



SPRING/SUMMER 2024

DISCOVER & LEARN

Official Newsletter of the Developmental Learning Center



www.DLCJAX.org
EIN# 92-0376681

Preserving his ability to walk

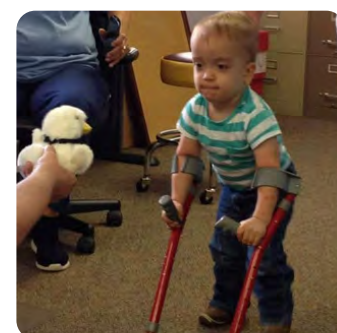
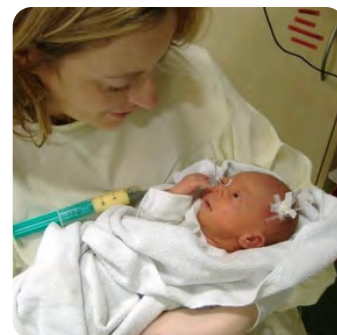
Meet George Liam Kohl Austin

When Liam's mom had some testing done during pregnancy, they found a problem in the development of his spinal cord and diagnosed him with spina bifida. This condition occurs when there is a problem during a short time in the development of an embryo that causes a portion of the spinal cord not to close. Then, because there is an opening, the nerves in the spinal cord are damaged over time, which can cause many problems. Liam's parents went to five specialists to have more testing done, and asked for advice because they knew nothing about spina bifida. One specialist said just carry on with the pregnancy and after the child's born, we will see what we're dealing with, but they had already been told the nerve damage occurs more and more throughout the pregnancy. **Four out of the five specialists stated that if it were them, they would just end the pregnancy and start over because you never know what kind of problems the child will encounter. Liam's mother had already lost three pregnancies and there was no way she was giving up on this baby.**

Feeling defeated, Liam's parents were getting up from their chairs to leave the final specialist when his mom suddenly remembered something that she had read in a magazine article years ago. She asked, "isn't there some sort of surgery they can do in utero?" This specialist knew of a procedure but did not approve of fetal surgery because he felt it was risky, so he declined to give the information until he was pressed. His mom pointed out that the abortion he was proposing was a 100% risk, so how can he be against trying the fetal surgery? He handed over the business card, which connected them with a wonderful man, Prof. Dr. Kohl, who just happened to be practicing two hours from where they lived in Germany. At the time he was the only man in the world performing minimally invasive spina bifida defect repair surgery using a procedure that he developed, which was accomplished by robotic arms entering the uterus through tiny holes in the mother's abdomen.

Yes, there was potential risk to the baby, and the outcome was not guaranteed, but Liam's mom had instant faith in this doctor after their first meeting because of his great patient outcomes and his deep honesty and caring. **She wanted her child to have this chance at improving his life and perhaps preserving his ability to walk.** The surgery could only stop further nerve damage from occurring, not fix the damage that was done, and Liam already had hydrocephalus of the brain seen in ultrasounds. The surgery on Liam's spinal cord was quickly scheduled and happened when Liam was only 22 weeks gestation, about the size of a sweet potato. Even though it had never happened in the previous 54 surgeries this man had done, Liam's hydrocephalus disappeared after the surgery.

READ MORE =>



Preserving his ability to walk - continued

He was born at 30 weeks, happy and healthy, and with significantly less nerve damage than he would have had without the surgery, and no hydrocephalus and brain shunt like so many of the other babies with his condition. The surgery also saved him from life in a wheelchair and who knows what else. It is important to say that even without the surgery he would be a wonderful, happy person able to cope with whatever life throws at him.

Liam was one and a half when he got to the Developmental Learning Center (formerly DLC Nurse & Learn). At the time, he could only commando crawl by dragging himself with his arms while other kids his age were already walking. His teacher, Laura, was quick to make him understand that he had to start doing for himself, and that his mother wouldn't always be there to carry him around. **During his four years at DLC, Liam had extensive therapy and learned how to walk with a walker. Today he walks independently with just leg braces.** It was also discovered that he would need catheters in order to empty his bladder, and the amazing staff at DLC taught him how to do this on his own so that by the time he got to kindergarten, he was fully independent. ***His time at DLC was full of love and encouragement from every single person that worked there, and they instilled him with so much confidence and a great sense of personal pride in his abilities and accomplishments.***

Liam is very happy and friendly, and thrived at his Montessori K through 6 school, John E. Ford. He is now proud to say that he has transitioned from DLC to DC, Darnell Cookman School of the medical arts where he is in 6th grade beginning his journey to becoming a surgeon, a dream he has had for years. He still fondly remembers his time at DLC. He says he remembers his teachers, and that they were really supportive and nice to him. He remembers taking some of his first steps on a rainbow rug, he remembers learning his ABCs and the wonderful visits from Santa and Mrs. Claus. He remembers getting cool little lightsabers as a reward from his therapist when he was learning how to do his catheters and playing with his friends in the classroom waiting for his mom to pick him up. **But mostly he remembers how good he felt when he was there [at DLC].**

Since his time at DLC, he has occasionally encountered a bully who hassled him because he couldn't run as fast as other kids or play stand-up sports, and he said his confidence helped him to not feel badly about himself even though that is what they wanted. Most kids are wonderful to him, and he has a huge group of friends, his best one he met at DLC! He loves reading and loves school, loves solving the Rubik's cube, collecting Pokémon and football cards, playing wheelchair basketball and sled hockey, ziplining, running in the Junior Gate River Run, and golfing. He dreams of someday visiting Germany where he was born and personally thanking the surgeon that helped him. **Especially when someone treats him badly or looks down on him for his disabilities, he feels sorry for them and understands that they are coping with their own problems in this world and that's why they feel that way about him. Liam has a message that he requested be included in this - 'Never let your disability stop you from doing what you want to do.'**

Liam's mom wasn't sure if miracles existed before this experience, but now she knows they are real. Every step of the way, it felt as if there were interventions. In Germany, amniocentesis is discouraged during pregnancy, but something told his mom to fight for it, which is how he was diagnosed so early. How did that article she read so many years ago pop into her head at the exact moment it was needed? How did they happen to be so close to this amazing doctor that could help them? Everything about Liam was meant to be, including his disability. *He is an absolute joy to be around, and he is destined to contribute some amazing things to this world.*



Overcoming the odds every day

Meet Andrew Etheredge



"Andrew was born with a seizure disorder (Epilepsy), lymphangioma, and cortical dysplasia. **His prognosis wasn't great when he was born, in fact it was hard news to hear.** The doctors said he most likely wouldn't walk or talk, or even feed himself. All of this was devastating news to process at that time, and then he got sick. He was hospitalized when he was 5 months old for 27 days and underwent major surgery to remove an infected lymphangioma on the left side of his abdomen. He was still so genuinely happy even though he was in a hospital for almost a month.



Michael and I just decided that we weren't going to give up or let them dictate his outcome. So, we started talking to our pediatrician about resources and specialist visits and then we found DLC!

Michael and I will always be so thankful for finding DLC because without everyone's dedication to his physical therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, and all the assistance you gave us when applying for everything we could so he could attend there.



While at DLC, his life changed so much, and he celebrated milestones like first steps, leg braces, walking and sitting up in a highchair to feed himself. Michael saw him sitting in a highchair feeding himself and was so surprised. **Those little accomplishments were so huge to us.** He was able to communicate early on with sign language, and now his vocabulary has grown, and he can talk and have conversations with people. He is genuinely loved and so happy!! **DLC has helped shape our son and who he is as a handsome young man.** We have taken him on vacation to the Bahamas and Cozumel. He is incredibly smart and super funny! He is the youngest of 7 and one of two boys and trust me he holds his own with them. He attends middle school at Landmark and rides the bus. Andrew still takes medicine for his seizures, and we have been fortunate to control those as much as we can with medication.



Our journey with Andrew is an incredible one. We have met some amazing people and thank you to DLC and everything he has accomplished and continues to do every day amazes me. Andrew has great instincts and enjoys hanging out with his family and friends. **We are so thankful for DLC and tell everyone what a wonderful resource they are, and the people there are amazing!** All of you should celebrate everything our son Andrew accomplishes in life, because you are a huge part of all his successes!"

Shared by Andrew's mom Tracie Etheredge.



You are invited to DLC's VPK Graduation
Thursday, May 30th at 6:30pm
Murray Hill UMC
4101 College Street, 32205



Heather Corey, CFRE
Chief Executive
Officer



Annalaura Scott, CNA
Chief Programs
Officer



Erin Church, MBA
Finance Director



Carolyn Janzen, PT
Director of Therapy



Sue Molina, RN
Director of Nursing



Elizabeth Smith, CNA
Assistant Program
Director

Thank you for your support of Passport to Riverside, Avondale & Murray Hill 2023!



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Tracy & Bill
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Passport Sites:

The Benefits of Stretching

Submitted by Carolyn Janzen, Physical Therapist
DLC's Director of Therapy

Adding physical activity to your daily routine can enhance your healthy lifestyle. But that doesn't mean you need to spend hours at the gym. One of the easiest and most beneficial things you can do for your body is to stretch.

What are the benefits of stretching?

- **Increased flexibility and range of motion:** By increasing flexibility and your body's range of motion, you'll have more freedom of movement to help you perform everyday tasks.
- **Increased blood flow to muscles:** Improved circulation can shorten recovery time and muscle soreness after strenuous exercise.
- **Reduced stress and tension:** Stretching will loosen certain muscle groups that are most affected by stress-induced tightness, such as your neck, shoulders, back and head.
- **Improved posture:** Developing poor posture happens over time and is a common issue for people who sit hunched over a desk for work. If your spine is curved for long periods of time, your muscles will overcompensate to stabilize the bones and joints in your back. Stretching may help lengthen certain muscles, allowing you to sit taller and straighter.



Types of Stretching

- **Active Stretching:** With active stretching, you use your own muscles to provide resistance. You're moving or contracting one muscle to stretch another. A prime example of this is yoga.
- **Static Stretching:** When you extend your muscles to the furthest point in a certain position, hold that position, and breathe for about 30 seconds. It is the most common form of stretching.
- **Dynamic Stretching:** Active movements that cause your muscles to stretch, but the stretch is not held in the end position. Dynamic stretching is usually done to warm up your muscles before exercising.
- **Self-Myofascial Release:** Involves using tools like rollers, tennis balls, or other objects to target different trigger points or knots in your muscles. Gentle pressure with these stretching tools can help relieve pressure or "release" the knot you feel in your muscles.

When is the Best Time to Stretch?

Listen to your body. You can stretch your muscles if you need to loosen up or relax. Your muscles are the tightest and most stiff first thing in the morning. Dynamic stretching is a great way to get the blood pumping and generate energy for the day ahead. Stretching before bed may help your body to relax. It can help to release any tension that has built up during the day. Stretching throughout your day can also be beneficial. Taking a five-minute break to stretch your legs, especially if you've been sitting at your desk for a few hours, can help you feel better and improve your overall health.

Most important tip – enjoy your time of stretching and how refreshed you feel afterwards.

Local Author visits DLC

In March we kicked off Literacy and Dr. Seuss Week with local author **Petika Tave**, sharing her book "Brilliant as You are."

Thank you to the Jacksonville Public Library and Kids Hope Alliance for connecting Petika with DLC.



Valentine's Day @ DLC

Thank you to everyone who helped make DLC's 2024 Annual Valentine's Day Dance fun and memorable.

Thank you to the Volunteers, Parents, Families, DLC Board Members, and Staff who helped make DLC's Annual Valentine's Day dance a great success!



Thank you to **Bolles Students "Characters for Care"** for joining us again for the dance. The kids love when so many princesses come to visit.

Easter at DLC

Thank you to everyone who helped make DLC's Annual Easter Egg Hunt a magical moment.

Thank you to all of the groups, Volunteers, Families, and Staff who helped make the Easter Egg Hunt a memorable time for our sweet kiddos.



Reading: The importance and benefits Submitted by Amanda Gay, DLC VPK Teacher



Does your child ever ask, "Can you read to me please?" and you say, "sorry I'm busy or I have a million things to do, but maybe later"? While we all live busy lives, reading is a very important fundamental that helps children with different areas of development. Reading to young children promotes language skills, cognitive skills, creative imagination, and emotional and empathy awareness. While these are just a few of the benefits of reading, there are plenty more options. It also helps develop reading and comprehension skills in your child, a creative imagination, and a parent-child bond.



According to the *Child Mind Institute*, when reading to young children every day, it exposes them to approximately 290,000 more words and can go up to a million by kindergarten versus a child that isn't read to every day. This creates children with a broader knowledge of not only a bigger vocabulary but a knowledge of diversity. It allows them to know the real world, while also indulging in the fictional world. Reading teaches children to use their imagination and allows them to be creative. They use bold colors, descriptive vocabulary and a different mindset than we have as adults. Books that are written about feelings, or tough situations that young children experience may allow them to know they are not alone. It also helps them know their feelings are validated and it is okay to feel the way they are feeling. Reading can teach them positive ways to handle their emotions and navigate others around them. Reading allows them to gain these life skills in a fun and easy way.

While saying all these things, reading has many different benefits and is such a big part of our everyday life, as adults, especially. If we can teach kids to read now and how fun it can be, we can set the foundation for the future and how to have a positive relationship with reading. **So, remember to slow down and read and set a little time aside every day to read, whether it's at bedtime or lunch or just sometime throughout the day.** Reading a book can impact your children in many positive ways. So, grab your favorite book or theirs and get them started today on an early journey to literacy awareness. Happy Reading!



Thank you to all of DLC's Volunteers who help throughout the year!



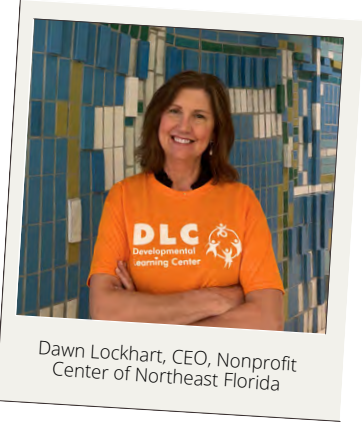
- DLC volunteers are needed to help:
- Organize, set up, and clean up during snack time and arts & crafts in the classroom.
 - During special events like the Thanksgiving lunch, Christmas Parties, the Valentine's Day Dance, Easter Egg Hunt and more.
 - A regular and reliable reading buddy during the week in the classroom (must be able to pass a background check).
 - Quarterly or monthly volunteers to help maintain the DLC grounds (playgrounds, walkways, etc.).

For more information or to sign up, contact Sarah Leitch by email at Sleitch@DLCJAX.org or by phone at 904-387-0370.

Let us know how you can help!

Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month

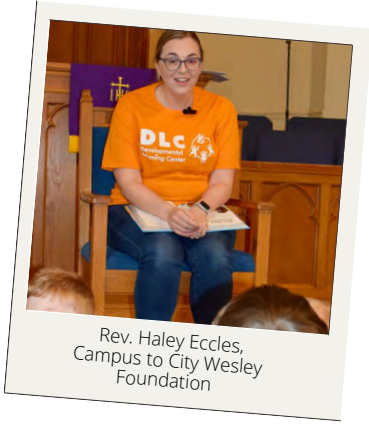
In March, DLC honored and recognized the efforts of so many for Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month. Thank you to community leaders, families (past and present), partners, volunteers, DLC friends, and staff for donning your orange to support children and youth with Developmental Disabilities.



Dawn Lockhart, CEO, Nonprofit Center of Northeast Florida



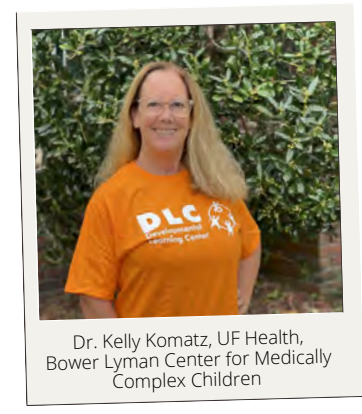
Pastor Mike Hudson
CrossRoad Church



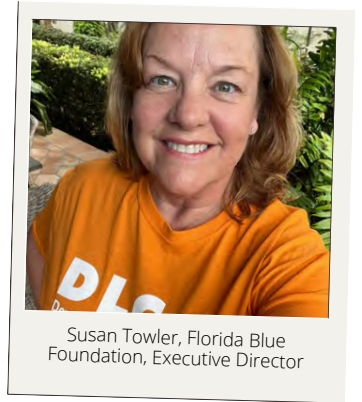
Rev. Haley Eccles,
Campus to City Wesley
Foundation



Lori Ann Whittington, CEO,
Pine Castle



Dr. Kelly Komatz, UF Health,
Bower Lyman Center for Medically
Complex Children



Susan Towler, Florida Blue
Foundation, Executive Director



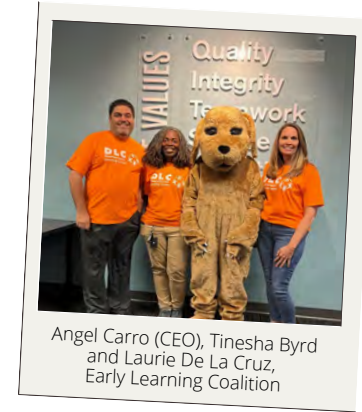
Mike Buresh, Meteorologist,
Action News



Kenneth Darity,
Chief Administrative Officer,
Kids Hope Alliance



Amy Buggle,
DLC Founder and Former CEO



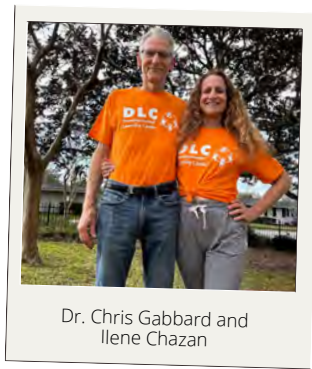
Angel Carro (CEO), Tinesha Byrd
and Laurie De La Cruz,
Early Learning Coalition



Dr. Chanley Dudley,
Carithers Pediatric Group



Stacey Lasonde, ASL Instructor,
and DLC Student Linda



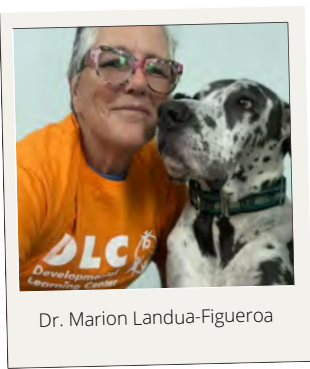
Dr. Chris Gabbard and
Ilene Chazan



Rachel Ybarra (OT), Lauren Foote
(ST) and Carolyn Janzen (PT)



Ashley Dallis, Aixa Atherton
and Amanda Gay



Dr. Marion Landua-Figueroa

Lent Box Thank You

Thank you so much to these DLC friends who filled their Lent Boxes for scholarships.



**Joshua Allen
Hannah C.
Scarlett Clemons
Mike & Kathie Dearing
Susan Lewis
Eileen Phelps**



**Aixa Atherton
Georgie Cerpa
Crossroad Church
Jack Hale
Daniel McCormick
Savannah Scott**



**David Scott Barron
Christopher Family Living Trust
David Corey
Ralph & Carla Hill
Linda Montgomery
Nancy Ann Wardrup**



**Kamrynn Briggs
Jane Strohm Crout
Jaden Laboo
Carolyn M Nelson
Melissa Workman**

New Partnership with Brooks Rehab for Music Therapy

We are grateful for our partnership with Brooks Rehabilitation and filled with joy to be able to provide music therapy each week at DLC. We enjoy collaborating with Music Therapist, Erica Fernandez, who is very popular with DLC's students, and she knows firsthand the value and importance of music therapy in the classroom.

"Music Therapy can address any of the following developmental goals: socialization, attention, cognition, motor coordination, emotional, academic, and other developmental milestones. Music is a great way to motivate kids to reach their goals! Music is able to reinforce concepts, movements, and language/communication skills while keeping kids engaged!"- Erica Fernandez, MM, MT-BC, Neurologic, Music Therapist, Brooks Rehabilitation



In 2024, DLC will be celebrating our 35th Anniversary serving special needs and medically complex children and their families on the First Coast.

How can you get involved?

- **Join the Planning Committee!** Help us plan and organize the festivities to celebrate 35 years. Email Hcorey@DLCJAX.org to sign up.
- **Are you a former student or know a former student?** Send your DLC story and, if possible, scan any photos and send to Hcorey@DLCJAX.org.
- **Want to be invited to all of the celebrations?** Make sure we have the correct mailing address and email Hcorey@DLCJAX.org.

Then



Now



Stay tuned for more details. For any questions, to share ideas or for information, email Hcorey@DLCJAX.org

Embracing Nature's Classroom

Submitted by Elizabeth Smith,
DLC Assistant Program Director



Today we live in such a fast-paced world where technology often takes the lead in educational settings, it's easy to overlook the vast benefits of outdoor learning. Stepping outside the confines of the classroom offers a multitude of opportunities for children to thrive and grow. Let's talk about the power of outdoor learning and the educational experiences that every child can learn from!

The outdoors is complete with a million sensory experiences and possibilities for exploration. Whether it is simply feeling the texture of the different leaves, smelling the flowers around, listening to the birds each making a different sound, watching the changing of the seasons, etc., the environment outdoors stimulates creativity and imagination that inside spaces cannot. Children are free to invent games, build structures with materials, and completely immerse themselves in play scenarios (such as playing pirate ship at the top of the play set to creating different "soups or potions" with the mulch and leaves they have found). There are ample opportunities for children to communicate with their peers in a freer setting to develop social skills as well as interpersonal interactions as they navigate the outdoors. A couple of examples for activities for families at home would be simple things like hide and seek or a nature scavenger hunt. Both of these activities can be easily adapted to children's specific needs and abilities.

Outdoor play encourages children to engage in their physical activities that promote gross motor skill development and wellbeing. Running, climbing, jumping, collecting, and digging in the dirt/sand not only helps to strengthen muscles, but also instills a love for an active lifestyle at an early age that will carry on with them through the years. Being outdoors also gives children exposure to the natural sunlight, which supports the body's production of Vitamin D. This vitamin is essential for healthy immune function and bone development.

In a world where technology and screen time commands the room, the importance of outdoor learning in early education cannot be overlooked. Embrace nature's classroom and foster an enriching learning experience filled with physical, social, emotional and cognitive development. Step outside and breathe the fresh air while unlocking the potential children will have during their outdoor learning experiences! Let's get outside!

Happy DLC Anniversary!

DLC Staff with 5+ years of service



Ms. Ashley,
19 Years



Ms. Aixa,
15 Years



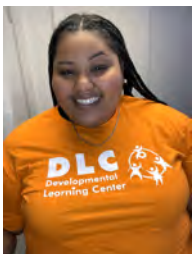
Ms. Laura,
13 Years



Ms. Amanda,
11 Years



Ms. Elizabeth,
9 Years



Ms. Aaliyah,
6 Years



Ms. Heather,
5 Years



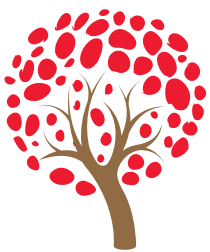
Ms. Sue,
5 Years



Ms. Carla,
5 Years



Mr. Jeff,
5 Years



Leave a Legacy for the future of DLC

The future is NOW at DLC. Please consider leaving DLC in your **will, bequest, Donor Advised Fund, and estate**, to continue your family's blessings for the next generation. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact Heather at Hcorey@DLCJAX.org or 904-387-0370, ext. 103.

If you have already made arrangements for DLC in your estate, let us know! Email Hcorey@DLCJAX.org to share your DLC story.



Join DLC as a Monthly Partner

Churches, civic groups, and individuals can sign up to be a monthly partner with DLC! Make a monthly gift to DLC to help provide support for scholarships for special needs and medically complex children. You can sign up to give monthly on our website at www.DLCJAX.org (click on the red Donate Now button) or email Hcorey@DLCJAX.org for more information.

Did you know you can designate DLC at your workplace?

If your company participates in an employee giving campaign each year, don't forget you can typically designate DLC as your preferred charity. You can also designate DLC to receive your Company's matching gifts, if available. Check with your HR department about company matching gifts and when your next workplace enrollment season is open. For any questions, contact Heather at 904-387-0370 or at Hcorey@DLCJAX.org



Fall 2024 VPK Registration is Open

Sign up your 4-year-old today for VPK



DLC offers Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) classes for children with special needs and medical complexities. We are conveniently located on the Westside and provide onsite nursing and therapy care. Families can obtain a FREE VPK certificate from The Early Learning Coalition (for Duval County) at www.elcduval.org/voluntary-pre-k. Sign up NOW! Email Enrollment@DLCJAX.org for any questions and more information.



Special Kudos

Thank you to these community businesses and organizations for their continued support of DLC:

- Bailey's Medical Equipment (Christmas gifts)
- Agape Baptist Church (Christmas gifts)
- Amazon Jax 9 Team (Christmas gifts)
- Woodmen of the World Lodge III (financial gift)
- Spring Glen Methodist Women of Faith (snack & supply donations)
- The Mustang Club of Jacksonville (financial gift)





The Developmental Learning Center/DLC
4101-1 College Street, Jacksonville, FL 32205
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**SCAN ME TO
INVEST IN DLC
TODAY**



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DLC Mission Statement

The Developmental Learning Center provides year-round high quality education, nursing care, and therapies to children of all abilities so that children and families have the opportunity to reach their maximum potential.

New Name *Same Mission*

Have you noticed DLC's new name on mailings, social media, online and in the newsletter? DLC has officially and legally changed our name from **DLC Nurse & Learn** to the **Developmental Learning Center**. Our mission and focus remain the same - to serve special needs and medically complex children in a faith-based loving, learning environment. We

age 22 years old for educational enrichment,
We continue to serve families impacted by

cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, Fragile X
Treacher Collins Syndrome, developmental delays, Microcephaly, genetic and chromosomal, disorders, seizure disorders, Congenital Heart Defects, and other special needs and medical complexities.



continue to serve infants (6 weeks) to nursing care, and therapy services.
unique needs such as spina bifida, syndrome, autism, HIE, epilepsy,

Thank you for your continued support for the past 35 years of serving the First Coast.

www.DLCJAX.org



*Petway Family
Foundation*

The Lucy Gooding Charitable
Foundation Trust



*Jack & Betty Demetree
Family Foundation*