

## The Blessing of *Affirmation*

Dear Friends,

If you are lucky, every once in a while, you receive the blessing of your hard work being validated with the affirmation that what you do matters. Here at St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center, we have received just such a gift.

We met “Nancy” when she came to us about a year and a half ago looking for assistance in obtaining her GED. When she enrolled, we learned of her background and how she came to need our help. As a high school student, she had a tremendous struggle with reading. Now in her early 20’s, we realized that she is dyslexic. But at the time, it was undiagnosed and she did not receive the assistance she needed through her public school. Instead, they informed her parents that due to her reading levels, it was unlikely that she would ever graduate. However, the school would allow her the alternative of “auditing” classes. Seeing no other way, Nancy’s parents agreed and Nancy went through school and even graduation.

When she sought her actual diploma, the school informed them that none of the classes she had successfully completed actually counted, as she was classified as “auditing” and she had not actually graduated. She was advised to just go get her GED and it would only take a few weeks. She signed up for a course, but she grew frustrated, as her dyslexia still went undiagnosed and untreated. Then she found us through a friend.

Nancy was paired with **Tracie Peller**, one of our Adult Education Managers, who realized quickly what Nancy’s challenges were. In her assessment, Tracie identified that Nancy would need significantly more tutoring time and support in order to obtain her GED. So she enlisted the help of **Dave Kuzeimko**. (*Dave is a former recipient of our Volunteer of the Year award.*) He and his wife **Maria** jumped in with everything that they had – feeling it was their responsibility to help this young woman overcome challenges that were not her fault.

During the pandemic, Dave worked with Nancy for over a year, tutoring her five days a week for over an hour a day by phone. And Maria provided the emotional support that Nancy needed, encouraging a never give up attitude. Nancy did the work every single day. She pushed through and, with the encouragement of her family, labored to overcome her challenges and get to the point of testing. Unfortunately, her story didn’t end there.

Nancy failed to score the needed 145 points in her first three attempts when she only had the standard time allowed. For individuals with learning challenges, special accommodations can be sought for additional time to take the test. However, it is not easy to obtain the

accommodation. Tracie, who had been active working with Nancy, tried unsuccessfully to obtain the accommodation. Then, another member of the Kuzeimko family stepped in to try and provide assistance. Their daughter **Ilyana**, a Professor at Princeton University, assessed Nancy’s reading skills and wrote a detailed letter about her findings to the GED Accommodations Department.

Even this request (*along with two other letters of support*) was denied for an accommodation. But tenacious Tracie wouldn’t give up – especially after all of the hard work that Nancy and the Kuzeimko family had put into getting this far. The accommodations department called Tracie and told her that they had never seen such compassionate documentation. At their request, Tracie made one more change to the documentation and on the third attempt, Nancy was finally awarded the extra time to take the test.

Tracie, the Kuzeimkos and Nancy were all ecstatic, but Nancy was understandably intimidated about taking the test that they fought so hard to reach. Tracie encouraged Nancy to find that last bit of strength to push towards the finish line. Nancy dug deep and passed the test on her first attempt. Now a GED Graduate, Nancy is enrolled at a Community College and wants to go into the field of IT. She will continue to work with Tracie and the Kuzeimkos, as a GAP (Graduate Accelerated Program) student, to ensure that she has the support needed as she tackles her next educational goals on her way to reaching her career goals.

The important takeaway from this inspirational story is that it was truly a team effort – between the student, volunteers and staff. Managing bureaucracy is difficult at best and unfortunately for Nancy, her learning challenge wasn’t the biggest obstacle that she faced throughout her education – it was the need for advocacy to get her what she needed to succeed. It would be much easier to shrug and walk away, but that’s not what the Center does. You’ve seen me refer to our social work approach to education many times and this is a perfect example of why that is needed. Too many people can fall through the cracks and it takes an enormous amount of time, energy and persistence to get resources that are needed.

We are incredibly proud of Nancy, happy for her family, grateful to the Kuzeimko Family and deeply appreciative to Tracie for being the embodiment of the Center’s values and mission. We count each of these people among our blessings for not only demonstrating what the Center is about, but also for proving that our system works and that we are making a difference. One student at a time.

Warmest regards,

Diane Renaud, Executive Director/CEO





# Children's Summer Program

This summer marked some great achievements in our Children's Program while continuing to provide services remotely to our children. Utilizing the functionality of the Neatboard in the **Kenneth A. Monicatti Virtual Learning Center**, SVSF staff led trainings for our STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) Volunteers for the summer. Thanks to the efforts of these STEM volunteers, SVSF collected and distributed STEM kits loaded with materials for eight different science experiments and activities for each student.

When asked to reflect on the summer, **Children's Education Program Coordinator Michael Mroz** was very pleased about the new addition of the STEM Kits, as they provided a unique hands-on way for students to learn. "Before every session," he said, "almost every student would show us their kits and ask 'When are we going to use our STEM Kits?'" Mike went on to say that the students' favorite activity was making Oobleck, a fluid that is based off of a Dr. Seuss book. "One of our incredible volunteers Ms. Emily loved facilitating the M&M Math activity where students used candy to solve problems," Mike continued. "These kits were a great way to bring some laughter and excitement in between math and reading."

We are so proud of the progress of our students throughout this past year. Overall, the program increased nine levels in reading and 13 in math. Way to go!



## Our Beloved Peggy

It is with heavy hearts that we must announce the passing of long-time volunteer and supporter Peggy (Margaret Ann) Condemi. Peggy passed away in April while battling Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD), a rare neurological disease.

Originally from New York, Peggy and David (her husband of 39 years) raised their five children in Farmington Hills, MI. A devout Catholic, talented florist, and spirited Irishwoman, SVSF was blessed to know Peggy. She was a passionate and caring volunteer working in our Children's Programs. Her smile and enthusiasm were joys to be around and we are eternally grateful to have been given the gift of sharing in Peggy's presence as she helped to bring quality service and education to the children in our programs. She will be dearly missed, but we know that Peggy's loving spirit will always remain a part of our Children's Programs.

*If you would like to make a gift in memory of Peggy Condemi, please visit our website at [svsfcenter.org](http://svsfcenter.org) or call Kevin Lill at 313-384-5242.*

# Thanks for Everything!

It is with tremendous sadness that we announce the retirement of our beloved CFO, Renee Pouget. You may recall



Renee, 1993

that last year Renee celebrated her 20th anniversary with the Center. But now, she has decided that it is time to ride off into the sunset with her husband **Rick** (*who also has worked at the Center for decades*) and enjoy life.

Renee has been one of the reasons for the Center's success and is a strong backbone to our organization. She

not only manages every financial aspect of the Center with excellence and integrity, but she is a genuinely kind, funny and generous person. She will be greatly missed by the entire team.

We want to thank her for her many years of service and her devotion to our mission. Whomever takes over her role will have very big shoes to fill, but they will never come close to replacing her. She is embedded in our hearts, minds and everyday procedures. Her decades of services are irreplaceable, as she has shepherded us through very difficult transitions.

Renee – we will push forward in your honor and we are grateful for the many years of your devotion that you gave us!

## *You will be missed!*



Renee in her natural habitat, behind an adding machine.

## easy ways to Help make a **Change**

**It's easy to be part of all of the positive changes in the Center and help in ways you may not have considered before.**

**AmazonSmile** – Think of SVSF when you are shopping and Help Our Students! Amazon will donate 0.5% of the price of your eligible AmazonSmile purchases to St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center whenever you shop on AmazonSmile ([smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com)).

**Charity Motors** – Donate your vehicle and you can designate the proceeds to the SVSF Center. Visit [www.charitymotors.org](http://www.charitymotors.org) for more information.

**Ask your employer** – Does your employer have an Employee Giving/ Matching Gift program? A volunteer group? Give grants to non-profits? Or are there employee activities such as a jean day that raise money? Ask how St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center can be included.

**Check with your place of worship** – Many faith communities have funds that they designate to community efforts.

**Designate us for Busch and Kroger Community Rewards programs** – log on to their websites and select St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center to receive a donation from your grocery shopping.

**Leave a Legacy** – Consider St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center in your estate planning, to leave a gift that keeps on giving. We can help. Call Kevin Lill at (313) 535-9200, extension 3109.

**Monetary donations** – We rely on donations to operate. Your contribution is not only tax-deductible, it also directly supports our programs. Your gift will help our kids to succeed in school and make our adults more employable, which has economic impact for our entire community – both now and in the future. We are able to accept secure donations on our website too!

**In-kind** - Visit our website at [www.svsfcenter.org](http://www.svsfcenter.org) – We have a variety of needs. Something as simple as a roll of paper towel or batteries can help off-set operating costs.

**United Way designation** – If you or your company participate in the annual United Way campaign, you can designate your gift toward St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center.

**Volunteer** – It doesn't take a lot of time to make a difference. And we have a variety of ways that you can help. Whether it is tutoring, administrative assistance, or publicity and marketing, your assistance is appreciated.

Call us at (313) 535-9200 or visit [www.svsfcenter.org](http://www.svsfcenter.org) and learn more about how you can contribute to change.

**Our Mission** – We provide educational programs, basic skill building and academic enhancement for at-risk children and adults, designed to build self-sufficiency skills for academic and employment success, personal achievement and dignity.

### Like us on Facebook Follow us on Twitter



Facebook is a wonderful way to stay connected to all of the announcements and activities of the Center. Help us expand our social network by "liking" us!



## St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center

16800 Trinity • Detroit, MI 48219-3968

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage

**PAID**

Permit #2655  
Detroit, MI

### Board of Trustees

Cynthia Chabie  
*Board Chairperson*

Andrew Blank  
Tricia Ennest  
John Hessburg  
William Korte  
Joelle Maes  
William Moylan, Ph.D.  
Greg Scheesele  
Bernard Schwartz  
Christianne Sims  
John White

**For more information, please call us at (313) 535-9200  
or visit [www.svsfcenter.org](http://www.svsfcenter.org).**

**svsf** St. Vincent and  
Sarah Fisher Center

# Save the Date!



**CELEBRATE THE CENTER**  
**APRIL 6, 2022 8:00 AM - 9:30 AM**

DETROIT ATHLETIC CLUB  
241 MADISON STREET, DETROIT, MI 48226



**TO LEARN MORE ABOUT SPONSORSHIP  
OR TO PURCHASE TICKETS, VISIT US  
ON OUR WEBSITE:**

**SVSFCENTER.ORG/  
CELEBRATE-THE-CENTER**

On Wednesday, April 6, 2022, St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center will hold its annual Celebrate the Center breakfast at the historic Detroit Athletic Club in the heart of downtown Detroit. This signature fundraising event will be attended by approximately 250 of the organization's closest supporters.

**We Hope to See You There!**