

# WE ARE WHAT SPECIAL NEEDS

FALL 2023 NEWSLETTER



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## Message from the CEO

Dear Friends,

I hope this letter finds you well and embracing the many changes that autumn brings to Michigan. Vivid fall colors, fresh apple cider, and college football are just a few of the seasonal opportunities we can all enjoy this time of year.

Fall is also the time when our children return to school. For children with special needs, this can be a tumultuous experience when trying to meet classroom expectations around communication and behavior. Without the 60,000+ hours of therapies provided by DIC in schools each year, many of these students would lose valuable ground in their quest to reach their full potential.

The same can be said for our LEAP programs helping underserved children with special needs and their families. Taking place at a variety of locations during the summer, after school, and in homes year-round, LEAP will offer early interventions, developmental screenings, and academic support across Metro Detroit to more than 300 underserved children and families this year at no cost to them.

While we are extremely proud of our work, DIC's board and staff continue to focus on increasing our impact with even more children and families!

An important key to achieving this goal will be expanding our geographic "footprint" in under-resourced communities. One way we plan on doing this is by partnering with other agencies that work with those who will benefit from DIC's portfolio of services. Examples include homeless shelters housing families with young children and working alongside organizations with locations in underserved Detroit neighborhoods.

Another strategy involves expanding utilization of our Commerce Township Center. While schools are mandated to provide Individualized Education Plan (IEP) based services during the day, oftentimes these children would benefit greatly from additional therapy time. We hope to partner with schools in offering speech and occupational therapies after school and on weekends at our Commerce Center that directly complement a child's IEP treatment plan. We look forward to serving families with insurance, Medicaid, or on a private pay basis.

As the parent of a child who received services from DIC years ago, I am proud to be building on the work of those before me while also leading DIC forward. Together we have accomplished much, but there is still so much more to do if we are to realize our vision: Children with special needs and their families are all thriving members of the community.

I know the entire DIC Board joins me in thanking you, our donors, partners, and stakeholders, for your generous support that allows us to implement our programs. Please consider responding to our upcoming Fall Appeal or visiting [www.detroitchildren.org/donate](http://www.detroitchildren.org/donate) to make a gift in support of our essential work.

With all best wishes,

Heather Martinez

# Summer LEAP Recap

As our memories of summer begin to fade, we wanted to take a moment to share some of the amazing experiences our Summer LEAP provided this year. Once again, it was a summer filled with laughter, learning, and unforgettable memories for the 54 underserved “campers” with special needs who participated at locations in Detroit and Muskegon.

## Diverse and Engaging Activities

Our summer camp offered a diverse range of activities, from space and arts to Dr. Seuss and outdoor adventures, to cater to all interests and passions. Campers had the opportunity to try new things, hone their skills, and discover new interests, ensuring that everyone found something they truly enjoyed.

## Social-Emotional Learning

Our summer program prioritized social-emotional learning and empathy. Campers developed valuable skills such as communication, kindness, and compassion through individual lessons, group activities, and cooperative games. These experiences helped them build self-confidence, develop resilience, and foster positive relationships.

## Enriching Learning Experiences

Our summer program integrated educational components into many activities to keep campers engaged and promote their intellectual growth. Campers explored science at the Cranbrook Science Center, tapped into their creativity during art sessions, and developed problem-solving skills in interactive math activities. These enriching experiences encouraged and fostered a love for continuous learning.

## Outdoor Adventures and Exploration

The great outdoors provided the perfect backdrop for adventure at our summer camp. Campers participated in walks, nature scavenger hunts, and a field trip to the Outdoor Adventure Center, where they explored exciting outdoor adventures through interactive activities, exhibits, and simulators. These experiences helped them connect with nature, learn environmental stewardship, and appreciate the physical world around them.

## Lasting Friendships and Unforgettable Memories

One of the most rewarding aspects of our summer camp was witnessing the friendships that blossomed. Campers formed bonds with their peers and staff, creating a supportive and inclusive community.



**5**  
Weeks



**3**  
Locations +  
Teletherapy



**54 children**  
with special needs

## Meet Our Team

# Dawnantoni (Dawn) Riley

## LEAP Program Supervisor

**Joined DIC:** 2023

**Credentials:** Western Michigan University, Bachelor of Arts in Secondary Education  
State of Michigan Standard Teaching Certificate



### About Dawn

I live in Clinton Township with my fiancé and our cat. I enjoy reading books, traveling, and visiting new restaurants. As a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, I also spend a lot of my time outside of work giving back to the people of Macomb County.

I initially went to college for Broadcast Journalism. After a semester in the program, I switched to Education because I wasn't honoring all of my passions. I had previous experience working with children at day care centers, summer camps, and after-school programs. Teaching was the best decision for me because I knew I could use my strengths to try to help youth be just as eager to read and write. After being in the field of education for more than eight years, I can say I am right where I need to be.

### Why LEAP?

Out-of-school time is important. I would not be the person I am today if I did not have access to free art, dance, cheer, vocal music, and violin classes; field trips; and programs like the Detroit Area Pre-College Engineering Program (DAPCEP). These opportunities became spaces where I could be brave enough to be my best self, make mistakes, make friends, learn, and gain confidence.

As the LEAP Program Supervisor at Marygrove, I work closely with DIC's Director of Program Development and Quality to ensure that our program is using best practices. I oversee all LEAP programming taking place at our Marygrove Center, which includes after-school tutoring, summer LEAP, and building relationships with community partners in the Metro Detroit area.

## Why choose After-School Programs?



### Academic Support

After-school programs can provide kids with special needs with the extra academic support they need to succeed in school. This can include help with homework, tutoring, and test preparation. Additionally, they provide kids a safe and supportive environment where they can learn, grow, and have fun.



### Social-Emotional Learning

After-school programs can also help kids with special needs develop important social and emotional skills, such as communication, conflict resolution, and self-regulation. These skills help them build positive relationships with their peers and adults.



### Increased Self-Confidence

After-school programs help kids build self-confidence by providing them with opportunities to try new things and be recognized for their accomplishments. These programs can also develop resilience by teaching kids how to cope with setbacks and challenges.



### Attendance and Achievement

Research has shown that kids with special needs who attend after-school programs are more likely to attend school regularly and achieve academically. This is because these programs can help them overcome challenges they may face in school and develop the skills they need to succeed.

# Parent Comments

*Casey had a lot of fun and I really appreciate this. I'm not able to afford a summer camp where I can leave her, and this is great that they have this for families that still work.*

*This camp was amazing for Shane, and I hope you guys have the funding to do it again next year, I loved it all. Thank you so much for including my child!*

*The quality of this program was unexpected since it was at no cost. I really appreciate how much my child enjoyed it. Thank you all so much.*

*I give the program two thumbs up. Knowledgeable staff, clean environment, appropriate methods of dealing with a challenging child. I'm signing him up for next year.*



## THANK YOU

Our heartfelt thanks go out to all of the corporate sponsors, patron underwriters, donors, and volunteers whose dedication and hard work once again made this year's Sigma Gamma Association Fireworks Picnic a smashing success. Proceeds from the event will be used to further enhance our LEAP programming. We are so very grateful for the generous support this annual event provides for the children and families served by DIC!



**22**  
staff



**100%**  
of students  
maintained or made  
progress on their  
**IEP goals**



**100%**  
satisfaction  
from parents

# DIC Back to School

School is back in session, and so is DIC's team of professionals who work with more than 2,000 students while providing more than 60,000 hours of speech, occupational, and behavioral therapy.

We currently partner with 192 K-12 schools, Head Starts, and Early Childhood programs across Detroit, Southeast, and West Michigan, with Detroit and Wayne County home to 150 of these locations. In addition, the sites where we work enroll 49% of Michigan's more than 200,000 special education students, with data also indicating 77% of students served are classified as "economically disadvantaged."

We also partner with agencies such as Inspire Autism to offer additional services, such as speech and occupational therapy, that can benefit their clients.

The various therapies we provide address an array of needs associated with conditions such as Autism Spectrum Disorder, Speech Delay, and Sensory Processing Disorder. Because these conditions are not readily apparent to the naked eye, they are often considered to be "hidden disabilities" that, without appropriate intervention, will negatively impact a child's ability to reach their full potential in school and in life.

DIC is proud to work with our school and agency partners in serving students with special needs. To learn more about our School and Partner Services program, please call **Mike Rhoads** at **248-918- 4279**.



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## Commerce Township Center Accepting New Clients

Now in its third year, DIC's Commerce Township Center continues to help children school-age and younger meet their speech and occupational therapy needs, with a specialization in working with children who have an Autism diagnosis.

DIC's team of professionals begins by conducting an independent assessment of a child's development across the entire spectrum of age-appropriate communication skills. If the child qualifies for special services by exhibiting a measurable delay in comparison to same-aged peers, one of our licensed and credentialed therapists will develop an individualized "game plan" designed specifically to meet that child's needs.

We are very pleased to serve families with insurance or on a private pay basis at our conveniently located Commerce location, and look forward to accepting Medicaid in the near future. To learn more, please call Desiree Garagiola at 248-963-1224 or stop in and visit us at 2045 E. West Maple Road (just west of M-5), Suite D407, Commerce Township, MI 48390.



*INSPIRE Autism is a proud partner of the Detroit Institute for Children (DIC). Their team is extremely supportive, and we couldn't be happier with our collaboration. The children we serve at our centers enjoy working with their passionate Speech Pathologists and are making tremendous improvements. We also highly recommend taking a tour of DIC's Commerce Township center – you won't be disappointed!"*

*- James Boudreau, M.Ed., BCBA, LBA*



2045 E. West Maple  
Suite D407  
Commerce Township, MI 48390

## Support DIC and Keep Children First

We know these are difficult times and we appreciate any gift you can provide in support of the work we do. Please help us reach our \$625,000 fundraising goal by using the enclosed envelope or visiting [www.detroitchildren.org/donate](http://www.detroitchildren.org/donate) to make your contribution today!



Shop at Kroger? Register your Kroger Rewards Card to donate a percentage of your transaction to DIC (and get great coupon deals while you're on their website!).  
**Our Organization Number is IM321.**  
Re-enroll every April!

### ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM

**Heather Martinez**  
Chief Executive Officer

**Mike Rhoads**  
Chief Operating Officer

**Niki Beebani**  
Director of Program Development &  
Quality

**Nicole Regentik**  
Director of Human Resources

**Jan Shimshock**  
Director of Development

**Desiree Garagiola**  
Office Manager

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