BLIND CHILDREN’S CENTER TURNS 80!

On Saturday, March 2, we held our 80th Anniversary at the prestigious California Club in Downtown Los Angeles. It was a celebration of our storied history and a commemoration of our founding by Delta Gamma alumnae in 1938 as the first preschool in their “Service for Sight” initiative.

The event exceeded expectations with over $100,000 raised in total contributions. A packed crowd of 120 friends and supporters enjoyed the themed event featuring a colorful array of “Tables that Bloom” courtesy of local designers, florists, and Delta Gamma alumnae chapters from Southern California.

FROM OUR PRESIDENT JEFF LEITZINGER, PhD

Over the last year, I had the chance to participate in some important conversations with parents, teachers and support staff about future directions for the Blind Children’s Center. While it came as no surprise, given my fond memories as a BCC parent 20 years ago, the deep appreciation for and commitment to the Center was heartwarming and inspiring. It reminded me that we have a deep responsibility to be good stewards of this marvelous organization.

Toward that end, our Board and executive team have been focused on developing strategies for continued success. While there is a large need for our unique expertise in the community, it is a need that is increasingly resource-intensive and expensive to serve. Fortunately, public funding streams are developing, especially for low-income communities and we are now actively pursuing those opportunities.

This year marks our fifth in a row as a top-rated 4-Star Charity by Charity Navigator. This kind of success requires continuing organizational evolution and transparency. With full Board support, CEO Sarah Orth has instituted a top-down review and reorganization of the Center’s administrative, IT and accounting functions, ultimately outsourcing many activities to third-party providers with greater capabilities and reduced costs, allowing us to better focus our limited resources on the communities we serve.

Thank you for being a part of our first 80 years, changing countless lives and lighting the way to independence for so many children and their families. I remain inspired as I look toward our 81st year.

Gratefully yours,

Jeffrey Leitzinger, PhD
This past year has been a time not only to celebrate and reflect on Blind Children’s Center’s 80 years of service, it has been a time to consider how we can best meet the needs of children with visual impairments into the future. After nearly a year of research and discussion, BCC adopted a strategic plan that calls for the Center to expand its infant and preschool programs over the next five years. Research and our own experience demonstrate that reaching children as early as possible—with appropriate interventions, education and support—is directly linked to their future success in school, work, and life.

In order to achieve our goals, BCC is sunsetting our grade school programming (kindergarten through 2nd grade) over the next two years to direct critical resources to the expansion of preschool and infant programming. These changes will enable us to continue our commitment to inclusion by opening our doors to neighborhood children in need of FREE, high-quality education and early intervention services.

The Blind Children’s Center has evolved many times throughout our long history. Like all nonprofits, we are charged with maximizing our resources for the greatest impact on the children and families we serve. Sometimes that means making hard choices. While BCC successfully added kindergarten through 2nd grade to our services over a decade ago, we have determined that going back to our roots is the most effective way for us to achieve our mission in the long-term.

Thankfully, we have donors and partners like you who believe in the importance of our mission, who choose to invest in the children and families we serve, and who share our vision of an inclusive and brighter world for children who are blind or visually impaired.

Sincerely,

Sarah E. Orth, MPA
“I DID IT!”

Xavier spontaneously exclaimed those three words as he walked away with his diploma from the Blind Children’s Center. For the eight year-old, the moment was the culmination of a long and often arduous journey. Born prematurely with multiple disabilities including Cerebral Palsy and Cortical Visual Impairment, Xavier’s early school years were unlike most, even at the Blind Children’s Center. Before graduation day, he had already battled through several major surgeries including hip adductor and hamstring lengthening. He had worn leg braces for six to eight hours a day at school since the time he was crawling, and just last year he endured another surgery to improve the mobility in his ankle. Despite all those challenges, he may have been the student who spent the most time at school smiling. He quickly earned the nickname “Happy Xavi” around campus.

“He really is a very happy little boy,” his mother Carla said. “And the teachers and specialists at the Center have been so patient and caring with him.” The family workers and teachers visited during his hospital stays, brought him his schoolwork, and helped walk her through the medical process. “They provided light through some scary times,” she said.

Xavier loves to tell jokes and has an uncanny memory for matching names to voices, including nearly every staff member at the Blind Children’s Center! Although he has significant delays, he enjoys stories and has learned to spell his name by rote. Most incredibly, after several years using a walker, he took his first steps on his own last year, into his grandmother’s arms. “When he was born the doctors said he would never walk,” Carla remembered. “I know so much of his growth has to do with the specialists and their adaptive physical education program.”

“Xavier’s success is a great example of the entire family working together with our multidisciplinary team,” said the Center’s Director of Education & Family Services, Dr. Fernanda Armenta-Schmitt. “His mother, grandmother and aunt are frequently on campus, benefiting from our family groups and community of support.”

Xavier just started at his local public elementary school. His aunt, who also lives with Xavi, said he already likes it very much though he does miss the Blind Children’s Center. “Although he is in a class with children of varying abilities at his new school, he was prepared for that thanks to the Center’s inclusion model,” she said.

“Xavi brings joy to everyone who meets him. When he arrived at the Center six years ago, we never imagined how far he would come. We are very grateful.”
LES MARRAINES LEADER LIGHTS THE WAY FOR OUR STUDENTS

Growing up as a child in German-occupied Denmark, Inge Jones never imagined one day she would be staring out over the Pacific from a home in Malibu. Her father was a tailor and the family lived a modest life where she said, “he could always trade something for a chicken.”

A decade after the War, she met a handsome young American named Tom Jones while working in the office of a home supply store. Unlike the Welsh singer, her Tom was an aeronautical engineer for Hughes Aircraft living in her hometown of Aalborg. They had a traditional courtship for two years before marrying and moving to the Unites States.

Good years followed as they traveled Europe and back to the U.S. for Tom’s work. In 1976, they settled permanently in Malibu. Within a year, Inge, who was still fine-tuning her English, met several neighbors who were members of a philanthropic group of women named Les Marraines (The Godmothers). Inge joined a year later. “We used to be a very large group of 30 active members, all united by a love of philanthropy” she said. “We came from various backgrounds, geographically and financially, but we all wanted to make Los Angeles better for young children.”

Les Marraines were first introduced to the Center in 1994. “We were so impressed by the warmth and happiness of the place,” said Inge who has served as Les Marraines’ Treasurer for many years. “We knew we wanted to be a part of the mission.”

This year marks 25 years that Les Marraines have supported Blind Children’s Center. For many years they held an annual gala, and they still lead an annual appeal campaign to aid the Center. Although their numbers have dwindled to six—several in their nineties—they are still champion fundraisers for our students and their families.

Inge has personally chosen to include the Blind Children’s Center in her estate plan to ensure our programs continue into the future. “This is a wonderful place and these are wonderful kids,” she said. “We want them to have a fair chance in life. The Center helps them become productive members of society and successful adults, and there is nothing better than that.”

CIRCLE | LIGHT THE WAY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

We humbly ask you to consider including the Blind Children’s Center in your estate plan. Your gift will do more than you even thought possible to transform the lives of children who are visually impaired and their families for generations to come.

For more information, please contact Scott Kassel at 323.664.2152, ext. 2330 or via email at scott@blindchildrenscenter.org.

To include the Center in your estate plan use our legal name, The Blind Children’s Center, Inc. Fed ID#: 95-1656369

TO A BRIGHTER FUTURE
YOUR SUPPORT MAKES IT ALL POSSIBLE

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

• Celebrated our 80th year of service to children who are blind or visually impaired
• Recognized by Charity Navigator as a 4-Star Charity—their highest rating—for the 5th straight year

90 CHILDREN WERE SERVED DURING THE 2018/19 SCHOOL YEAR.
• ALL CLASSROOMS WERE INCLUSIVE

Who we serve:

57% Visually Impaired
43% Typically developing
79% of our students who are visually impaired face disabilities in addition to blindness

Who we serve:

LATINO: 64%
• MULTIRACIAL: 20%
• CAUCASIAN: 8%
• AFRICAN-AMERICAN: 3%
• ASIAN-AMERICAN: 2%
• OTHER: 3%

100% of your donation goes directly to serving the children and their families

Administration, Development & Public Information costs are supported by the Investment Account. Audited Financial Statements are available on our website.

DONOR SUPPORT
1. Foundations 36%
2. Bequests 30%
3. Events 20%
4. Individuals 11%
5. Corporations & Civic Groups 2%
6. Other 1%

EXPENSE BREAKDOWN
1. Program Services 77%
2. Fundraising 13%
3. Administration 10%
**Our Donors**

**2018/2019 Gifts of Distinction**

It is our distinct pleasure to acknowledge the many individual donors and community partners who funded the Blind Children’s Center’s vital work during the 2018/2019 fiscal year.

To learn more about how you can support the Center, please contact Scott Kassel, Director of Development & Communications at 323.664.2153 ext. 2330 or via email at scott@blindchildrenscenter.org.

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WE LOST A LONGTIME COLLEAGUE AND DEAR FRIEND THIS YEAR.  
PAUL BREAMD SERVED THE CENTER FOR NEARLY 30 YEARS IN VARIOUS CAPACITIES—INCLUDING INFORMATIVE TECHNOLOGY, FACILITY MAINTENANCE AND FRONT OFFICE SUPPORT. HE IS DEEPLY MISSED BY MANY.

Paul Breard
1965 - 2019

Ms. Ada Lila Aguilera  
Dr. Fernanda Armenta-Schmitt  
Ms. Yolanda Blancarte-Chatman

We also thank the numerous donors who gave up to $100 for the children this year.
OUR MISSION

To prepare children who are visually impaired to thrive in a sighted world through inclusive, family-focused early intervention and child development programs.

Blind Children’s Center board members serve as volunteers and are not compensated in any way. Six board meetings are held throughout the year at the Center, 4120 Marathon Street, Los Angeles, CA 90029.