Jenny Blevens heads FamilyForward’s Therapeutic Preschool and, with the dedication of her expert staff and support from generous donors, she has overseen an amazing transformation this year.

As she flips through preschool equipment catalogs where bright primary colors seem to bounce off the pages, she acknowledges that a few years ago she probably would have gravitated towards those colors. Now, under the professional guidance of Dr. Kristie Brandt, a ChildTrauma Academy Fellow and internationally known consultant on the clinical use of the Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT), her perspective is very different. She and the Therapeutic Preschool team have learned to visualize the preschool environment through the eyes, ears, and the emotional wherewithal of a traumatized child.

“The majority of our children are in foster care or living with relatives other than biological parents,” Jenny says. “When they arrive in our preschool we assess their history of adverse experiences and relational health, and then try to connect the dots. Our kids may be preschool age, but they are often emotionally closer to infants and toddlers. NMT has been a powerful tool for understanding the impact of their trauma history on their current functioning.”

Many of these children have regulation difficulties and very sensitized alarm systems that can be triggered by colors, sounds, and smells. Dealing with uncertain expectations and intense stimuli diverts the very energy they need just to calm themselves.

“Our environment must be supportive of our therapeutic work.”

Jenny Blevens
Program Manager for Therapeutic Preschool
Dear friends,

I am pleased to share with you many new developments at FamilyForward as well as to highlight our ongoing work to support children and families. Recently we found a picture from over 40 years ago of Greg Schulte, retired CEO of Family Resource Center, enjoying the playground at our first Therapeutic Preschool on Lindell Blvd. It was a reminder of the dream Greg and his colleagues at Washington University had to lead valuable children in the direction of hope. The Therapeutic Preschool was the first program they put in place.

Coincidentally, we also received words of support from a former employee who has made this possible – it really took a village to lead vulnerable children in the direction of hope. The Therapeutic Preschool was the new Therapeutic Preschool (cover story), which is now part of our Developmental Group, we are in the process of drawing up a strategic plan for FamilyForward’s future. A nostalgic look back at the histories of our former agencies not only fills us with pride but reminds us to stay true to our mission.

Karen Nolte
Chief Executive Officer, FamilyForward

Gratefully,
Karen

The PathFinders program brings a coordinated response to address the emotional, behavioral, environmental, and social issues that contribute to safe, healthier relationships for children and families. With Boeing’s support, FamilyForward is working closely with school districts to expand existing services and build safe, trauma-informed schools as called for by the new Therapeutic Preschool. Today, only months after our initial assessment, we have already seen a great improvement in her speech and behavior. She is happy and interactive, and looks forward to coming to school.

SOPHIE’S STORY

The first thing we noticed was Sophie’s speech impairment. When she spoke she used only partial words, and then in a halting, stunted way. Her difficulty speaking as well as her daily tantrums were clear indicators of her emotional trauma. The little girl lacked a typical preschooler’s ability to self-regulate – those mental stop signs that most of us only use to control our impulses. She was already in her second preschool and second foster placement when her frustrated caregivers turned to FamilyForward for help.

Our psychological assessment of Sophie helped give us a sense of realistic expectations for her, as well as a clear intervention plan. Children with trauma histories and difficulty regulating their behavior can be easily over-stimulated and overwhelmed by change and distraction. Thankfully, Sophie has come to love the soft lights and calming environment of the Therapeutic Preschool. Today, only months after our initial assessment, we have already seen a great improvement in her speech and behavior. She is happy and interactive, and looks forward to coming to school.

“Names have been changed to protect client confidentiality.”

“We’re an oasis of calm” continued from P. 1

“Our environment must be supportive of our therapeutic work,” the preschool manager says. “Previously we had lots of color and wall decorations, bright lights and glassy linoleum floors, and the organization of each space was different. Our goal now is to make the physical environment of the preschool as neutral and relaxing as possible so we don’t do anything to distract the kids or cause them to be more dysregulated.”

Even the daily routine has taken on a calming rhythm. “We are very organized with our day’s schedule, with intentional activities, such as trauma-informed yoga, music and movement, active play, art and sensory play, and we make it clear what is expected of the child.”

How does one create a nurturing environment of peaceful calm?

FamilyForward was able to accomplish it with the help of a whole village of willing donors and skilled craftsmen, who painted walls, dimmed the lighting, installed wood-grained floors, and donated new playground and classroom equipment. Thank you to Megan and Jose Britte, Marta Blancos, Castle Contracting, Champion Floor Company, Radar, Bittle, Ryan Freeman, McCartney Building Companies, Sachs Electric, Superior turf Installation, The Pettus Foundation, and The Office for Victims of Crime for helping us as we lead our kids in the direction of hope.

BUILDING PATHS WITH BOEING

Today we are shining the spotlight on our partners at The Boeing Company. Thank you Boeing’s generous support through a $130,000 grant, FamilyForward has expanded its PathFinders program in North St. Louis County.

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ADDICTION’S TOLL
ON OUR KIDS
Opioid overdoses in the St. Louis region have increased four-fold over the past ten years. In fact, in 2016, drug overdoses were the leading cause of death for Americans under 50. As a result of this epidemic, we have seen a sharp increase in the number of drug-exposed babies placed in foster care, as well as older children who have been neglected or lost a parent because of drugs. Children like Carter.

“Addiction is such a problem,” Trisha Hobson, a FamilyForward therapist, says, “and it has really impacted Carter’s life.”

“Five-year-old Carter was alone with his aunt when she fatally overdosed on heroin six months later, he had to run for help for his mother when she too overdosed. He was placed in a foster home for his safety and to allow his mother to get the treatment she needed. Trisha says Carter is a charity “jackpot” – “but it’s the things he wouldn’t say that spoke volumes. He wouldn’t talk about his traumatic experiences; if you asked him what happened he’d say, ‘nothing.’”

Trisha says that Carter’s mother has been clean for a year now and is doing everything “and more” that the court has asked her to do. And Carter has come to understand that talking about addiction and loss in his family is a necessary step in the healing process. Both mother and son have come a long way.

“I have high hopes that this young family will be reunited very soon,” the therapist says.

“Names have been changed to protect client confidentiality.”

Have you considered becoming a Foster parent? FamilyForward provides training, licensing, and ongoing support for foster families. Learn more by calling 314.534.9350 or emailing our stuff directly: Angie Peters (angela.peters@familyforwardmo.org) or Abby Bell (abigail.bell@familyforwardmo.org).

ST. CHARLES COUNTY MAYORS’ CHARITY BALL
Each year, the mayors of St. Charles County come together to host a charity ball, raising funds for charities based within the county. FamilyForward was grateful to be among the 2018 recipients, receiving $90,000 in support of the FamilyForward Children’s Home in St. Charles. This facility provides residential and respite services 24 hours a day for children with significant developmental disabilities.

“Hong” Cheng, and Emily Vaughn were selected by their peers for two of the Core Values Awards. Staff members Jenny Meyers, Kaeling “Kale” May, and Angela Peters were selected for exemplifying FamilyForward’s core values: to be front, wholehearted, and rock solid in everything we do. Congratulations!

GRATEFUL FOR GOLF
Thank you to those who joined us at the 2018 Drive the Change golf tournament on Monday, April 30 at The Country Club of St. Albans. Together we raised more than $117,800.

*Names have been changed to protect client confidentiality.*
**DONOR SPOTLIGHT: TERRI AND DENNIS MULLINS**

In the spring of 1981, I was in the classroom teaching when the receptionist said, “Terri, you have a call from Children’s Home Society (now FamilyForward).” I called Dennis and we were married. It was a magical and sacred moment I will never forget.

We got our daughter an adoption book and talked about her adoption from the day she came home. A couple of years ago we brought her to help with the agency’s holiday projects, and we were able to experience the importance of this wonderful place to our five-year-old granddaughter. This holiday season we hope to involve them again. An experience like adoption touches your heart in a very special way, and we will always be involved with FamilyForward. We take the opportunity to solicit donations for our daughter’s arrival day and we will always be involved with FamilyForward. We encourage anyone thinking of adoption today to consider a child with disabilities, or another race or ethnicity. After all, it’s all about the child and your love.

Visit Familyforwardmo.org/wish-list to view the full wish list and how to donate.

FamilyForward has a wish list of items needed for the children and families we serve. You can help! Please consider hosting a drive or making a personal donation of new personal care and hygiene items like electric toothbrushes, backpacks for middle and high school kids, or art supplies, sports equipment, and games for teens.

**Thank You!**
OUR VISION
FamilyForward leads the community in providing innovative solutions for advancing safer, healthier relationships for children and families.

OUR MISSION
FamilyForward moves vulnerable children in the direction of hope by delivering comprehensive therapeutic and educational services to support biological, foster, and adoptive families.

VISIT
familyforwardmo.org/volunteer

to learn more about our meaningful opportunities for individuals, families, and groups to give back