Pathways to Success

Interview Series by Hannah Thompson

Pathways Awareness

Pathways Center

Hannah has spent the past few summers collecting stories from the parents, children, and staff of Pathways Center, to give you a personal insight into the Pathways Community. This month she writes about her experience visiting children participating in the PALSS program and interviews Mr. W., a Pathways' parent, about his child's experience with PALSS.

Hannah Goes Inside the PALSS (Practice and Learn Social Skills) Program

Inside of the PALSS program, there are three adorable children. Getting to know them was a pleasure! I learned that their favorite time in PALSS was the snacks and the games. Ms. Brooke's answer was, "how to hang out and be friends." The kids were absolutely enthralled in my communication device. I let them type in their names and the ice was broken between us! I learned some rules that the kids in PALSS used. There was the two question rule. An example of this rule would be: "Do you like cats? Not really. Do you like cats?" Another rule explained the appropriate distance for conversation. Robot arms would be arms to yourself down at your side and inner tube arms would be when you spread your arms out wide like you are holding an inner tube to keep your distance from people. Brooke explains that different relationships constitute if you should use robot arms or inner tube arms. The therapist also works on the appropriate tone of voice to use in conversations. In the room they work in, there is a poster with a green, yellow and red light. The green light is for loud voices such as yelling to a friend down the hall. The yellow light was for medium voices for conversations at a table for example. The red light was for conversations where you had to whisper. All of these signs were very useful to the kids.

Before I left, I noticed that the word "snag" was on the wall. I asked what it meant. It meant even if the conversation goes wrong, they were going to "Go with the flow, be flexible, we are going to be okay." My time with these three kids asking me about when they would be in the newsletter, all three of them were so excited about it!

NOTE:
The PALSS program has been modified. Its new name is "Let's Be Friends!". This summer, we are planning two age specific programs. Each will be led by occupational therapists and/or speech-language pathologists, depending on the number and needs of the participants.

Please speak with your child's therapist if you are interested in your child participating in future programs like this.

Mr. W. – Pathways Parent

Mr. W is a proud parent of an eight year old boy with high functioning autism. This means his son doesn't understand socially appropriate behaviors. For example, he struggles with sharing and taking turns with his peers. When Mr. W heard about the PALSS program, it sounded perfect for his son. According to Mr. W, The PALSS program is "guiding the children to make the appropriate choice in a social situation, such as loud voices outside, not inside, and quiet voices in a library." The hour and a half group session is led by Brooke, a speech therapist at Pathways, who is known as Ms. Brooke to the kids.

Mr. W's son has gained a lot from this program. He has learned appropriate social behaviors. Learning to take turns has been especially beneficial. The parents also benefit from their children acquiring these skills, and they even learn some skills of their own. For example, the parents have learned how to appropriately reinforce behaviors in social situations. They refer to how Ms. Brooke would act and give their children the same social cues that Ms. Brooke would use.

Due to this program, his home life has changed. Mr. W has noticed that his son is more patient, especially when it comes to sharing the remote with his sister. Also, when his son starts school in the fall, he hopes that he will be able to apply the skills learned in the PALSS during school with his friends.

Mr. W has advice for parents like him. He highly recommends that if you suspect your child has a disability to get him or her to therapy. Early detection and therapy help tremendously. Mr. W would suggest the PALSS program to other children like his son and plans to continue having his son participate.

Do you have a Pathways to Success story that you would like to share?

Please contact Sarah Kerndt at skerndt@pathwayscenter.org or call her at (847) 510-5654.