

The Building Block

Volume VIII, Issue 1
January - March
2014

An e-newsletter of the J. D. McCarty Center for children with developmental disabilities

Registration for Camp ClapHans Begins

Second season starts in June at camp for kids with special needs

Families can register now for Camp ClapHans, a residential summer camp in Norman for children with disabilities.

The camp is for kids ages 8 to 16 and is an outreach project of the McCarty Center. The center is a pediatric rehab hospital that specializes in the care and treatment of children with developmental disabilities from birth to age 21.

The deadline to register for the camp is April 24. The cost for the four-day camp session is \$325, and scholarships are available to families who qualify.

The camp is located on the hospital's campus at 2002 E. Robinson in Norman and features two cabins and an activities building that are located next to an 11-acre lake.

Five camp sessions are offered this summer, and the sessions are from Sunday afternoon to Wednesday evening. Activities for campers include archery, arts and crafts, camp fires, canoeing, fishing, field games, horseback

riding, nature hikes and swimming.

Camp Director Kyle Cottrell said the camp offers kids with special needs a place where they can enhance their self-esteem and social skills.

"I want them to have an amazing experience," Cottrell said. "I want them to have this opportunity to discover a new activity, to make new friends and learn something new about themselves."



Camp Director Kyle Cottrell relaxes in one of many rocking chairs that campers can enjoy at Camp ClapHans.

This is the second season for the camp, which opened in June 2013. Many campers and parents from last summer said they were thrilled with their experiences.

"I like camp because I get to be with other people like me," said Greg Carter, of Norman, who is autistic and attended camp last July.

Greg, 15, said he hopes to serve as a camp counselor when he is older. Until then, he wants to come back to camp this summer and encourages other kids to give it a try "because it would be a great experience for them."

Ted Fitzhugh said his great-grandson, Ethan, who has cerebral palsy, loved the camp and enjoys looking at photos of activities he did at camp.

"It was a great experience," said Fitzhugh, of Broken Arrow.

Fitzhugh was also thrilled with the camp counselors who worked with Ethan, 11, and the kindness and attentiveness they showed to him.

"I was so overwhelmed by not just the care given, but the genuine love that was given there to the kids," he said.

[Continued on page 2](#)

[See Camp Registration Open](#)

Continued from page 1

Camp registration open

Camp ClapHans has a 1-to-1 staff to camper ratio, registered dietitians to plan all dietary needs for campers, two registered nurses and a physician available to assist with medical needs, Cottrell said.

Also, "Camp ClapHans staff members work with the McCarty Center therapists, psych clinicians and nurses to ensure that a camper's social and emotional goals are being fulfilled," Cottrell said.

Camp ClapHans staff members are typically university students who are working toward a degree in allied health care fields, such as physical therapy, occupational therapy and speech-language pathology; special and general education; outdoor recreation; nutrition and

other related fields, Cottrell said.

Camp ClapHans also is accredited with the American Camp Association. Accreditation identifies programs that offer a solid foundation of health, safety and program quality, according to the association's website.

To register for camp, call 405.307.2814 or email kcottrell@jdmc.org. Families can also register for camp at www.campclaphans.com.



Canoeing on an 11-acre lake at Camp ClapHans is just one of the many activities awaiting campers this summer.

Fast facts about Camp ClapHans

Registration: Families can register for Camp ClapHans from now until April 24. To register, call Camp Director Kyle Cottrell at 405.307.2814 or e-mail kcottrell@jdmc.org.

Age limit: The camp is for kids with special needs ages 8 to 16.

Cost: The cost to attend a four-day camp session is \$325, and scholarships will be available to families who qualify.

Camp location: The camp is located on the south side of the McCarty Center's property in Norman at 2002 E. Robinson.

Camp history: The camp opened in June 2013 and served 54 children from 17 counties in Oklahoma.

The camp's namesake: Camp ClapHans is named in honor of the late Sammy Jack Claphan, a citizen of the Cherokee Nation and an Oklahoma native. Claphan played football at the University of Oklahoma and graduated with a degree in special education. He played in the NFL. After retiring from the NFL, he returned to Oklahoma and became a special education teacher. He died in 2001.



En garde! Fencing was one of the unique and adaptable sports that Camp ClapHans campers got to sample during last summer's camp.

Camp Sessions

This summer will feature a Wild West theme at camp. Here is a schedule of the sessions and each week's theme:

June 15 - June 18
Saddle Up Buckaroos

June 22 - June 25
Chuck Wagon Roundup

July 6 - July 9
Jumpin Jukebox Jamboree

July 13 - July 16
Rootin'-Tootin' Rodeo

July 20 - July 23
Head'am Up, Move'am Out

The Building Block

The Building Block is published by the J. D. McCarty Center for children with developmental disabilities in Norman, Oklahoma, and is authorized by Vicki Kuestersteffen, director and ceo. This publication is distributed via e-mail. If you would like your name removed from our mailing list, please send an e-mail to ggaston@jdmc.org. Write The Building Block on the subject line. Write Please Remove in the message box.

Director: Vicki Kuestersteffen
Editor: Greg Gaston
Associate Editor: Sharla Bardin

Cerebral Palsy Commission:
Rob McCalla
Karen Rieger
Joe Sher
Joe Steil
Chuck Thompson

J. D. McCarty Center
for children with developmental disabilities

2002 East Robinson Street • Norman, Oklahoma 73071
405.307.2800 • 800.777.1272 • www.jdmc.org

Camp ClapHans gets new director

Cottrell excited to use skills in new setting

Kyle Cottrell loves to learn and challenge himself.

It's what led him to attend summer camps as a kid, what led him to work at the McCarty Center and, most recently, what led him to change his career focus from occupational therapy to serving as the director of Camp ClapHans.



Kyle Cottrell's background as a COTA working with children with developmental disabilities and his positive experience with summer camps led him to a new career direction as director of Camp ClapHans.

Cottrell was hired as the director in September 2013. He is a licensed certified occupational therapy assistant and has worked for the McCarty Center for almost seven years.

Megan Stanek, former camp director, resigned from the position last year to spend more time with her young family.

Vicki Kuesterstephen, director and CEO of the McCarty Center, said Cottrell's excitement and experience are some of the many qualities he brings to the position.

"Kyle's enthusiasm and energy level, along with his knowledge of children with developmental disabilities will make him an excellent camp director," Kuesterstephen said. "Kyle has a huge heart, and children respond so well to him. The camp sessions will provide an amazing experience for the kids attending."

Cottrell said he applied for the camp position because of his passion for working with kids with disabilities, the positive experiences he had with summer camp and the chance to try something new in his career.

"It lets me use that background, use that knowledge I have in a whole new way." Occupational therapists work with people who, because of a disability, an illness or injury, need assistance in learning skills to help them lead independent lives. The therapists help patients develop, recover and improve the skills needed for daily living and working.

Cottrell said one of the skills he learned in occupational therapy is adapting activities for different ability levels. He believes that training will serve him well at camp where activities such as archery and fishing are adapted to a camper's skills.

The 31-year-old said he also is excited about seeing the positive impact that a summer camp can have for kids. It did for him when he attended a Boy Scout camp and forestry camp as a kid.

Summer camp gives kids the chance to learn new skills, while also having fun and meeting new people he said.

Another perk with the camp

job is that Cottrell can continue his work with kids with disabilities.

Cottrell, a Blanchard native, started working at the McCarty Center in 2004 as a direct care specialist. The specialists work one-on-one with inpatients at the hospital and provide assistance and supervision.

"I loved the job, from the camaraderie between the staff to the amazing bond you get with the patients."

While working at the hospital, he became interested in becoming a certified occupational therapy assistant. He attended Oklahoma City Community College and earned his certification in 2008. Cottrell worked at the McCarty Center after graduation but later left to spend a few years as a traveling therapist for a staffing company. He worked in schools in Virginia and New Mexico.

"It was so cool to live somewhere else and experience a different regional culture."

Cottrell said it was a great experience but he decided to move back to Oklahoma to be closer to family.

After the move, he started working again for the McCarty Center.

Continued on page 4

See Cottrell's new direction

Continued from page 3

Cottrell's new direction

"It was like home," he said. "I love the hospital. There's something very kind and very warm and homey about this place."

Cottrell said it's also gratifying to work with the patients and see the potential and progress they make through the years.

"To be a part of that success is so rewarding."

Cottrell also is excited about the campers he will meet this summer and watching them have a good time and gain new skills.

"I want them to have the best time. I want them to be more confident in themselves and build friendships."



Michelle Sherman, a camp counselor last summer, watches as Ethan Fitzhugh uses his communication device. Sherman said working with Ethan was inspiring and he "taught me so much more than I thought I would get from volunteering at camp. His genuine and happy personality brought a light to the whole camp".



Camp ClapHans

McCarty Center hosts Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month Carnival

The McCarty Center hosted a free carnival for the community to celebrate children with special needs.

The carnival was from 1 to 3 p.m. March 8 here at the hospital and nearly 200 people attended. The event included games, live music, food and information about services and volunteer opportunities at the hospital and resources in the community for people with disabilities. The carnival was also an opportunity to recognize "National Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month," which is celebrated each March.

The carnival featured activities for families, such as games, face painting and arts and crafts projects; information booths from area organizations like the Oklahoma Autism Network, SibShops, Humana Insurance, Expressive Movement Initiative (an adaptive dance group) and Shining Starz special needs cheerleading; live music from John the Franklin; therapy dogs and a tour of the hospital.

A special visit to the carnival was made by University of Oklahoma mascot "Boomer" and the OU pep band.

"We were so excited about hosting this carnival. It was an opportunity to honor the extraordinary children and adults in our community who have developmental disabilities and provide parents with information about organizations and programs that could benefit their families," said Sharla Bardin, public information manager.



Amanda Gold, carnival volunteer and Camp ClapHans counselor, paints the face of a young carnival attendee.



University of Oklahoma mascot "Boomer" conducts the OU pep band in a rousing rendition of "Boomer Sooner" for the crowd visiting the Developmental Disability Awareness Carnival at the McCarty Center.



OU student volunteer David Murray and McCarty Center nutritionist Lisa Braden make balloon animals for carnival goers.



Therapy dog Allie, a Great Pyrenees, was one of three therapy dogs making the rounds during the carnival being petted and hugged by young and old carnival goers alike.

A chance to dance



New program at McCarty Center give kids with disabilities an opportunity to learn moves, meet new friends and express themselves

They giggle, they glide, they spin and they shine.

They are students with a lot of heart, a positive attitude, plenty of patience and poise and a deep desire to dance.

They are members of the creative movement dance group at the McCarty Center.

The hospital hosts the dance classes for children with special needs, ages 4 to 21, as an opportunity for kids to learn about dance, work on physical movements and have an outlet to express themselves. The eight-week classes started in February and concludes with a recital in April.

The program is a great opportunity for kids with disabilities to boost their confidence, enhance social skills and build muscle strength, said Beth Morton, director of physical therapy at the McCarty Center.

"Movement is crucial for development," Morton said. "That's how kids explore and learn."

Students from the University of Oklahoma lead the classes, and the dance moves can be adapted to accommodate a child's ability level. Students partner with one child and work with that child each class. A therapist from the hospital is also

present during the classes.

Getting Started

Emily Scheele, a sophomore at OU, leads the creative movement dance group and was instrumental in organizing the dance classes at the McCarty Center.

Scheele said she was motivated to offer the classes because of her love for dance and a desire to work with kids with disabilities. The Colorado native has been a dancer since she was 3, and the majority of her training is in ballet.



Emily Scheele, a sophomore at OU, leads the creative movement dance group at the McCarty Center. The group is for kids with disabilities from 4 to 21 years old.

Also, while in high school, she served as a math tutor for students with disabilities.

"I found that it was so much more rewarding than anything I'd done," Scheele said.

So, she wanted to combine her interests into a program that could benefit kids with disabilities, while introducing them to dance.

Scheele met with Morton last

summer about offering the dance program. She then took a course to receive her certification in after-school programs administration from the American Camp Association with an emphasis on working with children with disabilities. She also shadowed a dance teacher from the Colorado Conservatory of Dance who offers a class for kids with disabilities.

Last fall, Scheele formed the Expressive Movement Initiative, which is a student organization that aims to introduce the art of movement as an expressive outlet to children with developmental disabilities.

Scheele then recruited students with experience in dance, therapy or education to join the group and help with classes at the McCarty Center.

The kids in the creative movement dance group include those who are autistic and kids who have spina bifida and cerebral palsy. In the classes, they learn moves that involve a series of jumps and turns. One of the favorite dances for the kids is the 'chasse', a gliding dance step in ballet in which the same foot always leads.

[Continued on page 6](#)

[See Moments of Pride](#)

Continued from page 5

Moments of pride

At the start of each class, the kids rush to find the OU student they are partnered with and smile and laugh as they work on moves together. In a recent class, Scheele asked the students to pick their favorite dances and perform those in front of the group. Each performance was met with enthusiastic applause and words of encouragement from all the dancers.



Caitie Bogenrief, a senior at the University of Oklahoma, and Jordyn Nichols, 5, practice dance steps during a class at the McCarty Center.

Parents of children in the class said they are thrilled about the program and proud of the progress their kids are making. They also talk about how well their children remember the names of the dances they perform and how willing they are to show family and friends what they are learning.

Cheryl Edwards believes the class has helped her granddaughter, Anicka, 7, who has cerebral palsy, build muscle and improve her focus.

"It has been awesome. She has really become immersed in music," said Edwards, of Stonewall. "She can't wait every Thursday to go to dance."

Janette Nichols of Norman signed daughter, Jordyn, who has spina bifida, up for the

classes as a way for her to exercise and have fun. She is doing that and so much more. The 5-year-old has quickly become a dancing queen.

"Jordyn dances everywhere now. She chasses in the Walmart parking lot," Nichols said. "In fact, a couple of weeks ago she was literally dancing in the aisles at our church during worship songs. Dance class has opened her up to a new world of ways she can move her body."

Nichols said she also is impressed with the OU students who work with the dancers.

"We have thoroughly enjoyed the dance instructors and helpers themselves who have warmly and positively supported Jordyn beyond words. We cannot say enough wonderful things about this dance class and are grateful to be a part of it."

The college students said they admire the kids they get to work with in the classes.

Caitie Bogenrief, a senior, is partnered with Jordyn and said she loves seeing the excitement and talent emerge from the young dancers.



"It brings joy and happiness to my heart every time," Bogenrief said. "You just see them light up. It's amazing."

Madison Deere, a junior, said it's rewarding to see the kids having fun and learning new steps. "Seeing the progress they make each week is so cool."

Deere works with dancer Mia Green, 9, who has Jacobsen syndrome, a rare chromosomal disorder, and heart defects. The two have danced together since last fall, and have become buddies. Mia smiled as soon as she spotted Deere during the first class this spring. Deere also gave her student a Valentine's Day card that Mia excitedly showed off to her family.

"I love her. She just absorbs everything," Deere said. "She loves being able to cheer on the other students."

Scheele said her hope with the classes is that the kids will grow socially, creatively and physically from the experiences.

She also sees the dance program as a chance for kids with disabilities to show others some of the multiple talents and skills they possess.

"That is what this program is: a chance. And we plan to provide each of our students with an opportunity to creatively express themselves, specifically because we feel they have so much to say."

Mia Green, 9, left, and Madison Deere, a junior at OU, have been dance partners since last fall when Mia started participating in the creative movement dance group at the McCarty Center.