

SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT CENTER

# Annual Report

FISCAL YEAR 2023-24



**Celebrating  
Strength in Community**



# Strength In Community

The theme of this annual report, Strength in Community, celebrates the remarkable power of collective efforts, highlighting how the dedication and support of our teachers, staff, families, donors, sponsors, and volunteers has led to lasting, positive changes in the lives of those we serve.

This report showcases the milestones we reached together and emphasizes the idea that our collective efforts not only transform individual lives but also strengthen the fabric of our entire community. **We thank you for all you made possible.**



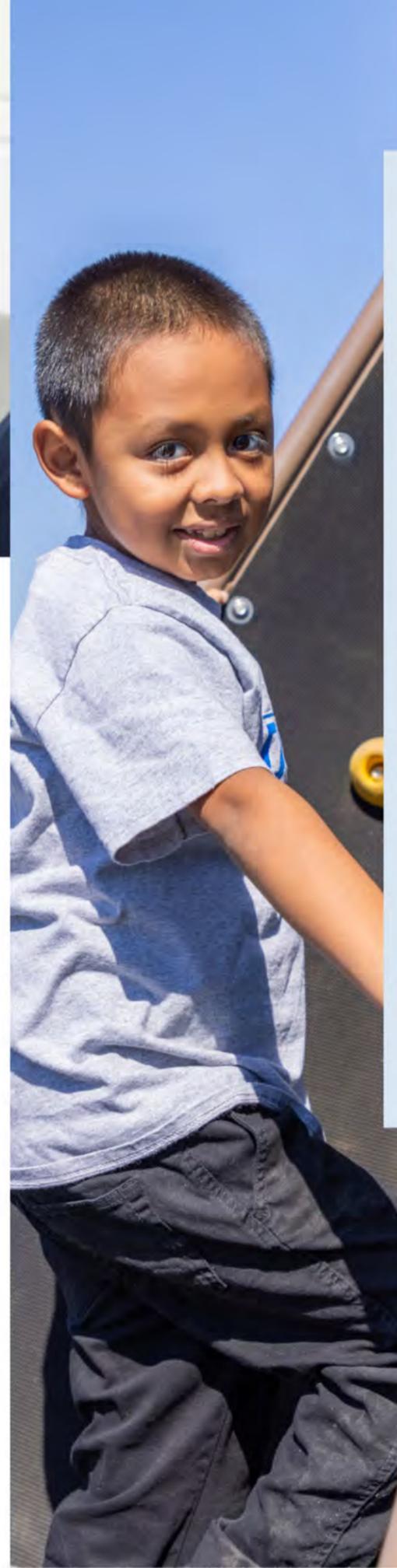
## Mission

Empowering minds, transforming lives:  
We provide accessible therapy and education to foster growth, resilience, and well-being in children and adults. Through compassionate support and evidence-based practices, we ignite hope and empower individuals to thrive.



## Vision

We envision thriving communities where every individual has the opportunity to reach their full potential through transformative therapy and education.



# What's Inside

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## Dear Friends, Families, and Partners:

When I was interviewing for the role of CEO at this incredible organization, the board asked me a question that has stayed with me: *What do you see as our greatest opportunity?* It was a question that invited me to reflect not only on our rich past but also on where we are headed. My response then—as it is now—was clear: **our greatest opportunity is to continue evolving with the needs of our community while remaining true to the legacy of our founders, Dr. Aleen Agranowitz and Gladys Gleason.** Their vision was to create a place where individuals could grow, thrive, and be seen for their incredible potential. Today, as we look toward the future, it's this same vision that drives us to embrace change with both purpose and boldness.

This past year marked a turning point in our journey. We reached new heights, providing over 173,000 hours of specialized academic instruction, expanding our clinical services, and growing our Adult Day Program by 53%. To be recognized as **Nonprofit of the Year by California Assemblywoman Sharon Quirk-Silva** reaffirms the profound impact we are making within our community and is a promise of even more to come.

As our organization has grown and evolved, so too has our need for a name that fully reflects the breadth of our mission and the scope of our services. The name "Speech and Language Development Center," though meaningful, captures only one aspect of what we do. After thoughtful consideration, research, and reflection, we recently announced our decision to rebrand under a new name that honors our roots while better representing who we are today. If you haven't heard yet, I am proud to introduce our new name: Linden Oaks.

**Why Linden Oaks?** The linden oak tree symbolizes strength, growth, and shelter— values that capture the heart of the inclusive, supportive community we've built. Over the last 69 years, we've blossomed into an organization offering K-12+ special education, comprehensive clinical therapies, and a thriving Adult Day Program. Linden Oaks is a name that encompasses these offerings and represents the expansive, inclusive vision of our founders. You can read more about the inspiration behind the name and how it honors our heritage at <http://www.slhc.net/FAQ>.

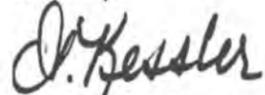
Over the next few months, you'll see our new name take root across our digital platforms and in our physical spaces. Rest assured: while our name is evolving, our mission remains as constant as ever. We will continue providing the highest quality care, education, and support to those we serve, now under a name that better encompasses the breadth of our work.

As I've come to know our community—families, educators, therapists, donors, and partners—I've been continually moved by the strength of our shared commitment. The collaborations we've fostered with universities, businesses, and community leaders, along with your generosity in time, talent, and treasure, have been essential in bringing our work to life.

Aleen and Gladys dreamed of a world where every person could thrive, and as we move forward, we carry their dream with us. This new chapter is about embracing growth, resilience, and transformation with the strength of a community as enduring as the linden oak.

Thank you for standing with us as we turn the page to a new chapter in our shared story.

Sincerely,



Adrienne Kessler, Ed.D., BCBA, CEO



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

## Board Notes

Our Board of Directors is dedicated to guiding and supporting our growth, strategy, and impact. These committed volunteers contribute their time, expertise, and passion, helping us serve our students, clients, families, and the community with excellence. We want to thank each of our 2023–2024 board members for their invaluable contributions and are thrilled to introduce three new board members who bring remarkable expertise and leadership to SLDC.

**Jon Borenstein**  
**Dinko J. Bozanich, B.S. J.D.**  
**Thomas M. Gieser, Esq., Vice President**  
**Daniel Juliano, Secretary**  
**Elden Peterson**

**Howard Platte, Treasurer**  
**Jeffrey Shew, President**  
**Janet Thomas**  
**Nicholle Trugman**

### WELCOME!



**DEBRA BAETZ, B.A., M.B.A.**

With over 33 years in public administration, Debra joins our board with deep experience in social services. She has served the County of Orange Social Services Agency with distinction, including her recent role as Director of the Agency. Her expertise spans program development and strategic initiatives aimed at improving services for Orange County's most vulnerable populations. Debra's service includes roles such as Chair of the Orange County Children's Partnership and Commissioner for the First 5 Orange County Children & Families Commission.



**ASHLEY POWERS**

Ashley Powers brings a dynamic background in client services and operational excellence from her leadership at OneDigital, where she currently serves as Vice President of Client Services. With over a decade of experience in delivering exceptional client care and fostering high-performance teams, Ashley's collaborative style and dedication to excellence promise to enrich SLDC's mission. Her accomplishments include outstanding client retention and the development of strategic advisory solutions that prioritize people and drive sustainable growth.



**DR. ELIZA DELPIZZO-CHENG, PH.D., BCBA-D, NCSP, LP**

A licensed clinical and school psychologist, Dr. Eliza DelPizzo-Cheng brings extensive experience in neurodevelopmental disorders, including autism and ADHD. Dr. DelPizzo has dedicated over 25 years to clinical work in hospitals, schools, and private practice across the United States, including as Supervisor of SLDC's Behavioral Services program until 2020. Her current role as Coordinator of Student Support Services at the Institute for Applied Behavioral Science at Endicott College, alongside her teaching roles, reflects her commitment to advancing behavioral health and education.

Thank you to all of our board members! Your guidance, leadership, and unwavering dedication continue to drive SLDC forward.

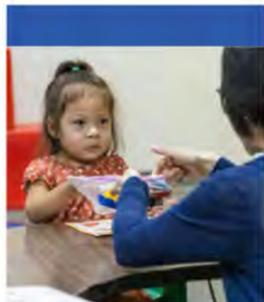
# Impact By The Numbers

SLDC has programs for every stage of life: clinical services (including early intervention), a K-22 non-public school, and adult day programming. Our impact reaches beyond those we serve directly, creating a ripple effect that strengthens families, enriches communities, and benefits society as a whole.



## NON-PUBLIC SCHOOL (kindergarten through transition)

During the 23-24 academic year, 52 elementary and middle school students, along with 94 high school and transition students explored, learned, and grew. Our 109 teachers and aides provided 173,460 hours of specialized academic instruction, and our 22 skilled therapists provided 14,280 hours of related therapy services (for a spotlight on related services, visit page 15!).



## CLINICAL SERVICES (all ages)

Our outpatient clinical services are provided on our Buena Park and Temecula sites. During the 23-24 fiscal year, our therapists provided 3,842 hours of outpatient early intervention, speech, and occupational therapy.



## ADULT DAY PROGRAM (age 22+)

Our Adult Day Program is geared towards building independence, meaning, and community among clients, year-round, each Monday through Friday. In the 23-24 fiscal year, we experienced 53% growth in enrollment, providing 21,000 hours of support and care to our 15 clients!

# We're Stronger Together

At SLDC, a comprehensive support system is the foundation of student and client success, with every detail in and out of the classroom designed to meet each person's unique needs.

## DID YOU KNOW?



In addition to teachers and clinicians, **nearly 100 paraprofessionals** provide daily support for students. They help reinforce educational lessons and provide 1:1 or small group learning and behavioral support to students who may require additional assistance.



SLDC provides breakfast and lunch for every student who wants it. With 200 days of school, this equates to **over 58,000 meals!** Photo: high school student, Christopher, working his on-campus job in the lunch room.



Every school day, SLDC transportation vans operate **20 routes spanning 4 counties**, providing door-to-door transportation for an average of 109 students. Each van is staffed with a driver and 1-2 aides to provide support throughout the commute.



“It's never a dull moment. My student always brightens up my day with his smile and his jokes. I love working as a para because it brings out a different side to you. You get to see our students gain independence and it's amazing to see how far they come.”

– Kelley Edwards, Paraprofessional



# Finding Community Through Dance

Like many parents, Jeziel Collazo has struggled to find enriching and engaging activities for her son offered in an inclusive space.

Luckily, last year, Jeziel and Jayden attended SLDC's annual Walk Your Way event at Knott's Berry Farm. There, they got a chance to witness an outstanding performance by local dance troop, Straight Up Abilities.

At SLDC, we recognize the importance of connecting our families to inclusive enrichment opportunities that appeal to the diverse needs and interests of all children. Through community events like Walk Your Way and our accompanying resource fair, we strive to make this process easier, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to participate and flourish in activities they love.

Over a year later, Jeziel cannot stop raving about how much Jayden has enjoyed being a part of Straight Up Abilities. From tap and ballet to hip-hop and pop, Jayden has had a blast learning about different types of dance and music.

Jeziel believes the benefits of Jayden's involvement in extracurriculars like Straight Up Abilities goes beyond just the activity itself. "Not only has Jayden been able to learn more about dance and music, in combination with his time at SLDC, he is developing better social and behavioral skills. He can coexist with others like him, he follows directions better, and he's learning the importance of teamwork."

Jeziel recommends this organization to any parents looking for a fun and safe activity for their child, noting that it's a great form of exercise, movement, and expression for individuals of all ages – no prior dance experience required!



# A Holiday Legacy

**Santa Claus is undoubtedly magical for many reasons, but the man underneath the red suit and white costume beard, may be even more – Dan Juliano. This is a Santa who carries a profound legacy and a deep connection to SLDC, as he dons the red cap today just as his father did for 50 years before him.**

Dan's involvement with SLDC began 30 years ago when he started assisting his father, **Dick Juliano**, during his annual Santa visits. By that point, Dick was seasoned as SLDC's Santa Claus, as he had begun the tradition 20 years earlier. Dick delighted students by listening to their holiday wishes and hosting story time, while Dan would pass out candy canes and Christmas books. This gave Dan the chance to connect with the students and staff at SLDC. He fell in love with the campus and found that he looked forward to Christmas time at SLDC with his family every year.

As the years went on, it became obvious that Dan would be the perfect heir to the Santa Claus tradition.



And so, in 2017, Dick lovingly passed the Santa Claus role to Dan. Today, Dan remains committed to honoring the tradition of his father and upholding his love for SLDC as Santa. This heartfelt tribute was even more special this year with the passing of Dick Juliano in October 2023.

Dan's connection with SLDC extends beyond the festive season. Joining the Board of Directors three years ago, he now serves as the secretary on the governance committee. SLDC has become a primary focus for philanthropy and service for Dan and his Mrs. Claus, **Becky Juliano**. Their commitment to supporting SLDC's mission is truly inspirational.

"There is so much need and the school does a tremendous job. There's nothing but potential for the school to keep growing and serving more individuals. We should all seek out avenues where we can help others. I've always felt called for service and community."

# Success Through Unique Chapman Partnership

Now in its 8th year, SLDC's innovative Chapman Summer AAC Camp, a partnership which is led by Speech Supervisor Dr. Marissa Caccavale, welcomed a record 40 graduate level SLP students to fulfill clinical training hours. During AAC Camp, campers gain independence in communication, while interns acquire invaluable hands-on experience. *By Kristen Dea, Marketing Intern*

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) encompasses a range of high-tech tools like iPads and low-tech options like communication boards, customized to each individual's needs. At SLDC, AAC empowers students to express themselves more effectively, boosting their confidence, relationships, and participation in daily life.

*"AAC gives so many people a voice," says Dr. Marissa Caccavale, AAC Camp and Speech Department Supervisor. "We get to support our students while also training the next generation of speech-language pathologists."*

Chapman student **Sophia Fisher**, one of this year's interns, shares that her cousin's experience in speech therapy inspired her career path. SLDC's AAC Camp enriches her education by allowing her to connect with diverse students and enhance their communication skills.

At SLDC, interns like Fisher are able to build personal connections and use creativity to help students adapt their communication across different settings. She recalls a student who couldn't bring his electronic AAC device to work in a garden, so she created a lanyard with laminated icons to facilitate communication.



Success at AAC Camp varies, from uncovering a student's interests to seeing them joyfully engage in activities. Positive reinforcement is key to their growth, as Fisher notes, "We've seen campers come out of their shells and generalize skills even when we're not around, which is really special."

As interns help students realize their potential, they master the balance of providing support while fostering independence. The transformation from the start of camp to the end is heartwarming, as students gain functional communication skills, opening up new possibilities for their futures.

SLDC deeply values its partnership with Chapman University and the impact it has on our students and clients. Interns are innovative, ambitious, and passionate, and we know the next generation of speech-language pathologists is ready to make a meaningful difference in the lives of those they serve.



*"I feel so lucky to be able to work with these students. I really think that the connections I've built and the growth we have seen over the last few months is really going to push me to be a better, more well-rounded clinician in the future."*

*- Sophia Fisher, AAC Camp Intern*



# Checking In With Sergio Pousima '03

When Sergio Pousima enrolled at SLDC in 2003 to seek interventions for his speech impediment, he thought he was going to lose his voice.

"A lot of people told me I wouldn't be able to do certain things and that I would have difficulties in my adult life," Pousima recalls.

From the moment he stepped on campus, SLDC's dedicated staff and expert therapists, including founder **Dr. Aleen Agranowitz**, challenged what others told him he couldn't do. "They took the time to know my case and exactly what I needed."

Sergio credits programs like the Hi-Tops Dance Team and the vocational program in providing him social, behavioral, and job skills. Pousima, known around campus as a "handyman," would help out wherever needed.

One of his favorite memories is applying for a job at Michael's. With support from his vocational instructor, **Teacher Sandy**, Pousima got hired and worked there for nine years. He emphasizes the special relationships he formed with SLDC teachers and therapists, crediting them for inspiring him to pursue his goals.

## PASSION TURNED CAREER

After graduation, Pousima found his passion as a DJ. Using skills from SLDC and past work experience, he launched his own business, working events like weddings, proms, and quinceañeras. Pousima cherishes being part of his customers' major life milestones.



"We're there to create memories. I'm thankful to my customers for allowing us to be part of their memories." His wife, **Margaret**, handles the business side while Pousima focuses on the music and events. They have been married for six years and have a five-year-old son.

## GIVING BACK TO SLDC

Reflecting on his journey, Pousima acknowledges SLDC's transformative role in his life. Grateful for the institution, he now volunteers and offers his DJ and emcee services at SLDC's events.

To him, this commitment is about ensuring future generations of students have the same transformative opportunities he had. Ready to pay it forward, Pousima remains grounded in his roots, dedicated to the institution that believed in him when others doubted.



## INSPIRED BY SERGIO'S JOURNEY?

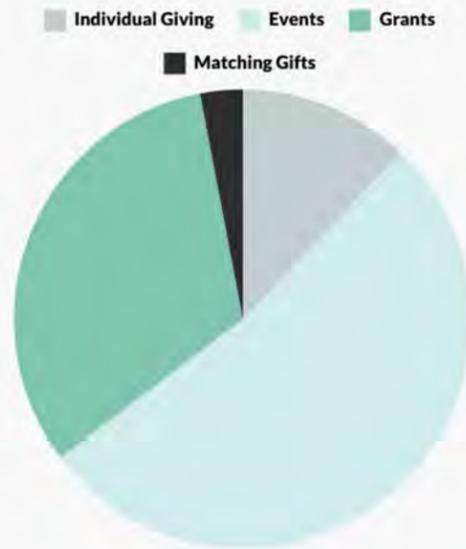
Share your own SLDC story with us and help inspire others! Email: [development@sldc.net](mailto:development@sldc.net).

# The Gifts You Made Counted!

## \$792,000

Total donations in fiscal year 2024

Over 600 donors supported SLDC in fiscal year 2024 (July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024). Consider the ripple effect of your generosity, it goes far beyond the success of one individual, ultimately impacting entire families and broader communities.



**\$252,000**

RECEIVED IN GRANTS FROM 10 CHARITABLE FOUNDATIONS!  
(MORE ON PAGE 12-13).



**299**

FIRST-TIME DONORS COLLECTIVELY DONATED \$284,050!



**\$24,688**

IN MATCHING GIFTS! A GREAT WAY TO DOUBLE (OR EVEN TRIPLE) YOUR GIFT.

### MEETING THE MOMENT

SLDC relies on district funding, insurance, and Regional Centers to provide a standard level of care. Your gifts allow SLDC to go **above and beyond** in delivering a life-changing experience to students and clients.

This year, **YOU** made possible:

- classroom smartboard upgrades
- the purchase of high-tech AAC devices (specialized iPads)
- enrichment activities (like art classes, a broadcasting studio, and field trips)
- adapted classroom supplies and equipment
- professional development and trainings for teachers and staff
- classroom and playground renovations
- expanded community outreach programs
- **and so much more!**

USE THE QR CODE TO GET A HEAD START ON YOUR 24-25 GIVING!



# Helping Hands Our Community In Action

Each year, our success is fueled by more than just fundraising. In the 23-24 academic year, **nearly 300 individual and corporate volunteers donated their time in support of SLDC.** We welcome volunteers year-round to assist with community events, school activities, campus projects, and other impactful initiatives. As we celebrate another year of growth and success, we are profoundly grateful to every volunteer who helped make our achievements possible.



### A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO OUR CORPORATE VOLUNTEER PARTNERS



“Working with SLDC students is healing, and it lights a passion inside that makes you want to change the world for them. Their bright smile when they see you, watching their progress, watching their enjoyment at the smallest things, truly warms my heart.”

– Current Parent and Volunteer, Stephanie Bautista (pictured right)

# Collaboration & Partnerships

In 2023–2024, we received support totaling over \$252,000 from generous foundation partners who recognize the investment potential in SLDC and have made the decision to fund emerging needs, along with enriching, innovative initiatives across campus.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Thanks to a generous grant of \$5,000 provided by **Ability Central**, along with another grant of \$5,000 from the **City of Temecula**, we were able to fully outfit our (2) Temecula therapy rooms to serve as sensory and tactile experience rooms for the clients participating in our early intervention program. This program has experienced rapid growth in the last year, and the additional resources made possible through these two grants have been imperative to helping us keep up with growing demand.



- The **Knights of Columbus Orange County Chapter Charities** generously answered the call when we embarked upon our 2023 Playground Renovation (phase 2). With a \$24,000 grant, they completely closed the gap on our \$45,000 fundraising goal! Over this past school year, we've successfully installed a gaga ball court, added a new adapted physical education/physical therapy structure, renovated our existing basketball courts, and completely resurfaced and painted our blacktop!



- A grant of \$15,000 from new partner **Intracorp Foundation** enabled SLDC to invest in the renovation of key clinical spaces and technological upgrades this past year. While our existing programs will remain in place, this new space allows SLDC to introduce new service lines that expand our ability to meet the evolving needs of individuals and their families.



- An unrestricted gift of \$7,500 provided by the **Miracle Foundation Fund** will be used to support critical programs and services at SLDC. This generous contribution allows us the flexibility to allocate resources where they are most needed, whether it be enhancing our classroom environments, providing essential therapeutic equipment, or expanding our community outreach efforts.



- Local partner, **Cox Charities**, expanded their support of our STEAM enrichment programming this year. With the support of their \$5,000 gift, we are launching Digital Voices in the 24–25 school year, an enriching digital journalism elective aimed at advancing communication skills while empowering our students through inclusive storytelling. Through assistive technology integration (funded by this grant), verbal and non-verbal students alike are empowered to express themselves effectively, allowing each individual to find their voice. This innovative program allows SLDC to fulfill its mission by addressing the urgent need to bridge the digital gap, preparing students of all abilities to thrive in our increasingly digital world.



- **RiteAid Healthy Futures** assisted SLDC in expanding our reach in the Inland Empire. Through their \$10,000 grant, we aimed to support and expand our early intervention program, which provides services and support to babies and toddlers (from birth to 3 years of age) with developmental delays or disabilities. Over the grant term, we successfully achieved our goal of a 30% increase in early developmental screenings within our target communities.



## REDUCING EDUCATIONAL DISPARITIES IN RIVERSIDE COUNTY

This year, SLDC received a grant of over \$140,000 from the Inland Empire Community Foundation's Riverside County Nonprofit Assistance Fund-- the largest one-time gift in SLDC's history and the first time the RCNPAF has supported SLDC.

The award supports SLDC's Temecula-based Early Intervention Program with a primary focus on providing timely and comprehensive developmental screenings, assessments, and therapy services to infants and toddlers in southwest Riverside County. By identifying developmental delays early, SLDC aims to reduce long-term impacts, especially those worsened by the pandemic. This one-year grant will increase screenings by 30%, serve 150 children, and build partnerships to expand interventions in early childhood education settings. We are deeply grateful to RCNPAF for supporting this vital work.



# Staff Excellence

At SLDC, our dedicated and expert staff enhance every aspect of the student experience. From personalized therapy plans to innovative educational programs and door-to-door transport to daily meals, our team goes above and beyond to ensure each student reaches their full potential.

## ANDREW BRUCE THOMAS AWARD

Named for an SLDC alumni and funded by his parents, **Janet and Gerald Thomas**, this annual award recognizes the contributions and dedication of staff who go above and beyond for students. Team members are encouraged to nominate colleagues who go beyond the call of duty, whether that's showing immense dedication to their role in service of students, meeting even the most challenging students at their level, or finding new ways to incorporate movement and hands-on learning into daily student routines. The internal recognition from their peers empowers staff to thrive in their roles and fosters a culture of support, camaraderie and positivity that resonates through in their work with students.

### CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2024 STAFF RECIPIENTS

- |                                           |                                        |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Lupita Avila, Paraprofessional            | Jonathan Kramer, Driver                |
| Leo Castillo, SLPA                        | Taylor Mason, Paraprofessional         |
| Fiona Gonzalez, Teacher                   | Becky Mosher, Clinical Admin Assistant |
| Crystal Higashimura, Paraprofessional     | Justin Reyes, Paraprofessional         |
| Samantha Horrocks, Philanthropy Associate | Leah Roepke, Paraprofessional          |
| Rolando Jimenez, Paraprofessional         | Monica Singh, Counselor                |



# Spotlight on Related Services

## ABOUT

Related services can help children with different abilities benefit from special education by providing **extra support in areas like communicating, moving, or participating in class.** These services are provided to students per their individualized education plan (IEP) at no charge to families.

The goal of related services is to help students access their education both in terms of curriculum and environment. Therapists work in parallel with teachers to help students participate in the curriculum, meet their educational goals, and take part in extracurricular activities. Related services can also help students work around challenges related to their disability by providing specialized tools and skills.

Our campus offers a robust clinical team with more than twenty licensed or credentialed therapists, including:

- Speech and Language Pathologists
- Occupational Therapists
- Counselors focusing on social-emotional and mental health
- Adapted Physical Education (APE) Specialists
- Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA)

“What motivates me is to get to know the students that we work with. Seeing their personality flourish, getting to know them, and finding unique ways to support them is very meaningful.”

**Fatima Guardado, M.S., BCBA**  
Supervisor of Mental & Behavioral Health Services





# SLDC Selected as 2024 Nonprofit of the Year

Of the over 190,000 nonprofits registered in the state of California, SLDC is one of only 117 honored by their Senators and Assemblymembers for their outstanding contributions to the communities they serve.

## A THRILLING RECOGNITION

We are proud to have been selected as a 2024 California Nonprofit of the Year by **Assemblywoman Sharon Quirk-Silva**, representing District 67. We believe that this recognition is a testament to the hard work, dedication, and passion of our entire community—our incredible staff, resilient students, and supportive families and partners. Being chosen as one of the standout nonprofits in California fills us with immense pride and gratitude.

A celebratory luncheon for awardees was held at the Capitol on California Nonprofits Day, which this year fell on June 5. During the occasion, **Dr. Adrienne Kessler**, CEO, and **Jessica Cobb**, Director of Philanthropy, had the opportunity to spend time with Assemblywoman Quirk-Silva and her staff, sharing stories of SLDC's impact and discussing future initiatives to further support individuals with special needs.

This acknowledgment from Assemblywoman Quirk-Silva and the California Association of Nonprofits (CalNonprofits) underscores the vital role nonprofits play in enriching our communities and driving economic growth. Nonprofits like SLDC are not just service providers; they are lifelines, offering essential support and opportunities to countless individuals and families.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to Assemblywoman Sharon Quirk-Silva for this honor and to all our supporters who make our work possible. This achievement belongs to every member of the SLDC community, and we look forward to continuing our journey of making a meaningful difference in the lives of those we serve.

# Did You See SLDC On the News?

SLDC was proud to be featured in two significant media segments this year, highlighting the incredible work being done to support students with special needs.

Spectrum News 1 SoCal's **Carmen Valencia** visited our campus to explore the arts and crafts room, where she witnessed the heartwarming bond between **Teacher Marita** and her student, **Gigi**. Over the past three years, Marita has been a mentor and friend to Gigi, showcasing the power of relationships in special education. During the visit, CEO **Dr. Adrienne Kessler** emphasized the urgent need for more affordable and accessible special education and affirmed SLDC's commitment to providing support, resources, and equal opportunities for students of all abilities.

Additionally, in celebration of National Down Syndrome Awareness Month, SLDC was featured on NBC4's California Live. Hosted by **Amber Pfister**, the segment shined a spotlight on the transformative impact of our programs for students with Down Syndrome. Dr. Kessler and Gigi, now a sophomore, discussed the importance of empowering students to reach their full potential, further demonstrating SLDC's dedication to the special needs community.



**THANK YOU TO NBC 4'S CALIFORNIA LIVE AND SPETRUM NEWS 1 FOR SPOTLIGHTING THE IMPACT OF ORGANIZATIONS LIKE SLDC!**

## ADVOCACY

In July 2023, SLDC CEO **Dr. Adrienne Kessler** was named board president for the **California Association for Private Special Education Schools (CAPSES)**, which is focused on local and state-level advocacy with representatives who inform and shape both policy and legislation.

"I am incredibly proud of how this role has amplified our ability to advocate for equitable education and resources for all students. The connections we've built with state leaders and policymakers have directly aligned with SLDC's mission, allowing us to drive forward key initiatives that expand access and improve outcomes for our students. It's been a privilege to lead these efforts, and I am excited to continue advocating for policies that benefit both SLDC and the broader special needs community."



**Adrienne Kessler, Ed.D., BCBA**

# Community Events With Purpose



## 2024 WALK YOUR WAY

SLDC's largest community event of the year, Walk Your Way, took place on April 7th, 2024. This inclusive event for all abilities invited friends and families on a 1-mile walk around Knott's Berry Farm.

This year's Walk welcomed a remarkable **547 participants**, comprised of walkers, dancers, vendors, sponsors, and volunteers. Together, our community showed up to celebrate all abilities, raising an impressive **\$68,154**. The success of this year's walk is attributed to the commitment of our community who formed fundraising teams to raise money for our school and therapy programs.

During the walk, participants enjoyed performances from local dance troops, meet-and-greets with the Peanuts Gang, and a resource fair which provided valuable information to the special needs community.



## VIP NIGHT 2023

On September 17, 2023, we hosted our annual VIP Night at the beautiful Balboa Bay Resort. Guests enjoyed craft cocktails, a gourmet dinner buffet, and live and silent auctions. Heartfelt testimonials from parents added a personal touch, uniting everyone in support of our mission. The dedication of our incredible community was on full display, as together we raised **\$127,389** to benefit SLDC's students, clients, and programs.



## FOR THE LOVE OF SLDC

Held on September 18, 2023, at the gorgeous Monarch Beach Golf Links in Dana Point, our annual Dick Gorrie Memorial Golf Tournament offered over 160 golfers a perfect day of play with stunning ocean views as their backdrop. After a day of friendly competition, participants enjoyed a BBQ dinner, raffles, and a silent auction. Thanks to the generosity of everyone involved, the event raised an impressive **\$183,351** in support of SLDC!



## GOING ALL-IN FOR A GOOD CAUSE

During the 2023-2024 fundraising season, two exciting poker tournaments took place, hosted by Board members Tom Gieser and Howard Platte at the Knights of Columbus Kass Hall. Guests enjoyed an exhilarating evening of cards, and the big winner of the night was SLDC! Thanks to everyone who went all-in for SLDC, these tournaments raised nearly **\$45,000** collectively. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Tom, Howard, and all who participated!

## ARE YOU RECEIVING OUR EVENT INVITATIONS?

If not, email [development@sldc.net](mailto:development@sldc.net) so we can add you to the list!

# Celebrating Milestones

At the heart of SLDC's impact is fun! At every stage of their academic journey, we provide students with opportunities to participate in milestone events, field trips, and extracurricular activities. We strive to ensure that no one misses out on these essential parts of the student experience.

## GRADUATION

This past June, SLDC proudly celebrated the achievements of our 8th graders, high school graduates, and Adult Transition graduates in a series of memorable ceremonies. Families gathered to support our graduates, who delivered inspiring speeches with the assistance of our skilled speech therapists and AAC devices. The event was made even more special with a special appearance by **Buena Park Mayor Susan Sonne**, who helped us honor the hard work and dedication of our students.

10

High School  
Graduates

10

Transition  
Graduates



## PROM

On April 27th, 2024, students traveled back in time for an unforgettable night of nostalgia with a 90s-themed prom! From iconic fashion to throwback hits, the event was a blast from the past for our 9th - 12th graders and Transition students. This night of neon colors, cassette tapes, and classic 90s vibes was truly one to remember!



## SENIOR DITCH DAY

Skipping class never looked so cool! On May 31st, 2024 our upcoming graduates celebrated their Senior Ditch Day with a fun-filled adventure at Camelot Golfland! From miniature golf, to bumper boats, to arcade games, the Class of 2024 made the most of their well-deserved day off campus. It was a memorable day with friends that the seniors will cherish forever!



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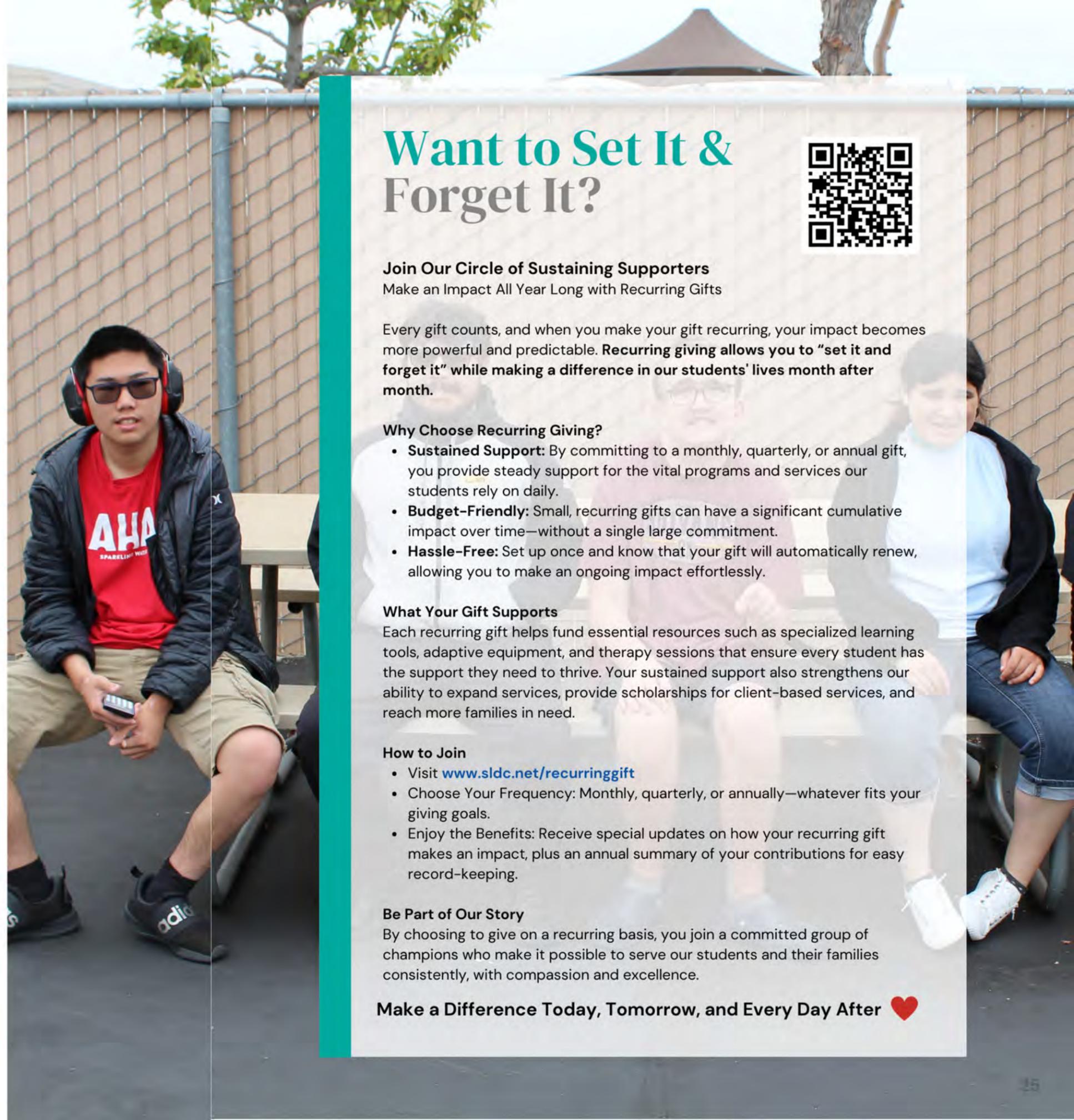
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