



A New Partnership May Be Coming Soon

With huge support from the Blue River Community Foundation, the SENSES gym opened on February 1, 2016. The primary goal was to serve children, ages 1-6, that had a developmental or intellectual delay, especially those with autism or on the autism spectrum, Down syndrome, Asperger's Syndrome, sensory processing disorders or others. But it quickly became obvious that all children could, and now do, benefit from sensory play and learning. This gym is unique and the only one of its kind in this area.

In just two short years, the gym has served about 1,200 kids and their families. The benefits of a parent-led sensory playroom are still being found. The brain connections of a child are 85 percent complete by the age of 3 years, and the play and learning experience prior to and shortly after that age, are extremely vital to helping every child develop and be the best they can be.

In October 2017, Dr. David Adams and Mary Harper, the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent of the Shelbyville Central School district came to the SENSES gym for a visit. During the visit they mentioned that the district was considering making an offer to purchase the former Marsh Supermarket buildings at the corner of Michigan Road and Amos Road. The buildings have been vacant for a few years and the schools needed additional space for a variety of reasons.

Besides moving the administrative offices to the space, there were plans to add up to 15 or so classrooms for preschool children. Many recent programs for preschoolers have installed sensory rooms, due in large part because they have been found to help special needs students in a variety of ways. But they are also helpful and beneficial to all children during their early years of development.

Since the SENSES gym had been so well received by the community, they felt that it would be a good idea to move the present SENSES gym to the new space instead of starting from scratch and creating another one. The school will have access to the gym on a schedule soon to be determined.

The SENSES gym is unique in many ways, including the 24-foot tactile sensory wall, objects in the light room and other things that have been designed and created by Holly Forville, with lots of construction help from her brother, Bill Collins and others.

The Arc and SENSES are grateful to the local school leaders for creating this outstanding opportunity for the current and future children of our community. We fully support and believe that all early play and education are vital in helping children learn more during their formative years. We look forward with optimism and hope that this collaboration will endure and be a symbol of how people and organizations can work together for the benefit of everyone in our wonderful city and community.