

Monthly WMLC Perspectives Highlights - January 2014



WEST METRO
LEARNING CONNECTIONS, INC.
Developing Social Understanding & Skills Since 2001
Centers in Edina & Excelsior

The Importance of Therapy Dogs Meet WMLC's Therapy Dog "Danger"

Written by: Jessica Armstrong, B.A., Senior ASD Support Specialist

Danger Pavlov, often called "Dangey," is a 9 year-old retired racing greyhound, and WMLC's therapy dog (and unofficial mascot.) Danger currently visits WMLC's Lotus Specialized Learning Center day program every Wednesday and he spends the day interacting and supporting the students in this program in a variety of ways. Danger, the gentle giant who in no way lives up to his name, needed no formal training to become a therapy animal at WMLC; his calm, sensitive nature and love of being around people makes him a perfect fit as part of the WMLC day program team. Furthermore, all of the students LOVE him!

During his day at WMLC, Danger spends most of his time going on walks during movement breaks and helping his friends with their schoolwork by being a comforting presence in the classroom. He also helps his friends keep their bodies calm when they are feeling overly-excited or anxious. Research shows that petting a dog lowers stress levels and blood pressure in both children and adults, and stroking Danger's soft fur when they are upset has helped students de-escalate from numerous situations. Touching Danger's back or rubbing his ears can also provide some much needed sensory-input for a student that may otherwise shy away from tactile stimulation.

According to Therapy Dogs Inc., "A visit from a therapy dog can break the daily routine, increase happiness, calmness, and overall emotional well-being, and stimulate the mind in dramatic ways." And this is certainly true of Danger's days at WMLC's day program. Danger's presence in the classroom has a calming effect on everyone (the teachers really enjoy having him there, as well) and he often minimizes emotional outbursts, which allows the students to participate fully and have a more successful day. For example, a student who might typically demonstrate some work-avoidance behaviors when asked to read out-loud will eagerly volunteer to read-aloud to Danger. He also assists students during transitions between activities by easing their anxiety and providing an alternate focus to the transition. For instance, the focus of a transition might be a student walking Danger down the hallway instead of returning to the classroom.

A student who cannot recognize how he might feel in a certain situation may be able to identify how Danger might “feel” in the same situation. He also facilitates numerous social interactions between the students, and helps develop their social and language skills. In addition to being the topic of many conversations, interacting with Danger enables the day program students to practice social skills, such as inviting someone to play or taking turns. A student who is normally hesitant to engage in peer play, might be willing to go on a walk together with Danger and another student (and a teacher, of course), and they can take turns holding onto the leash and talk about the different things Danger sees and smells.

When he’s not at “work,” Danger can usually be found sleeping on one of his many favorite couches or beds at home. He also enjoys running around and exploring his fenced backyard (when it’s not too cold).

Works Cited

Roberts, K. (2010). *About Autism Service Dogs of America* from [Autism Service Dogs of America](#).

Therapy Dogs Inc. (2013). *Member Information: [Why Have Therapy Dogs](#)*.



METRO FRIENDSHIP FOUNDATION
PROVIDING SCHOLARSHIPS *for* CHILDREN WITH AUTISM
**Metro Friendship
Foundation Fundraiser**

SAVE THE DATE: The annual Ice Breaker Social will be held on **Sunday, April 13, 2014.**

[Metro Friendship Foundation](#) (MFF) is a non-profit organization that provides scholarships to qualifying individuals on the Autism Spectrum who are seeking social skills development.

This year guests will spend an evening enjoying themselves at the black-and-white ball. There will be more information



Strategy Central

These events are FREE to attend for parents, educators and anyone in the community who is interested. There will be two different topics presented during the month of February. The topic for the first group on Saturday, February 1 is called Autism and Adolescence. The topic for the group taking place on

on tickets and pricing in next month's newsletter.

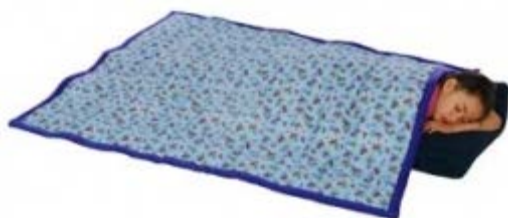


SOCIAL SKILLS THERAPY

HELPING KIDS FIT IN & SHINE

Social Skills (Spring & Summer)

With summer just around the corner (fingers crossed) it is time to start planning fun social activities for your child. Keep an eye out for [Spring Registration](#) information during the first week of February followed by [Summer Registration](#) information by the end of February.



Sensory Strategy

Does your child have trouble falling asleep at night or need a tool to help them relax and ease into a calmer activity during the day? Have you tried using a weighted blanket?

Many individuals on the Autism Spectrum do not regulate sensory input well. Weighted blankets help offer soothing, calming, deep pressure therapy which helps relax the body. Weighted blankets come in a variety of sizes and weights to best serve individual needs. Licensed

Thursday, February 6 is Fostering Friendships.

Please click [here](#) for the descriptions, dates, times, and locations.

To register contact Mary Wyatt at mwyatt@wmlc.biz or 952-474-0227 x204



Facilitated Playgroup

If you are looking for something fun for your child to do on Friday evenings from 4:30 to 6:00 you should sign-up for our Facilitated Playgroup. This playgroup is tailored to children between the ages of 3 to 6 years old.

Participants develop and generalize appropriate play, communication, emotional awareness, and social interaction skills by practicing them in a natural setting. Each session includes a play skill of the day, circle time, and guided play.

E-mail Mary Wyatt at mwyatt@wmlc.biz for more information.

Therapists suggest that the blanket equal 10% of the body weight plus 1 or 2 pounds.

We use weighted blankets, weighted lap pads and weighted vests with our Social Skills clients and our Lotus Specialized Learning Center clients on a daily basis.

Weighted blankets can be purchased at the [Autism Shop](#) located in Minnetonka, online, or there are a variety of websites that teach you how to make your very own. WMLC has also purchased some of our weighted blankets from [Cozy Calm](#).



Staff App of the Month

Time Timer. This month's pick can be used with children and teens of all ages. The timer displays time as a red disk that quietly gets smaller as time elapses. Children as young as two understand that when the red is gone, time is up!

Using timers often helps to alleviate anxiety and ease stressful transitions by allowing the individual to know how much time is remaining. Another helpful tip is to use a "First/Then" sentence when using the timer. For example, "First we will play Legos, then we will go to Target." This helps the child prepare



Create an "I-Spy Bag"

Waiting can be a very hard thing to do for children of any age, one solution to this problem is to create an I-Spy bag.

The bag is filled with plastic pellets and tiny treasures kids can find by manipulating the bag so the objects surface to the clear plastic window. There is a list of objects that are hidden within which they can check off as they find them.

This is the perfect activity for car trips, waiting at the doctors office or any other time you need a simple activity. Older children can time themselves to see how fast they find the objects or try and beat their best time.

Making an I-Spy Bag can be a fun activity for you and your child to do together!

1. Ask your child to pick out 15-20 "treasures" to hide in their bag.
2. Lay all of the objects out and take a picture of the treasures. (You may want to print this on cardstock or laminate for increased durability.)
3. You can sew together your own bag or for easy assembly buy a clear front pencil case.
4. Pour approximately 8 oz. of poly-pellets into the bag.
5. Add the treasures and zip closed.
6. Use a hot glue gun or super glue

for what will be coming up when the red on the timer is gone.

Click [here](#) to find out more about this app.



Mom's Cheeseburger Soup

"I don't like other soups because of my sensory issues. I love this soup because it tastes good and I love hamburger."

From the kitchen of Davis and Lisa Carlson (WMLC Friends)

- 1 lb. Ground Beef or Turkey
 - Celery cut into chunks
 - Potatoes cut into small chunks
 - 1 large bar of Velveeta
 - 1 large container of Sour Cream
 - Cornstarch for thickening if needed
 - Carrots cut into chunks
 - 1 large Onion cut up
 - Parsley, Garlic, Basil to taste
 - Chicken Stock (at least 4 C)
 - Water (at least 4 C)
 - Salt and Pepper to taste.
1. Brown meat in large stock pot. Set aside.
 2. In same pot, sauté veggies and herbs in butter.
 3. Add water, chicken stock and potatoes. Simmer until potatoes are tender.
 4. Add meat and cheese—cut up cheese into chunks so that it melts faster. Stir so that the cheese

on the zipper track to keep it from opening. You can also glue a piece of ribbon onto the zipper track to keep it hidden from curious little hands.

7. Enjoy!

*Due to small pieces this should not be used for children under the age of three or without adult supervision.



Student App of the Month

Stack the States This month's pick comes from one of our 3rd grade Lotus Specialized Learning Center students.

He writes, "This app represents geography that kids will love. Every time you finish the game you will earn a new state."

Stack the States helps kids learn not only the geographic location of the states but also the state shape, capitals, flags, nicknames, abbreviations and more. This app also features hundreds of unique questions.

Click [here](#) to find out more information about this app.



FAMILY SPEECH & THERAPY SERVICES
Therapy Services

Family Speech & Therapy Services

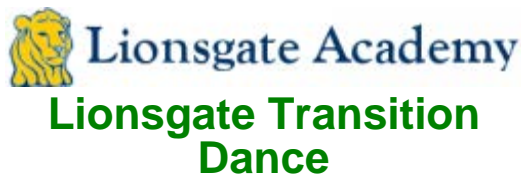
- doesn't sit on the bottom and burn.
5. Add cornstarch to thicken if desired.
 6. Add sour cream. We use all the sour cream.
 7. Serve with bread and salad. This soup freezes well.
 8. Enjoy!

This recipe was taken from the WMLC Facilitated Employment Cookbook. To order your copy of this book contact nringgenberg@wmlc.biz



WMLC Featured in Edina Magazine

If you haven't had a chance to check out the article about Edina's resources for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder click [here](#).



The AIM transition program from Lionsgate Academy will hold their annual winter dance on **Friday, January 31, from 8:00 pm to 10:30 pm.**

- Snacks and hanging out will take place from 8:00 pm to 9:15 pm
- The dance will begin at 9:15 pm and will go until 10:30 pm

The cost for this event is \$5.00 (clients must be 18 to 21 years old to attend)

If you are interested in attending please contact Kate Doman at

provides [speech & language therapy](#) and [occupational therapy](#). They help children and adults with deficits in communication, self-help, gross motor, fine motor, sensory, or academic skills reach their fullest potential. They have three separate locations, one of the locations is located inside of our Edina Center. To find out more about Family Speech & Therapy Services click [here](#).

Check out their blog full of helpful information and ideas [here](#).

The Social Security Disability Process

This educational presentation will relay the following concepts concerning the Social Security benefits process: eligibility requirements, the overall process itself, rules for proving disability, and the hearing that can occur for both SSI (Supplemental Security Income) and RSDI (Retirement, Survivors, Disability Insurance).

This event will take place at Fraser Bloomington on:

- Tuesday, February 18, 2014 from Noon to 1:30 or
- Wednesday, February 19, 2014 from 6:30 to 8:00

For more information contact Fraser at (612) 767-7222 or click [here](#) to register

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Better Business Bureau



BBB
Rating: A+

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