Together We’re Better

It’s a new day for Little City and Countryside Association with exciting possibilities and a future that’s brighter than ever.

Recently, after more than a year of exploration and discussions, Countryside Association for People with Disabilities and Little City became one organization – one family. In the short time since the merger was finalized, we’re on track to creating a stronger, more dynamic and sustainable community for people with autism and other intellectual and developmental disabilities, and their families.

Expanding an already talented and caring staff, and adding bright and enthusiastic members to the Little City board has had a positive impact on everyone involved. There is no doubt the goal of being the leader in providing the best possible options and opportunities will exceed all expectations.

“It marks the beginning of something new and exciting, building a future filled with the capacity for greater resilience and sustainability in the face of a dramatically changing landscape,” stated Shawn Jeffers, Executive Director of Little City. “The merger integration process brings with it a natural opportunity to reevaluate – and even improve – our ability to focus on what is most important: bringing life enrichment and fulfillment to children and adults with disabilities and their families.”

Countryside brings a focus on home-based services and a track record in day programming and employment services. Because of the merger, those programs can grow and receive extra support as we move forward together.

“With significant governmental and legislative challenges, joining forces will increase the organization’s ability to efficiently and effectively continue to serve the most vulnerable ones in our society,” said Howard Reicheneker, former interim Executive Director of Countryside Association and now part of the financial team at Little City. “Their generosity sparked a record-setting fundraising effort that brought us to this proud, ground-breaking day for the third home, which will be named ‘The Coleman Foundation Home’.”

The Coleman Foundation supports various programs aimed at helping individuals with developmental disabilities experience a higher quality of life and increased self-determination.

“We are very excited to be part of helping Little City continue to build a brighter future for children with autism,” said Rosa Berardi, Program Officer, The Coleman Foundation. “We were also quite impressed at the speed of which they were able to raise the funds to match our grant.”

Made up of different colors, textures and threads, the individual elements of a tapestry are not impactful or dramatic, but when woven together, they create something extraordinary and purposeful. Like a tapestry, the lives and individual stories of those touched by the Little City mission create something moving and special.
Executive Director’s Corner

Dear Friends,

When an aligned vision and mission merges with talent and teamwork, the results create rewards that can be held dear as well as high. There are many important examples of late, the first being the merger with Countryside Association.

After more than a year of discussions and anticipation, our efforts are now focused on the goal of creating a leading human services organization uniquely positioned to maintain and sustain programs and services for individuals with autism and other intellectual and developmental disabilities.

I want to express my deepest appreciation to everyone who made this exciting future a reality. We will strive to inspire, innovate, advocate and pursue success with passion and purpose, and to create hope, happiness and optimism for individuals with disabilities and their families.

The next example is, literally, groundbreaking news. Several years ago, in order to be in the strongest position possible to serve the ever-expanding population of children with autism, Little City took a proactive stance and began planning the Duffey Family Children’s Village consisting of six homes. Two are already completed and occupied. Thanks to a grant from The Coleman Foundation, which sparked a record-setting fundraising effort, the third home recently broke ground and will be called ‘The Coleman Foundation Home.’ Our fourth home, ‘Mario’s Home,’ will be breaking ground in the very near future.

On a different home front, several months ago Little City was approached by Illinois Department of Children and Family Services and asked to help the agency by accommodating additional DCFS funded youth. They came to us because of our leadership position in the industry and they respected our ability to perform at the highest level. Our strong relationship with DCFS and willingness to help not only allowed us to expand our Children’s Group Homes program, we were also able to realize additional benefits that will enhance the entire Little City community.

Lastly, there are rewards that acknowledge inspired thinking and successful results: prestigious marketing awards. These are the result of yet another kind of merger, one of creativity, commitment and collaboration. Little City was recently flooded with numerous honors, including the most coveted and distinguished “Best in Show” prize recognizing overall excellence in creative and marketing innovation, and the Past Presidents’ Award at the 2016 Tempo Awards Ceremony in Chicago. There was global recognition, as well, from The Hermes Creative Awards, an international competition that recognizes talent that exceeds a high standard of excellence. From over 6,000 entries, Little City’s work was acknowledged with a Platinum award and two Gold awards.

With the many challenges that face our industry and test our fortitude each and every day, I am sure you share my enthusiasm and pride at seeing our present and future looking so bright.

With deep appreciation,

Shawn E. Jeffers
Executive Director

News from Around the City

Special Olympians Win Big

For Ciara Craig, a gold medal is not a symbol of some ultimate achievement, but a reminder she can do more than she did before with hard work and determination.

Craig was one of 27 Little City athletes who competed in the Illinois Special Olympics last June and helped earn a combined 42 medals spanning multiple events. It was her gold medal in powerlifting that already has her pushing herself to new heights.

“I’ve been competing in Special Olympics since I was a little girl and I love that I get to try new goals,” Ciara said. “Next year I would like to get to 80 pounds on the bench press.”

Craig also delivered the Special Olympics oath in front of all the participants and attendees during the opening ceremony - “Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt.” While she was nervous, she knew she could do it.

It’s that confidence and hard work that coach Tim Lahart said is contagious among the athletes he trains. Lahart, fitness and recreation director at Little City, has been taking athletes to the Special Olympics for seven years.

He said each year keeps getting better and the athletes always want to be pushed to their best abilities.

“We expect our athletes will do well and that’s how we prepare,” Tim said. “There is a wide spectrum of abilities and it is fascinating to work with athletes at different levels and see them reach new goals.”

Some athletes like Kevin Mastin are at the top of their sport. Kevin earned a silver medal in the most advanced powerlifting stage with a deadlift of 435 pounds. Others may not have medaled, but still posted personal bests.

“Both accomplishments are just as significant,” Tim said. “I love seeing their reactions when they do well.”

Ciara Craig proudly wears her gold medal she won in powerlifting.
City. “The Integration process could take up to a year to complete. Teams are working to determine the best way to integrate programs that overlap and to expand the capacity of programs unique to each organization.”

Since the Countryside Shirley Road location has been sold, there were a number of properties under consideration that met the needs of the newly merged organization. One location in particular meets all of the requirements and acquiring the building is now in its final stages. Details will be provided when the transaction becomes official.

Every effort will be made to provide regular communications to keep you informed and engaged. Should you wish to reach out, we have created a special email address for your convenience to ask questions, comment or request information: LaQuest@littlecity.org. LaQuest will soon be expanded as a dedicated page on our Website where you will be able to find program and staffing updates, issues that arise, as well as the progress of the merger integration.

Merger FAQ’s

Why did Little City and Countryside Association decide to merge?
Both organizations believed there was a unique opportunity to build a future together filled with the capacity for greater resilience and sustainability in the face of a dramatically changing landscape. The goal is to increase our ability to focus on what is most important: bringing life enrichment and fulfillment to children and adults with disabilities, and their families.

What does this mean for my loved one who receives services from Little City or Countryside?
Nothing will change in the daily routine for our clients. As we work toward full integration, more exciting opportunities will become available. As always, it will be up to you and your loved one to decide which programs to participate in.

What will the name be?
Little City will remain the primary name of the organization. The Countryside name will live on in forms yet to be determined.

How can I make donations to the new organization?
Countryside will continue to collect donations as they always have. For now, nothing has changed except that your generous donations will mean more than ever and go further than ever in continuing to support the programs you cared about. Ed Hockfield, Chief Development Officer at Little City, heads up our fundraising team and will be your primary contact moving forward. Feel free to contact him at 847-221-7880 or ehockfield@littlecity.org.

For the Aikins, It’s Always Family First

For 40 years, Jeff Aikin has called Little City home. He has friends, a job, receives training and loves to perform. He even does a pretty mean imitation of Prince.

In addition to his Little City family, Jeff has his mother Marti, his sisters Sherry and Cindy and his big brother John “Jay.” When I first met with John L. Aikin, the patriarch of the family and longtime donor to Little City, he told me his philosophy on life is “family first.” His strong love of family guides his involvement in Jeff’s life at Little City and extends to all of his children, grandchildren and extended family.

When meeting “Big John,” I instantly admired him for his commitment to hard work, responsibility and love of family. I was honored when he shared with me his estate plans and that he had included Little City in those plans.

“I want to make sure that the support I have given to Little City over the years continues when I am no longer here to personally write the check.” John said, adding his oldest son Jay was originally going to make donations on his behalf.

However, he realized that responsibility was an additional burden on his oldest son. Through our many conversations, John learned about other options that could best carry out his wishes for his loved ones and charitable interest in Little City.

“I have decided to specifically name Little City as a one of the beneficiaries of my will with instructions to continue making an annual gift every year to Little City as if I were still here making the gift myself,” John said. “In the end, by removing the responsibility from Jay and stating my specific distribution terms clearly in my will, I was really keeping family first.”

India Alexis Ehioba, MNA, CFRE, Senior Philanthropy Officer and Director of Planned Giving, is an experienced, highly credentialed gift advisor. The Donor’s Corner is a regular column providing helpful information on various gift options to Little City. You can contact India directly at 847-221-7809 or iehioba@littlecity.org with your questions and to discuss your personal interest in supporting Little City.
Upcoming Events

Friday, August 26, 2016
Soldier Field Stadium | Chicago, Illinois

Register at www.rockthenight5k.com

The Rock the Night event features a 5k course and a rocking after-party with live music, a barbecue dinner, and craft beer from Bell’s Brewery! Participants receive an award-winning goodie bag, which is collected at packet pick up on the day of the event. Funds raised from this event to benefit Little City.

Saturday, October 22, 2016
The Drake Hotel | Chicago, Illinois

You are invited to attend Little City’s Annual Dinner, the “Legacies Gala.” This year, we are delighted to honor Illinois Secretary of State Jesse White, and Julie Bell and The Bell Family.

Join us for an evening of dinner and dancing as we celebrate 57 years of dedication in supporting children and adults with autism and other intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Register today at www.littlecity.org/gala