



FREEDOM ACRES NEWS

Fun and Newsworthy

April 2009

WELCOME SPRING!

From the Principal's Desk—

Happy Spring! We are all ready for a warm breeze and plenty of sunshine. This school year has been moving swiftly and I can hardly believe that we are into our third trimester. On the following pages you will see some highlights of classroom activities that have taken place since our last newsletter.

The students recently completed the spring administration of the state level assessments. Students in Grade 11 took part in either of the MEAP (MME) or the MI-ACCESS assessment. The staff has been meeting monthly as a full staff and also in smaller "program" groups. They have been brainstorming ways to improve services and supports to the students they care so deeply about. I love to see the ideas they come up with and implement, to help make the days better for the students. The staff in the SCI program has been working hard to implement the concepts of Active Learning, since our training in the Fall. We are trying to find creative ways to purchase the needed equipment.

Carol Ritcheske, our Adaptive P.E. teacher, recently coordinated the second dance for students with se-

vere cognitive impairments (SCI) at Freedom Acres.

The dance was a great success and a good time was had by all. More details are available in this newsletter. I continue to be amazed at how our students and staff worked together and benefited from each other across the variety of programs for this event. I think these types of activities bring out the best in us all.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome our newest paraeducators to the Freedom Acres team. Colleen Tennant, a paraeducator in Kathleen Cook's classroom retired in February and is enjoying time with her husband. We welcomed Wendy Zank as a paraeducator to fill the vacancy left by Colleen. We were also able to secure Jim Clark and Fred Post as paraeducators in our SEI classrooms. These three individuals have been working diligently to build positive relationships with the students and assist them in their learning. We look forward to seeing the many strengths they bring to the SCI and SEI teams.

The parking lot and drive in front of Freedom Acres is in much need of



renovation! With the increase in students and consequently bussing at Freedom Acres, we will lengthen the "unloading" area and widen sidewalks. We have also had some drainage difficulties that will be resolved with this project. The project is slated to begin June 11th and we anticipate completion by June 22nd. This should not affect summer programming in any way. We look forward to these positive changes!

I know how busy life can get at times, but please take a moment to think of the staff at Freedom Acres. I feel very blessed to be a part of the team here. They are dedicated to seeing our students succeed. I am fortunate enough to see examples of their dedication everyday. Take time over the next few weeks to look for opportunities to thank them for all that they do, for we all need to know that we make a difference.

As always, please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns. I value your input in our efforts to provide the best programs for our students.

- Terry Platte, Principal

Hello from Younger SEI Room!

Throughout this school year our students welcomed new classmates into the classroom, while saying good-bye to others who moved out of the district. During the third trimester, one student from our classroom began going to Ionia Middle School for part of the morning. We are quite excited and wish him continued success.

Many of our students have mastered the ability to convert their daily points to money, fill out deposit and withdrawal slips, and manage a savings account each week. Then once a week, students look forward to participating in an auction where they budget their money while bidding on various food and non-food items. Our students also look forward to Physical Education each week with our wonderful P.E. teacher Carol, who plans such wonderful activities like Yoga, swimming, bowling, and badminton.

In Art class, Tony B. continues to enlighten our students with different genres of art, while facilitating creativity and quality. Twice a week, Amy B., our school social worker, engages students in various social skill activities, goal setting, and role playing which students are able to put into practice each day in the classroom. Earlier in the school year, students took part in a woodshop experience (right). Students also have the oppor-

tunity to check books out at the local library and keep them at school. Once a week, Lois takes a couple of students into the community where they shop for snacks and cooking supplies by comparing prices and choosing the best bargain.

Laura's students and our students have been making some tasty treats that are sold at a bi-weekly bake sale. Ours students really enjoy baking, selling, and eating the snacks. Students take turns working at the bake sale, interacting with customers, and counting money. Proceeds from the bake sale are reinvested into the classroom. So far, we have been able to purchase more baking supplies like pans, utensils, dishes, and baking ingredients. - Michelle and Lois



Left— Andrew practices woodshop skills with guidance from Mr. Allen.

Laura's Upper SEI Class

Welcome to Fred Post! He is our new paraeducator in the Secondary SEI classroom. The students and Fred have been working hard in getting to know each other over these past few weeks. Jim Clark has also become a permanent paraeducator with the ISD and serves both the SEI classrooms as well as the A-Square program. Welcome Jim!

We have been very busy this trimester. Our "Goodie Sales" have been productive. Students create the goodies and sell the goodies to staff and fellow students in an effort to raise money for possible future outings and programming.

Students and staff have also been very busy working on the school memory book which encapsulates the school year and the various ways of learning that happen here at Freedom Acres School.

Recently, the students and staff visited the Knights of

Columbus Hall to set up for the Color My World dance for the MoCI programs. We will be going to help assist the American Red Cross later this month to set up for the Blood Drive.

- Laura and Fred



Spring Greetings from A2!

A2 students had a busy and productive 2nd trimester. Our service learning project was assisting with the SCI Sweetheart Swirl Dance. Students enthusiastically participated with staff and students to make this a day to remember. We all celebrated our hard teamwork with a pizza and ice cream party with our friends. What a blast! A special thanks to Gwen O'Mara and Karen Simmons. It would not be a formal dance without suits and corsages. Thanks again! ☺

Students enjoyed bowling at Ionia Bowl 3000. We had a great time predicting our bowling scores and then comparing them to what we really got! Congratulations to Tyler Pardee for bowling a "turkey!" Thanks to Carol R. for all your hard work and thinking of us.

A-Square students are busy working on meeting their year-end goals of returning to their home schools. They are diligently working on PLATO and other individualized curriculum as well as producing fine art work lead by Tony B.

Thanks to Susan Wilson for helping our students get through this winter healthy as well as with all the behind-the-scenes scenarios!

- Becky and Tony



Appreciation of the Arts

Seasonal themes were the primary focus in Art class as we turned the corner on another school year.

Hot Air Balloon Parade—With the parade of cartoon characters marching along at ground level in place for our SHARE program's enjoyment, art students took to the sky and created hot air balloons from poster board. Each rendering was mounted in 3-D and completed with a picture (to scale) of each student dangling, climbing, or surfing with his or her hot air balloon.

Broken Hearts—In this Valentine exercise students painted a heart using colors and patterns that make them feel happy. The painted heart was mounted atop a pedestal and photographed. To finish the piece students were asked to break the heart into patterns that reflect sorrow. Older students were asked to write a paper about their relationships that influenced this piece.

St. Patrick's Day Weave—Each student painted two identical shamrocks with different colors and patterns. Table salt was sprinkled onto the paintings while wet, giving each shamrock a sandpaper feel. The two shamrocks were then cut and woven together to form one painting.

April Showers—Students turned a still life acrylic painting of fruits and vegetables into an abstract by cutting out random raindrops from black construction paper and attaching it to their still life. Younger students used colors they associate with water to paint a patterned piece to place under their raindrops.

Easter Centerpiece—Art students recently took home a beautiful box centerpiece hand painted with acrylics. Each box was crafted with poster board and stuffed with vibrant colored tissue paper. Students attached a poem, sonnet, or words of inspiration to the lid.

Notan (Expanding the Square) - Students were given one 5x5 square of construction paper and were challenged to expand the square by cutting patterns into the mass and then flipping them outside the perimeter (where in turn they may cut another pattern and flip 'em back etc.). It was truly amazing to see their creations take shape.

Sunset Shadows—Using a band of red, yellow and orange, students sponged a sunset onto a large sheet of construction paper. For the shadows, students cut out a silhouette of any object(s) of interest from black construction paper.

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Appreciation of the Arts

Imaginations ran wild as one student cut out silhouettes of musical instruments left on the stage after a rock band concert, while another had a solitary giraffe strolling off into the sunset.

Upcoming—Students are currently working on large footprints that will be used for the path people will stroll for Freedom Acres' 2nd Annual Diabetes Awareness benefit.

Parents please take a moment to talk to your children about their artwork that will be coming home soon.



Each piece tells a story, and that's a tale coming from within. - Tony and Cindy



House Happenings

The students at the House are busy practicing, getting costumes ready and making props for their play next month. The performance of "The House Is A Rockin'" is scheduled for Thursday, May 14th at 6 p.m. at the Ionia Theater. The students are using this activity as a class fundraiser. We hope to have many friends attend the performance. The cost of tickets for the play is \$3.00 for adults; children 10 and under are free. This activity allows the students to try new things, go outside of their comfort zone, work as a team member, have fun, and get applause. The students are working very hard to learn their parts, build props, and support each other.



In addition to all of the fun stuff going on students are busy getting the outside of the House cleaned up after a long winter. Raking, weeding, planting and mowing are just a few of the outdoor activities we are doing. They are also planning for their annual "Yard Sale." It will be held May 28 & 29 at the House. If you have items you would like to donate to this event please call 527-9689.



Students are responsible for pricing the items, setting up for the sale, selling items, working with money, and working on their communication and social skills. We

appreciate the support we receive for this activity.

We have three graduates this year—Deven Velasquez, Allan Westberg and Blaire Wray. Their graduation will take place on Monday, June 8th with a celebration ceremony in the evening at the ISD. These are three wonderful young adults who have worked hard to reach their goals. We are looking forward to acknowledging their accomplishments on this special night.

The House has been transitioning students for 18 years. Time sure flies when we are having fun! Stop by and say "HI" if you are in the neighborhood.

- Julie and Staff

High School MoCI

Happy Spring everyone! The calendar says it is Spring, but we are still wishing for more days with warm temperatures so we can walk the track and go on some outdoor CBI adventures.

We have had a busy winter. In January we had our annual New Year's Eve party. We invited Mr. Lincoln's MiCI class. We had snacks and made our resolutions. We had a wonderful time. Belinda Cadena, Tina's mom, came to our classroom and helped our students make personalized clipboards. They are so awesome! Thanks Belinda! We have been out to eat at numerous restaurants, practicing our good manners and ordering and paying for our own meals. We have also been to the Lansing Mall and RiverTown Crossings Mall. We are still selling our Pulp Creation's cards at Creative Works.

In P.E. class we have been swimming, sledding, bowling, and learning new Yoga positions. We have had our Spring dance; this year's theme was Color My World. We had a wonderful time! Thanks to all the staff and parents who make this dance so much fun year after year. In March, students chose a movie and then went

to see it. In April, we visited a pet store in Lansing and went to Fire Mountain for lunch. We also visited Leon's farm. He is a paraeducator in our classroom. He has baby chicks, baby goats, cows, dogs, cats, and he is going to take us on a hayride! We cleaned up Bertha Brock park for Earth Day. We are also starting our fishing unit and have been digging for worms, practicing our casting, and doing a pond study so that in May we can GO FISHING!!!

In May we will also go to Tina's house for a cookout and art activity. Students will visit Mooville in Nashville to tour the dairy and eat some ice cream. A very special picnic graduation will be held on May 29th for Marshay Thompson who will be leaving the high school to attend the Independent Living Center next year.

Of course, while we are having all this fun, we are still doing our school jobs, working on functional academics, and arts and crafts. We hope you all have a wonderful Spring and a fantastic Summer!

- Ruth Ann, Trudy, Dorothy, and Leon



Middle School MoCI

Spring is finally here! And with Spring comes many exciting end of the year activities.

Our class had a lot of fun practicing for the dance and working on the decorations. The students got dressed up and had a blast grooving to the tunes at the Color My World ball.

We are very excited about the fishing and outdoor unit that Carol has planned for us in P.E. We will also be using the warmer weather as an opportunity to explore our community

including the movies, post office, bank, and local shops. Our class is working on a nutrition unit and have been busy sorting and graphing healthy and unhealthy food choices as well as learning about serving sizes. This has helped our T.M.I. Food business to offer healthier choices to our customers and has really encouraged the kids to make better choices at home too!

- Stephanie, Deb and Lisa



FOR SALE

2000 Dodge Caravan

- Rear-entry wheelchair accessible van with E-Z lock hookup.
- Great condition!
- Contact Teresa Krieger for more details at (616) 642-6555.

Primary MoCI

Happy Spring! It has been wonderful to get outdoors for walks or time on the playground! We have enjoyed our first year at Emerson Elementary. Mr. Mercer has been very supportive and we've made many new friends. Speaking of friends, we would like to welcome Tayven to our class. He started with us in February.

Our Fun Fridays continue to be FUN, FUN, FUN! Our past several themes have been Winter Wonderland, Casino Day, and Slumber Party Day. We will close out our Fun Fridays for this school year with "Patriotic Day" in May. We look forward to continuing with this activity next year. We would



like to thank Gwen O'Mara for joining us on these days and incorporating her O.T. activities with our themes! Ariel and Sean will be going to the Middle School next year and we wish them the best of luck! We have certainly enjoyed having them in our class. Have a wonderful Summer!

- Bert, Marilyn, Jane and Kathy



Rather SCI News

Well Spring has arrived, as well as a new baby for Stephanie and family. Welcome Brandsen Earl Brown—born on March 24th, weighing 7lbs., 7ozs. Stephanie will be taking the rest of the school year off, but will join us for summer school! Amy Evans will be replacing Stephanie for the remainder of the year. She has brought a few new and great ideas to the classroom.

We are greatly anticipating the spring weather and being able to get back outside and enjoy the fresh air.

We have really enjoyed all of our



CBI trips to the store and especially our monthly trips to Pizza Hut for the Book-It program. We even rode Dial-A-Ride once and that was great fun! On Earth Day the class planted flowers in addition to other activities. We will also be joining a walk-a-thon to help raise money for Rather's School Improvement committee.

We've had a great year and can't wait for summer weather and activities.

- Stephanie, Amy, Denise, Kay, Tyler and Kids



Jane's Class

Happy Spring! We had a round of flu this winter but are glad to see everyone well again and the green that is sprouting outside. The students all seem to be making leaps in their progress this winter. We love seeing all the playing with activity boards, toys, and the computer. We're trying a lot of new sensory activities—everything from touch and feel bags to smells and temperatures. Art continues to be a weekly activity and we

like to incorporate a sensory experience into that also. We continue to display our masterpieces in the hallway. Fridays have been our big social breakfasts with Kathleen's class. We're happy to have some of the A-Square students now helping out and spending time with us on Friday mornings. Another welcome addition to our room is Wendy Zank—our new paraeducator. YEA! Happy Spring! - Jane, Vicki, Jill and Wendy

Leigh's Class

The snow has finally stopped flying; well at least we hope that it has, which means Spring is in the air! Both the students and the staff can't wait to get outside to enjoy the fresh air, beautiful sunshine, sensory trail, and playground equipment. For now, while it's still a bit on the chilly side, the students continue to work hard on their work tasks, art projects, and individual goals.



To the left, Kayleigh is working hard with her Active Learning Board while standing in the stander. To the right, Jaydin has recently discovered his ability to feed himself during meal-



times. Way to go Jaydin!



To the left, Lexie creates spin art while standing in the stander. Another student, Sarah (upper left), works hard on her speech goals with Mrs. Terri. Besides working hard within the classroom, the



students have had several opportunities to let loose and have fun. Thanks to Ms. Carol and the A2 students, we were able to put on our dancing shoes and have fun

at the second annual SCI School Dance. The students truly enjoyed practicing their dance moves and sharing many smiles and laughs as we danced the morning away. To the right, Brianna had a blast dancing with Charles from Mrs. Becky's class. Below, Lexie and



Christopher have fun dancing hand and hand together. Lucky for us, the fun is not over! This Spring we will continue to work hard and play just as hard.

- Leigh, Kim, and Kimber

Middle SCI Class

It is hard to believe that Spring is already here! We have been staying busy and having a fun year so far. We have continued to go shopping at Meijer on Wednesdays with the other SCI classes. Some of our students and students from Kathleen's class have been taking turns going to Corner Landing on Tuesdays too. They do work tasks there, such as filling coffee filters and setting things out on the tables. Also, on Thursdays we have been taking one of our students with a student in Kathleen's class to various stores and restaurants in the area. All of the students really enjoy their time out in the community!

Some of our students have enjoyed swimming throughout the winter. It is such a fun way for them to get exercise! This past month we enjoyed getting to play games in the gym with Carol with black lights on. All of us had fun glowing in the dark!

In February, the SCI "Sweetheart Ball" was a big success! The students looked very nice in their dress clothes and they had lots of fun dancing. A big thank



you to Carol for all her hard work organizing it! Left, Leia at the dance. Below, Selina has fun at the dance. In March the students had fun making Shamrock Shakes in our classroom by pushing a

switch to turn on our blender. We also colored eggs for Easter. The students have been working very hard throughout the year and have been making great progress on all of their IEP



goals. We are looking forward to the rest of the school year and the warm weather ahead!

- Catie, Beth, Kathy, and Diane

SCI Transition

As better weather arrives, we are beginning to see hints of Spring. It is unbelievable that our school year will soon come to a close. We have had another awesome year!

This year, we will be saying good-bye to another student. Tammy Dowell (right) will be graduating in June. We will sure miss her big bright smile and we wish her and her family our very best.



Colleen Tennant, a paraeducator in our classroom, decided to retire in February. She is now off in her new R.V. traveling throughout the U.S.A.



New to our classroom, but not to Freedom Acres, is Liane Wood who has joined our team. The students really like her and we are so happy she is with us.

The highlight of our week is when our room joins with Jane's and A2 on Fridays for breakfast and activities. We are hoping for some warmer spring days so we can walk the sensory trail.

Happy Spring to All!

- Kathleen, Glenda, Judy and Liane

O.T. Notes



As we are getting ready for the school year to be over I just want to remind you of some activities to continue to do with your children.

Spring is a good time to get your children outside.

Those that are able could help rake the yard, pick up sticks/stones, help plant flowers, play ball/catch, use the playground, go for walks, sweep the garage, and smell the flowers. Let your child help in the kitchen by stirring, tasting, setting the table and folding napkins. Have a fine motor box/basket on the refrigerator with

appropriate activities to use 10-15 minutes each day for 3-4 times a week. Include tactile activities such as salt, sand, rice in a container, Play-Doh, lacing, stringing, blocks, beanbag, Nerf ball, paper tearing, coloring/markers, bubble wrap, pop beads, Velcro mitt/ball, rattles and shaking toys. Encourage banging toys, clapping games, books, wind-up toys, and using bubbles. There are endless possibilities, but play and have fun!

- Gwen O'Mara, Teresa Krieger, Lu Dowsett



P.T. Notes

Well, it's been a busy year in P.T. We have had fun. Recently, I worked with Bert's class along with Carol R. on a bike riding unit that was a blast! The SCI classes



have all been working on getting up and moving. They have been using the gait trainers, standers and bikes. We are looking forward to Spring to get the bikes outside and do some more activities outside. Hope you all have a great Spring and Summer! As always, if you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to call me at ext. 1343 or Joyce at ext. 1349.

- Brenda B., Physical Therapist or Joyce W., P.T. Asst.



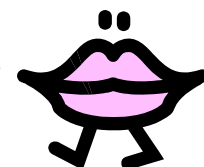
Speech News

Speech therapy continues with the students at Freedom Acres. Most of the students are receiving some sort of oral motor therapy to help with mouth movements for speech and eating. Some students have participated in the Picture Exchange Communication System to help them learn how to exchange a picture for something they want. This communication system has allowed some students to communicate with a purpose and their listener can better understand what that student wants/needs.

I have also been working with students on horn blowing

and bubble blowing. This is a fun approach to getting the mouth moving in ways that will help them make speech sounds, increase the strength of their vocal quality and allow others to provide oral care as needed. I have some students for the first time who are allowing horns and whistles in their mouths and they love the feedback they get and want to do it again and again. I enjoy working with the students and watching the progress that they make.

- Terri Lay, M.A., CCC-SLP



P.E. Fun!

Spring always gets us excited to go outdoors! SCI classes will all enjoy going out on the trail, playing with bubbles, sidewalk chalk, bikes, and of course, the playground!

Bert's MoCI class came to Freedom Acres for a bike riding unit in April. The fun involved both skill improvement and safety. Also, while they were here, they enjoyed the trail and playground, and bike related art activities. In May, they will practice their leaps while learning to do low hurdles in Track.

Stephanie's middle school MoCI class and Ruth Ann's high school MoCI class will enjoy a four week fishing unit thanks to a grant received. Some of the time will be spent at Freedom Acres where we will dig for worms and practice our casting. The last week will be spent at

Bertha Brock Park at the specially created pond where we are all hoping to catch a bunch of fish!!

The MoCI Dance "Color My World" at the Knights of Columbus Hall was right before Spring Break. All the songs had colors in their titles (i.e. Yellow Polka Dot Bikini, Blue Suede Shoes, etc.). As always it was a great time! Thanks to all the staff and parents who helped make it so much fun!



Michelle and Laura's Harwood students are currently enjoying some badminton. In May they will enjoy a two week stunt kite flying activity here at Freedom Acres. Finally, our last few weeks of swimming will happen in May also, and will be enjoyed by all the kids! Enjoy the sunshine! - Carol

"Healthy News"

Our 2nd annual upcoming Walk for Diabetes will be held on May 15th at Freedom Acres. We are hoping to utilize our beautiful walking trail for most of the activities, weather permitting. Students will be bringing home letters soon about the event and *optional* fund raiser participation to support American Diabetes Association. I encourage you to read this information and contact me if you have any questions or suggestions. On another note, the cold and flu season should be drawing to a close now, but recent news reports are highlighting a new strain of swine influenza. Flu symptoms include cough, fever, fatigue, sore throat, headaches, body aches along with possible diarrhea and vomiting, usually lasting from 5-14 days. The Michigan Department of Community Health recommends that—

- Anyone with respiratory illness stay home from work/school.
- Avoid close contact with people who are coughing or otherwise appear ill.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Wash hands frequently.
- Contact your physician early (if you experiencing severe symptoms) for testing and medication.

A reminder to call the Freedom Absence Line at 616-527-8071, ext. 1999 for any absence due to illness. This information is reported to Ionia County Health Dept., which in turn helps to prevent the spread of illness and keep our school a healthy environment! Please feel free to contact me or the health department with any questions or concerns. - Susan Wilson RN

