The Bell Center is dedicated to maximizing the potential of children from birth to three years of age who are at risk for developmental delay

Parent Packet

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Each year, hundreds of babies in the central Alabama area are born prematurely, or with spina bifida, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, and a variety of other genetic disorders. These disorders are often accompanied by physical and mental challenges that jeopardize the health and development of these children.

The Bell Center offers early intervention services to children at risk for delay, often within a few days or weeks after birth. Parents often feel a sense of helplessness when they discover their child has special needs; however, the Bell Center staff and volunteers are able to provide them with specific information and encouragement allowing parents to move from a sense of confusion, to a deep pride in their children’s accomplishments and optimism for the future.

Programs at The Bell Center are designed to promote growth in gross and fine motor skills, as well as language, cognition, self-help, and play skills. Each child is evaluated annually, and goals are tailored specifically to the child’s needs. Trained volunteers carry out these individually prescribed programs under the close supervision of a team of fully qualified professional staff members including physically and occupational therapists, speech language pathologists, special educators, and a nutritionist.

For more than 30 years, The Bell Center for Early Intervention Programs has provided treatment for children with special needs through its therapy programs. The program has provided dramatic results for the more than 1,000 children who have participated since its inception.
Programs

Programs for infants:

Bright Beginnings
Infants come to The Bell Center for an hour at a time and receive services in a one-on-one format with members of the professional staff. Because it is critical for parents to become active partners in their children's learning, parents and other family members are encouraged to stay during the session to receive training so that they are able to continue essential therapies at home.
A separate, high risk infant therapy room is available to infants whose premature birth and/or medical conditions put them at increased risk to illness. While parents are encouraged to sit in on the session for training purposes, other family members are requested to stay in a nearby waiting area to reduce needless exposure to the medically fragile child.

Little Leaps
Children with special needs grow and flourish in group settings, learning from their peers, just as their typical counterparts do. For that reason, as an infant grows toward toddlerhood, the child is transitioned into the group format he or she will likely experience in later preschool and elementary school years. In Little Leaps, small groups of four children meet for one hour and receive early intervention services in a one-on-one setting with members of the professional staff.

Programs for toddlers:

All About Me
Toddlers in All About Me groups come to The Bell Center for a two-hour class. Each toddler is assigned a specific volunteer who provides one-on-one direction as the toddler works on his or her individual goals. Led by a professional team which includes an early childhood special education teacher, a speech/language pathologist, an occupational therapist, and physical therapist, All About Me groups have circle time with stories and songs, snack time to concentrate on feeding and language skills, group art projects and time for work on individual gross and fine motor skills. In addition to the professional team, a nutritionist is available on a consultative basis. Drum Circle, Children’s Dance Foundation and Hand in Paw are also included in this program.

Explore Every Day
Toddlers in Explore Every Day participate in center-based activities that are designed to promote independence in a structured therapeutic environment. A team of therapists lead children and their typically developing “friends” through preschool routines and activities. Activities are modified accordingly to provide opportunities for children to work on individual therapeutic goals while becoming more independent in a preschool environment.
**Munch Bunch**

The Munch Bunch is a peer group that is led by a team of therapists focusing on self-feeding skills. The class utilizes the Sequential Oral Sensory approach to build sensory and oral motor skills to broaden a child’s acceptance of foods and develop chewing skills to manage a variety of table foods. This approach believes in supporting the child’s needs while challenging each child’s skill set. Through food play and peer modeling, each child will develop his or her own intrinsic motivation to eat. Skills across all developmental areas are addressed within the context of a mealtime. Family support is given through individual problem solving with the team, practice meals at home, and educational handouts.

**My Friends**

This program is designed for children with sensory, social and communication challenges. The small My Friends group has one-to-two ratio of peer model children to children with challenges. Some but not all children who participate in the program have a diagnosis of autism. A Bell Center team including an early childhood special education teacher, speech/language pathologist, occupational therapist and physical therapist work with the children to address their early intervention needs. The class meets for 2 hours, four days a week and through adapted typical preschool activities, children are challenged to successfully participate in classroom routines, interact with peers and tolerate various sensory experiences. The team uses a variety of developmentally appropriate practices to target the children’s therapy goals and also collaborates with other professionals in the community that are helping families address their child’s challenges. Parents have the opportunity to observe their child’s class and the team of professionals meets with the family regularly to update and provide support.

**Kindermusik**

The core belief of the Kindermusik approach is that all children are musical and that the parent is the child’s most important teacher. Every class offers a delightful mix of songs and activities, while each lesson is also thoughtfully designed to nurture specific learning and developmental goals. Kindermusik meets once a week for one hour, and parents accompany their child to this class led by a Bell Center staff member who is also a certified Kindermusik instructor. A team of Bell Center therapists also participate in the class, ensuring that children target their therapy goals throughout each activity.

- Kindermusik Village, 0-18 months (not available for the 2016-2017 school year)
- Kindermusik Our Time, 19 months-3 years (not available for the 2016-2017 school year)

**Early Eaters**

The Early Eaters program is designed to offer information and support to families that find feeding and nutrition a challenge for their child. Early Eaters program objectives are to 1) identify the feeding problem; 2) incorporate appropriate intervention to be included in the child’s Bell Center program; 3) collaborate with parent in appropriate interventions at home; 4) communicate with other agencies or practitioners providing services to the child’s feeding problems; and 5) document outcomes.
Peer Models

Peer Models are an important part of the Explore Every Day, My Friends and Kindermusik programs at The Bell Center. The latest early intervention research shows that when children with special needs and typically developing children are integrated in preschool settings, both benefit from the learning experience. Peer Models serve as social language role models, as peer helpers and also have the opportunity to grow and learn from the preschool experience provided by our highly qualified teachers and therapists. Program times and age requirements vary from school year to school year.

Summer Programs

Learn to Learn
This unique program allows children and their caregivers to learn and grow together as they participate in therapist-led activities. It is an extension of our All About Me, Little Leaps and Bright Beginnings programs. During sessions, caregivers will assist, encourage and engage their child in an environment created for learning. A team of therapists will guide caregivers and their children through discipline focused activities designed to promote developmental gains in all areas of development.

Sensory and Skill Group

Pre-literacy skills and a variety of sensory experiences will be the focus of this class. Small group instruction will be based on the preschool Hand Writing Without Tears curriculum and will also include movement and sensory activities. Parents will be given an informational hand out each week regarding the carryover of skills into the home environment. There are prerequisites for participating in this program; please meet with your child’s team to determine if this program is developmentally appropriate for your child.

Stay and Say Playgroup

Join a team of therapists once a week for an hour and a half of guided play and conversations on topics related to raising a child with special needs. The session will begin with playtime led by a team of therapists that targets individual therapeutic goals. After 45 minutes, parents will break away with one therapist and/or speaker to engage in a discussion on predetermined topics. We will provide the necessary staff to carefully watch over the children as they continue to participate in play activities. Parents participating are encouraged to suggest topics. We believe that, as parents, you are the best experts about caring for your own children. Sharing your experiences will be helpful to other parents. Topics for discussion might include proper diet and feeding, discipline, toilet training etc.
Summer Steps

This transitional program is designed to prepare graduates for their future preschool placement. A team of therapists will lead center-based activities designed to promote independence in a structured therapeutic environment. Typical preschool routines and activities will be modified accordingly to provide opportunities for children to continue to work on individual therapeutic goals in all areas of development while becoming more independent in a preschool environment. For this reason, one-to-one instruction will not be offered in the Summer Steps program.
Staff Listing

Executive Director
Jeannie Colquett

Founding Director
Betty Bell

Program Director

Marketing & Development Director
Kelly Peoples

Early Childhood Special Education Teachers
Cindy Florence
Ashley Ross
Sarah Swindle

Physical Therapists
Mary Beth Moses
Holley Steele
Rachel Brown

Speech Pathologists
Annie Krepps
Jane Lamb
Noelle Nicholson

Occupational Therapists
Mary Laura Day
Jennifer Wolf
Katie Weden
Becky Weldon

Nutritionist
Harriet Cloud

Classroom Assistants
Emily Zimmerman
Hunter Brown

Child Assistant s
Laura Stacy

Marketing & Development Coordinators
Stacey Morales
Emily Israel

Program Assistant
Janie McKinney

Bookkeeper
Janet Wilson

Community Volunteer Coordinator
Gina Henley

Certified Pediatric Nurse
Libby Kellen
Team List – 2017-2018

Team A
Sarah Swindle, early childhood special education teacher
Annie Krepps, speech and language pathologist
Jennifer Wolf, occupational therapist
Rachel Brown, physical therapist

Team B
Cindy Florence, early childhood special education teacher
Noelle Nicholson, speech and language pathologist
Mary Laura Day, occupational therapist
Holley Steele, physical therapist

Team C
Ashley Ross, early childhood special education teacher
Jane Lamb, speech and language pathologist
Katie Weden, occupational therapist
Mary Beth Moses, physical therapist

Harriet Cloud, nutritionist
Libby Kellen, pediatric nurse
General Family Policies

**Attendance/Illness Policy**
Each parent is asked to notify The Bell Center, at 870-0081, any time your child will be absent from the program. If a child is absent for four consecutive sessions without proper notification, his or her place will be filled by a child on the waiting list.

A child should not be brought to school if a contagious illness and/or fever is present or has been present within the past 24 hours. In the event that your child will be absent from the program, please will notify the program director as soon as possible. Due to the fragile health of some of the children at The Bell Center, parents are asked not to bring their child to the center if the child, siblings or parents are sick.

**Community Partners**
The Bell Center is fortunate to have The Dance Foundation, Drum Circle, and Hand in Paw partnering with us to provide therapeutic early intervention services. The All About Me, My Friends and Explore Every Day programs curriculum includes participation in activities designed by professionals from these organizations supervised by Bell Center teachers and therapists. Partnering organizations collaborate with The Bell Center staff to ensure experiences are developmentally appropriate and target each child’s individual therapy goals. Our community partners enhance our programs and reinforce the growth and learning of every child. For more information about our Community Partners please visit their websites.

- thedancefoundation.org
- rejoicingrhythms.com
- handinpaw.org

**Confidentiality**
Families have varying opinions on the need for confidentiality regarding their child’s special need or diagnosis. The Bell Center encourages families to be sensitive and understanding of all families enrolled in the program, The Bell Center staff and the program as a whole.

Blogging, personal websites and social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have become very popular ways for people to communicate with family and friends. However, our staff and some families have expressed concern over the confidentiality issues these websites can call into question. Therefore, if you do blog or maintain a personal social media page, we ask respectfully that you not include any information or pictures of any Bell Center children (other than your own) or any Bell Center staff.
Equipment
The Bell Center has numerous pieces of equipment that is available for families to borrow. When a therapist recommends a piece of equipment, families are required to sign an Equipment Agreement Form and provide a deposit for the equipment before taking it home. Arrangements for borrowing equipment are made through a child’s professional team.

Financial Assistance
A limited amount of financial assistance is available for qualifying families. If you are interested in applying for assistance, please see the executive director or program assistant to request a financial aid application.

Gift Giving Policy
Families who wish to exchange gifts with each other are asked to conduct these exchanges off premises in order to avoid potential hurt feelings of families not included.

From time to time, families express an interest in giving a gift in appreciation of The Bell Center staff. Presently bringing lunch for the entire staff is common. However, if a family would like another alternative, donating to either The Bell Center Scholarship Fund or The Bell Center Wish List Fund are two other options to offer families. Families may donate to The Bell Center Scholarship Fund in appreciation of The Bell Center staff. This fund enables families that would otherwise be unable to attend The Bell Center due to financial challenges to receive financial assistance for tuition. The Bell Center Wish List fund allows families to donate to a general fund that provides the opportunity for different disciplines to purchase therapeutic equipment and materials that benefit the entire program. The administrative assistant will handle these types of gifts.

Holidays and Birthdays
The Bell Center believes that every family has its own individual way to celebrate holidays and that holidays are best celebrated within the family unit. For this reason we do not celebrate specific holidays at The Bell Center but share the joy of the holiday season with our families at our annual holiday party held in December.

We do celebrate birthdays at The Bell Center. Families are asked to discuss with their team what kind of celebration would be appropriate and fit into the classroom schedule.

Latex-free and Nut-free Environment
Many children who receive services at The Bell Center have significant allergies which, when triggered, can lead to extreme allergic reactions. Latex and nuts are the two most significant allergens that can potentially harm our children.

Before bringing any food or other items into the building, please check with a member of that staff so we can be certain that nothing contains latex or nut products.
Evaluations and Charts
At The Bell Center, all children are evaluated using the Hawaii Early Learning Profile and followed by physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists, special education teachers, and a nutritionist; these therapists set initial goals for each child that are updated on an as needed basis.

Charts stating individual goals are created for each child so that children can work on all areas of development during each session. Parents receive a copy of these goals to work on at home, and an additional copy is given for parents to share with any other service providers. A copy of a child’s evaluation is emailed directly to the family pediatrician and child’s state early intervention provider.

Suggestions and Concerns
The Bell Center is a family focused program, and we want to meet the needs of you and your family. If you have a suggestion or a concern, we want to know. Please discuss your thoughts with the program director or assistant program director. We will make every effort to address any issues brought to our attention and welcome your input.

Weather Policy
The executive director of The Bell Center has authority to close the programs in the event of inclement weather. If the decision is made to close The Bell Center, local media outlets including WBRC Fox 6 will be notified. Families should refer to the news for this information.

During severe weather indicated by a tornado siren, Bell Center Staff will direct families and children to the building’s safe places.
Board of Directors and Service Guild

The Bell Center for Early Intervention Programs is governed by a board of directors made up of community leaders and Service Guild members. This board understands and supports the mission and purpose of The Bell Center, participates and assists in providing effective planning for The Bell Center and ensures adequate resources through pro-active involvement in fund raising and investment activities. The board meets every other month. Members of the board are as follows:

Bill Niketas, president
Melissa Baker
Lessie Brady
Kelly Brewer
Dow Briggs
Justin Bryant
Blair Crabtree
Abigail Corcoran
Jim Delk
Reed Dimmitt
Jerri Haslem
Trey Hill
Key Hudson
Martin Nalls
Ashley Kimball
Cragi Krawczyk
Kim Lepley
Joe Medori
Blaire Middleton
Wayne Miller
Adam McClain
Michael Sandifer
Houston Smith
Paul Wells

Jeff Hicks

The Service Guild of Birmingham, Inc.

The Service Guild of Birmingham is a local women’s volunteer organization which was founded in 1958. The Service Guild focused its attention on providing early intervention services and began the Early Intervention Program which has grown to become The Bell Center in just 20 years. Members of The Service Guild provide support to The Bell Center in two very important ways. They raise funds to support the work of The Bell Center and Service Guild members assist in the All About Me classes each day by working one-on-one with children to meet gross motor, fine motor, speech and cognitive goals. This year’s Service Guild leadership includes:

Blair Crabtree President
Blaire Middleton President – Elect
Robin Nix Vice President – Classroom Coordinator
Rachel Waters Vice President – Communications
Alexa McElroy Vice President – Membership
Deidre Booker Secretary
Grace Kipp Treasurer
Ways You Can Help!
The Bell Center is a completely privately funded organization. We receive no state or federal funds, nor are we a United Way agency. Knowing this, there are lots of ways our families and friends can help The Bell Center as noted below. If you have any questions about any of this information or want to join in, please contact Jeannie Colquett, jcolquett@thebellcenter.org, or Kelly Peoples, kpeoples@thebellcenter.org, or call 879-3417.

Junior Board
The Bell Center Junior Board is a group of young professionals whose mission is to create awareness of The Bell Center and to help with annual fundraising events. If you know of someone who would be interested in becoming involved with the Junior Board, please let us know.

Donahue Memorial Fund
The Donahue Memorial Fund honors the memory of Bell Center teacher Janice Holmes Donahue. Janice’s love of teaching was most apparent during circle time. Stories and songs came alive for the children when she led the circle. Janice knew that early literacy exposure was vital and created an atmosphere in which all children could succeed. For this reason, family and friends chose to honor her memory by making sure the Bell Center children and staff have excellent literacy materials. As a result of the memorial fund our library has grown to over five hundred books and many additional resource materials.

Donations to The Bell Center
Should you have occasion to receive donations that would benefit the Bell Center or Bell Center families please refer these contacts to our Fund Development Director. She will ensure that appropriate and professional contact is made on behalf of The Bell Center.

Mercedes Marathon (MM)
Each February, thousands of runners and walkers take to the streets of Birmingham for the Mercedes Marathon and Half Marathon which benefits The Bell Center.

The Bell Center benefits from this event not only in increased community awareness but also in dollars raised by BellRunners, a group of runners and walkers who participate in the MM in honor of a child at The Bell Center. In return for the social opportunities and expert training that the runners/walkers receive, they agree to raise at least $100 for every mile that they run which goes directly to The Bell Center.
Since the BellRunners program began, more than $900,000 has been donated to The Bell Center, a significant portion of the daily operating costs of The Bell Center.
Registration in Bel Runners is $75 and covers the cost of the participant’s entry fee for the marathon or half marathon, a running shirt and invitation to fun social events along the way.

Poinsettia Sale
The Poinsettia Sale is a quick and easy fundraiser that continues to grow. Everybody loves poinsettias during the holidays, and many offices and churches use them for decorating
during the season. Simply pre-sell poinsettias to your family, friends and neighbors using the Poinsettia Sale form. The 8-inch pot poinsettias come in a choice of three colors (red, pink and white) and are $18 each. Please have checks made payable to The Bell Center, and turn in the money and order form before October 31st. The poinsettias will be delivered Monday, December 1st. You can pick up the poinsettias you ordered at that time and make arrangements to deliver them to your buyers. If you have any questions, please call Jeannie or Stacey at 879-3417.

**Tailgate Challenge**

The Bell Center Tailgate Challenge is an annual event prior to the beginning of the college football season. Bell Center supporters come together to host tailgating tents for their favorite teams and provide tastes of tailgating food for event-goers to sample. It's all about fun, food, and definitely team spirit! Bragging rights for a year go to the Best Tastin’ Food, Most Team Spirit and Best All-Around Tailgating Tent. You can join the fun and further the cause by planning to join a tailgating tent, form your own tent, or just bring your family and friends to the event.

**United Way Designation**

There is an easy way for you, your family and friends to help support our important mission. Each year many of us are asked at our workplaces to make a contribution to the United Way. Did you know that you can designate that your United Way donations come to The Bell Center for Early Intervention Programs?

The Service Guild and The Bell Center are not United Way agencies, and we do not have any agreement or obligation to the United Way. However, you may still make a donation to The Bell Center through the United Way Pledge Campaign by writing the following information down on your United Way pledge card:

- Designated to: The Bell Center for Early Intervention Programs
- Tax ID #: 63-1244330

The United Way will send your donation to The Bell Center for Early Intervention Programs for an administrative cost of 14.9%. Please remember us if you or your spouse’s employer participates in the United Way Pledge Campaign. Your donation will be used to further the goals of The Bell Center. This is an easy way for you to make a big difference for the children.
Fees
All families must pay three fees each year at The Bell Center – application or registration fee, evaluation fee and supply fee.
- Initial application fee (for new students due at the time of their enrollment) is $25.
- Registration fee (for returning students due at registration in February/March) is $50.
- The fee for both new evaluations and re-evaluations is $100.
- The annual supply fee is $75 and is due September 15. If a child enters the program between January 1 and March 31, the supply fee for the current year is $37.50. If a child enters the program April 1 or after, there is no supply fee until the following September when $75 is due.

Tuition
Monthly payments are due at the beginning of the each month and are considered late after the 10th of each month.

Summer tuition should be paid in full by June 15. Or families can choose to pay half by June 15 and the remaining half by July 15.

Past Due Accounts
Statements will be mailed to families around the 25th of each month if there is a balance on the account. The Bell Center reserves the right to discontinue services to a child whose account has a balance over 60 days due; parents will be notified by letter if this is the case. Balances over 90 days will be sent to collection services.

Also, arrangements must be made to have all balances paid in full upon graduation from The Bell Center; children whose families have a remaining balance by graduation will not be allowed to participate in the graduation ceremony.

Voluntary withdrawal from the program does not excuse a child’s family from tuition incurred; as such, families must make payment arrangements before leaving the program, and any balances over 90 days will be sent to collection services.

Family Fundraising
The Bell Center does not receive any federal or state funding and relies on fundraising efforts each year to cover the majority of our operation expenses. For this reason, families are expected to participate in the 5, 5 & 5 program which requires their help in selling (or purchasing) five tickets to the Tailgate Challenge, selling five poinsettias during the Poinsettia Sale and selling five tickets to the Big Red Deal.

The 5, 5 & 5 program is just the basic vehicle for families to participate in Bell Center fundraising; there are many other ways our families can and do get involved including participation at some level in other special events, individual and corporate solicitations.
Successful fundraising is key to The Bell Center’s ability to hold tuition costs as low as possible.

**Financial Assistance**

Only a small amount, approximately 12-15% of our costs, is passed on to our families in the form of tuition and fees. The Bell Center does have a limited amount of scholarship funds available each year for families with significant financial hardships. Please see Jeannie Colquett, Executive Director, to apply for this assistance.

Families who receive financial assistance during the regular program year will receive financial assistance for summer tuition at the same percentage rate; for instance, if a family receives 50% tuition assistance, they will receive the same percentage off summer programs.