

## Annual Report 2016-2017

We began this program year with a sense of great anticipation and excitement as we responded to Houston Independent School District's RFP's (request for proposals) which allows our organization to become board approved, thus able to serve children in the HISD schools. It also allows for schools who desire to help finance our programs on their campuses to do so. Working to bring increased fun interactions throughout our program year has been a delight for all involved even during this year of financial challenge. We would like to share with you what we have seen as success.

As required, we were in a period of silence that would not allow us any contact with the potential school or schools that we might serve through the RFP's. Therefore we were delighted to serve our friends at Arbor School with a Switch- A- Thon event. Our volunteer friends from St John's Middle School joined us for the event. They engaged each participant in conversational turn taking, using a voice recorder (VOCA-voice output communication aid). They then partnered with each child with special abilities allowing them to independently access each environmental/sensory item that they desired. Low tech items such as capability switches and VOCA's, were used by the participants. The volunteers (cheer captains) cheered them on and encouraged them and complimented them on what they were able to accomplish.

In addition, students at Hogg Middle School were able to enjoy the variety of multi sensory items as we shared the Switch – A – Thon event there. The students from the PSI class and the Life Skills Class used independent movements and vocalizations, eye gaze and words to indicate and control the preferred items.

**This first event of our program year helped us achieve stated objectives ...**

**Taking the fun of Switch A Thon to Arbor & Hogg Middle School/To more children with Special Abilities**



We started our year at Rogers in the Spring of the year. One parent wrote saying that it “feels like a million years since I have seen you, but I hear you will be back on campus soon!! I found out through two staff members that HRH had been approved by the board to be back on campus this spring.... That absolutely made my day!”

This is what we saw during this season of our club play. We saw a student use his communication board with meaning and in a fun way to direct the behaviors of others, to call, to greet, to comment and to count and even engage a peer who was hearing impaired. He also used his body movements, gesturing to signal hello and to say come here. How delighted he was taking many conversational turns using his communication board and sometimes exploring pictures and symbols that were new to him.

**The player is using a communication board with his coach! Increased successful interaction & communication.  
Fun in the Home Run Hitters' Dug Out!**



One of the players loved forming joint attention with his coach during our games. At the end of the season when we were taking pictures, he noticed a baseball that had fallen on the floor in the corner. We were looking for the ball. The adults including his coach did not see the ball. It was so cool that he looked at his coach then looked in the corner where the ball was, looked at his coach again and again to the corner until his coach realized he wanted her to see what he was looking at. When she found the ball everyone laughed including the player because the mysterious lost ball was found by him!!! Success...Once again, movements used to interact became movements to communicate.

**What a team! Player led coach in discovering lost ball using eye gaze and movements!**



Finally, one young girl had begun to show movements and interactions that had not been seen before (starting with the last campfire in 2015, then increasing her movement in fall of 2015 to be 3<sup>rd</sup> place runner up in our Switch A Thon Event....) This same little girl was seen coming down the hall. When she neared the Dug Out, the place where we played the games, she began to move her head and sometimes her arms and legs....as if to interact with us and engage those of us who were in the Home Run Hitters' Dug Out. It was rewarding to look at the consecutive shots of her team photos. Her movements were clearly seen. Those movements were always interpreted as her efforts to engage and interact with us.

Over the years, parent and coaches have expressed so much joy and excitement for our kids as they are escorted down the red carpet and their names announced as finalists and winners. Registration for this event required 5 to 10 engagements with friends (20 to 40 interactions) for each participant using movements or voice recorders (VOCA's).

**Increased Interactions with Friends lead to this special HRH Coronation Day!  
Parents, Coaches & Staff Beam with Pride**



Finally, the Playoffs and the End of the year Celebration brought our season to a close. For the first time in our club history, the player of the year award trophy went to a new player and coach... Player Neave and Coach Monica. They beat out Gjared, who had held the title for more than 5 years.

How do these activities help us accomplish our goals and our mission? All of these activities require that increased fun interactions take place with our special guys and girls. Our Switch A Thon requires that each participant independently engage persons and items in their environments (through use of movements, low tech aides or VOCA's/voice recorders) To be a part of the coronation ceremony or run for king and queen, qualifying cards must be filled with initials of 5 to 10 different people who engaged our special guys and girls. In support of the volunteers and parents, they have the opportunity of supporting their partner or child and rejoicing in their accomplishments.

**Summer and Camp M.I. Way and Camp M.I. Way Extended (M.I. Way Theater Production)**

Our board of directors took on the challenge of making sure we had funds to support our summer camp and our extended camp called M.I. Way Theater Production. A fundraising firm was hired with money given to us by The Children's Fund. He began the process of a financial campaign to raise operational funds for two years 2017 and 2018. We were able to plan and carry out the plans for a summer camp experience that was to rival none.

Our staff was assembled: Camp Directors, Nursing Staff and Support Staff, along with our Jr. Director crew of experienced volunteers. Room and bus reservations were made and we were ready for the best Camp M.I. Way experience ever! The multisensory camp environment was set up, volunteers were trained. All of this so that our special guys and girls, those who attended summer school at T.H. Rogers and those who did not, were able to be engaged in increased fun interactions involving, no tech, low tech and high tech experiences. Each camper was given at least 70 opportunities for interacting/communicating as they traveled through the camp sites. Even more opportunities 70 + were available for those campers who were a part of the extended camp area (M.I. Way Theater Production).

Success: The camper who surprised us all at the last campfire of 2015 took the lead around camp as her counselors had her using her movements to lead the pledge of allegiance, turn on bubbles, to turn on lights, to give instructions for potting a plant and much more! There was something special about this. This little girl, who a couple of years earlier had been viewed as one who "probably can't" is viewed this year as "We know you can...we will just wait"... Opportunities for this little girl and others requires the support of the programs, the technology but most importantly those who believe in and focus on the CAN part of the word 'dis ABILITY'.

**Counselors Believe the Camper Can/ Waiting with Anticipation proves them right! See the Lights!**



Our second camp at Smartie Pants Academy was a success as volunteers joined us to engage and interact with special children and their siblings and friends. We met our goal of providing increased opportunities to engage and interact using gestures, words, no tech or low tech supports. At least 50 opportunities for interacting occurred daily for each camper. They were able to discuss the activities for the day, select which activity would be first, ask for needed materials at each site, request more, describe items, their qualities/characteristics using all senses, and at the campfire discuss favorite activities of the day.

We ended the program year with the Away Weekends, the Interactive Respite for our special guys and girls. Parents drop the girls and guys with us in the mornings and picked them up in the evening (8am to 8pm). What did we accomplish? Times of interaction and communication for our special guys and girls and a time of restoration, recreation and relaxation for the parents and care providers. Parents told us: They appreciate having the time to spend with each other... taking in a movie and a nice lunch. They also like the idea of their child being busy because at night the child goes right to sleep and does not wake until the next morning! They ask if we can continue doing what we do to “make that happen again”. One family indicated that they are pleased to be able to focus on their non disabled child on these weekends while knowing that their child with special needs is not only safe and well cared for but also engaged and interacting with friends.

We spent our first two weekends at the local hotel and the Mini Vacation weekend at a hotel in Kemah! We served as many as 8 to10 children each day. We were able to support as many as 14 different families this year. Parents tell us that they look forward to these weekends each year.

**Fun for the Special Guests & Family Support During the Away Weekends**



**Finances and Funding**

Home Run Hitters International has been proactive this year in raising funds for its programs. We continue to depend on generous gifts from our long time friends like Buster Hayslip with Dirty’s Golf Tournament and friends at the Houston Chapter of the IADC. Even though there was a significant downturn in the oil industry

the IADC continues to lend financial support to us. We are ever so grateful for their continued support.

Because of funds given by the Children's Fund, we are able to seek a fundraiser/executive director/marketing person who will help us begin an operational campaign that will help us for the next two years. During this time we will be able with funds raised to hire a person whose job will include fundraising, developing community relations and seeking grants. The decrease in funding gave impetus to our board seeking alternatives to having camp as we have known it in the past...being creative and thinking of having teams of volunteers and staff go to each child's home to engage them. However, with financial gifts from friends and board members and special fundraising efforts from Tom Herren's Company, we were able to fund the camps for our special guys and girls this program year!

Houston Independent School District and T.H. Rogers School continued to help support the costs of providing two of the three programs (the Club and the Camp) for 40 students with special abilities during the year, and 30 children during the time of camp. HISD provides finances for services rendered.

Our board is actively engaged in financial support of Home Run Hitters International. The board gives, seeks funds through sponsoring special events, or makes requests from individuals and granting agencies.

### **Staff and Volunteers**

It is such a pleasure to have our Director of Programs as a leader on our staff. Sylvia Palacios does a wonderful job of reflecting the spirit and passion of Home Run Hitter International. Her knowledge, her presentation of excellence and her experience with the children and each of our four programs makes her an invaluable member of our staff.

This year we were short staffed but we were able to present all of the programs using temporary helpers. We thank Mary Ann for stepping in and helping us when we needed extra help. We will make sure that we enter this program year with the needed staff. We are committed to having a trained team so that we can share each of our programs with additional children and their teachers, care staff, and parents. The program staff that must be in place have to be able to help with our children as well as help with office work which is directly related to the programs that are run.

Our volunteers that partner with our special guys and girls as cheer captains, coaches, counselors or young audiences are a part of the school staff, and student body where the programs are held. Some of the volunteers for camp and Switch A Thon are recruited from other schools inside and outside of the district. Many of these camp volunteers are former or current students of the campus on which the camps are held.

We will seek additional volunteers to help with our times of moving equipment and times of set up. This is a critical part of our being able to be portable. If portability remains a characteristic of our programs, we must build a volunteer base who will be willing and able to help.

Each year we have been able to count on the support from our home school friends. They have helped whenever help was needed. A big thanks goes to the students Ethan, Jordan, Jabari and Cory and to Mrs Tomitra for always having her students ready to serve. We really appreciate each of you.

## Financial and In Kind Support

In kind gifts continue to be a part of our success. We continue to be thankful for Weingarten Realty supporting us over the years by donating office space to us. That is a very important contribution to our non profit as we continue to plan and work to expand our programs and reach more children with special abilities in our city.

Aaron Crawford and Megan Crawford of Colorplex Studios have supported our online needs for many years with our website development and has now given the website a new look also making it easy to access from varying platforms. He and his company have donated their services to us and we are forever grateful!

How blessed we were to have Tina Cooper who volunteered to help the support staff during camp at T.H. Rogers. For all the energy and effort and special care given to our special guys and girls, we are indeed grateful for such a selfless gift!

We have received so many financial gifts from family, friends and foundations for which we are so grateful.

HEB has partnered with us for years donating gift cards, bottled water, and a special grant for use with our programs at T.H. Rogers. Community businesses such as the Houston Children's Museum, Museum of Fine Arts, the Science Museum, have been supportive by giving complimentary tickets for our special guys and girls to use on these special weekends or with their families. Volunteers who work with them are also presented special complimentary tickets as a way of saying thanks.

For years, the Hyatt Regency has donated space for our Away Weekend programs and the Holiday Inn has done the same for us for our Mini Vacations.. These hotels have been very supportive of our efforts to support our special guys and girls and their families.

We continue to have a desire to find donated storage space for our equipment and camp items but have not to date found a donated space. We are thankful for the small storage unit that has been donated and appreciate only having to pay insurance for that smaller unit even though we now pay full price and insurance for the two larger units.

## Income

\$118,909.73 -Total Contributions and income for **fiscal year March, 2016 to February, 2017.**

## Expenses

\$100,487.82 -Total Expenditures for our **fiscal year March, 2016 to February, 2017.** Our greatest expenditure continues to be our 3 week Camp-extended at T.H. Rogers called M.I. Way Productions. Our 25 special campers (girls and guys with special abilities/*disabilities* ) who require extra supports for travel /transportation, personal and medical care account for the most significant increase in program expenses seen in the past two years. An increase in administrative expenses continues with the cost of the CPA who was hired last year and now the Tom Herren Co. hired this coming fiscal year to bring in operational funds. (Note: funds to support the cost of the fund raiser was part of a grant given by the Children's Fund.

A detailed financial report of our fiscal year is available on Guide Star or upon request from the HRHII Office.

## **Mission Statement:**

The mission of HRHII continues to be to provide increased opportunities for successful, fun interactions among those whose disabilities affect their communication and non-disabled volunteers of all ages while supporting their families, care providers and educators.

## **Objectives:**

**To be able to offer**/maintain and support programs at current sites while expanding programs to other sites....reaching an increasing number of children/persons with varying ranges of communication issues and volunteers of all ages.

**To train an increased number** of persons who can become site managers, to run the programs maintaining quality, intent, character and integrity of the programs.

**To facilitate visible/recognizable changes or increases** in communication or interactions for those who have disabilities that limit success in communicating or interacting.

**Mission Update:** We are fulfilling our mission of providing increased opportunities for successful fun interactions with a total of 450 club meetings with friends (games). Meetings (games) average approximately 16 conversational turns. The resulting total is 7200 fun interactions for the special guys and girls in our club. An estimated total of 460 interactions in the Switch-A-Thon event (35 students) at Arbor and Hogg Middle, 26,400 interactions in Camp M.I. Way Rogers, and 9216 interactions during the Away Weekends. Home Run Hitter Programs brought an additional 43,276 plus opportunities for interactions to our special guys and girls. It was a fun year of motion and fun communication and interaction!!! We also spend the year encouraging staff, care providers and parents as we involve them in the successes of our special children and provide the special weekends of rest and relaxation.

## **Addressing our objectives:**

1. Maintaining programs in current sites- 4 of 5 programs were maintained in current sites (Club, 2 Camps and Expanded Camp-"M.I. Way Theater Production")  
Expanding to new sites: Switch-A-Thon at two new sites Arbor and Hogg Middle School
2. Training increased numbers of persons to become site managers  
We are beginning the training with our camp counselors. Counselors become Jr Directors and some assigned to oversee and manage camp areas while others are assigned to help with training new counselors. These Jr Directors will be tasked with helping to set up camps in new sites.
3. Visible changes: Coaches comments, personal observations of two or more persons, photos and videos have confirmed visible changes among the participants in our programs.

## **Report on Operations**

Funding during the year was a challenge as we prepared for the financial responsibilities of the expanded summer camp and the cost of the CPA firm hired. Our supporters, IADC (The International Association of Drilling Contractors), the Children's Fund, Dirty's Golf Tournament (formerly Maribelle's) , Ms Robin have been our greatest contributors in the past and our programs would not have gone forward without that support.

Our Director of Programs, Sylvia, runs each of the Home Run Hitter Programs with excellence and sensitivity to the special guys and girls that is the hallmark of our organization. Margaret, our newest program staff member has increased her knowledge of the program standards and demonstrated her understanding of multi sensory environment set up. Margaret has continued her commitment to the style of interaction that Home Run Hitters requires.

We thank Sylvia, Tara and Margaret for the quality of work performed at the office in support of each of the programs run by our organization. A special thanks to all of the Camp Staff, Lorenda, Sylvia, and Margaret; the support staff Tomitra, Tonisha, Lathalia, Tiffany, Gwen, and the nursing staff headed by Kimberly assisted by JWanyka. How blessed we were to have Tina who volunteered to help the support staff. For all the energy and effort and special care you gave, we are indeed grateful for such a selfless gift! We are able to have the camps because of the people on our staff who have a heart for our children.

We continue to express appreciation to the community organizations who lend us financial, in kind and moral support: IADC (The International Association of Drilling Contractors) , Dirty's Golf Tournament (formerly Maribelle's), Weingarten's Realty, Hyatt Regency Hotel, MW Cleaners Augusta at Woodway, Pilgrim Cleaners FM1960 and T.H. Rogers' School administration and staff, HISD, and our parents and many friends.

**Our Board and Advisory Board for the 2016-2017 calendar year:**

Dr. Deborah Carr	President
Denise Trahan	Board Chair
Bessie Cox	Financial Director
Fannie Ward	Financial Assistant Director
Elaine Bleakney	Operations
Jeffrey Kessler	Fundraising
Bandana Chawla	Community Awareness
Karen Ponce	Administrative Assistant

**Advisory Board**

Carlene Warren	Administrative Resource
Yvonne McCant	Human Resource
Nicole Hayes	Financial Resource

Note: Assisting Temporarily as Legal Counsel is Felicia Hubert until replacement found.