DID YOU KNOW?

- **DABSJ** received a $25,000 grant from the Consumers Energy Foundation. This grant will support our Together for Kids campaign.
- **April** is Autism Awareness Month. Family Support Services and Applied Behavior Analysis both provide services to those on the autism spectrum.
- **Heart of West Michigan United Way** awarded DABSJ a $25,000 grant from their Coronavirus Response Fund for extra healthcare and food needs for the kids and families we serve.
- **Become a monthly donor** and provide our programs with regular revenue to ensure that children’s needs are met year-round! Visit dabsj.org and click Give Today for details.
- **Work of Heart**, our new DABSJ blog, is officially live! Check out our first blog posts at dabsj.org/blog.

A WORK OF HEART

**COVID-19: CHALLENGING TIMES CALL FOR STRENGTH AND CREATIVITY**

Now more than ever, D.A. Blodgett – St. John’s (DABSJ) is committed to the health and safety of the children and families we serve. Our mission is of utmost importance. We continue to work creatively to provide prevention, counseling, and care for kids even when a crisis hits, and are incredibly grateful for our staff who are continuing the exceptional service that our mission and vision require.

The speed at which COVID-19 has spread is stunning – and has placed our country and world into uncharted territory. Currently, DABSJ continues to provide all services. While most people are sheltering in place at home, our residential services staff are on the front lines working with vulnerable youth. They are continuing their important work, making sure that the kids who live on our residential campus are safe, healthy, and getting the therapeutic and clinical support that they need.

Not only are DABSJ staff working more creatively to help children, they are coming together across programs to ensure that staff and kids have everything they need. DABSJ’s Family Preservation Services staff pooled their own money together to purchase items from the residential wish list. This group stepped up to provide activities to help minimize the new challenges our residential campus is facing while the shelter-in-place order is in effect. While it sounds simple, this act of kindness does something amazing not just for the kids, but for the spirit of our staff. We are all in this together.

As this pandemic continues to spread, resiliency spreads too. While we are inspired by the spirit, hard work, and camaraderie of the staff, DABSJ is beyond grateful for our supporters.

As with past challenges, our supporters have provided the extra layer of support, compassion, and dedication that helps maintain DABSJ. Thank you to everyone who has donated, provided/made personal protective equipment, or sent us items from our Amazon wish list to keep the children, families, and staff going.

So to the people whose work and support continue – like the social workers, clinicians, residential staff, therapists, donors, and many more here at DABSJ – we see you, and we thank you.

Thank you to Laura Taylor and Judy Rice for sewing 75 face masks for our residential staff!

Make a gift with the enclosed envelope to support DABSJ during the COVID-19 response.
Autism is a Journey

Just like many 13-year-olds, Tyson enjoys listening to music. He also enjoys drawing portraits. When you think about it, he has a lot in common with any other teenager. But one thing that makes Tyson unique is he was diagnosed with autism in 2009.

Tyson first came to DABSJ in 2013 due to severe behavioral concerns. Sadly, he did not have the skills to self-regulate his emotions and calm down. But Tyson and his mom, Crystal, were determined to help him live the best life he possibly could. Tyson started receiving services through DABSJ’s Family Support Services (FSS), which provides support services for families of children under the age of 18 with a developmental disability in Kent County.

For the last 6 years he has continued to receive services and continues to make improvements. His therapist Sara said, “When I saw him recently, it nearly brought me to tears. He has improved immensely with his overall demeanor, mood, aggression level, and communication. His personality is shining through and he truly seemed happy.”

When asked how FSS has benefited the family, Crystal said, “It is immensely helpful, it has helped to point us in the direction of services we did not know anything about. The staff are like a second family and they care about us.” Stories like Tyson’s are why DABSJ exists today. Because when teens like Tyson can overcome and his family can be supported, our community becomes stronger.

Supporting Children and Families for Generations

As vital supporters of DABSJ for years, Beverly and George Grant have grown and changed their involvement over the course of their careers – at both individual and systems levels. For Beverly, her commitment started with her mother, Daisy P. Franks, and for George, he actually started his career in child welfare with D.A. Blodgett Services for Children and Families.

Beverly was born in Grand Rapids, is a graduate of Creston High School, and received her Master of Social Work degree from Atlanta University. She ended up following in the footsteps of her mother and working in social work, and even worked for DABSJ.

After Beverly’s mom’s death, an award was named after her in recognition of the years of exceptional service she provided to children and families – the Daisy Franks Recruitment Award. This award honors Mrs. Franks’s memory by recognizing an adoptive or foster parent who exemplifies passion for helping children by recruiting others to become adoptive and foster parents.

Five years ago Beverly joined the DABSJ Board of Directors to further help advance the work of the agency. She says, “I think what’s really kept me motivated is knowing that children and families right here in our community are receiving the best care and service. Children are the greatest indicator for how this country values our future and we must continue to invest in children.”

George’s career and personal mission are closely aligned with Beverly’s, and he states: “Child welfare has always been a passion of mine, and I think it’s important to work with an organization that has that same passion. As a former employee, donor, and advocate, I hope, I could help as many families as I could rise above their circumstances. When I was a foster care and adoption worker here, seeing the joy on the faces of families when they were reunited is what kept me going. It’s what still keeps me going today.”

Beverly and George recently served in a new way: as two of the co-chairs for DABSJ’s Together for Kids capital campaign.

As for encouragement to others to support DABSJ, Beverly says, “Find your passion and your purpose for giving back, so that others can follow in your footsteps and leave a legacy.” George adds, “Families just need a chance. Having an organization like DABSJ that cares can create a community that will thrive.”

Thank you to Beverly and George for their inspiring work and words. DABSJ is so grateful for their commitment to making Grand Rapids a better place for families and children.

Family Support Services (FSS) works with youth diagnosed with developmental disabilities and their families to develop a person-centered plan to assist them in daily living, improving the child’s ability to communicate and interact with his/her environment, and promoting inclusion and participation in the community.
DABSJ Awarded Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage

Arthur came into foster care when he was 8 months old. During his first eight months of life, Arthur was unable to rely on adults to care for him, due to difficult circumstances at home. He struggled with food insecurities, didn't sleep well, and avoided interacting with adults.

His foster family began receiving Early Childhood Attachment services to learn strategies to help Arthur build trust and develop healthy attachments. Over time Arthur’s food insecurity decreased, he started to sleep better, and he started showing more appropriate and healthy interactions with his foster parents.

Arthur began to trust the adults in his life, which was a huge step!

In January, D.A. Blodgett – St. John’s was awarded the Home Visiting award through the Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage, enabling the expansion of the ECA program. The Ready by Five Early Childhood Millage provides dedicated and sustainable funding for programs that improve the health, school readiness, and well-being of children under age 5 in Kent County. We’re proud to be a part of the Ready by Five Provider Network and help more children like Arthur!

Businesses Ignite the Potential of Youth

We are excited to expand our workplace mentoring program to other businesses in our community. D.A. Blodgett – St. John’s (DABSJ) workplace mentoring program, called Youth in Business, makes meaningful matches between adult volunteers and high school students. The program improves the likelihood that youth will perform better in school, have stronger relationships with their parents and peers, and succeed as adults. Mentors help youth further their education beyond high school as well as assisting them with entering the workforce.

Youth in Business is a great way to engage staff by providing a mentoring opportunity to shape the future of a child’s life. It is also a great way to develop employees by giving them a sense of purpose and a tangible experience to make social impact through their workplace.

To explore having Youth in Business in your workplace, check out our website or contact Jim Visser at jvisser@dabsj.org or Melissa Rosado at mrosado@dabsj.org.

In exciting news, DABSJ has reached 92.6% of our $10 million campaign goal! Since the Together for Kids campaign was announced publicly in late May 2019, an additional $2.36 million has been raised. We are grateful to the over 450 donors who support our vision for a single physical space that is integrated, responsive, and exceptional so that we can serve children and families the best we possibly can. DABSJ plans to continue fundraising into fall, working to maximize all possible donor and foundation support.

By the end this year, we’ll have finished pre-construction architectural design, engineering, and landscape planning. Next steps will be the construction bid and general contractor selection process, which should be completed by spring 2021. Once our building team is in place, we anticipate beginning construction in summer 2021. Our intent remains to move into the new facility in late 2022.
UPCOMING EVENTS

KIDS FIRST OPEN
Monday, June 22
Blythefield Country Club

GOLF FOR KIDS
Monday, July 13
Blythefield Country Club

BRIDGE FOR KIDS
Friday, September 11
Kent Country Club

ST. JOHN’S GUILD BALL
Saturday, November 21
Amway Grand Plaza Hotel

Visit dabjs.org/Together-for-Kids for more information.

HELP US FINISH STRONG – support the Together for Kids campaign! Donate $100 or more to receive a commemorative star in the lobby of the new building.

A Campaign for D.A. Blodgett – St. John’s