

## Fun in ASPEN Classrooms

**Do you remember being excited about school? Did you ever wake your parents up early to make sure you didn't miss the bus? That is what kids in our new classroom are doing.**

### SAVE THE DATE

#### 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Mile High Country Q & Brew

February 20, 2016  
Mile High Station  
2027 Old West Colfax Ave.  
Denver, CO 80204

#### 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Northern Colorado Dinner

April 16, 2016  
Embassy Suites Loveland  
4705 Clydesdale Pkwy  
Loveland, CO 80538

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Corks for a Cause Wine Tasting

June 16, 2016  
Blanc Event Center  
3150 Walnut St.  
Denver, CO 80205

For information on these or any Tennyson Center events, contact Alicia at 720.855.3317 or [alicia.perras@tennysoncenter.org](mailto:alicia.perras@tennysoncenter.org).

The official newsletter of



This past fall, we opened our second Adaptive Skills for People with Emotional Needs (ASPEN) classroom. We now serve kindergarten to twelfth grade students that are diagnosed on the autism spectrum or that have intellectual disabilities.

Bridget Smith is teaching the new class for kindergarten to fifth graders. She has been with Tennyson Center for seven years. She started volunteering in college, held past positions as a Youth Treatment Counselor, Vice Principal and teacher. Miss Smith has a Master's Degree in Special Education and a certificate in autism.

Miss Smith is assisted by two Youth Treatment Counselors, Rachel Glenn and Elliot Hoffman, and clinician Jenna Eisenhart. The class maxes out with eight students for a 2:1 ratio of students to staff. This allows for a great deal of individual and small group instruction throughout the day.

The class covers typical elementary education like reading, math and science while working social skills into every lesson. For example, they will read a story about playing a game together, and then they will actually play a game together. The kids learn more easily because they are repeating the educational elements and practicing what they learned. Additionally, the class is built around routine so the



Miss Smith, ASPEN special ed teacher

kids know exactly what to expect at all times.

Miss Smith and her team celebrate successful moments throughout each day. The staff recently taught the students skills around getting excited and calming themselves down, an ability that many of us take for granted. The class also went on a field trip to a restaurant where they practiced riding safely in a van, ordering food at a restaurant, sitting and eating at a restaurant. These are skills that the kids struggle with in public and with their families. The staff is able to break down the social skills into simple steps, using lots of visual cues, for the kids to practice and learn.

Miss Smith has a passion for teaching kids with autism and intellectual disabilities. "I get to see the progress they are making. It may not be straight academic progress, but ... parents say they are taking these skills and using them at home. It is awesome to hear!"

We are in the process of opening our third ASPEN classroom. We are seeking a special education teacher and Youth Treatment Counselors. The classroom will be opening soon to additional students. To learn more about ASPEN, contact our Admissions department at 303.433.1232 or [admissions@tennysoncenter.org](mailto:admissions@tennysoncenter.org).



Sample daily routine in ASPEN classroom



We cannot thank you enough! You make the holidays special and magical for the kids every year.

Right: Part of Community-Based Services Department Holiday Door - candy/gumdrop land

## Top 3 Reasons Why Tennyson Center Holidays are Special by Rod Witte, CEO

Have you ever wondered what the holidays are like at Tennyson Center for Children? For kids who have survived abuse and neglect, or who have mental health or developmental issues, the holidays can be a difficult time of year. Yet, the holidays are very special and magical for the kids at Tennyson Center for Children. Here are my top three reasons why:

**Number 3: Our staff.** We could not help hundreds of children and families each year without our amazing staff of therapists, teachers, Youth Treatment Counselors and all the support staff that work at our agency. I am privileged to work with dedicated people with a passion for helping kids. Everyone gives so much to the mission and cares so deeply for these kids who need it most.

Our staff also knows how to have fun at work! This year, we reinstated an agency tradition of decorating our office doors to bring the holiday spirit into the building. Many departments created elaborate scenes from a candy/gumdrop land, to a Peanuts-themed door, to Santa's workshop, to a life-sized snow globe equipped with blowing "snow." Our staff works 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and you can tell they love what they do. I was delighted to see everyone having so much fun!

**Number 2: Our kids.** Every day at Tennyson Center, I am astounded by the resiliency of



children. The kids we serve need help to heal from past traumas. They need to learn coping skills to handle their complex emotions. At the end of the day, they need help learning how to be kids again. I am grateful for the opportunity to witness their transformation and healing.

At the holidays, there are many parties and special activities for the kids. Seeing smiles, hearing laughter and squeals of delight, the kids truly have a chance to be kids again. One of my favorite moments last month was when one of our minion-loving kids received a surprise minion stuffed animal. (You know, the silly yellow creatures made popular by the *Despicable Me* movies.) This particular student wears a jacket covered in minions everyday and often a minion t-shirt too. When he opened the minion toy from an Operation Santa donor, his shouts of glee could be heard down the hall.

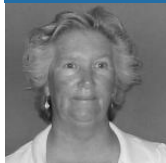
My wife Laura and I were also fortunate to spend time with the kids that live at Tennyson Center on Christmas day. We personally witnessed the smiles and joy from the kids after they received their gifts. Moments like this at Tennyson Center are priceless!

**Number 1: You.** People like you volunteer your time and donate your financial resources through Operation Santa to help kids who need it most to have special holidays. Folks from organizations like Amp the Cause throw holiday-themed parties with carolers and Santa. Others adopted more than 200 children and families to make sure everyone we serve had a happy holiday. Other corporate groups decorated the cottages where the kids live so their homes felt cozy and special for Christmas. We cannot thank you enough! You make the holidays special and magical for the kids every year. Thank you!

## Staff Spotlight:

Each month, we recognize a staff member who exemplifies Tennyson Center's mission through service and learning. Nominated by colleagues for doing an outstanding job, here are the most recent employees honored:

### November



Operations staff member Susie Bonan started with Tennyson Center in August 1992. For quite some time now, Susie has been

doing two jobs at the same time, overseeing the kitchen and the food for the children, and purchasing for the agency. We can throw an unplanned event or need at her and Susie comes through.

### December



Resource team member Skip O'Daniel has been with Tennyson Center since September 2012. Skip has shown great leadership skills,

stress management and a constant willingness to learn more about the kids we serve. Skip is always there for staff and kids and provides safety and security with his calm demeanor and positive attitude.

### 2015 Employee of the Year



Special Services Unit (SSU) Supervising Clinician Jessica Courtney has been with Tennyson Center since

July 2011. Jessica has restructured the SSU program, allowing even more kids to be served. She spends a great deal of time coaching staff and is a caring and thoughtful supervisor.

## Because of You, Families Have Hope

In December, our Community-Based Services (CBS) team was providing therapy and support to a newly single mom and her three children, ages 6, 9 and 10. Mom and the kids fled from her abusive husband and ended up homeless. They stayed with friends and at times had to sleep in the car. Our CBS team assisted her in finding a home but, due to her situation, she still had no money to buy household supplies, furnishings, warm clothes or Christmas presents. She had to tell her kids that Santa couldn't make it to their house. However, because of generous

**“I cried all the way home. I never in a million years thought I would be someone who needed help like this. Words cannot express how grateful we are.”**

donors like you, that wasn't the case. With the help of the Operation Santa donors who adopted families this year, Mom was able to provide her three kids with a very merry Christmas. Donors like you provided gifts for the kids, including a bicycle and skateboard, and even household necessities like laundry detergent. When Mom saw the detergent, she said, “I needed some so badly!” Any family can get excited about toys and presents but when a family is excited about detergent that shows you the need you were filling for this mom. Donors also generously provided a tree and ornaments so they could decorate their new home for the holidays. Mom said, “I cried all the way home. I never in a million years thought I would be someone who needed help like this. Words cannot express how grateful we are.” Thank you for helping this family and many more who needed it most this holiday season!



## 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Student Speech Contest - Feb. 5

On Feb. 5, 2016, the Colorado National Speakers Association is hosting their 10<sup>th</sup> annual speech contest for the kids at Tennyson Center. It is an opportunity for the kids to learn how to give a presentation in front of their peers and adults and often times, the speech writing and presenting is cathartic and quite fun. Here is what 10-year-old Max had to say about his experience in last year's contest:

“I really like to talk. A LOT. Most of the time, I get in trouble in class for talking too much, either to my friends, or to other staff. I can't help it! I like learning new facts about the most random things. When I heard about the school speech contest, I couldn't wait to sign up! The contest was the perfect place to pick something random to learn about, and then tell people all about it too! My teacher agreed, and thought that the speech contest

would be a great opportunity for me. He also said that if I worked hard on my speech, I could practice it weekly during class, delivering my speech to my classmates. I also thought that

**“When I heard about the school speech contest, I couldn't wait to sign up!”**

working on a speech would help to pass some time. Since I live at Tennyson Center, I am always trying to find ways to keep busy. I picked the topic of Male Pattern Baldness and learned all about it. I picked out my favorite facts, and my speech contest coach helped me to put all my information in a speech format. The day of the speech contest I was so excited, and couldn't wait to get started. I was the first kid up to give their speech! Everyone in the audience

seemed to really like my speech, and the audience laughed many times at some of the facts I talked about. This made me feel really good, and my potential foster family\* was also there to see me in action. They thought I did great and said that I am very talented. This made me feel even better, that my potential family saw how great my speech was, and was able to see me doing something I loved: talking! The speech contest was so much fun. I really enjoyed doing something outside of normal school work, and something that interested me too!”

\*A few months after the speech contest, Max went home with his foster family and they moved forward to adopt him.

Thank you to the Colorado National Speakers Association for continuing this tradition for the kids!

# VISITOR

**Winter 2016**  
[www.childabuse.org](http://www.childabuse.org)

## Santa Came to Tennyson Center

Thanks to Amp the Cause, and Wells Fargo volunteers, the Tennyson Center kids attended a very special holiday party in December. For the third year in a row, Amp the Cause organized a holiday celebration at Tennyson Center. The kids got to hear carolers sing holiday songs, make cookies and other arts and crafts, got their faces painted and a photo with Santa! The children also received three presents along with the activities. The kids, staff and volunteers all had a blast! It is a wonderful way to celebrate the holidays. Thank you for sharing holiday traditions with kids who may not experience them anywhere else!



Santa with Tia Hunter, Manager of Volunteer Services, Tennyson Center (left) and Rebecca Rallis, Executive Director, Amp the Cause (right)

Holiday Carolers at Amp the Cause Holiday Celebration



**Help the Kids - Buy a Raffle Ticket**  
Amp the Cause's Board of Directors are raffling off a 2016 Ford Escape to help Colorado nonprofits raise money. A Million For What Matters enables nonprofits, including Tennyson Center, to sell raffle tickets from now until May 28, receiving 100% of the funds from ticket sales (minus credit card processing fees-just \$0.59 per raffle ticket). The 2016 Ford Escape will be awarded at the annual Denver Day of Rock on May 28. Visit [www.amillionmatters.com](http://www.amillionmatters.com) to purchase your raffle ticket and help the kids.

