

Community Voice

IN THIS ISSUE . . .

**A SCHOOL DESIGNED
FOR THE WHOLE
STUDENT**

page 3

**BUILD TRYBE
HARVESTS MORE
FARMING PROJECTS**

page 5

**THERAPISTS HELP
LEARNING ACADEMY
STUDENTS HEAL**

page 6

**NEW SIM LAB PREPARES
CHILD WELFARE
WORKERS FOR JOB**

page 8

**BUILDING STRONGER
RELATIONSHIPS
THROUGH PATIENCE
AND UNDERSTANDING**

page 9

**BRIDGE PLAN SEEKS
TO MAINTAIN OZANAM
CAMPUS AS A PLACE
TO HEAL**

page 10

From the Desk of Our CEO



More than two years ago, we started asking a hard question: What happens when our lease on the Gillis Campus runs out? Aging buildings and costly deferred maintenance made our future there uncertain.

As we looked for alternatives, we identified the former Archbishop O'Hara High School as a spot that could do double duty, relocating not just our K-8 Gillis Campus day treatment school, but our grades 9-12 Ozanam Campus school too. That location became the Cornerstones of Care Education Campus, now home to our Learning Academy (a K-12 therapeutic day treatment education facility); Build Trybe; our Behavioral Intervention Support Team (BIST); and Collaborative Learning, our professional development team.

During a tour, U.S. Representative Emanuel Cleaver called the Education Campus, "the only one of its kind in the area." We soon learned it mattered in other ways too. Local neighborhood associations were glad to see the building, vacant for nearly a decade, become an educational facility again, full of activity and care.

So, as the new school year began, the monumental task of readying this building for students is virtually complete. On behalf of Cornerstones of Care and our board, I want to thank the incredible members of our team, property owner Blue Ocean, The Haren Companies, Focal Design Studio, Integrity Capital Management, an incredible group of volunteers, our school district and charter school partners, and of course our students and their families. We're looking forward to an amazing school year, and many more years of meeting the educational needs of students, teachers, and child welfare professionals.

A stylized signature of Merideth Rose in black ink.

Merideth Rose, President and CEO



Above: Student receiving personalized instruction.

Below: Merideth Rose meeting students on the first day of school.

Opposite: Dr. Seabury in his office at the new Education Campus.



The Cornerstones of Care Education Campus Learning Academy: A School Designed for the Whole Student

On August 24, students walked through the doors of the new Cornerstones of Care Learning Academy for the first time. Located at our new Education Campus in the former Archbishop O'Hara High School, the K-12 day treatment school brings students from our former Gillis and Ozanam campuses together at one location.

The new location facilitates better integration between academics and therapeutic support throughout the school day. "By combining our locations into one new school, we're able to add some additional services to meet our students' needs," Shelia Rancatore, Executive Director of Missouri Programs and Services, explained on opening day. The new setting also allows for closer collaboration among educators, staff, and families.

There are about 100 students—referred from more than 40 school districts and charter schools—who attend the Learning Academy. For these students, being ready to learn can require support beyond academics. "The therapeutic environment allows for collaboration between the therapy team and the teachers. Students receive the support they need at the moment distress or dysregulation interferes with

learning," said Dr. Angela Danley, Senior Director of Education Programs and Services.

Classrooms have a maximum of 10-12 students to one teacher and one paraprofessional. Six clinical therapists and a clinical manager are on staff, with individual and group therapy integrated into students' days. Therapeutic education assistants and crisis intervention staff also provide support as needed.

Dr. Arthur Seabury, therapist at the Learning Academy, was excited to discuss how our new campus has a more traditional school environment than our previous locations, while continuing to bring dedicated therapeutic spaces and services under the same roof. "We're developing a therapeutic alliance because now we have a great school, and we have this therapy suite as well. It feels healthy. This is a safe place."

Therapeutic support is also woven into traditional curriculum, giving students opportunities to practice emotion regulation, communication, and other skills as they learn. For example, Music Therapist Mizuki Asano uses instrument play, songwriting, and other activities to work toward social-emotional goals. "The skills they learn can easily be translated into their daily lives, especially when used naturally when doing an activity they enjoy, such as music,"



"We're developing a therapeutic alliance because now we have a great school, and we have this therapy suite as well. It feels healthy. This is a safe place."

—Dr. Arthur Seabury, Therapist



He was struggling in a traditional classroom and his family had trouble finding the right support until they found Cornerstones of Care. Finally, “people listened to him and were willing to talk to him and he was willing to talk back. That’s the biggest thing,” his mom said.

Ben has also excelled academically. His dad said that he “could barely write a paragraph a year or two ago,” and now writes essays. Dr. Danley recalled Ben telling her about Greek root words. “Seeing him light up when he shared that with me reminded me that this may be hard work, but it’s worth it when you see something like that happen.”

“Everyone deserves a chance to come and get an education. It’s an alternative location, yes, but it’s a good place. My son has succeeded,” Ben’s mom said.

Creating a campus where students can experience this success took a community effort. Two standout volunteer projects helped put the finishing touches on the new campus: PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) volunteers painted a “You Belong Here” mural, while Burns & McDonnell volunteers built playground equipment in the days leading up to the opening.

Now the classrooms, therapy spaces, and outdoor spaces are filled with students and staff starting a new chapter together. According to Dr. Danley, “Our biggest hope is every student and family that comes to the Learning Academy knows they are welcomed, cared for, and valued. I want each person who enters our school community to feel a genuine sense of belonging.” ■

Mizuki said. For instance, “When appropriate, I encourage students to play how they feel through the instruments, if words cannot express it. Often, students can find the words after using instrument play as an emotional outlet.”

Art Teacher Tracie Loux also fosters a classroom environment where therapeutic support and learning go hand in hand. She works closely with a paraprofessional, who helps plan lessons, offers insight into student needs, and encourages students during projects.

“My desire is to build a visual arts program where students have space to find alternate ways to communicate, to experience therapeutic art experiences, and to find within themselves strength to explore the creative experience with confidence,” Tracie said.

Our intention is to help students make progress far beyond a report card. Dr. Danley defines success as the students feeling safe and connected, engaging in learning, and developing coping and communication skills with growing independence, always with the ultimate goal of preparing students to return to school in their home district.

The family of a student named Ben recently spoke about his success in our day treatment program.



Above: Student learning fundamentals in art class.

Left: Student receiving a tour on the first day of classes.



Build Trybe Harvests More Farming Projects

As summer gives way to fall, Build Trybe is expanding the ways it teaches marketable skills to youth and grows food for the community.

In the coming months, Build Trybe will deepen its partnership with the DeLaSalle Education Center, revitalize an urban farm in Wyandotte County, and open its new training kitchen for Seed-to-Plate youth at the Cornerstones of Care Education Campus.

What started last year as groundbreaking on a community farm at the DeLaSalle Education Center has blossomed into something bigger: Build Trybe instructors are now teaching DeLaSalle students directly. Starting this fall semester, Build Trybe will offer horticulture classes, modeled on the same apprenticeships it already runs for youth in its core program.

Build Trybe and DeLaSalle educators built the curriculum around Market Value Assets (MVAs), industry-recognized skills students can earn in high school that smooth the jump to college or the workforce. Research shows students who graduate with both a diploma and MVAs are more likely to go on to further their education.



“We’ve seen so many parallels between DeLaSalle and our program, in philosophy, in teaching style, and definitely in mission. It’s rare to see alignment this strong.” –Theo Bunch, Director of Build Trybe

In Wyandotte County, Build Trybe is kicking off a new community garden project, revitalizing Splitlog Farm alongside Build Wyco, Blue Cross Blue Shield, and KC Farm School, which runs a learning farm in KCK. Students at nearby M.E. Pearson Elementary School will use the farm as a hands-on classroom for agriculture. KC Farm School will teach classes on-site, while Build Trybe pre-apprentices and community volunteers pitch in to support the farm and built a picnic area.

On top of these new projects, Build Trybe is celebrating the opening of its new training kitchen for Seed-to-Plate apprentices. This commercial-style kitchen gives youth interested in culinary trades a real space to learn the ropes. Over the next 12 months, Build Trybe will also build out a garden in the courtyard of the Education Campus, while Seed-to-Plate youth keep tending the 1.5-acre Ozanam Campus garden, greenhouse, orchard, and raised beds.

With so much going on, the Build Trybe team has its hands full, and Director of Build Trybe Theo Bunch says that’s exactly the kind of work they want to be doing.

“Getting buy-in from multiple community partners to pursue all these new projects at once? That’s basically a unicorn,” Theo said. ■





Therapists Help Learning Academy Students Heal

When the Learning Academy opened in August, students gained access to 20 classrooms, an art room, a cafeteria, and a playground. Just as important, the Learning Academy features six therapy suites to support students.

Therapy is a core part of any day treatment educational facility, where academics and healing go hand in hand. The Learning Academy's 100+ students, referred from more than 40 school districts and charter schools in the region, routinely receive some form of therapy. These students need a different environment than a traditional K-12 school, one built to help them work through trauma.

The six soundproof therapy suites give students a focused, safe space to work with therapists. The soundproof design keeps outside noise from breaking a session's focus, and it gives students the privacy they need to open up.



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“A lot of our kids try to present themselves as ‘normal’ among the other students. They mask it and try to hold it in,” said Therapist Dr. Arthur Seabury. “But in our sessions, it comes out that they need to work on those underlying themes, those things that have been in their lives forever.”

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Each of the six Learning Academy therapists carries a caseload of students they meet with regularly. Every student has an individualized treatment plan with specific goals, and as therapist and student make progress, new goals get added. Beyond individual sessions, therapists also run group therapy in the classroom. Therapists also have access to a play therapy space, which provides a safe environment where children can use play as their language to process emotions and heal. As the school year unfolds, they'll stay flexible to provide what students need, when they need it.

“We have set times to meet with students each week, but if something is happening and they're in some kind of crisis or situation where they need more support, we're available for that too,” said Therapist Dr. Arthur Seabury.

Helping students learn to regulate their emotions, right alongside their school subjects, is one of the most valuable lessons the Learning Academy offers. As students gain confidence in these skills, they are better equipped to handle challenges both inside and outside the classroom. Over time, these tools will help them thrive in future learning environments and beyond. ■



Above: Overhead rendering of the therapy suites.

Left: Interior of a therapy room setup for safety and support.

Volunteers in Action



Multiple volunteers from PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), along with a host from Goodera, spent the day on August 14 at our new Education Campus painting a mural to welcome students. More than just a piece of art with the message, “you belong here,” the mural was designed to create a bright and inviting space that helps set a positive tone for students the moment they walk through the doors. Goodera organizes volunteer projects that support nonprofits across the country, and PwC generously funded the mural's design, paint, and supplies.



Then, the following day, volunteers from Burns & McDonnell and Integrity Capital Management came together to assemble and install a new playground on campus. More than just a place to play, the new playground gives children a space to develop friendships, stay active, build confidence, and simply enjoy being kids. Thanks to the dedication of our incredible volunteers, our youth now have two fun and welcoming spaces they can enjoy for years to come.



New Education Center Sim Lab Prepares Child Welfare Workers for Job

Each case a child welfare worker encounters on the job is unique. Factors like family structure, the circumstances surrounding a case, and even the physical location of the work itself can vary from case to case. But no matter the particulars, each case has equally high stakes at play: the well-being of children and their families.

That reality can feel daunting for many of our front-line staff, even for those who are experienced case managers. The Collaborative Learning team's new Simulation Lab helps alleviate stress by giving them a place to prepare.

Rather than a fixed classroom, the Sim Lab in the Education Center is a flexible space that can be reconfigured to replicate almost any environment a staff member might encounter on the job. The first set of scenarios our Collaborative Learning team are developing for use in the lab cover things case workers are most likely to face in the field. This includes situations like conversations with teenagers in foster care, home walk-throughs to identify safety concerns, and navigating difficult discussions with parents or guardians.

Court preparation simulations are one of the most important simulations the lab will offer. "Testifying is a significant part of the job that can be intimidating the first time," explained Amber Maledy, Senior Manager of Collaborative Learning. "Being able to practice it in advance makes a real difference."

That same principle applies to everything the Sim Lab does. A safe environment where staff can ask questions and work through uncertainty benefits case workers and families alike.

"The Sim Lab gives staff valuable learning experiences in a safe, structured environment where they can make mistakes and learn from them before they're in a real family's home."

—Amber Maledy, Senior Manager of Collaborative Learning

The Sim Lab is launching its first batch of scenarios with case managers in mind. The Collaborative Learning Team is working to expand the scenario library so all programs across Cornerstones of Care can eventually make use of the space. Looking further ahead, the hope is to open the lab to community partners as well, extending the reach of the training model beyond our own staff.

The Sim Lab reflects something we have long believed at Cornerstones of Care: Investing in the people who serve children and families is one of the most important investments we can make. ■

Building Stronger Relationships Through Patience and Understanding

At Meadow Lane Elementary, BIST (Behavior Intervention Support Team) is helping staff look beyond student behaviors to understand what students need to be successful—and the results are measurable.

Our BIST team, which is based at the new Education Campus, uses a trauma-informed approach to teach school staff how to support students and effect positive change. The model gives adults the tools they need to help students develop self-regulation and problem-solving skills as they work on building positive connections.

Meadow Lane Elementary embraced this approach with impressive results. With 450 students and 70 faculty members, Meadow Lane is one of three Title I elementary schools in the Lee's Summit, Mo., school district. By using behavioral data, collaborating as a team, and focusing on relationships, the school reduced student absences related to disciplinary issues by 65 percent in just one year.

"We don't ever use the fact that we're Title I or have so many students on free and reduced lunch as a barrier or way to limit our beliefs in them," said Principal Christine Johnson.

"Our kids can learn at high levels, can behave at high levels and experience productive, safe peer and adult relationships at the same level as anybody else. We go into it thinking that our kids deserve the best of us." —Christine Johnson, Principal

Johnson first experienced BIST as a principal at an elementary school in Warrensburg, Mo. After seeing the impact the model had there, she knew she wanted to bring BIST to Meadow Lane. Over the past five years, the school has used behavioral data to identify challenges, create solutions, and better support students.

For example, the BIST team analyzed when behavioral challenges occurred most often and noticed an increase around lunchtime. The team looked closely at what might be contributing to



the challenges, including hallway transitions, class groupings, and how students were welcomed into the cafeteria. Teachers were not supervising cafeteria and recess transitions; instead, those responsibilities were given to part-time resource team members.

The team trained lunch shift resource workers in BIST to create more consistency in how student needs were addressed. Each Friday, they shared information, practiced scenarios, and discussed common challenges. They also used resources from BIST Director Marty Huitt's book, *Cultivating Behavioral Change in K-12 Students*. Over time, behavioral issues in the cafeteria decreased.

The same approach was applied to recess, where students from all grades shared the playground. By incorporating sportsmanship into activities and having volunteers model positive interactions, students had more opportunities to practice teamwork, regulation, and problem-solving.

Johnson describes Meadow Lane as "a calm school, and you can tell the kids are happy and the staff wants to be there." And the data confirms it. ■

The Learning Academy has integrated BIST's approach to supporting students. Learn more about BIST at bist.org.



Bridge Plan Seeks to Maintain Ozanam Campus as a Place to Heal

As the gap widens between compensation and the cost of care, the Ozanam Campus is facing structural upgrades to provide residential treatment to the metropolitan area.

Since 2020, Missouri has lost approximately 20 percent of its residential treatment facilities, sharply reducing access to trauma-informed care for youth facing challenges. As one of the area's few remaining Qualified Residential Treatment Programs, Cornerstones of Care's Ozanam Campus increasingly serves as a stabilization point for youth with complex trauma histories.

Beyond the escalating costs of food, utilities, liability insurance, and other expenses that all intensive treatment locations face, the Ozanam Campus needs significant structural upgrades to maintain safety and quality of care for youth in residence.

Many people who tour the Ozanam Campus are surprised at how open it is, with playgrounds, a ball field, a gym and swimming pool, garden and greenhouse. The idyllic setting supports youth in need of therapy and healing.

Opened in 1948, most of the buildings on campus are between 30 and 60 years old and require updates, ranging from life safety upgrades and



ADA compliance issues to renovation of therapeutic environments to plumbing and electrical upgrades. The Cornerstones of Care Bridge Plan campaign asks for public support in making these changes.

"The Ozanam Campus plays an important role in our community, and we are exploring options in how to maintain its viability in our upcoming strategic plan," said Cornerstones of Care President and CEO Merideth Rose. "We will need the public's support to make these improvements, ensuring the campus remains open as a viable, functioning residential treatment facility in the future."



A potential loss of residential care on the Ozanam Campus would be a setback for the Kansas City metropolitan area, which has already seen fewer intensive residential treatment facilities. Research indicates the value residential facilities provide for communities:

- Investments in trauma-informed residential treatment and behavioral health services generate strong social returns—up to \$7 in value for every \$1 invested. (Hackett et al., 2017)
- It costs Missouri approximately 7.5 times more per day to place a child in out-of-state residential care than to serve that child at the Ozanam Campus, according to 2024 Missouri Department of Social Services data.

“The cost of locally caring for youth, truly helping them heal, is a fraction of the alternative cost,” Merideth said. “The Ozanam Campus still has a bright future in helping area youth grow and change.” ■

If you would like to learn more about the Bridge Plan and the future of the Ozanam Campus, visit cornerstonesofcare.org/careforthefuture



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TRANSFORM LIVES, ONE SPACE AT A TIME

Are you looking for a meaningful way to support children and families in our community? Now is your chance to make a powerful impact!

With our exclusive naming and recognition opportunities, you can put your name, or the name of someone special, on a space that will help children heal and futures transform for generations to come. Your investment in the new Education Campus ensures that every child receives the support and education they deserve. Whether you choose to name our commercial kitchen, a classroom, or sponsor a locker, your generosity will be celebrated and remembered as a cornerstone of progress.

Don't miss this unique opportunity to shape our campus's future. Contact Katie at katie.culbertson@cornerstonesofcare.org to learn more about available opportunities and how you can make your mark!

