

Dear Friends,

Most of you know the Friends Grow Friends story and how we came to be. (For more information on who we are, please visit friendsgrow.org). Friends Grow Friends is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and was inspired by my son, Sam, and my desire to support children, with and without special needs, in their interactions with peers in scenarios that are typical for all children to experience. This year, Friends Grow Friends Foundation, Inc. rebranded itself from The Social Smarts Foundation, Inc. in order to more accurately describe who we are — a group where children not only come to learn, practice, and reinforce social skills, but a place to make friends. I am pleased to announce that Friends Grow Friends Foundation's trademark application has successfully passed through an Examiner's review and has been accepted by the United States Patent and Trademark Office for publication on the Principal Register. We hope to receive final approval for our trademark status in early 2021.

This year we faced significant challenges, as did many nonprofits and small businesses, given the COVID-19 pandemic. The week after the State of New Jersey mandated a lockdown for its residents, Friends Grow Friends moved its operations online, and began running its social skills groups virtually.

We continue to run our groups virtually — since March 2020 — and can't wait to be back in person with our kids. Although virus cases dropped over the summer and early fall, we chose to remain virtual to eliminate any risk to our clients, staff, and to the organization.

Friends Grow Friends has adapted this new mode of program execution to meet the needs of our clients. We understand, just as in our in-person groups, that in order to be effective, we need to keep the kids engaged. As a result, over the summer, we began delivering supply bags to every enrolled child. We keep it easy for the parents and interesting for the kids. Our incredible staff ties our hands-on activities and games to a skill of the week. Despite the fact that our groups are remote, we continue to receive positive feedback from our families about their children's developing social skills. In the past two weeks, we have had two children in our groups be honored at school for their citizenship, and their parents believe that Friends Grow Friends had a role in this. We are humbled. Finally, we have also made a number of "friendship matches" where kids are connecting outside our groups.

One of the hidden blessings of this switch to virtual programming has been that we are now able accommodate children from all over New Jersey. This diversity has benefited all of the children, and we will continue offering a virtual option for children outside of Monmouth County and outside of New Jersey once the pandemic ends. We have also been able to access peer models who may not have otherwise had the ability to join our groups while in-person. Additionally, this summer, we began offering very small group instruction (1 instructor with 2-3 children) to work intensely on skills that may otherwise be more challenging to work on in a larger group. This is a part of our programming that will continue virtually as well as in-person once it is safe to do so. Children who are

enrolled in both our regular groups as well as a small group receive this additional instruction at no cost.

Friends Grow Friends is fundraising this December in order to help offset the dramatic decline in revenue that we have experience as a result of lower registration fees, increased number of scholarships, and decreased enrollment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. From March through June, we ran our groups at no cost, in order to eliminate any financial burden to our families. When we began charging for these groups again in June, we cut the already low prices significantly in order to account for the fact that we are not in-person. However, our costs have risen significantly given the supplies that we provide to each family for each session, as well as an increase in the number of scholarships that we have afforded to families who need financial assistance. We will continue to provide scholarships to any family in need, and will specifically target lower income areas in our 2021 marketing in order to reach more children who may not have access to services that they need.

Please consider making a small donation this #GivingTuesday. Facebook will match donations made on Tuesday, December 1, 202 beginning at 8am EST. We are grateful for your support — whether it be financial or otherwise. Wishing you all a happy and healthy holiday season.

All the best,
Friends Grow Friends Foundation, Inc.