

Inclusive

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Isaac (second from left) and his peers work on a writing assignment in their combined first and second grade classroom.

Creating a Culture of Inclusion at Allendale Christian

When Melanie first visited CLC Network partner Allendale Christian School (Allendale, MI), she thought it was too good to be true. After sending her son to three different schooling environments over the past several years, Melanie was hesitant to send her eight-year-old son Isaac to a non-public school. However, a visit to the school and a partnership fueled by CLC Network donors changed her perspective and gave her confidence. She was surprised by the calm, accepting environment and openness between students and teachers. Melanie left the visit hopeful she had found a place of belonging for her son.

Now in his first year at Allendale Christian, Isaac is blossoming in ways Melanie never imagined. He is growing socially and academically in his second-grade classroom. "Isaac is set up for success," shared Melanie. "Teachers make an effort to come alongside him—but they do this for every student." Isaac's teachers have an openness to inclusion and frequently ask, "What can I do to make this work?"

Students of all ages are quick to work and play with Isaac. Recently, Isaac tried to open a door before discovering it was locked. A fellow classmate came up to him, placed his arm around him, and said, "Let's go use another door." Students accept Isaac for who he is. "At the beginning of the year, we conducted a sensitivity training with his class to help children understand him better," said

Melanie. The students learned examples of things he is sensitive to, such as buzzing lights, sounds, temperatures, textures, and social situations.

When Isaac's teacher, Julie Van Oordt, commented to parents of Isaac's peers that their son or daughter worked well with Isaac, they responded that their kids did not see him as any different than their typically-developing peers. "Kids are eager to read with him, practice spelling together, and partner with him on activities and assignments," said Julie. Equipped with an understanding of Isaac, they accept him as a fellow image bearer of God and a classmate.

"Kids are eager to read with [Isaac], practice spelling together, and partner with him on activities and assignments."

Isaac is growing in his new environment, too. He is learning generosity and selflessness. He recently created a Minecraft figurine for one of his friends, demonstrating that he is thinking about others. "It's not typical for him to develop a connection with those outside his immediate family, so this was a big deal for Isaac," said Melanie. He will tell you that his favorite parts of school are spending time in the computer lab and playing outside in the

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Creating a Culture of Inclusion at Allendale Christian

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school's woods, where he can often be found at recess playing Star Wars and making forts with friends.

Isaac has found a place of belonging at Allendale Christian. When visiting the school, talking with school staff, or looking at the school's budget, it is obvious that Allendale Christian has a commitment to creating places of belonging for every student — a commitment strengthened through their partnership with CLC Network. "When you walk down our hallways, you can tell that everyone has a place in our student body," said Rachel Seinen, ACS student support services director. "We're all different — that's just how we roll."

"Because of donor contributions, we can respond to the needs and vision of Allendale Christian, and help them create a culture that celebrates and supports students with diverse abilities."

In a letter to families, principal Brian Koetje expressed, "Jesus never said, 'Let the typical or average children come.' Instead He said, 'Let the little children come to me.' This was a clear statement from God that the children

in the body of Christ belong, regardless of ability or disability. The ACS community desires to represent the diversity in the body of Christ as much as we can." Brian shared in this letter that the body of Christ at ACS includes students with attention, cognitive, emotional, and physical differences — each of these students is an essential part of making the body of Christ complete.

Brian credits CLC Network with helping the school create this culture of inclusion for all students. "CLC Network has been an invaluable partner and teammate in helping us make decisions to care for all students," said Brian. "This partnership makes inclusion doable." CLC Network director of school services, Becky Tubergen, makes monthly visits to the school to provide Brian, Rachel, and general education teachers with insight, tools, and resources, along with professional development accountability. Rachel shared, "CLC Network is the behind-the-scenes support staff — providing resources, workshops and feedback. It's vital to be part of a bigger team with vast experience and knowledge."

The intentionality of including students of all abilities at Allendale Christian has created an environment where families are enriched by the care displayed at the school. "God has completely blessed us through ACS," said Melanie. "Our faith has changed." The family's recent involvement at the school has given them an example of the value of community and what it means to love and accept one another.

The naturalness of inclusion and ease of acceptance at ACS is a testament to the impact of CLC Network donor's gifts and advocacy. "Because of donor contributions, we can respond to the needs and vision of Allendale Christian, and help them create a culture that celebrates and supports students with diverse abilities," said Elizabeth Lucas Dombrowski, CLC Network executive director. "We are delighted to see the community that has taken shape at ACS and look forward to the ways it will continue to grow."



Blessed by Inclusion

Dear Friends:

I have been blessed by several wonderful experiences lately. In March, I watched more than 200 students and alumni from the Grand Rapids and surrounding area raise hands and sing "Friends are Friends Forever" at the Connections Celebration. At that moment, I was witness to an inclusive community of the kind that I am sure is representative of the body of Christ, and the kind that we strive—backed by our community of donors—to grow and develop across the country.

Glimpses of true community are demonstrated at other CLC Network events, too: the Auction, the Golf Outing, and daily at our partner schools and churches. We include, support, joke around, and play together as we learn and attempt to follow God's will for our lives. We are not perfect, but this is how we do life together as Christians: filled with grace and appreciation for the gifts of each person.

I am blessed, too, by the way that volunteers spend their Saturday nights to make sure these events run smoothly. These gatherings matter, for all of us. Because of you, and because of all the work that has gone into CLC Network over the last thirty-eight years, this type of community is expanding.

That is why I want to thank you for inviting new members to this community and to these events. And I want to thank you for trusting CLC Network to carry this mission forward, onward, and outward, to all the places that are working to re-create inclusion for those who have never been blessed by it before.

We hear from seekers of community like this every day: parents, school leaders, and church members who feel that someone is missing from the body of Christ. Your support of CLC Network is changing lives, making them richer and more inclusive. I am privileged to witness these blessings and eager to share more of them with you!

With gratitude,

Elizabeth Lucas Dombrowski
Executive Director

"This is how we do life together as Christians: filled with grace and appreciation for the gifts of each person."

DONOR PROFILE:

Heather and Eric Schreur Family



The Schreur family, from left: Gerrit, Grace, Ellie, Mitchell, Heather, and Eric.

"It is because of CLC Network that my kids can look forward to school every day," shares Heather Schreur. "The friendship of students with disabilities like Annah provides that extra dose of happiness and purpose to their day."

Heather and Eric Schreur have four children, and for some of them "school becomes this monumental chore. Knowing that other students see and look forward to their arrival gives that extra jolt that keeps them doing well. Our family has benefitted so much from inclusion."

Recently, Ellie Schreur, a senior at CLC Network partner Unity Christian High (Hudsonville, MI), and Annah Huisman, a Unity Christian High sophomore, spoke about the Connections Celebration during CLC Network's Auction. Together, they raised a record amount for this event!

As Ellie and Annah wrote their speech together, it was brought to their attention that by writing it in smaller chunks, Annah would be able to deliver more of it. This small change made a big difference, and helped both students learn something new. "We can always try to be more understanding of each other, and inclusion teaches us to learn and be patient throughout our journeys. Inclusion makes us better people," explains Heather.

"The need is great for CLC Network. You gather up not only inclusion students in our schools, but all those students who may be wandering through their education," Heather reflects. "The

benefits of this mission are way beyond what we could have hoped for."

Over the years, the Schreurs have come to know CLC Network's director of evaluation services, Doug Bouman, through his work with Hudsonville Christian School and Unity Christian High School. "Our son felt welcomed and at ease after meeting with Mr. Doug," remembers Heather. "It was like a big hug to him, and he wanted Mr. Doug to be his teacher. That evaluation was so important to his growth as a student."

In March, Ellie and her friends enjoyed time together at the Connections Celebration. "It drew people together in such a great way, I hope it continues to grow," shares Ellie. "I would love to see even more students get involved!" The Schreurs have also become more involved at school, hosting students for a tour at their farm in Hudsonville, and helping to build community.

The Schreurs have not always been aware of the depth of CLC Network's mission and impact and were thrilled to access the resources through their schools. "I didn't always realize that CLC Network was a great place for our contributions," recalls Heather. "Knowing what I do now, I hope all those who benefit from inclusion in their schools will join us in supporting this awesome mission."

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Making Worship Accessible



Participants at the Accessible Worship Symposium ended the day in unity by joining hands and singing praise.

Thanks to the advocacy and support of CLC Network donors, our church services team is equipping church leaders at national conferences, regional training events, and individual churches to make worship accessible for persons with varying abilities.

This fall, we partnered with the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship and Joni and Friends Chicago to host a day of practical accessible worship training for worship leaders in Chicagoland.

Because of your commitment to inclusion and faithful support of CLC Network, our team shared the biblical vision for inclusion, introduced practical tools, and modeled an inclusive worship service at this event. Church leaders left the event invigorated with a passion for recognizing each person's worth, gifts, and abilities within a worship service. We are pleased to share some of their responses with you:

"I used to think accessible worship was a luxury. Now I think it is a necessity."

— Attendee, Accessible Worship Symposium

"We left [the Accessible Worship Symposium] more convinced that we are all diminished when our worship and fellowship do not reflect the diversity of Christ's body."

— Attendee, Accessible Worship Symposium

"After attending this conference, I am reassured that all people, no matter their ability, have a purpose in God's kingdom and should be given that opportunity to serve."

— Attendee, Accessible Worship Symposium

"Prior to this conference, I used to think it was super important to launch a disability ministry at our church. After attending this conference, I now think it's less about a disability ministry and more about accessible inclusive ministry including persons of ALL ability levels."

— Attendee, Accessible Worship Symposium

"At the symposium, [our worship team was] newly convicted of the importance of making worship accessible for people of varying abilities. With open minds ready to learn, people were able to connect across differences that may have kept them apart in another context. When the door is open to make an effort and push through awkwardness or confusion, the result is beautiful. The symposium reminded us that we are all integral members of God's family and co-laborers with other believers in the work of His kingdom"

— Attendee, Accessible Worship Symposium

Educating Students Impacted by Trauma



Betsy Winkle, CLC Network school psychologist, recently presented a webinar: “Trauma: What it Is, What it Does, and How to Support Affected Students in the School Setting” as a service to Christian schools across the country.

Imagine not knowing if your father is healthy enough to put you to bed at night; wondering if your mom will stop crying so much; or moving across the world, away from all that has been familiar to you throughout your life.

Trauma has become an increasingly prevalent topic in Christian education today. We understand trauma as occurring when a powerful experience overwhelms a person's ability to cope.

Trauma does not discriminate. It impacts children regardless of race, socio-economic status, religion, or family systems. With an improved understanding of the impact of trauma, educators are better equipped to support learning and behavior of affected students.

As an organization dedicated to supporting students with a variety of gifts and abilities, we find that trauma can be a significant barrier to a student's education. As we get to know every student we serve most excellently, trauma can often be part of that student's history. Thanks to donors who help us stay at the forefront of best practice education, we are able to apply today's research in the classroom to help these students learn and succeed.

Current research provides an understanding of how thinking processes are altered in the brains of children and youth who experience trauma. Those structural changes impact the way a student learns, interacts with others, and processes events. Kids then struggle to calm down strong emotions, focus on instruction, understand the social environment in school, and interpret the signals their bodies are sending them. Using the language of the “Thinking Brain” and the “Doing Brain” can help staff and

students understand how the brain responds to trauma. When school personnel understand these changes in the brain, student behavior can be interpreted through the lens of trauma.

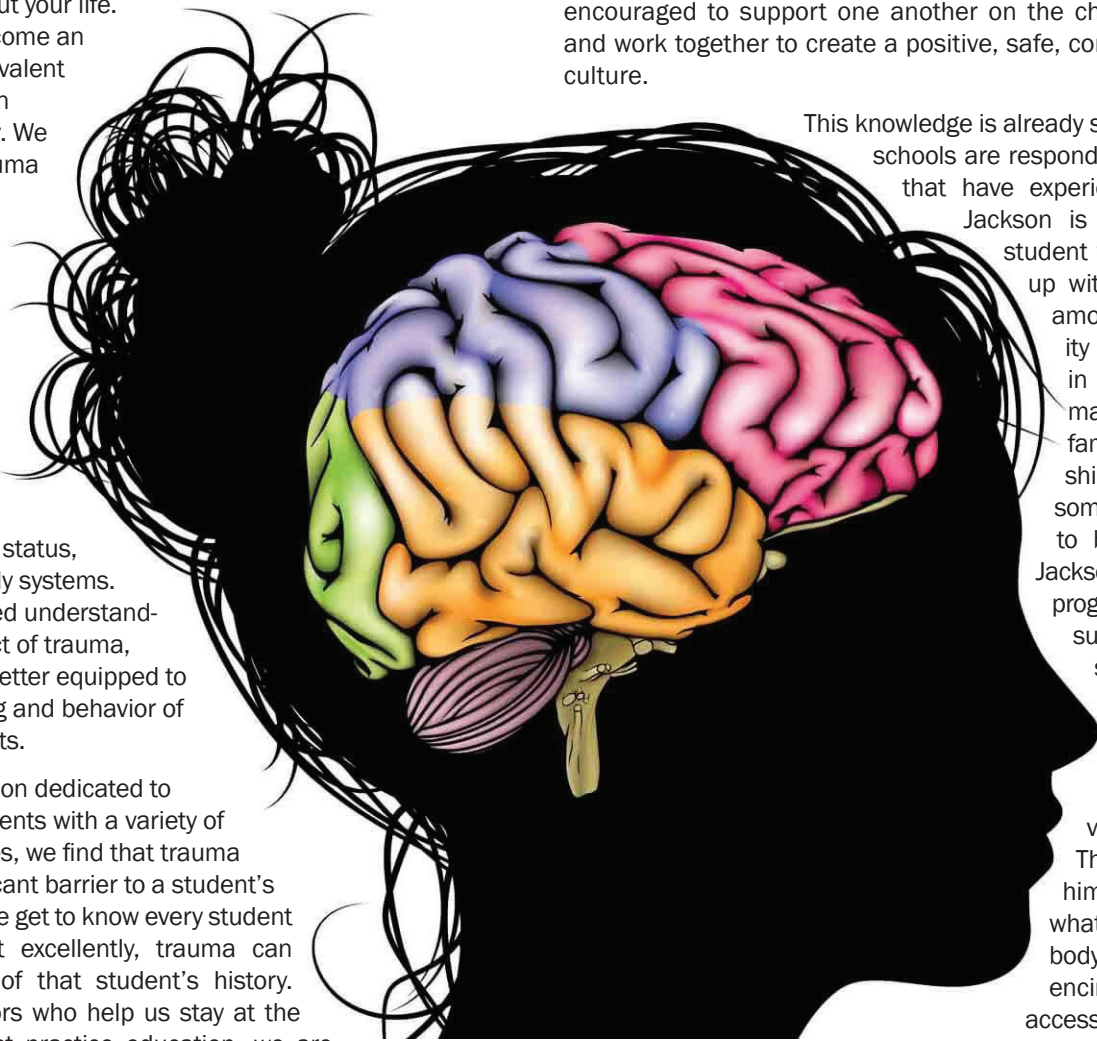
With this shift in perspective, school personnel are better equipped to help students who have experienced trauma learn new adaptive skills and become engaged, positive, and included members of the school community. Providing support in the moment, teachers can use their own calm emotions to help a student regulate behaviors. School staff can support students learning new coping skills and set up their classrooms to be safe and healthy environments that promote growth: academically, behaviorally, and socially. As a school, staff are encouraged to support one another on the challenging days and work together to create a positive, safe, consistent school culture.

This knowledge is already shifting how our schools are responding to students that have experienced trauma.

Jackson is a third grade student who has grown up with a significant amount of instability in his life, both in housing permanence and his family relationships. Although some days continue to be challenging, Jackson is making progress with the support of the school principal, classroom teacher, and educational support services teacher. They are helping him to recognize what his brain and body are experiencing, and how to access his “Thinking

Brain” to respond to challenging situations. The work is hard, but each day Jackson comes and puts in the hard work, with more moments to celebrate each day!

“Thanks to donors who help us stay at the forefront of best practice education, we are able to apply today's research in the classroom to help these students learn and succeed.”



Thank You for Making the Biggest Fundraiser of the Year a Success!

What a privilege to gather with enthusiastic people who care about building inclusive communities! On Saturday, January 28 donors gathered at Calvary Christian Reformed Church (Wyoming, MI) and gave **more than \$52,000** in support of our work to equip schools and churches nationwide to receive the gifts of people at all levels of ability and disability.

One highlight of the night was a speech (excerpt below) given by Unity Christian (Hudsonville, MI) students Ellie Schreur and Annah Huisman. They shared their experiences at the annual Connections Celebration with the Auction guests. Their friendship is a testimony to the transformative power of making space for all of God's people. With Ellie and Annah's encouragement, donors raised a record amount for this year's "You've Got a Friend in Me" Connections Celebration!

A special thanks to the Auction Committee for their efforts, dedication, and willing contributions: Sharon Baker, Jane Bouman, Jan DeJonge, Kathy Heidmann, Sid and Patricia Helder, Jim and Ruth Systma, Wendy VanDoeselaar, and Roger Wesorick.



Sid and Patricia Helder, Auction committee members, and Board member, Doug Rottman, getting excited about mobile bidding for the silent Auction.



The kids' table was a popular spot all evening long!

AUCTION 2018

SAVE THE DATE:

January 27, 2018

An excerpt from Annah and Ellie's talk:



Annah and Ellie helped raise a record amount for the annual Connections Celebration.

Annah: My name is Annah Huisman and I am a sophomore at Unity Christian High School. I am 16 years old. I love God, I love my family, and I love Michigan State. I also love meeting new people!

Ellie: My name is Ellie Schreur and I am a senior at Unity Christian. We are here to tell you about an exciting event that involves all the Christian high schools in the area.

Annah: Ellie, you know that I have lots of friends, right?

Ellie: Yes I do.

Annah: I have friends in different places. Places like Costco, Culver's, church, and school. Last year I went to the Connections [event] with my friends from school.

Ellie: Not only do many of the current students of our local Christian high schools attend the celebration but so do many graduates and their friends.

Annah: It's a night to celebrate our awesome God. It's a night of fun for everyone!

Ellie: Excitement, smiles, and laughter are everywhere. Pure Joy. Simple Joy. Radical Joy. From eating dinner to dancing, to taking pictures and playing games. The place is rockin'. Remember last year, Annah?

Annah: I sure do, Ellie. It was a blast! Last year, I got to play games, have a great dinner, and dance with all my friends... and I made some new friends, too.

Ellie: And I remember how we ended the night. I loved our last song. We all stood in a circle, with our old friends and our new friends, holding hands, and we sang:

Together: "A friend is a friend forever, if the Lord is the Lord of them." Thank you for supporting the Connections Celebration!!!

New School Partners

Thanks to the support and advocacy of donors, we can come alongside staff, students, and families at First Church Christian Academy (Fresno, CA) to help them include students of all abilities!



"First Church Christian Academy joyously affirms and declares that all children are wonderfully and beautifully created in the image of God. Although each child is designed as a kaleidoscope with many different views, we see our students and each other through one remarkable lens that collaboratively loves and learns together. As such, we humbly recognize and respect the need for one another in our classrooms and within our school culture. This means that we strive daily to celebrate and challenge the unique gifts and talents of all our learners in all aspects of our school life. Thanks to our growing partnership with the CLC Network, we hope that relationships are strengthened and furthered for the building of God's kingdom on earth."

— Monique Ouwinga, principal

New Partners in Service

Welcome New Staff Members!



"God created each and every one of us in a unique way, with many different abilities and disabilities. Seeing all different people come together and use their talents/abilities is what makes inclusion so real and exciting to me. I look forward to working with CLC Network and seeing inclusive communities come to life."

— Ashtyn Grevenstuk,
Marketing and
Communications Intern



"CLC Network helps people value the abilities of every individual and see each person as a treasured covenant child of God. Because I have a daughter with autism spectrum disorder, this mission resonates with me at a personal level. I've learned so much from her... about beauty, patience, gentleness, trust, and being present in the moment. These are qualities that I experience more deeply because of her. With help, she can infuse her circles (school, church, extended family) with those gifts. I've seen so much transformation just through her experiences. Can you imagine what the world could look like if it was open to the contributions of all types of learners? I am looking forward to working with passionate volunteers to raise goodwill, awareness, and more income through the Auction and Golf Outing. I also look forward to hearing (and telling) the stories of schools, churches, and families who partner with CLC Network to enrich their communities."

— Sue Kuyvenhoven, Advancement Coordinator

CLC NETWORK

OUR MISSION

CLC Network promotes the development of people with a variety of abilities and disabilities to live as active, integrated members of their communities.

THE INCLUSIVE NEWSLETTER

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THURSDAY, JUNE 15 | PILGRIM'S RUN GOLF CLUB (Pierson, MI)

REGISTER TODAY AT clcnetwork.org/golfouting

Annual Connections Event Celebrates Friendships

Thanks to the generous support of donors and efforts of student volunteers from area Christian high schools, more than 220 students and alumni of all abilities gathered to celebrate friendships on Saturday, March 4 at the Pinnacle Center in Hudsonville, MI for the western-themed Connections Celebration. The annual

event, planned by students from NorthPointe Christian, South Christian, and Unity Christian high schools, was an opportunity for individuals of all abilities to remember and share, "You've got a friend in me." Visit facebook.com/CLCNetwork to view more photos from the event.



Participants enjoyed playing western-themed games and celebrating accomplishments with one another.



The annual Connections Celebration is a highlight of the year for many students and alumni.



More than 220 students and alumni from four West Michigan high schools celebrated at the annual Connections event.



Everyone enjoys closing the evening by joining hands and singing, "Friends are Friends Forever" by Michael W. Smith.