

2023-2024

ANNUAL REPORT

Cheerful Helpers Child and Family Study Center

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A MESSAGE FROM OUR LEADERS



The theme for 2023-2024 was community. In March of 2024, we celebrated the 65th anniversary of our therapeutic school. Alumni staff, parents, and students joined in the celebration along with current staff and parents.

This was a year of growth focused on expanding the Cheerful Helpers community and outreach into our local neighborhoods. Friday and Saturday social skills groups grew allowing us to provide a continuum of care for our recent graduates while creating an opportunity for new families who cannot attend programming during the week. This year we held our first Saturday BEIG group. In the 2024-2025 school year, we have plans to start a Father's Group. The group will be led by Richard Vieville, LMFT. Richard has been a clinician at Cheerful Helpers for many years and, as a supervisor, supports our classrooms daily. He is a wonderful leader for all of our Saturday groups.

Thanks to the generosity and consistent support of our donors, we are able to keep growing and imagining more ways to provide resources to families and young children. Cheerful Helpers has always been a place of hope and growth, and our future plans hold this legacy in mind with the added goal of expanding our reach to a wider population. Keep holding tight to our "invisible string", as there are so many exciting things ahead!

Janet Upjohn

Executive Director

Jaclyn Zeccola

Clinical Director

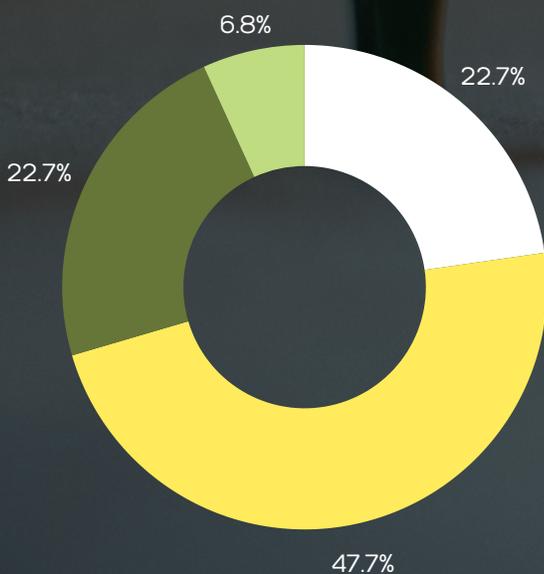
WHO WE SERVE

Since our inception, Cheerful Helpers has worked to provide hope to families with young children experiencing significant developmental, social, and emotional challenges.



This was **42.25% increase** from last school year!

Our families found us in different ways



Check out our age break-down!



Over the years, it has been said that Cheerful Helpers is “L.A.’s best-kept secret” and every year, we aim to spread the word. This year, we were checked out by folks all over California.

Take a look at our reach:



Our name reached 205 cities, spanning across 10 counties!

In 1935, twelve philanthropic women in Los Angeles joined together to form The Cheerful Helpers, a corps of “willing hands in dedicated service to the unfortunate child in our midst.” From 1935 to 1955, the Cheerful Helpers mission evolved into one consistent with an increasingly complex view of child development and autism.



CELEBRATING 65 YEARS OF SERVICE

A BRIEF CHEERFUL HELPERS HISTORY

CEDARS ROOTS

1958 - 2007

In 1958, the dream of creating a school for the understanding and treatment of emotional disturbances in preschool-aged children was realized when the Cheerful Helpers Child and Family Study Center opened on the campus of Mt. Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles. In 1966, the organization affiliated with Cedars-Sinai Medical Center.

In 1973, the school was co-located in the Thaliens Mental Health Center on the Cedars-Sinai Medical Center campus.

Then, as now, Cheerful Helpers offered a unique, family-oriented, multidisciplinary, integrative approach to early childhood intervention. Our programs and services continued to expand, and in 2007, Cheerful Helpers divested from Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, becoming an independent, self-reliant non-profit organization.





THEN CAME THE CHURCH

2007 - 2020

In 2007, Cheerful Helpers moved to Immanuel Presbyterian Church, in the heart of Los Angeles. This move established Cheerful Helpers as an independent entity outside of the auspices of Cedars-Sinai. While the agency's location and affiliation changed, our program and mission remained as the only agency in the Los Angeles area that integrates educational, psychological, and therapeutic modalities in a manner that empowers the entire family to achieve its potential for life long growth.

SETTLE INTO STOCKEL

2020 - Present

In 2020, the world was put on pause by the COVID-19 pandemic; many schools had to stop in-person schooling and Cheerful Helpers was no different. Committed to the safety of our families, Cheerful Helpers moved to Zoom to provide services. Adults and children alike had to be flexible and learn to do hard things.

While the service delivery looked different during the pandemic, our dedication to our mission was steadfast. Concurrently, Cheerful Helpers was looking to relocate to a building to call their own and on January 6, 2021, the agency purchased the Stockel Building. March of 2021, Cheerful Helpers opened its doors for children to return to in-person services. Our doors have remained open ever since.



Since 1958, over one million hours of advocacy and therapeutic services have been provided by Cheerful Helpers' original visionaries, staff, clinicians, board members, and trainees. In addition to direct professional service Cheerful Helpers parents learn new skills and tools to support their child's development maximizing their family's potential. As a result of this tireless devotion, hundreds of graduates have gained personal tools needed to realize their full learning and living potential. Cheerful Helpers graduates have successfully transitioned to elementary, middle, and high school. Furthermore, many have pursued post-secondary education - obtaining advanced degrees at colleges and universities around the country. Most importantly, our alumni have become independent adults -- living meaningful, fulfilling, and connected lives. This has been our history and remains our continuing commitment.

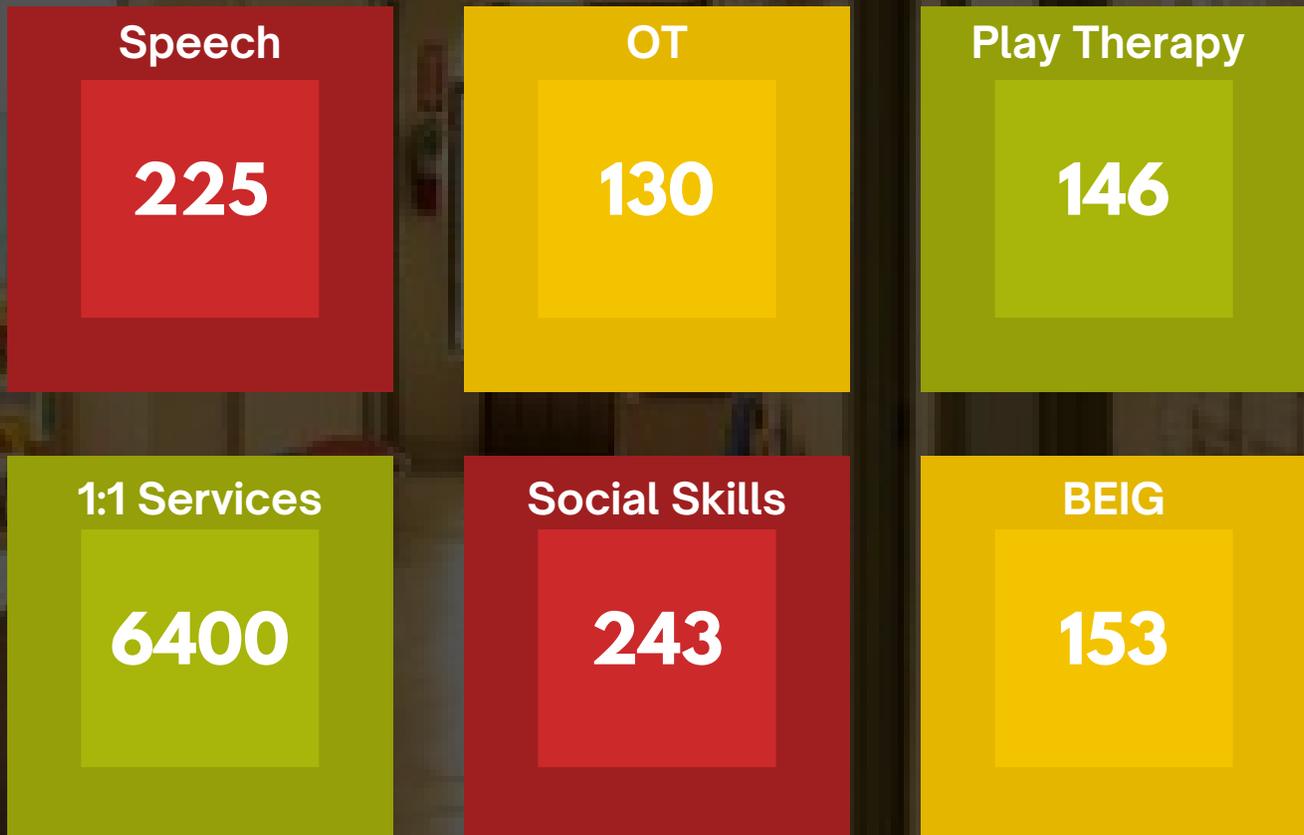


OUR IMPACT

At Cheerful Helpers, we put families at the heart of everything we do. Every hour of service is thoughtfully designed to nurture each child’s growth, joy, and learning. By partnering with the whole family, we offer holistic support to parents while meeting every child where they are—embracing their unique interests, strengths, and personality through meaningful relationships.

We’re proud to offer a wide range of programs, from group and one-on-one services to engaging classroom activities, ensuring every student enjoys the enriching school experience they deserve.

Here’s an approximate breakdown of the hours of services provided by Cheerful Helpers this academic year:



OUR PROGRAMS

at a Glance

Therapeutic Schooling

Cheerful Helpers is a fully accredited non-public school serving children ages 3-10. Attending schools five mornings a week, children are under the guidance of our special education teachers and clinicians. The class curriculum follows the Common Core State Standards of education. This year, Cheerful Helpers had 16 students enrolled between both classrooms.

BEIG

Brief Evaluation and Intervention Group, known as BEIG, is often the first step for families. BEIG is a 15-week program designed for children ages 2-6. It is structured as a “parent-and-me” group in which both the child and the parent(s) attend the group twice a week. This year, Cheerful Helpers introduced a Saturday BEIG, meeting for 16-weeks, once a week. Though our traditional BEIG program and our pilot Saturday BEIG program, Cheerful Helpers served a total of 11 families through BEIG providing 153 hours this school year.

Social Skills

Socialization Training Group, also known as “Social Skills”, is a program that is hosted on-site at Cheerful Helpers. Through participation in Social Skills, children gain basic skills, such as sharing ideas and listening to others. These skills allow children to feel successful on the playground, in the classroom, and at home with family. In addition to our school-based Social Skills that meets twice a week, we have two community groups offering students the opportunity to attend Social Skills while remaining enrolled in their own school program. This year, Cheerful Helpers has provided approximately 243 hours of Social Skills!

Play Therapy

Cheerful Helpers' play therapy services are provided both to augment our therapeutic school and to support children from the community. Play Therapy allows children to explore and work through challenging aspects of their lives through symbolic play. In a comfortable and safe space created by a clinician, children use toys and other play items to express their emotions and share ideas that are otherwise difficult to express directly to others. Through their play and reflection, along with guidance from a therapist, children in play therapy can begin to heal from traumatic or distressing experiences, expand their self-expression, and develop coping skills. In the 2023-2024 school year, Cheerful Helpers delivered 146 hours of Play Therapy.

HIGHLIGHTS

The 2023-2024 academic year was a milestone year at Cheerful Helpers. This year brought celebrations, new opportunities, and community!

The fall semester saw a robust school size with a total of 16 kids between our two classrooms.

In September, one of our community members presented us with the opportunity to have custom Cheerful Helpers shirts and hoodies for the first time ever. This gift kicked off our 2023-2024 Back to School

In the spring, Cheerful Helpers received a generous donation from emeritus staff member, Tom Brauner, Ph. D, LCSW. Tom donated books from his personal clinical library. The books live in our newly dedicated Tom Brauner Library, accessible to all of our staff and interns to supplement our training program.

This year, our summer Social Skills Camp had a robust enrollment and we were happy to offer our Family Camp program for a second year in a row. With a total of 14 campers, we had two weeks of fun activities and social connections.

“Cheerful Nights Out” is one of our unique fundraising platforms. The goal is to host mini community fundraisers allowing us to introduce the work of Cheerful Helpers far and wide. In May, we held our Body, Mind, and Spirits at HYPE Silver Lake for the second consecutive row. With a total of 36 attendees, we shared a night of a spin and mobility class, followed by a cocktail reception.

In March, we celebrated the 65th anniversary of our therapeutic school. Our extended Cheerful Helpers community, including alumni students and parents to our current parents and interns, came together to commemorate this great milestone. The 65th-anniversary party was a reminder to us all about how important the work that we do is.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

by Hannah Barukh

Cheerful Helpers is proud to have a team of talented and dedicated professionals who positively impact the lives of children and their families. Rebecca Quinto, an exceptional Special Education Teacher who has been an integral part of our community for 15 years.

Rebecca's path to Cheerful Helpers reflects her open-mindedness and passion for growth. While pursuing her master's degree in Early Childhood Education, Rebecca wasn't initially planning to become a teacher. Her focus was simply on working with young children and their families in some capacity. During her studies, she connected with a classmate, Ellen Pearlman, who was a long-time teacher at Cheerful Helpers, and through those conversations, her interest in teaching began to grow.

Encouraged by her counselor to take a few teaching courses to keep her options open, Rebecca was introduced to Quint Paige, who also worked at Cheerful Helpers. Ellen and Quint's approach to working with children intrigued her. At Cheerful Helpers, children weren't just learning letters and numbers; they were learning how to express their feelings, relate to others, and navigate their emotions in a healthy way. The two invited Rebecca to tour Cheerful Helpers, and while she initially thought, "I'm not going to be a teacher!" she quickly realized Cheerful Helpers was unlike any other school she'd seen. "The moment I toured, I was impressed by how the children expressed themselves," Rebecca recalls. "They were able to share their emotions and frustrations, and the teachers gave them the space to process these feelings."

Since joining Cheerful Helpers, Rebecca has witnessed incredible growth, not just in the children she teaches but in the school itself. Over the years, Cheerful Helpers has relocated three times, finally settling into their current location in 2020, a move Rebecca describes as bittersweet but exciting.

Rebecca loves seeing the transformation in her students. “Some children come in with unsafe or difficult-to-communicate language,” she explains. “Over the years, they learn to express their feelings and thoughts and become more regulated. It’s amazing to see them write cohesive stories and communicate so much more effectively.”

Her work doesn’t just impact the children. Rebecca takes pride in seeing interns and staff members grow into confident professionals who support children in meaningful ways. She describes working with such intelligent, passionate, and caring colleagues as an honor. Though it can be sad to see colleagues leave over the years, Rebecca cherishes the opportunity to learn and adapt with new team members. One of Rebecca’s most cherished aspects of her work is facilitating activities like “Picture and Story” and “Monday Business.” These unique activities allow children to reflect on their experiences, process emotions, and share their stories.

Looking to the future, Rebecca hopes to see Cheerful Helpers expand. “There is a need for more schools like Cheerful Helpers to help more children and families,” she says. “We need more opportunities to teach children emotional regulation and social-emotional skills.”

For 15 years, Rebecca Quinto has been a cornerstone of the Cheerful Helpers community, bringing compassion, dedication, and expertise to everything she does. We are so grateful for her contributions and excited to see what the future holds under her guidance.

CY'S STORY

Our story is similar to many of yours. In preschool, our son was prone to hit, yelled at loud noises, broke other kids' constructions. We sought supports like OT, PT, and speech, and so many evaluations to better understand his needs. After finding that our neighborhood kindergarten was an even more disastrous place for Cy (he was unable to separate from us or act safely in the classroom, and spent most of his time the principal), Joanna and I felt lost. We searched for another school that could support our son, and juggled OT and other appointments, not sure what would help.

We had heard the name Cheerful Helpers in passing from a therapist. Hoping this was not another dead end, Joanna called one day from work. Keeping her voice low, she described some of the challenges Cy was having. Then something unfamiliar happened: the voice on the other end of the line said, "it sounds like your son is having trouble finding an anchor in the classroom." Indeed! We will never forget those words. This empathic woman on the other end of the line got it, got us. At Cy's intake meeting several days later, when we sheepishly shared that he had eloped several times from kindergarten, sure this would be disqualifying information, Jinous grinned and said "YES!"

And so Cheerful Helpers became an anchor for all of us. We felt incredible relief at being held by a team of magical, caring experts and other families who understood the full picture. No longer were we alone in navigating totally unfamiliar systems, or trying to decode what was going on. We still feel held by the Cheerful Helpers community – it is a force that has lifted our family, given us invaluable tools of observation, understanding, and constructive language.

We quickly learned that "Cy worked very hard today" meant that it was a rough day – that everyone worked hard! The 3.5 years our family was at Cheerful Helpers were really hard years, but we also knew we were being held together with expert care, and in the company of other wonderful families. We saw significant improvements, and also new challenges. We grew as parents and people. Like many Cheerful Helpers parents, we feared that our kid would never be ready to give a speech (!) at graduation. But then, all of the sudden, there he was, dressed in a grey suit and a hat, proudly talking about his bird: "the most loved flamingo."

We moved to Seattle in 2021, the summer after Cy graduated from Cheerful Helpers, as we all were coming out from the pandemic. It seemed impossible for a kid who struggles with transitions that we were changing everything at once. But we successfully navigated that big change and the big feelings that went with it by using tools we learned from Cheerful Helpers. After three successful years in a supported elementary school, Cy is now a 6th grader in another new school in a classroom with only one teacher. Cy has become a real schoolboy. On the cusp of teendom, he is challenging his dyslexia and working hard to develop his reading, rather than working hard just to be in a classroom. Cy would like us to tell you that he does parkour now – jumping and balancing and stretching and moving through unusual spaces. Not unlike how our family navigates life together.

We recognize the immense privilege of attending Cheerful Helpers and wish that more families could access this life-changing place. Whenever we talk about someone who has done something hurtful, Cy says "they should have gone to Cheerful Helpers!". He knows that's the place to learn about feelings and do hard things and care about yourself and others. And we say yes, YES, everyone should go to Cheerful Helpers.

Cheerful Helpers is a foundational place and will always be a significant part of our lives - the experience grounded us, and the skills continue to sturdy us. Please join us in supporting this wonderful anchor in all our lives. Invite your loved ones to contribute too. We can't think of a better investment than supporting Cheerful Helpers. The world needs more of this, and our incredible kids do too.

Bianca Siegl and Joanna Hankamer

WHAT WE'VE ACCOMPLISHED

Social Skills

Looking at feedback from the 2023-2024 school year, families shared an interest in our expanding services for students ages 8-11. Based on this information, we set out to expand our reach and impact to serve those students in the community. We successfully met this goal, providing our Social Skills program and developing children's skills through games, activities, and open conversations.

Saturday Program

During the 2023-2024 school year, not only were we able to run a full round of a Saturday Social Skills group, but we added to our Saturday Programming! A pilot round of a Saturday BEIG began in March 2024 and ran for 16 weeks, following our traditional BEIG model. Our Saturday team was also able to begin promoting our Father's Group to the community.

Play Therapy

Our Play Therapy program grew during the 2023-2024 school year. In addition to serving children in an individual setting, Cheerful Helpers offered dyadic play therapy to children and their families. In holding families through this service, Cheerful Helpers was also able to offer training to MFTs in this model, enriching our training program.

WHERE WE'RE HEADED

Celebrating 65 years of service is a huge milestone for Cheerful Helpers. Over the years, our mission has remained the same: provide hope to families with young children experiencing significant developmental, social, and emotional challenges. As we look forward, our goal is to promote continuity, stability, and growth in our classrooms and auxiliary programs. We are committed to maintaining consistent and meaningful learning experiences for all of our students. This careful clinical consideration will allow us to build strong, trusting relationships with students, families, and communities.

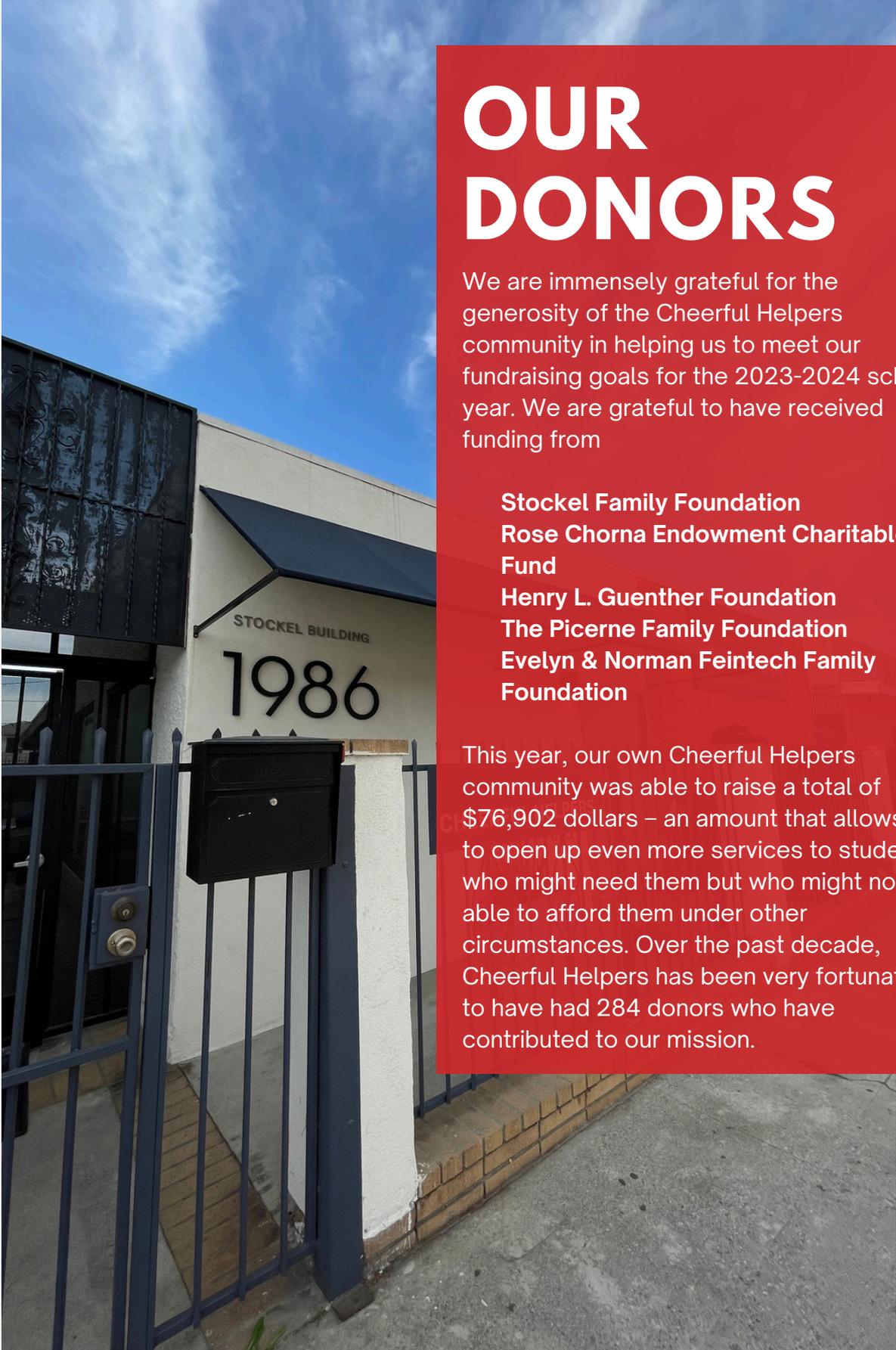
Moving forward, we will continue to invest in the development of our teachers and staff who are at the core of our relationship-based model. By supporting our team, we create a welcoming and engaging environment for our students to learn and grow.

As Cheerful Helpers continues to grow in numbers, our priority continues to be ensuring that our school is the right fit for every student that comes through our classrooms. Our fundraising efforts support our financial stability, allowing the agency to provide scholarships so every student in need can benefit from our programs.

While maintaining focus on our classrooms, Cheerful Helpers is looking forward to another year of supporting our community at large through our auxiliary programs: BEIG, Social Skills, and Play Therapy. We continue to evaluate our programs and welcome feedback from our participants to ensure that we can address the diverse needs of our community.

Inspired by 65 years of service, we continue to look for ways to improve and stay up to date with the latest therapeutic approaches that best serve our students and their families. We look forward to another year of stability and partnership with our ever-expanding community.





OUR DONORS

We are immensely grateful for the generosity of the Cheerful Helpers community in helping us to meet our fundraising goals for the 2023-2024 school year. We are grateful to have received funding from

Stockel Family Foundation
Rose Chorna Endowment Charitable Fund
Henry L. Guenther Foundation
The Picerne Family Foundation
Evelyn & Norman Feintech Family Foundation

This year, our own Cheerful Helpers community was able to raise a total of \$76,902 dollars – an amount that allows us to open up even more services to students who might need them but who might not be able to afford them under other circumstances. Over the past decade, Cheerful Helpers has been very fortunate to have had 284 donors who have contributed to our mission.



OUR BOARD

**We are grateful for the generous support of our
Cheerful Helpers Board of Directors**

Jackie Sloan, **President**

Eric Stockel, **Vice President**

Susanna Lovell, **Secretary**

Peter Foster, **Treasurer**

Steve Barlam; Sarah Bloom; Carrie Cannon; Kate Colleary; Ben Decter; Dana Ostroff; Ellen Pearlman; Ellen Reinstein; Arlene Schneur; Victoria Sonu Song; and Sandy Throop

2023-2024 TEAM

STAFF

Janet Upjohn, LCSW, Executive Director
Jaclyn Zeccola, PhD., Clinical Director
Reyna Alvarez, Administrative Coordinator
Etta Iannaccone, Occupational Therapist
Alyssa Fye, SLP, Speech Therapist
Christina Mojica, SLP, Speech Therapist
Monica Halchishick SLP, Speech Therapist
Floresita Acari, AMFT, Child and Family Therapist
Erin Angle, BA, Special Education Teacher
Rebeca Quinto, MA, Special Education Teacher
Richard Vieville, MA, Special Education Teacher
Sam Zarate, ACSW, Program Coordinator

CLINICAL & EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANTS

Quint Paige, LMFT, RPT-S

INTERNS

Eliza Amory, AMFT, Child and Family Therapist
Lexie Barrow, AMFT, Child and Family Therapist
Taryn Cantorez, AMFT, Child and Family Therapist
Jason Cho, AMFT, Child and Family Therapist
Angelene Drummond, MSW, Master of Social Work Trainee
Denise Duval, LMFT, Child and Family Therapist
Sierra Dyer, MFT, Marriage and Family Therapist Trainee
Emily Glickman, AMFT, Child and Family Therapist
Brenda Grow, MFT, Marriage and Family Therapist Trainee
Angel Herrera, AMFT, Child and Family Therapist
Ben Hietala, MFT, Marriage and Family Therapist Trainee
Ebony Isaac, MFT, Child and Family Trainee
Andrew Megerdechian, MFT, Marriage and Family Therapist
Mackenzie Miller, MFT, Marriage and Family Therapist Trainee
Alex Moradians, MFT, Marriage and Family Therapist Trainee
Rony Norcia, AMFT, Child and Family Therapist
Jude Radwan, MFT, Marriage and Family Therapist Trainee
Pratichi Sadavrati, MFT, Marriage and Family Therapist Trainee
Kayla Sanders MSW, Master of Social Work Trainee
Forrest Suh, Matthew Simino, MFT, Marriage and Family Therapist Trainee
Matthew Simino, MFT, Marriage and Family Therapist Trainee
Melissa Townley, MFT, Marriage and Family Therapist Trainee
Caroline Wallace, AMFT, Child and Family Therapist

GET INVOLVED

The mission of Cheerful Helpers cannot be accomplished alone, it requires a collaborative team with staff and volunteers to ensure child success. Please join us and take part in our mission! There are three ways to help, by donating, becoming a partner, or joining our team.

1. DONATE

In financially supporting Cheerful Helpers, you are providing hope to families and their young children. Here is the donation link featured on our website:

<https://www.cheerfulhelpers.org/how-to-help/>

2. PARTNER WITH US

For 65 years, Cheerful Helpers has focused on building relationships with not only families but also organizations, corporations, and fellow non-profits to enrich the lives of our Cheerful Helpers community.

Throughout the year, these partnerships have been impactful in our ability to develop meaningful experiences for our students, families, and extended community.

Hype Silverlake
Pica + Sullivan Architects
Stoller Barakat Design
Stewart Design and Antiques

3. JOIN OUR TEAM

Cheerful Helpers has a Clinical Intern Program for graduate students and postgraduate students who are interested in early childhood and want to gain hands-on clinical skills in our school. Associates registered with the B.B.S. may earn hours toward licensure (e.g. LCSW, LMFT), and local educational institutions grant academic credit for the training program. Interns are welcomed year-round. Be sure to email your resume to jaclyn.zeccola@cheerfulhelpers.org.

Hear what our AMFT Trainee, Jason Cho has to say:

“ I graduated from Pepperdine University’s Graduate School of Education & Psychology in 2022, and I am currently an associate marriage & family therapist working towards licensure. I began interning at Cheerful Helpers in January of 2021, starting my time here as a clinician in Rebeca’s classroom. I have worked in most of the programs offered at Cheerful Helpers, including BEIG, social skills, and play therapy. Right now, I am the everyday teaching assistant for Maria and a family therapist for several families at our school. I was drawn to this agency after working with children during my undergraduate years, in which I participated in the Jumpstart program. The goal of that program is to assist preschools in preparing underserved children for kindergarten. I enjoyed that work immensely, and I decided that I wanted to continue and gain more experience working with children during my time in graduate school. When I saw that Pepperdine was offering Cheerful Helpers as an option for practicum, I felt that it would be an amazing opportunity to continue working with children and expand my therapeutic scope by working with a neurodiverse population.”

Hear what our MFT Trainee, Andrew Megerdechian has to say:

“I am a practicum student and intern from Pepperdine. I work in teacher Maria’s class as a clinician helping out with the students. I was drawn into the field of psychology during community college where I started out undecided but then after taking a couple psychology classes my first year, decided to declare it as my major! When I’m not at Cheerful Helpers, I work as a teacher's aide and a play therapist. The big crossover between those jobs also influenced my decision to join Cheerful Helpers.”

