

## Annual Gala Raises \$150,000 for our Programs

Mar 03, 2023



**On February 24, we celebrated our Night to be Inspired Gala after a three-year hiatus due to Covid. Nearly 350 friends and supporters came out for a night of dinner, dancing, and inspirational stories and collectively raised more than \$150,000 to support our programs and mission.**

On February 24, we celebrated our Night to be Inspired Gala after a three-year hiatus due to Covid. Nearly 350 friends and supporters joined for a night of dinner, dancing, and inspirational stories and collectively raised more than \$150,000 to support our programs and mission.

The night kicked off with a cocktail hour, followed by a dinner speaking program, music, and dancing. The group was welcomed by President and CEO Sara Ray Stoelinga who later gave a speech about the affiliate's mission, vision, and values, saying, "In a world where educational services do not yet meet the needs of individuals of all abilities and where family services aren't yet democratized, Easterseals Serving Chicagoland and Greater Rockford broadens access to intensively individualized early learning, development, disability and behavioral services to children of all abilities and their families."

"In a world where educational services do not yet meet the needs of individuals of all abilities and where family services aren't yet democratized, Easterseals Serving Chicagoland and Greater Rockford broadens access to intensively individualized early learning, development, disability and behavioral services to children of all abilities and their families."

**-Sara Ray Stoelinga, President and CEO**

One of our Gala Co-Chairs, Bryan Lindskog, spoke about his role as a music therapist at Easterseals Academy, referring to his experience as an "inspirational kaleidoscope" that is made possible by the students, staff, families, and supporters of the work, "each representing a colored piece of glass of individual shapes and colors."

Bryan was followed by another Easterseals Academy staffer, paraprofessional Nicole Moya from the Tinley Park Campus, who talked about how her students have inspired her over the last 12 years.

"I joined the Easterseals team because of my strong belief in their mission and values, both of which are upheld by our outstanding senior leadership team, influential academy administrative teams, committed co-workers and most importantly our inspirational students and clients," she said. "When I started this career path, I had no prior experience working with children with disabilities. Yet, over the years, it was the students who have motivated me and made me fall in love with the work I do. During some of the most difficult times in my life, it was our students that gave me hope."

"During some of the most difficult times in my life, it was our students that gave me hope."

## -Paraprofessional Nicole Moya

The final speaker was the parent of an Easterseals Academy Chicago Campus student, Tonya Jackson, who described the change in her daughter once she began attending the school. "In 2007 our Jasmin was diagnosed on the spectrum and we began the work towards our degree in autism ...she'd hesitate, stop at the stairs or yell when we turned the corner leading up to a particular CPS school. Although we'd get her to go in, we knew, we had to be prepared for a call. But in January 2014, Jas walked through the doors of EasterSeals Academy and has never shown any hesitation since," she said.

She added, "We've been so fortunate to come across some of the most caring, compassionate, motivated, inspiring individuals. I should add psychic too because they're all so in tune to our children and their needs. I've not come across one teacher, therapist or aide who's not been willing to go the extra mile."

The evening was truly a Night to be Inspired and none of it would have been possible without the contributions of so many. A special thank you to our Night To Be Inspired Gala Co-Chairs: Amy Greenebaum, Steve Kashul, & Bryan Lindskog. Thanks to our Gala Emcee, [Leila Rahimi](#) from NBC5 Chicago; our entertainment for the evening, [Maggie Speaks](#); and [RoccoVino's](#) for the delicious food. A big shout out to all of our sponsors (see their logos in the photo carousel). Congratulations to David Arts who won our Golden Ticket auction and the grand prize of a diamond necklace valued at more than \$8500.

Thank you to all who attended and made the night so special! We continue to be humbled by the generosity shown by our friends and supporters toward individuals with disabilities and early learners. With your help, we are truly Embracing Abilities and Expanding Possibilities for every individual we serve.