

Fraser In Focus

A Newsletter for Friends of Fraser



SENSORY FRIENDLY

Winter 2019

Fraser, Children's Theatre collaborate on gentler plays



When a character yells or thunder booms or lights flash in a Children's Theatre Company (CTC) production, most kids are happy to be part of the chaos. But for children with sensory issues, including many with autism, those kinds of sounds and lights can be jarring and upsetting, and may prevent them from enjoying the show.

Luckily for those children and their families, CTC has for the last two years worked with Fraser to put together a sensory-friendly performance for each of its productions. "Organizing these special performances is so worthwhile," says CTC education program associate and sensory friendly liaison Madeline Geier. "We've had wonderful feedback from families, many of whom are for the first time able to attend our shows with their entire family."

The process starts with Madeline attending a show and developing a minute-by-minute sensory guide and social narrative. Then Fraser lead sensory therapist Gina Gibson attends a performance, such as Dr. Seuss's *How The Grinch Stole Christmas!* She notes aspects of the show that could prove challenging to children with autism (as well as sensory-processing issues, PTSD, anxiety, etc.), such as high volume, unexpected flashes of light, or extremely emotional scenes. Next Gibson meets with Geier and other CTC staff to discuss how to alter the show while ensuring that its essential character remains consistent. Together they also produce a social narrative and sensory guide, which are sent to schools as well as anyone who buys tickets to the special performance.

The "attitude of the performance" is another key part of its being sensory friendly, says Gibson. "Everyone is welcome at the show, and the actors know that audience members might be moving or talking more than usual—and that's okay." Gibson does an hour-long training with all CTC staff—ushers, concession workers, lighting, sound and production crew—who will work the day of the sensory-friendly performance. As for the actors, says Geier, "They're game! And they're happy to adjust their performances as needed."

Quiet spaces are also available around the theater, as are Fraser therapists with their backpacks full of sensory supplies such as earplugs, headphones, fidget toys and snacks.

Both Geier and Gibson credit U.S. Bank with getting the ball rolling on this project. "They're the financial partner that makes it all possible," says Gibson.

And U.S. Bank staff are pleased with how the partnership has turned out, says Kenna Poppler, vice president of Twin Cities community relations at U.S. Bank. "It's been fantastic!" she continues. "This has really helped make theater more inclusive in our community—more accessible and enjoyable for everyone, regardless of their needs. Diversity and inclusion are important to U.S. Bank and to our partners, Fraser and CTC."

"CTC has been offering sensory-friendly performances since 2014," says Geier. "We are so grateful for the contribution from U.S. Bank and the partnership with Fraser because it has really strengthened those performances and made our productions more accessible to more families in the community."

Photos courtesy of CTC

The Fraser mission is to make a meaningful and lasting difference in the lives of children, adults and families with special needs. We accomplish this by providing education, healthcare and housing services.

Fun for everyone



Diane Cross

There is nothing more magical than that moment when the auditorium goes black, the curtain rises, and the play begins!

But for many children and their families, this theatrical experience can prove to be impossible. Actors shriek, gongs sound, strobe lights

flash, and those children who are sensitive to sensory input are quickly overwhelmed. Their distress often leads them to leave the theater, their disappointed parents and siblings trailing behind.

Fortunately, this scenario is no longer inevitable for families attending Children's Theatre Company (CTC) productions. That's because for the past two seasons, CTC has partnered with Fraser—with important financial assistance from U.S. Bank—to provide one sensory-friendly performance during the run of each CTC play.

Read our article (pages 1-2) to find out more about how Fraser therapists are helping to shape a kinder, gentler version of each CTC production, as well as providing a calmer sensory experience at Fraser events.

One of those events—the Fraser Walk for Autism—is coming up soon on April 13, 2019, at Mall of America (MOA) in Bloomington. The walk is one of our key fundraising events each year, and we count on your support to make it a success.

Thank you for walking, for sponsoring a team, or just turning up at the MOA to show your support for Fraser and all the important work we all do together!

Warmest regards,

Diane S. Cross, President and CEO

Other sensory-friendly events

Children's Theatre productions are not the only Twin Cities events to benefit from the sensory-friendly areas and tools provided by Fraser staff.

At both the annual Pulling Together and Walk for Autism events, Fraser therapists offer children sensory-helpful backpacks full of items such as earplugs, headphones, fidget toys, squish toys, bubbles, clay and snacks.



Calming stations—with crash pillows, shoulder wraps, yoga balls, and more—are also found at both events.

And Dakota County Libraries offers sensory-friendly hours in partnership with Fraser. At their Galaxie Library in Apple Valley, they occasionally open two hours early, providing Fraser-provided activity stations, therapy dogs, and a story hour geared to children with autism.



Nancy Baldrica is new VP, Chief Marketing Officer

Nancy Baldrica recently joined Fraser as Vice President, Chief Marketing Officer. Baldrica's responsibilities include being a champion of the Fraser brand, implementing a marketing and communications strategic plan that supports the organization's goals, and increasing brand awareness and visibility.

Baldrica brings a wide range of experience to the position, having worked as a communications consultant, as the managing editor for a book publisher, and in communications leadership roles with mental health provider Nexus.

"We are thrilled to have Nancy join our executive team and share her vast expertise with us," says Diane Cross, Fraser President and CEO. "Her experience and knowledge will help us position Fraser as a leader in the healthcare industry and build awareness in the community."

Says Baldrica, "Every child deserves outstanding mental health care, and Fraser delivers that to children and families. I'm excited to extend Fraser's outstanding reputation in the community."



MEET OUR STAFF

Elana Schuster

Permanency & Adoptive Family Support Program Lead

I knew I wanted to work in foster care and adoption after studying in Korea during college and volunteering in an orphanage. As an adoptee myself, I thought I might be able to provide a different lens to the work.

Fraser has long provided help for adoptive families, but in 2013, we decided to set it apart as its own program. Parenting a child who has experienced losses and trauma around foster care and adoption is quite different from other kinds of parenting.

Children in this program might present with aggression, post-traumatic stress disorder, difficulty attaching, anxiety, depression or difficulties related to in utero substance exposure. Simultaneously, they may be processing the loss and grief related to transitions, trying to understand their race and identity in a new family, or navigating mixed feelings about all of their different caretakers.

It's amazing to see kids moving from major behaviors, such as getting in fights, self-harm, etc., to a point where they feel safer and calmer and are settling into the attachment. Recently, a caregiver was so happy because her son wanted to snuggle with his father for the first time since being adopted. That was a huge thing for their family. It is great to see children not be scared to receive love and express it to others again.

Upcoming Events



FRASER 2019
Walk
for autism



SATURDAY, APRIL 13, 2019 • 7AM
MALL OF AMERICA
FRASER.ORG/WALK

Why we walk

The Fraser Walk for Autism is a family-friendly walk around the first level of Mall of America, filled with sensory activities, mascots, games, prizes and giveaways. You can rally a team or register as an individual. All participants receive breakfast. In 2018, participants, volunteers and sponsors helped raise more than \$120,000 for services benefiting the local autism community.

Today, 1 in every 59 U.S. children is diagnosed with autism. For many, an autism diagnosis begins a journey to experience life from a unique and often challenging perspective. Each year, thousands of Minnesota families are faced with navigating through the complexities of autism spectrum disorders.

Your support of the Fraser Walk for Autism will help us sustain current programs, and more importantly, expand innovative services for children, adults and families affected by autism.

Get started at fraser.org/walk

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EVENT PARTNERS

Do Good Events





Fraser Annual Benefit 2018

A Venetian Masquerade Ball

More than 800 guests joined us in late October at the Fraser Annual Benefit, presented by U.S. Bank. Over \$600,000 was raised for Fraser families. Because of that generous support, more families in the Twin Cities—and throughout Minnesota—will receive life-changing Fraser services.

We could never achieve such success without our sponsors, listed below. We would especially like to thank our presenting sponsor, U.S. Bank. Thanks, too, to all the generous volunteers who helped make it such a glittering and fun affair.

Want to relive the magic? Go to flickr.com/fraser.org.



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**Save the date!
October 26, 2019
Hilton Minneapolis**



The Louise Whitbeck Fraser Award Winners

The Louise Whitbeck Fraser Award recognizes those who are building on the legacy of our founder, Louise Whitbeck Fraser. The award distinguishes the outstanding vision and dedication of individuals and companies who have devoted themselves to improving the lives of children and adults with special needs.

Every year, Fraser accepts nominations from clients, board members, donors and staff. The Fraser Board of Directors and Executive Leadership Team select a slate of finalists, and the board votes to choose the award recipients.

Congratulations to the 2019 Louise Whitbeck Fraser Award winners: Lyn and Duane Jergenson and

U.S. Bank. "These winner exemplify the legacy of our founder, Mrs. Fraser," says Diane Cross, President and CEO of Fraser. "Mrs. Fraser believed that all children deserved the opportunity to live, work, learn and play as members of our community. Lyn and Duane Jergenson and our friends at U.S. Bank have provided incredible financial support to Fraser so we can continue to do great work in our community."

The 2019 Louise Whitbeck Fraser Award winners will be recognized this spring at the 2019 Fraser Donor Recognition Breakfast.

Fraser gives single parent vital support

By Cathy Gonzales, as told to Lynette Lamb

My 8-year-old daughter, Priscilla, and I live in South Minneapolis. When she was in kindergarten, I noticed that Priscilla was having trouble in school. Her doctor referred me to Fraser and soon they had diagnosed her with autism. Since then, Priscilla has had a series of therapies, including occupational therapy, food therapy, family therapy and group therapy. She has made definite improvements and now is in the third grade at a public school.

But one of the most helpful aspects of our involvement with Fraser has been the Adult Rehabilitative Mental Health Services (ARMHS). The ARMHS worker assigned to me has been my right hand, helping us through everything. She has worked well with my daughter's case manager and our family therapist. We're grateful for another Fraser service that can help our family.

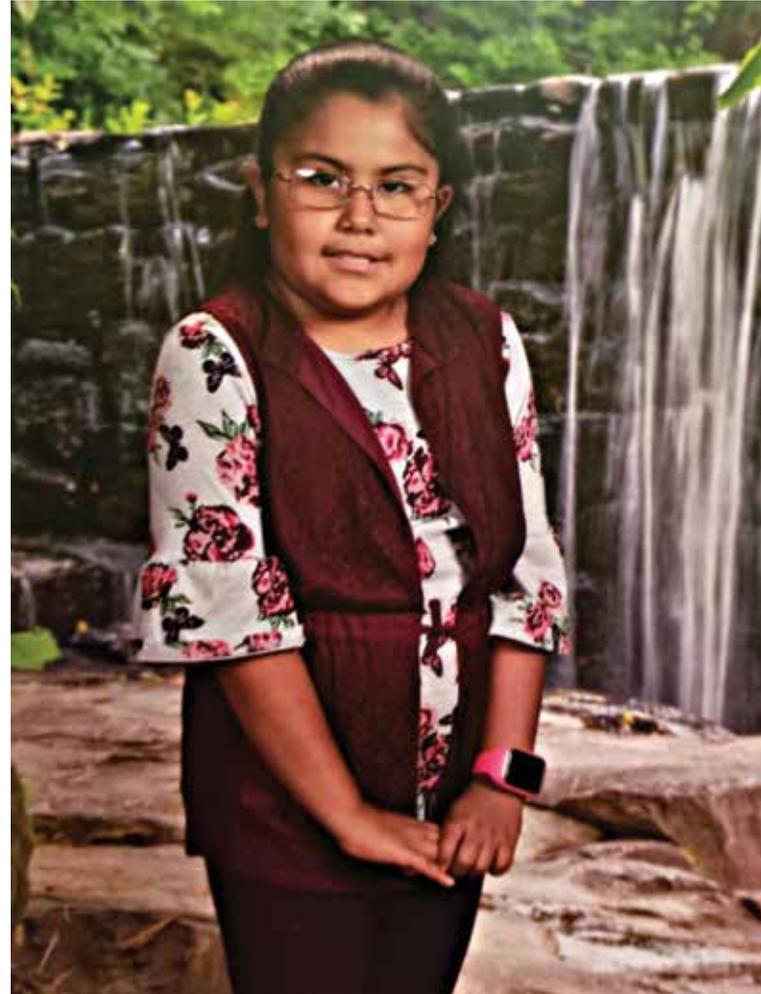
I really don't know where I'd be without her help and support. She is so kind and patient and gives me the information I need, but doesn't overwhelm me. She explains the medical information so that I can understand it—and that can be a lot to take in.

My ARMHS worker has helped me to maneuver. As a single parent, it has been so great to have her help with appointments. She has attended meetings at my daughter's school with me. She even came along when I had surgery and helped Priscilla and me during and after surgery. She is always right there, making sure everything is okay.

When I get overwhelmed from the stress, she helps me understand that it is going to be okay. And, of course, she has given me many strategies for working and communicating with Priscilla.

When Priscilla was first diagnosed, I remember crying a lot; I didn't know what was to come or how I would handle it. But the support I receive from Fraser has meant the world to me and my daughter.

People at Fraser are our rocks. We need and depend on all of them, but especially our ARMHS worker, to get us through our rough days. She has been with us from the beginning and helped us through so many difficult issues. We see her as family. I don't know where we'd be without her.





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Now hiring for Fraser Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) staff at all Fraser clinics.

