

C H I L E D A

# CHRONICLES



## Welcome to the Summer Issue of the Chileda Chronicles!

Dear Readers,

I am delighted to welcome you to the summer issue of the Chileda Chronicles Newsletter. As summer draws to a close, we reflect on the season that swiftly passed, marked by both meaningful work and many enjoyable moments along the way. The transition into a new season offers an opportunity to reconnect, refocus, and look ahead with renewed purpose.

In this issue, we highlight various summer activities, provide updates on programming and service offerings, discuss relevant issues and celebrate organizational milestones. This newsletter reflects our shared journey, a celebration of our collective achievements, and a glimpse into the exciting opportunities that lie ahead.

We hope you enjoy reading about the people and efforts that make our organization thrive. As always, we welcome your ideas and feedback and thank you for your continuous support.

Sincerely,

**Derek Cortez, PhD**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

Submitted by: Sam Ankey, Behavior Consultant at Chileda Shine

## Chileda Night at the La Crosse Loggers

On July 18, 2025, employees of the La Crosse campus and Chileda Shine students and families had the opportunity to attend a Logger's baseball game. As the featured non-profit of the night, staff were able to set up a booth upon entry and showcase information about our organization as a way to connect with the community. This event also involved a fundraiser where half of the proceeds of the tickets Chileda sold went back to support our organization.

After the 5<sup>th</sup> inning, Shine families and staff were invited onto the field to accept the check from the Loggers. Though some kids initially appeared nervous, our kids eventually were very enthusiastic about holding the check and helping the Logger's staff walk it on and off the field.

Events like this, enable us to share the wonderful work we do at Chileda and potentially support more families in need. It was a great night of socializing and a beautiful night to watch baseball! We look forward to repeating the experience next year.



Photo by The La Crosse Loggers

## Celebrating 52 years of Chileda

Happy 52<sup>nd</sup> birthday Chileda! Our Birthday bash brought staff and students together for a day of celebration. Highlights included a delicious catered chicken BBQ lunch and a celebratory cake to mark the occasion.

We are grateful for the 52 years and look forward to many more years to come.



## Annual Leadership Retreat Wraps up another year

More than 140 Chileda leaders gathered for our annual two-day

Leadership Retreat in July. A time dedicated to connection, reflection, and growth endeavors, this year's theme, "Who Will Care", guided meaningful discussions and applied learning around severe and profound autism.

Leaders from every Chileda campus and service line took part in hands-on learning, skill-building exercises, and thoughtful conversations about leading with purpose and compassion. Breakout rooms offered focused sessions on a variety of topics, providing leaders the opportunity to dive deeper into areas most relevant to their work. The retreat also featured powerful family stories that highlighted the heart and impact of the work we do each day.



## Family Fun Day At Chileda in La Crosse

On Saturday, June 15, Chileda hosted Family Fun Day at our La Crosse campus, welcoming over 20 families to join in the festivities. The day began with a brunch in the Commons room, offering families a chance to connect with others who understand the unique joys and challenges of raising children with similar needs. Activities included campus tours, crafts, photo booth sessions, and much more, all culminating in a heartwarming student performance that left everyone smiling.

Pictured below are some of the incredible staff members who helped make this special day possible.





**NEW  
UPDATE**

## Celebrating One Year of Menasha Learning Center

August 26th, 2025, marked our one-year anniversary. When we opened last year, the Menasha Learning Center welcomed just one student from one school district. Our small team, consisting of just two teachers, a maintenance technician, an administrative assistant, and three administrators, dedicated themselves to expanding our reach and building a strong foundation.

Since then, our small team of 7 employees has grown to 35. We now serve students from 13 school districts in the region. Our once-empty parking lot has become so full that cars line the street during pick-up and drop-off, a visible sign of our growth.

We celebrated this milestone by inviting families to share stories of progress and the impact Chileda has had on their lives. Their heartfelt messages continue to remind us of why we do the work we do. Each of these stories not only celebrates our students but also highlights the dedication of our staff and the strength of our community.

Submitted by: Rob Becker, Principal,  
Chileda Learning Center- Menasha, WI

## A Summer Well Spent at Menasha

Our summer programming concluded with an End-of-Summer Celebration on August 22nd. The program was a wonderful opportunity to engage many of our students from the regular school year, as well as a group of students who joined us just for the summer.

Throughout the summer, our students maintained strong habits of behavior and learning, while also having the chance to relax and have fun. Mornings were devoted to academic goals, and afternoons focused on community involvement, daily living skills, and recreational activities.

We enjoyed exciting field trips to the splash pad, local parks, the public library, neighborhood stores, and nearby attractions. Parents shared how grateful they were that their children had a meaningful and engaging place to go to each day.



Submitted by: Audreana Royer, Adult  
Family Home Program Director



## Summer Joys at Chileda's Adult Family Home

The Adult Family Home has been full of sunshine and meaningful moments. We've made the most of the warm weather with pool time, regular YMCA visits, and outdoor adventures.

Our residents have enjoyed park picnics, swinging, hiking, and even a trip to the arcade. Our favorite indoor activity includes Play-Doh which has become a go-to favorite for creativity and engagement. Skill building has also been a focus; residents have been practicing cleaning up dishes after meals, putting away laundry, and exploring new hobbies.

This summer has been about making memories, building skills, and appreciating the community that makes the Adult Family Home such a special place to live and work.



Submitted by: Rob Becker, Principal,  
Chileda Learning Center- Menasha, WI

## Building Fun: Home Depot Joins Chileda for a Day of Service

On Wednesday, August 27th, we welcomed about 10 members of the Home Depot team to our campus. Staff from both the Appleton East and Appleton West stores spent the morning installing an industrial basketball hoop, assembling picnic tables, and building a gaga ball pit for our students (and yes, staff too!) to enjoy.

We fired up our new grill to provide lunch as a thank-you to our Home Depot friends for their time and hard work.

This project was made possible through a generous grant from Home Depot to fund these exciting playground upgrades. We are incredibly grateful for their support and look forward to continuing this wonderful partnership in the future.

[View the blog article here](#)



Submitted by: Sam Ankey, Behavior Consultant at Chileda Shine

## Annual Summer Programming at Chileda Shine Wraps Up



Chileda Shine summer programming was a blast! Our students worked on their social skills, life skills, and emotional regulation/coping skills. They completed daily activities focused on a weekly objective such as sharing, emotional identification, or making friends.

We also had opportunities to go on many fun outings this summer! Students and staff frequented just about every park in the area, with Springbrook Splashpad being a favorite for many. On rainy days, our students went to the movie theater where they enjoyed a fun kid's movie. We also went to the Nature Place often, and students really enjoyed all of the animals and interactive activities they had there.

Finally, we visited the Creation Space, where students were able to use their creativity. We are grateful for another adventurous summer at Chileda Shine.



## Shine Students Visit the La Crosse Police Department

Shine students visited the City of La Crosse Police Department, where they toured the station, met K9 officers, saw a drone demonstration, and even sat in a squad car. Officers also shared important safety tips, and each student left with a stuffed animal police dog as a special keepsake.



## Critters and Curiosity: A Visit from The Critter Mobile

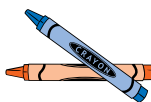
On July 22nd, Shine students enjoyed a special visit from the Critter Mobile, courtesy of The Nature Place in La Crosse, WI. The mobile exhibit featured snakes, turtles, insects, and other fascinating creatures, giving students a hands-on opportunity to learn about the animals that call the Driftless Area home.

Thank you to The Nature Place for providing such a fun and educational experience for our students!



Submitted by: Jason Colvin, Recreation Manager

## Camp Chileda's Inaugural Summer: A Season of Discovery and Growth



This summer marked the exciting launch of Camp Chileda, running from May 26th through August 22nd. Over thirteen themed weeks, students embarked on imaginative journeys—from the World of Wizardry to the frontiers of Science and Space, and even Olympic-style adventures. Each themed week could include hands-on science experiments, creative arts, outdoor games, and collaborative group missions designed to spark curiosity and build community.

Campers also enjoyed memorable outings to the local splash pad, the Children's Museum, community pools, parks, and fishing spots—ensuring every day brought something new and exciting.

Staff and students demonstrated remarkable adaptability and resilience.



According to multiple camp staff members, students showed noticeable growth in following schedules, participating in classes, and tackling tasks they once hesitated to try. The variety of activities helped students explore their interests and develop new skills in a supportive, fun-filled environment.

With over 50 camp staff representing first and second shifts and 42 residential and 16-day school students participating, Camp Chileda proved that with the right systems, people, and processes, stepping outside our comfort zones can lead to incredible opportunities for learning and growth.

Thank you to everyone who made Camp Chileda a success. A special shout out to the Recreation and Education staff who contributed to the creation, planning, and execution. The success of the camp wouldn't have been possible without their creativity, dedicated effort, and intentional implementation. This team bridged the gaps between departments and shifts, allowing us all the opportunity to make a valuable impact on the lives of the students we serve. We're excited to continue in this newly formed tradition next year!

Submitted by: Derek Cortez, PhD, Chief Executive Officer

## Autism in Focus



This July we concluded our 2025 Leadership Retreat, centered on a powerful and poignant theme: “Who Will Care?”

It’s a question I’ve heard more than once from parents of the individuals we serve. For families, one of their greatest fears is what happens next—after Chileda. They know Chileda isn’t forever. But where will their child go when this chapter ends? For many, Chileda was the first place that didn’t say no after countless rejections. So, when the one place that finally said yes can no longer be the answer, what then?

This year, two families opened our retreat by sharing their stories. Their testimonies were heartfelt and deeply moving, offering a glimpse into the daily struggles so many of our families face. One comment, in particular, struck me — a former parent said:

*“What we appreciated about Chileda is that it was a place where we didn’t have to apologize. When you have children like ours, you spend so much of your life apologizing. ‘I’m sorry they tipped over the tables... I’m sorry they broke something... I’m sorry they hit someone.’ But at Chileda, we never had to say we were sorry. People here understand.”*

I had never thought of it that way until they said it. If you’re a parent, imagine living with the constant burden of having to apologize for your child’s existence—for their disability. That is the reality many of our families face every day.

A recent study referenced by the Profound Autism Alliance on individuals diagnosed with Profound Autism revealed that:

- 63% have been asked to leave a program due to their behaviors.
- 69% have been denied access to services—like healthcare, respite, or education—because of their level of need.
- 80% have been excluded from community programs such as church, sports, and recreational activities.

Now imagine all the apologies that came before those denials. And still, the doors closed.

Our presenter’s words were among the most meaningful compliments I’ve heard in my time at Chileda. What we do matters. We are a place where families don’t have to apologize—where their child is not only accepted but valued. Chileda is a safe, nurturing space that believes in the dignity and worth of every individual, regardless of their challenges. Because we believe in that worth, we invest in each person—helping each one grow, thrive, and prepare for life beyond our care. That is what we do. That is who we are. And that is who we will continue to be.

We are a place where no parent needs to apologize—and a place that answers the question:

**“Who will care?”**



## Employee Spotlight



**Sophia Block**

Mentor  
Development  
Specialist

My journey to Chileda began with a personal connection to the field of special education. While I had limited professional experience working with the population we serve, I was fortunate to grow up with a mother who worked in special education. Through her, I witnessed the incredible impact that comes from supporting students with disabilities and helping them thrive.

After graduating high school and feeling uncertain about my career path, I applied to Chileda with the hope of making a meaningful difference, just as I had seen my mother do for over 15 years.

That decision led me to exactly what I was looking for. Over the past two years, I've grown within the organization, starting as a Skills Trainer, then becoming a Teacher Assistant, and now serving as the Mentor Development Specialist.

In my current role, I work closely with trainers and mentees across our La Crosse campus. I develop mentorship resources that promote learning and independence, and I help assign mentors to new staff, supporting them throughout the mentorship process to ensure they feel confident and prepared.

The people is what I love most about working at Chileda. The staff and students here are some of the most fun, intelligent, and creative individuals I've ever met. I'm grateful for the learning opportunities, the friendships, and the unforgettable moments we share. There's nothing more rewarding than seeing a student succeed because of the dedication and teamwork of our staff.

Outside of work, I enjoy spending time with my rescue cat, Goobert. When the weather is nice, you'll find me hiking, gardening, or relaxing in a hammock. Most of all, I cherish quality time with my amazing friends and family.

## We'd Love to Hear From You!

Your thoughts and suggestions are important to us! Please take a moment to share your feedback on this edition of the newsletter. What did you find helpful? Is there something you'd like to see in future issues?

<https://forms.office.com/r/7vv36H44uZ>

Or feel free to reach out directly at [marketing@chileda.org](mailto:marketing@chileda.org)

Thank you for helping us make this newsletter better for you and your family!

### Chileda Institute

[www.chileda.org](http://www.chileda.org) | [info@chileda.org](mailto:info@chileda.org)

Find us on    @Chileda