



A Message From Stephanie Clay

Dear friends,

My name is Stephanie Clay. I am the director of the Special Stars Inc NFP program. I was introduced to the dance world at age four. 45 years later, I am still a very large part of the dance world. After finishing school, I began teaching dance classes to students of all ages as well as performing professionally. August of 2003, I opened my own dance studio, Stephanie's Academy of Dance. In 2004, we adopted our son.

As the dance world continued evolving, I noticed a rising interest in dance classes being requested for children with Special Needs and learning differences. I began to volunteer and teach free Ballet classes at GiGi's Playhouse, a Down Syndrome awareness center in Naperville. In 2014, I created a Sensory Play and Dance Therapy Program. This program grew very quickly, and it became apparent that our community was in desperate need of this type of program not only for the students, but for their families. In 2016, I began creating more classes, I became certified in teaching dance, music, and movement for those with Special Needs and learning differences, and created our Special Stars program. Very quickly the Special Stars program grew. I was approached by a mother of a dancer, who happens to be a therapist that specializes in Early Intervention and she asked me if I would be willing to create something for this population and their families. These classes became the Special Stars Playgroup. The playgroup class filled within 24 hours. Once again, the need for these classes grew and we decided to begin the process of turning Special Stars into a charity. In August 2017, Special Stars became a 501c3 non for-profit charity. Special Stars Inc NFP currently offers eight special needs dance classes weekly, each a different level of functionality. We have given many opportunities for our students to shine in the classroom, on stage, in their communities, make friendships, and progress in meeting their individual goals in their lives.

The Special Stars program has made a positive impact on our families as well as typically developing students. We have created a safe inclusive environment for families to come and enjoy themselves along with build relationships with other families. The Special Stars program also impacts the lives of typically developing students in our community. All our volunteers are students of Stephanie's Academy of Dance and dedicate their time assisting the Special Stars students during their weekly classes, performances, dance competitions, and any outings we are invited to attend. These volunteers build great friendships with our Special Stars students by helping with building social skills and learning how to make friends. Our program also offers higher functioning students with Special Needs the opportunity to help other Special Needs students that require more assistance. This builds great self-esteem and pride for those higher functioning students.

There is such joy in watching our students blossom and their families connect with one another. We appreciate your continued support of our efforts in bettering the lives of those with Special Needs and learning differences.

Mission Statement

To provide therapeutic movement through physical activity while creating an inclusive environment for those with physical, cognitive and social differences.

Board Of Directors

Tania Pope SLP - President

Tania Pope is a Licensed Speech and Language Pathologist for 20 years. She holds a certificate of Early Intervention Specialist through the State of Illinois. She received her Bachelor's degree in Communication Disorders in 1998 and A Master's degree in Speech and Language Pathology in 2000. She serves as the Board President of Special Stars and a volunteer therapist for the Special Stars Program.

Tania has five children. She has been a licensed foster parent and adopted two children with special needs. Tania became involved with the Special Stars Program through her children. Through her field experience, she has found the relationship between motor skills and social skill development is linked. The use of movement and music to build these skills has made a significant impact on her children's' development of their social skills. The opportunities her children have had through Special Stars to perform their skills in the community with their peers has helped build confidence and purpose that works in conjunction with other therapies. The specialized classes developed for those with special needs and symbiotic relationship with typical peers is what makes Special Stars unique. Special Stars has provided a community for the entire family and a place for those of all age levels to have a sense of belonging and purpose. It is her honor to serve in this position bringing these opportunities to her community.

Christine Prentiss - Treasurer

Christine has been with MetLife for over 20 years. Most recently, she spent 4 years as a Senior Implementation Leader for both Core and Voluntary Products. Prior to Implementation, Christine spent 12 years supporting both the Dallas and Houston offices as an MIB/1000+ (Legacy) Client Service Consultant. Christine also come to us with experience in the VB-GUL unit support billing and eligibility.

Sandra Garcia - Secretary

Sandy Garcia maintains the agenda and minutes of all meetings. Sandy also serves as the Vice President for the West Aurora High School PTSO. She previously served on the Resource Council for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southern Kane and Kendall counties. Sandy has been employed at Nicor Gas since 1998. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Accounting and Business Information Systems from Illinois State University. She received her MBA from Aurora University. Sandy resides with her husband and three children in Aurora.



Board Members

Josephine Feltes Starke

Josephine is a graduate from Northern Illinois University class of 1983. Josephine holds a BA in Communication Studies with a minor in Women's Studies. She was employed as a proofreader with Peat Marwick in Chicago, Illinois and uses those skills to enhance the Special Stars grant writing process.

In 1991, Josephine began working for Family Counseling Services in Aurora, Illinois. While at the Family Counseling Services, Josephine wrote grants, supervised programs as the agency went through national accreditation. Josephine finished her time at Family Counseling Services in 1998 and formed Accreditation Consulting Services. She consulted with non for profit agencies as they went through the accreditation process. Josephine became the Director of Community Life at New England Congregational Church in Aurora Illinois in 2002. She organized new programming for the church, such as Film Series, Winter Dinners, women's Circle of Friends Breakfasts. Josephine's connections with the community helps build awareness, acceptance, and expand our reach. Josephine decided to continue her education at Waubensee Community College to be certified in Therapeutic Massage. After receiving certification in 2015, Josephine opened Starke Bodyworks where she currently serves as a licensed massage therapist.

Josephine is a mother of a 30-year-old daughter, Adrienne, diagnosed with Turners Syndrome and Autism. Adrienne lives at home with her parents, who have acted as advocates for her medical, insurance, educational, financial, recreational and housing needs her entire life.

Susan Amundsen M.Ed. BCBA

Susie Amundsen is a mom of two adopted girls, one with special needs. In 2005, she graduated with her undergraduate degree in Elementary Education along with a graduate degree in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Missouri. Susie graduated from Southern Illinois University in 2017 with a certificate in Behavior Analysis. She began her career as a teacher in Missouri and Texas. After a move back to Illinois, Susie became a Developmental Therapist for the Early Intervention Program. In 2018, she became a Board Certified Behavior Analyst. Susie has worked with in clinic and home based therapies aiding children from birth-18. Susie currently works as a Behavior Therapist in Early Intervention.

Susie was introduced to Special Stars Inc NFP when her daughter was 4 years old, and has been involved since. Currently, she helps support Special Stars play groups and dance classes.

Susie currently co-directs the Awana Cubbie program at church. Susie is also a member of the special needs ministry there.



Special Stars, Inc NFP is a therapist supported program that uses evidence based practices commonly used in sensory integration; ABA therapy, kinesiology and movement safety. These practices aid in supporting five areas of development and ultimately assist in reaching developmental goals in the areas of: Cognitive, Social & Emotional, Speech & Language, Fine Motor, and Gross Motor.

Classes Offered

Early Intervention

Sensory Gym Play, Play Group Tumbling, and Parent & Me Play Group

Classes for children of any ability, ages 2-5. Perfect for children in Early Intervention or Early Childhood programs. Children with disabilities, siblings, or any child looking for fun with music & movement.

Special Stars 1

For ages 6 through adult. This class offers 1:1 support for those with more significant needs. This class works on stretching, gross motor skills and movement with music.

Special Stars 2

For those with higher levels of independence that enjoy the stage and performing. 1:1 support available on request. Includes 2-3 performances & 2 local competitions.

Special Stars 3

For those that are ready to be given more complex combinations, steps, & choreography. This class is taught by Stephanie & will NOT be therapist supported or have volunteer helpers.

Special Stars Tap

For those with higher levels of independence. 1:1 support available on request. Includes performance in the annual recital.

Highlights

Danced at the Chicago Bulls Game, featured guests and recipients for Inside Chicago Dance Youth Summit, Dupree Dance Competition, Tribute Talent Competition, Specials Stars Inc NFP annual Talent Show, Stephanie's Academy of Dance annual recital, featured guests at The Dynasty show case, Kane County Cougars Game, guest performers at Fox Chase Elementary School's Multi Cultural Night. Guest performers at Bella Moxi dance convention's closing ceremonies.



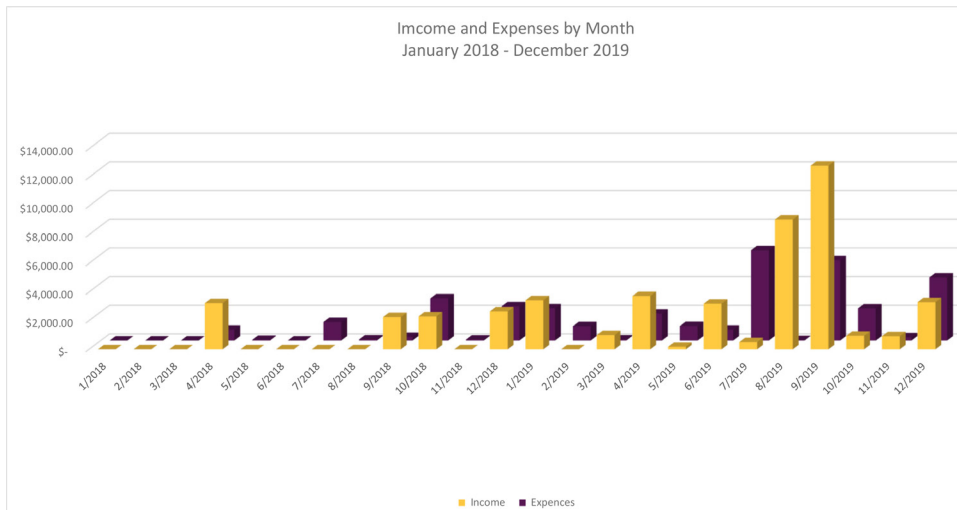
Grants & Donations

Specials Stars Inc NFP is recognized as a 501c3 organization by the Internal Revenue Service and all donations are tax deductible.

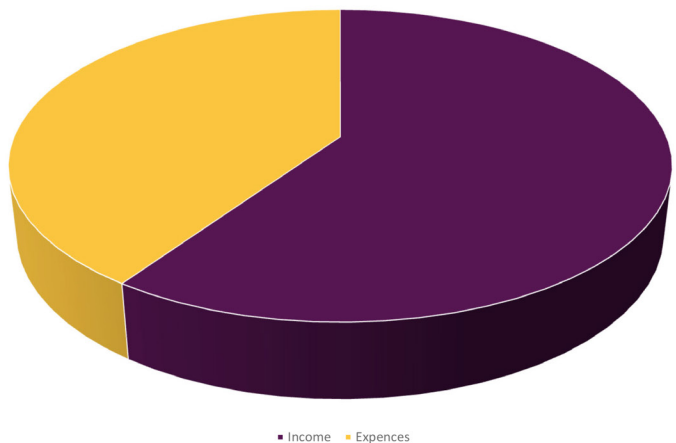
In 2018, Special Stars received \$10,429.00 in direct public support. Expenses for 2018 were \$196.00.

In 2019, Special Stars received over \$43,507.49 in grants, continued support from individuals, businesses, and participants of the program. Expenses, including rent, during 2019 totaled \$24,767.63.

Special Stars is very proud of their Sensory Gym. They received a \$10,000.00 grant from the Community Foundation Of The Fox River Valley to help build this gym. The manufacturer, Fun Factory Sensory Gym made Special Stars Inc NFP their promotional partner. This enabled Fun Factory to deliver and install the gym (a cost of \$7,000.00) free of charge to Special Stars.



Income Summary
January 2018 - December 2019



Donors

AC'S Pub
Allison Sanders
Amy's Weighted Blankets
Annette Sanders and Tom David
Aspen Lane Wine Company
Aurora Earthmover Credit Union
Aurora Sunrise Rotary
Batavia Sports Clips
Bella Moxi Dance Convention
Bryan Gibson
Chicago Wolves
Chrisann Ramos
Colbie Gordon
Color Street Nail Products / Kari Kraber
Community Foundation
Debbie Swanson
Debra Beach
Dolan & Murphy
Donna Cheeks
DoTera Oils
Double Good Popcorn Company
Dr. Kim Young DDS.
Dr. Tom and Dode Brooks
Face Book
Fox Valley Veterinary Clinic
Francesca's Passaggio
Fun Factory Sensory Gym
Graz Plumbing
Great Clips
Hillgoth

Hope's Blooms & Rustic Creations
Inaside Chicago Dance
James Clay
Jessica Flores
Jiffy Lube
Jim Chuporak
Jo Anna Ramos
Joanne Leibold
Joe Musiel
John McKee
John Ramos
Karen Rogers
Kelly Caraynoff
Kelly Wilson
LaMonica Family
Longaberger Baskets
Lou Maldinatis
Lynn & Bill Slavik
Marianne Aromin - 31 Bags
Melody Polanec
Mequeeta Jones
Moxie Dance
Navistar
Nicole McPherson
Oberweis Dairy
O'Donnell Family
Old Second Bank
On The Edge Salon
Pampered Chef
Panera Bread
Paramount Arts Center

Patti Vickerman
Pilmer Family
Pizzanos
Portillos
Potbelly sandwich shop
Pure Health
Rick & Josie Starke
Ron Westphal Chevrolet
Rosin Eye Care
Rotary
Rudny Family
Salon 213
Seidleman Scharbert Memorial Fund
Shed Waxing Spa
Skyjack
SL Mott
Small Cakes
Spartan House
Sports Clips
Stephanie Clay
Susie Petkus
Target
Tech Soup - Quick Books Non Profit Edition
Tiffany Calloway
Tinseltown Movie Theater
Tom Coogan
Tommy Santoyo
Tracy Lafaire
Walmart

Inkind Donations

Aurora Central Catholic High School
Beti Films
Brinda Family
Chris Evans
Chrisann Ramos
Christine Brandenburg
Cristina Ochoa
Dan Pope
Dupree Dance Competition
Emma Pilmer
Emmy Huebner
Father Ethridge
Geers Family
Gordon Family
Jen Knoll
John Ramos
Kaitlyn & Kelly LaMonica

Kaitlyn Prentiss
Kari Anderson
Kelly Caraynoff
Lexi Bunce Design
Margaret Byrne
Nedrow Decorating
Phil Noll
Premier Printing & Mailing
Representative Stephanie Kifowit
Rick Huber
Robert Jones
Stevens Family
Susie & Steven Amundsen
Tania Pope
The Photographic Edge
Tribute Talent Dance Competition
Ty Jones

Beneficiary

Special Stars never turns away a family regardless of financial ability or the special need their child may have. They are able to serve a multitude of disabilities with grace, love, respect, and inclusion.

Currently, Special Stars serves over 100 families in Kane, Kendall, Will, and Dupage counties. Students range in ages from 0 to 38 years old. Special Stars also provides parent / family support outside of classes. The programs therapists, Tania Pope and Susie Amundsen, along with program director, Stephanie Clay, have attended student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting at their schools to help as support to parents, assist the students school team in creating accommodations to provide success in school. Tania, Susie, and Stephanie also support their Special Stars families in finding doctors, specialists, therapies, and other various avenues special needs families need to function successfully every day. Special Stars has Social

Workers within the community that volunteer their time to assist families with the many aspects of having a child with special needs.

Success Stories

We have seen our students progress from not being able to come into a classroom without mom or dad; to taking class independently, getting up on a stage and performing in front of a crowd. We have witnessed friendships blossom. Many of our students have trouble making friends. Now the students in their classes, their volunteers have become their friends. These volunteers have gone to assist their Special Stars in a talent show at their school, attended a birthday party, and being able to say hello while passing in the hallways at school. These situations are life changing for our Special Stars. Special Needs children want to be treated like everyone else and experience the same things as everyone else. The Special Stars program creates the bridge to make this happen in their lives. Students that begin with us at age 2 have a place to grow, dance, and play through their adulthood. Our dream is to be able to offer all of our programs free of charge to all families. With the continued support of our community, businesses, individual donors, and upcoming grants, we look forward to making this happen. Special Stars Inc NFP continues to build programs to help support their community. They are creating programs that take place during the day for the pre school aged children, and planning events during the summer to help incorporate more sensory play. Special Stars is more than just a program with dance, music, and movement for those with special needs and learning differences. We are a village. Parents typically don't have dreams of becoming a part of our village when starting a family, but when their lives take an unexpected turn into becoming a special needs family, our village is there for them for eternity.

The Special Stars program has had such a positive impact on my daughter. She has grown so much with their help and it makes me so incredibly happy that she can be included and accepted somewhere without me having to make excuses for her if she may be having a tough day. Just all around- an amazing program that my family is blessed to be a part of.

Allison Sanders



Special Stars has been life changing for our 7 year old daughter, Avery! Avery is a Level 1 autistic child who participates in 4 classes at Stephanie's Dance Academy. We enrolled her a little over a year ago mainly to help her with new social situations. She has high anxiety with new things and change of any kind. She took an interest in music and we thought dance would be a nice addition to her weekly routine. With the support of her speech therapist, Avery began a weekly Special Stars class with other kids with various special needs.

As a parent, we were blown away with the amount of support and attention given to each child. It was a warm and welcoming place from the moment Avery walked in the door. She was scared at first and took several sessions to warm up, but boy did she ever warm up! Within four months of starting, she danced a solo at the Special Stars Talent Show. She has participated in several performances over the past year including a performance at the Chicago Bulls game. She has truly blossomed before our eyes! She loves the stage and now loves having an audience. She now dances in the Special Stars Tap and does Acro/Gymnastics. She looks forward to every class at Stephanie's Dance Academy.

I truly believe her experience with the Special Stars has helped her open up to so many others experiences. She is more social at school, family gatherings, and new situations. She is dancing everywhere! We couldn't be happier with her progress. The people involved with the Special Stars program go above and beyond for these kids. We are so grateful Avery is a part of this amazing program.

Nicole & Brian McPherson

Seriously can't even describe how excited and relieved I am to have found Stephanie's Academy of Dance in Montgomery, home of Special Stars. To anyone with kids with special needs, this is the most supportive, professional, well- staffed (with people who truly "get it") place I've seen. This will fill so many needs for our family!! Socialization with kids of all ability levels, mom comradely, resources, real dance instruction. Absolutely blown away! Tony was so nervous he barely participated in the first class (btw....at least 15 + kids....because they can handle it and it's that good!) but he can't stop talking about going back and how many new friends he has. Love seeing him feel good about himself and I know this place will celebrate him! After an insane week, this was God speaking to me for the millionth time!

Jessica Mueller



How To Support Us

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Special Stars Facebook Page

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