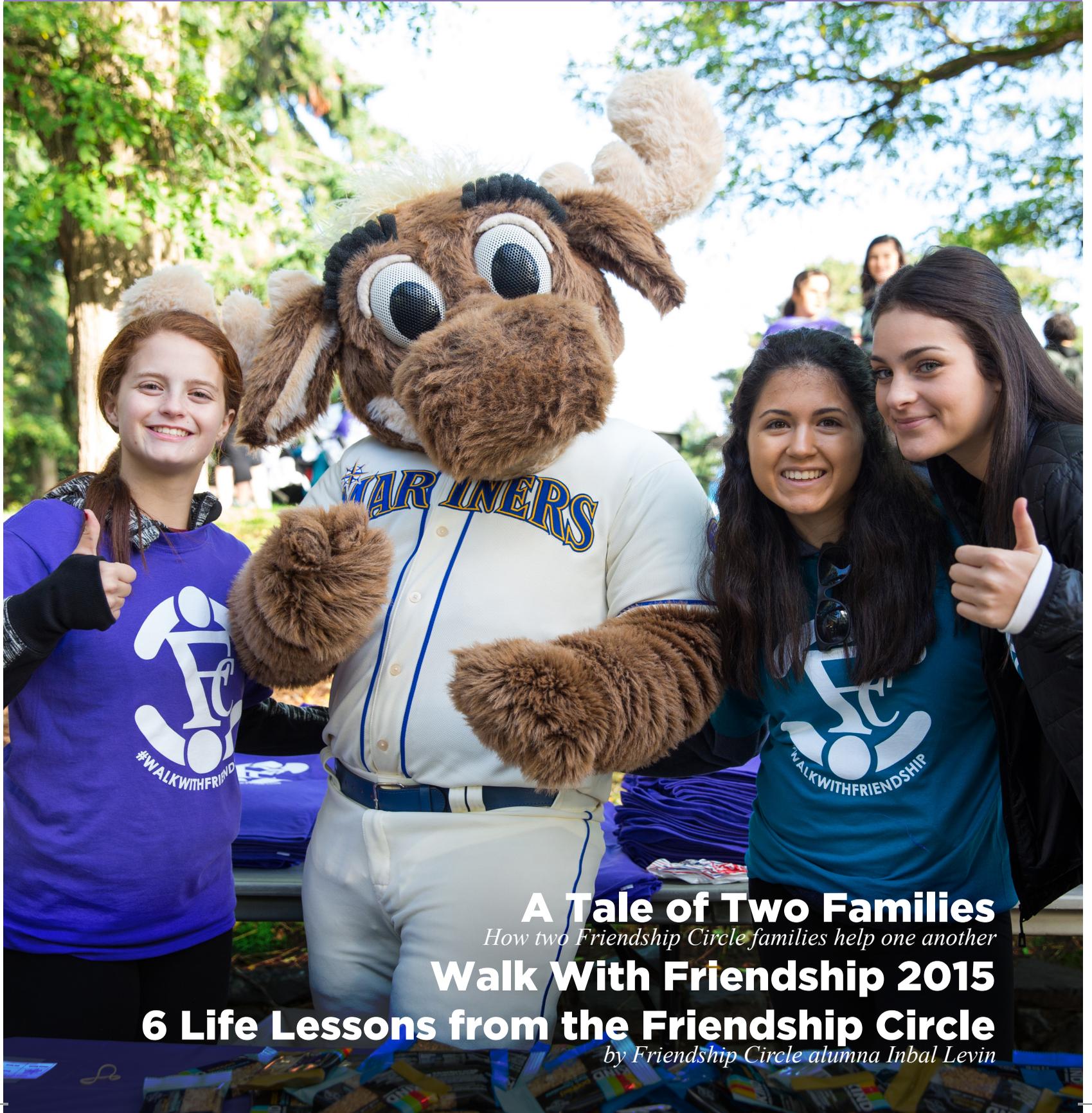




# THE Circle

Winter 2015



## A Tale of Two Families

*How two Friendship Circle families help one another*

## Walk With Friendship 2015

## 6 Life Lessons from the Friendship Circle

*by Friendship Circle alumna Inbal Levin*

# A Tale of Two Families

The Hawkins's two youngest children, Charlotte and Cooper, were both born with special needs. The Hawkins joined the Friendship Circle five years ago, and they are active in a number of programs. Jo Kershaw's two daughters, Elisa and Sophia, are committed volunteers with the Friendship Circle. Sophia participates in Sunday Circle, and Elisa is in MVP. Both families participate in Friends@Home together. Below, the mothers explain how the friendship between the families began and what their children get out of Friends@Home. (See page 6, for Sophia and Elisa's take.)

## Jill Hawkins, mother of Charlotte and Cooper

**Q: What do your children get out of Sunday Circle?**

*Jill Hawkins:* It is really tough to find activities for our kids. Sunday Circle is a place where they are welcome and enriched.

**Q: What would you tell another family considering placing their kid with special needs in Sunday Circle?**

*JH:* That having a two-hour break while someone else is entertaining your kids is awesome. That the relationships their children will develop with the teens is also totally awesome.

**Q: Could you describe Charlotte and Elisa's relationship?**

*JH:* Elisa is very patient and attentive. She knows Charlotte's interests. Elisa will come and I will just hear belly laughs from Charlotte. It's heartwarming.

**Q: How is Sophia involved in Friends@Home?**

*JH:* Sophia and Elisa were going to team up. But when they came, Cooper



**Charlotte**  
at Sunday Circle

per glommed on to Sophia and was like, "No, you're going to play with me." It worked out. Now I hear belly laughs coming from Cooper.

**Q: What would you say to parents considering Friends@Home?**

*JH:* Go for it. Trust it. It's not always perfect, but FC will work with you on that. We cannot do this alone. The bigger circle we can build around our family to support our kids the better. There are so many benefits: for the parents, a bit of rest; for your child,

friendship and fun; for the teenager, some profound changes can happen.

**Q: What message do you have for the Friendship Circle volunteers?**

*JH:* Keep up the good work. Get to know these kids, really get to know them. You're performing a really, really valuable service. Thank you.

**Q: What does the Friendship Circle mean to you?**

*JH:* It means that we have more people on our team, and I'm interested in having the biggest, strongest, most loving team we can to support our kids.

**We cannot do this alone. The bigger circle we can build the better.**

## Jo Kershaw, mother of Sophia and Elisa

**Q: Could you describe Elisa and Charlotte's friendship?**

*JK:* Elisa and Charlotte would play at recess. Elisa's relationship with Charlotte developed as a normal friendship would. Little by little, they became closer and closer. It was very natural, which is part of what makes it so special. It was coincidental with the FC; it was meant to be.

**Q: What do your daughters get out of volunteering?**

*JK:* When they come home from volunteering, they are happy. They talk about it. They get a lot out of it too. Not just the kids they help. Elisa once didn't see Charlotte for a week; so Elisa wanted to have an extra-long Friends@Home. She wanted to see her friend. Elisa gets so much enjoyment out of it. I've seen her grow and come into her own.

**Q: What lessons do they learn?**

*JK:* The bigger lesson is that people can be different, but we're all human, and we should treat each other with kindness and respect. These children are growing up to be more tolerant, more understanding, more empathetic, and they will pass it on. And it isn't something that you can teach in the classroom. I love that. It's something you can't just tell someone. You need to live it to understand it.

**Q: Have your daughters changed because of volunteering?**

*JK:* Elisa hadn't interacted with anyone who had special needs. She was quite scared and now is comfortable. Sophia is very fast at everything. It forces her to slow down and to be more accepting. Also, she did the Student Mentor program at school last year because she had done Friendship Circle.

**Q: What would you say to parents**

**who might want their kids to volunteer?**

*JK:* The Friendship Circle helps with volunteers' personal growth. They develop an understanding that different isn't better or worse; it's just different.

**Q: Do you have a message for Friendship Circle volunteers?**

*JK:* Keep doing what you're doing. I know the parents get a lot out of it, because Jill has told me the difference it has made, and we see it in the kids. Cooper and Charlotte are so happy when they see Sophia and Elisa. When you see your best friend, it feels good.

**Different *isn't* better or worse; Different *is* just different.**



**Elisa**  
*at Friendship Circle  
Summer Camp*



# WALK WITH FRIENDSHIP 2015

Over 400 community members raised awareness for special needs at the fourth annual **Walk With Friendship** on October 11th at Luther Burbank Park! 36 Sponsors and over 500 unique donors helped to raise **over \$80,000!**

Allan and Ashley from Warm 106.9 emceed this year's event, and many amazing organizations contributed to the walk's success. The Mariner Moose stopped by for pictures, there was an inflatable obstacle course and a photo booth, and the Daddy Dunk Tank made a crowd pleasing return!

Thank you so much to everyone who joined a team, sponsored a walker, and came out to support the Friendship Circle and the special needs community. We did a great deal to raise awareness and promote inclusion throughout Seattle. Be sure check out the amazing Walk With Friendship video on [Facebook.com/FriendshipCircleWA](https://www.facebook.com/FriendshipCircleWA)



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Walk With Friendship 2015 media donated by the FourFront. All photography is attributed to Nate Burgher. Additional thanks to Garret Van Swearingen and Christopher Meister. Visit: [TheFourFront.com](http://TheFourFront.com)



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# It Runs in the Family

With Sophia and Elisa Kershaw



Sophia  
at Sunday Circle

It is rare to find anyone as devoted to making others happy as the Kershaw sisters. “I want to see the kids laugh,” said Sophia, the elder sister at 13 years old. “I make funny faces or knock over blocks with them.” She began volunteering with the Friendship Circle after attending MVP. Now she participates in Sunday Circle whenever possible. “I like that I can make their day when I volunteer. I’m doing something that is not hard for me, but it makes them happy and grateful.”

Elisa, 11 years old, is currently in MVP, but even before that she had been friends with Charlotte Hawkins. They developed a relationship in school, and then they organized regular play dates through Friends@Home, which has only made their relationship stronger. “Charlotte is my friend, and I think it is good for her to have a friend come over every week. It makes her life more typical.”

Both girls say they have taken away important lessons from volunteering with

the Friendship Circle. “I’ve learned to be more comfortable around kids with special needs,” said Sophia. “Even at school, if I just smile or say hello it makes them happy.” Elisa also noted that she had become more outgoing since beginning to volunteer, but admits that she had to learn to be comfortable around the kids. “In third grade, I was really scared. In fourth grade, I started to learn about it, and, by the end of the year, it felt normal. Now, I am completely comfortable. At first it may seem scary, but, as you learn more, it gets better.”

The Kershaw sister both plan to volunteer throughout high school until they enter college. They point out that Friendship Circle is easy to fit into their lives. Sophia explained, “For some things, you have to go every single week or every single day. With the Friendship Circle, while it’s an important commitment, I can volunteer and still do the other things I have to do.”

However, the main reason Sophia and Elisa will volunteer for years to come is the effect they can have on children with special needs. “I’ve seen a lot of positive experiences come from the Friendship Circle. I have seen it make a lot of kids happy, and that makes me really happy.”



# 6 Life Lessons from FC With Inbal Levin

## 1) Value real, pure sincerity

Deep discussions and perfect test scores are nice, but FC taught me to value sincere gestures: eye contact, a slurred “I love you”, and (best of all) a drool filled smile.

## 2) Be patient with yourself

Through high school, I liked to challenge myself. Get the highest score, be the best counselor. Challenges help you grow, but high expectations can also be damaging. FC taught me to be patient with myself and my goals, just like I was patient with my special friends.

## 3) Get out of your comfort zone

I used to refuse to babysit, let alone work with children with special needs. If you would have told me that I would work one-on-one with



four kids and then be hired by the Autism Treatment Center of America, I would have laughed. The Friendship Circle coaxed me out of my comfort zone one Sunday Circle, one child, one smile at a time.

## 4) Do not judge others

Everyone is struggling with something. Parents and families are affected by their child’s special needs. Our job is not to discover their struggle, but to be compassionate.

## 5) Don’t judge appearances

It may be a cliché but I never truly internalized this lesson until I met my first special friend. She may have looked different, but I have never met another person whose soul shines brighter.

## 6) You don’t need to speak in order to say what you want

Most of my special friends were nonverbal, yet they still expressed their love: a smile, a giggle, even a high five. Words are overrated.



New Programs

## FC Empowers Creativity

The Friendship Circle recently launched a series of art workshops. Youths with special needs create professional art pieces under the guidance of local Seattle artists, like Matt Lome. Sunday Circle participants have created stained glass, expressive pastel works, and a large abstract group piece, among others.

One mother said, “I’ve never seen my son do such skillful art. I’m excited to see it displayed in a sophisticated setting, alongside other great work.”

The art series is conducted in partnership with Bear Givers, and the series will culminate at a forthcoming gallery showing and fundraiser. Titled Art of Friendship, the showing celebrates the talent and vision of Seattle’s youths with special needs.



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# YEAR-END FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE CHARITY OPPORTUNITY

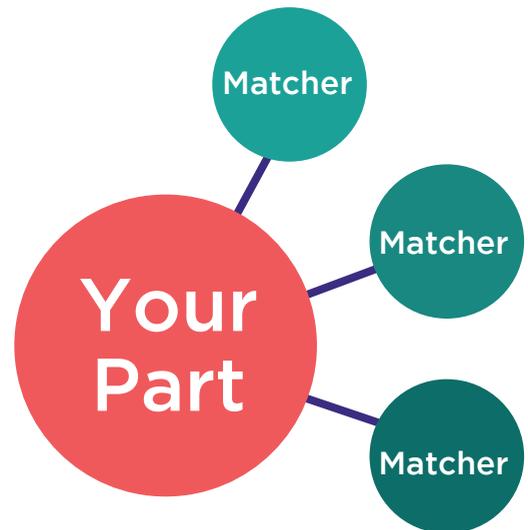
Help us raise \$100,000 in 24 hours!

## Here's How

On December 16<sup>th</sup>, The Friendship Circle will raise \$100,000 in a Charidy campaign. Three matching donors have pledged to **QUADRUPLE every donation** received on our giving day. That means for every dollar you give on December 16<sup>th</sup>, The Friendship Circle receives \$4.

(4x)

*\$36 becomes \$144!*  
*\$180 becomes \$720!*  
*\$1,000 becomes \$4,000!*



All of this funding will directly support Friendship Circle programs, but **only if we can raise of \$100,000 in 24-hours.** If we can't, the Friendship Circle receives nothing.

So pre-plan your gift, share on social media, and on December 16th **do your part!**



Visit [FriendshipCircleWA.org](http://FriendshipCircleWA.org) for more details

