and explore a school for my daughter's future. I heard about FCSN and had the opportunity to become an instructor at FCSN. After teaching at FCSN for two years and three months, I am convinced that FCSN is the right choice for my daughter. FCSN has a wonderful environment, and everyone cares for each other like a family. The staff respects a client's choices. There is a lot of flexibility within the program and customizations to the clients' need.

Because of the Shelter-in-Place order in March 2020, FCSN began providing services and lessons remotely. Throughout the Zoom classes, I have been impressed with the adjustment FCSN has made to ensure clients get the help and support that they deeply need. I have fallen in love with FCSN, both the organization and

the clients. FCSN clients are so sweet. They show their sincere love to the staff and their dedication during classes. We enjoy each class as if we are meeting each other in person. I always feel touched when we say "Bye" at 2 pm each day. It seems everyone wants the classes to keep on going after 2:00.

During my research for better material online, I have found that there are many good educational materials and fun YouTube videos available. We have learned many exercises from the best dancers, from Yoga masters, and videos about traveling around the world without spending money. We have learned to make many dishes from a number one chef, etc. I have also learned many great things for myself.

Of course, there are struggles while teaching at home with a daughter with Special Needs. I want to say: "Thanks" to my husband for his great support, taking care of our daughter when I am teaching classes. While we have provided lots of training and support to the clients using Zoom for remote learning, some clients still can't handle all the basic functions such as unmute or turn on/off Video. Support from parents

is needed to help clients become more familiar with Zoom and more comfortable with remote learning. Together, we work to continuously improve learning for the clients.

The quality of FCSN's online classes improves each day, thanks to the leaders and staff of the FCSN Programs. Each week, we staff members train. We learn to use new technologies; we work on team building; we plan holiday celebrations; we focus on improving instructional and curriculum quality; and we add new classes. Teachers write an average of three, detailed reports a day for each client.

Someone I respect at FCSN once told me she is working at FCSN not because of money, but because of how much she is attached to everything there, particularly the people and the mission to create a loving community that supports people with special needs. I appreciate that as I am also sharing the same feeling. I would like to thank FCSN for providing such as great environment, and to thank all the staff for the dedication and teamwork. I am proud to be part of the staff that brings our hearts to FCSN. We are better together always.

When the World Turns Upside Down, Be Still, My Soul

Sylvia Yeh, Executive Business Director



2020 is the year that we will never forget for the rest of our lives. It marks sky-high numbers of people who were infected by and died from COVID-19. Yet, the pandemic has carried into 2021, and we are anxiously in the dark tunnel not knowing when it will end. The hymn “Be Still, My Soul,” composed by Jean Sibelius, helps me through the valley of the shadow of pandemic. “When disappointment, grief and fear are gone. Sorrow forgot; love’s purest joys restored. Be still, my soul, when change and tears are past. All safe and blessed, we shall meet at last.” I tell myself, “Be still, my soul when the world is turning upside down. We will meet again with joy and tears on our faces after being through thorny ways.”

Making and adjusting to changes aren’t easy tasks. Adapting to the new norm is a lesson we all need to learn to survive through the pandemic. FCSN adult programs sent our clients home on March 16, 2020, with the idea that we would see them within a couple of weeks. Due to the virus transmission skyrocketing, it became obvious that our clients would not return as soon as we hoped, and they needed their programs and routines. By week three (which was the first week of April), our amazing staff, some reluctant at first to embrace technology, launched five hours of daily programs that resembled our clients’ in-person educational and training programs. FCSN provided training to the staff and bolstered internet services where needed. I can still hear the voices of joy over Zoom that first morning.

As weeks rolled into months, our very adaptive staff has found ways to present everything from tours of the world to housekeeping skills. Our clients also adapted the new norm to learn simple cooking via Zoom. They also have been enjoying dancing and exercises virtually as long as they can connect with their teachers and friends. They have taken drawing classes, worked on reading and math skills and learned to stay

focused. For students with more limited skills, our staff has developed one-on-one curriculum. Our staff has continued to expand their skills, learning to operate breakout rooms on Zoom to tailor training to small skill-based groups. Throughout this pandemic, our staff has maintained its communication with our clients, allowing them to keep their routines and stay connected while being socially-distanced.

We never expected this shutdown would last so long. I found myself holding periodic parents’ meetings over Zoom, offering target-date re-openings at least four times that continued to slip-and-slide from June to August to September to January 2021 reopening, the day after Martin Luther King’s birthday, but the Bay Area moved back into the Purple Tier in November with a new Sheltering-in-Place order as transmission and hospital admissions climbed beyond March 2020 rates. Recently, I have decided I won’t mention any dates until I am sure we are opening.

Management with staff has developed a Covid-19 team with a detailed plan of how to respond to exposures and any cases, should that occur. There has been so much learning from scratch,

learning without a manual to guide us but thanks to each one of our adaptable and resilient staff members and each one of our adaptable and resilient clients and their amazing parents, we are continuing to grow, learn and develop our resiliency.

I feel so grateful to all of our families, friends, and donors, who supported our fall fundraising campaign and virtual Gala. We could not have continued to keep our doors open without that support. I am so appreciative to many community members, high schoolers, their parents, many organizations, foundations and companies that donated personal protective equipment and sewed masks for our staff and clients. I feel so blessed that our community has empathy for the vulnerable individuals with special needs and offer their support continuously through this difficult time.

A poem I saw on FB, claiming it was written 200 years ago by K. O' Meara during the plague epidemic in 1800. Not sure it is true, but surely it is a beautiful poem that touches my heart and inspires me to believe that we, FCSN staff, clients and families, will get through this pandemic turmoil.

*When the storm passes
And the roads are torn
and be survivors
of a collective shipwreck.
With a tearful heart
and the destiny blessed
We will feel blessed
Just because I'm alive.*

*And we'll give you a hug
to the first stranger
and praise the luck
to keep a friend.*

*And then we will remember
all that we lost
and once we will learn
everything we didn't learn.
We will no longer have envy
for everyone will have suffered.
We will no longer have disidia
We will be more compassionate.*

*It will be worth more what is of all
Never achieved it
We will be more generous
And much more committed*

*We will understand the fragile
which means to be alive
We will sweat empathy
for who is and who is gone.*

*We will miss the old man
asking for a market weight,
We did not know his name
and he was always by your side.*

*And maybe the old poor
was God in disguise.
You never asked the name
because you were in a hurry.*

*And everything will be a miracle
And everything will be a legacy
And life will be respected
the life we have made.*

*When the storm passes
I pray God, sorry,
make us better,
as you dreamed of us.*



STAFF SHARING

Glad to Be Back Home!

Tania Viana, SBWILL Teacher

First, working at FCSN has been a blessing. I feel glad to share my love and passion every day for this wonderful organization and its purpose. However, I had to resign due to my relocation to southern California at the end of last year (2019). When Annabelle Foz, Program Manager, called in September this year and asked whether I could teach classes virtually, I knew it was temporary due to the pandemic. But I did not think twice about saying yes, although I had held a different position before and it meant dedicating extra time to design a few hours of lessons. I knew I could make a great difference as a Direct Support Staff. Having expe-

rience as a Case Manager before, I knew how much we need staff that is committed and compassionate in this field. I could not be happier to be back and give my best to not only fulfill a position but also take on a goal of giving our clients the best learning time possible.

I personally have a philosophy of doing the best I can in every work I do in life. But for me, FCSN is more than a job, this is home. This is where I can share my love for teaching and feel that I am enriching someone's life. Seeing our clients smile when they enjoy a class that I teach or simply seeing them engage in a lesson means a lot to me.

I wish that my humble contribution as an instructor, designing quality classes and showing engaging materials to our clients leaves a footprint in them, as well as in this organization.



Virtual Learning Explorations

Emily Kang, SBWILL_ILS Teacher

When COVID-19 hit the Bay Area, FCSN was forced to close down for the safety of the staff and clients. The clients were eager to go back to class and see each other again, and we couldn't disappoint them. The sudden disruption to our normal routine was challenging to everyone at first, and there were many trial and errors along the way.

As an Adult Day Program and ILS instructor, I had to alter my lesson plans and figure out the best way to teach the clients without being with them in person. Although difficult in the beginning, I managed to figure out what worked and what didn't with the help and feedback of my

coworkers and clients. Teaching online was tough and time consuming, but rewarding at the same time. It forced me to think and be creative in ways I didn't have to before.

The teachers weren't the only ones who had to adapt to the new and unusual circumstances. The clients had to learn how to use Zoom to attend classes, something they have never done before. Despite the changes, the clients were ecstatic to see all their friends and teachers again. I was surprised at how many of the clients quickly learned to use Zoom without the help of a parent or caretaker. They were very patient with us while we figured out and

planned fun, engaging lessons for them. Throughout the year, I have observed the clients participate in the virtual classes with the same amount of enthusiasm as when they were at the center. The smiles on the clients' faces have never faded, and they have always been excited and ready to learn.



Friends Coffee & Tea: Updates and Revamped Website

By Anvi Kalucha, FCSN Youth Volunteer

Friends Coffee & Tea has been temporarily closed since March 2020 due to the COVID-19 shelter-in-place order. However, Friends being temporarily closed doesn't mean that it is derelict—in fact, it gives Friends time to work on its foundational business elements, including improving the website, making its social media platform more engaging, and producing a motivational video.

During the pandemic, Friends had a chance to update and revamp its website, which now features an engaging promotional video on its front page. Filmed in August, the video gives viewers a glimpse into the cafe that operated under the auspices of FCSN and provided employment training for special needs individuals. Visitors to the website can view menu details as well as scenes of customers enjoying the relaxed ambiance as the staff take orders. The video also provides viewers with a behind-the-scenes look into a typical cafe workday and the services provided. Precautions were taken during filming to ensure safety during COVID-19.

Beyond serving a variety of pastries and coffee, Friends features gift items available for purchase. “Our coffee shop not only serves drinks and sandwiches. We are more like a store introducing special needs individuals’ special abilities and talents to customers,” says Auntie Roxana, as she is known within the FCSN community. In the sitting area where customers are able to sip their drinks and chat, the shelves are

stocked with soaps, ceramic mugs, and T-shirts created by special needs individuals.

The website features navigation tabs at the top of the page, with “Store” and “News” among other links to facilitate ease of use. Prior to the pandemic, Friends hosted different celebrations, including musical events and holiday gift sales. The website now lists all the different sales and events so our customers can have a heads up for what is occurring in the coming months. There is also a page for catering, an aspect of the business Roxana hopes to develop, with different sandwiches and salads as well as twelve types of desserts.

To increase exposure, Friends has cultivated its social media presence on both Facebook and Instagram. Handled mostly by FCSN youth volunteers, its social media accounts now show frequent posts with colorful pictures detailing both upcoming events and sales. Friends hopes that its social media presence will expand its appeal to a wide range of customers of all ages, from kids to adults, as well as businesses and corporations that are in need of catering.

With its interactive and detailed website, Friends seeks to provide an improved customer experience and build ongoing relationships with customers who will spread the word about its delicious coffees, teas, and menu items while supporting a business that integrates special needs individuals into their community and provides essential job training.

“We want our coffee shop to be a feel-good place where customers can treat themselves to a relaxing cup while making a difference to the special needs community, since our shop offers on the job training for special needs individuals,” says Roxana.

Due to the pandemic, Friends Coffee & Tea has been temporarily closed for almost a year. Roxana is hoping that our new website and daily Facebook and Instagram posts will remind our customers that Friends is still here, and after reopening in 2021, everyone will say, “Let’s meet at Friends for coffee!” while bringing more customers to visit the coffee shop again.

Friends Coffee & Tea is located at 1029 S. Bascom Ave. in San Jose, CA.

To contact Friends Coffee & Tea, please visit the website at www.friendscoffeetea.com (408) 725-8811 coffeeshop@fcsn1996.org

**Hours: M - F, 10 AM - 4 PM
Saturday, 12 noon - 4 PM**

Currently, Friends is temporarily closed due to the shelter-in-place order for COVID-19.

“
 We suddenly noticed this place in our daily drive down Bascom Ave. and had to check it out. It's such a cute place with yummy and unique coffees and teas as well as yummy pastries, very cool items to purchase from local artists. Very friendly workers too. Love this place. If you are in the area you should go check it out!

5-STAR FACEBOOK REVIEW
 ★★★★★

Friends Coffee & Tea



Friends COFFEE & TEA

FRIENDS COFFEE & TEA CATERING

—
 A recipe for every occasion!

FRIENDS FRIDAY

COFFEE IS A HUG IN A MUG.

feel the warmth at Friends Coffee & Tea :-)

Friends are the people who make you smile brighter, laugh louder, and live better.

#FriendsFriday

FRIENDS COFFEE & TEA

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Friends COFFEE & TEA
 visit us and get your coffee fix in for the day!

Friends of Children with Special Needs

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