

Kids club looks to make miracles a step at a time

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When she talks about her role in the Kids Miracle Making Club, Jane Williams doesn't waste words.

"We're kids helping kids," the Penfield 11-year-old said.

Jane and other young members of the Penfield non-profit group have organized Project Wii Fest, an effort to bring together kids with physical or developmental disabilities and others who don't face such challenges, for about a dozen evenings of fun. Kids and youths up to high school age who are clients of CP Rochester will participate in the festival, as will as many as 50 others from around the Rochester area.

CP Rochester is a not-for-profit agency that provides outpatient clinical treatment, community recreation opportunities and other services for children or adults who are physically or developmentally disabled. Kids Miracle Making Club Chairman Steve Pellow said the club plans to kick off the project with a Jan. 16 celebration at CP Rochester's Winton Road facility.

Pellow, his stepdaughter, 11-year-old Mackenzie Eagan, and two of her friends founded Kids Miracle Making Club in September to raise money for the Golisano Children's Hospital at Strong.

"The idea was to help kids with special needs," Pellow said.

Kids from 5 to 12 years old make up the club's membership and officers — Mackenzie is the club's president.

With the assistance of its adult volunteers, they've organized fundraising efforts and other supportive activities for Golisano, CP Rochester and the Mary Cariola Children's Center, a Rochester facility that serves children who have developmental disabilities. While the fundraising is important, the group's main goal is to help its members learn about kids who face mental or physical challenges, and about value of service to others.

"They're able to see kids with disabilities, and it's fun," Pellow explained. "At the same time, you're doing a community service."

The organization has about 50 members.

Pellow said the path to Wii Fest started in the fall, when Kids Miracle Making Club presented CP Rochester with four stuffed animals the club purchased for

the organization and toy chairs members had made for them. While club members were touring one of the organization's facilities, the kids noticed CP Rochester uses the Nintendo gaming system Wii as a physical-therapy aid. Those using Wii play games by moving two motion-sensitive remote controllers.

"It's a much more engaging way to carry out your therapy," said Lynn Keller, CP Rochester's vice president of operations. "The more engaging we can make that interaction, the more productive it's going to be."

Kids Miracle learned Wii accessories could make the game more useful for therapeutic purposes, and set out to find the money for them.

"Our kids applied for a grant with YAR," Pellow said. YAR refers to Youth as Resources, a philanthropic program of the Rochester-Monroe County Youth Bureau.

With the \$975 grant, the kids plan to purchase a variety of accessories for CP Rochester. Wii Fit, for example, would allow its clients to perform aerobics and improve their balance, and Wii Sports would give them a chance to "play" tennis or baseball, all while reaching for their therapeutic goals. Kids Miracle also reached out to local merchants to help CP Rochester.

"We wanted to get another Wii for them so they could use it for their physical therapy," Jane said.

Henrietta's Best Buy donated a second Wii system to CP Rochester.

The Wii Fest is also intended to help local kids and their parents learn about and interact with children with disabilities, benefiting both.

"There's going to be additional mental and social benefits to the kids, as well," Pellow said. Kids Miracle has paid for bus transportation for kids to the kickoff from locations in Greece and Penfield. Parents can also drive their kids to the celebration and participate in it, or just drop them off.

"If they want a night out, they can go out to dinner with their spouse," said Pellow.

One of Kids Miracle Making Club's supporters, the Rochester Raiders professional indoor football team, will be on hand, as will its cheerleaders, the Raiderettes.

Hawthorne's Restaurant, a Pittsford dining establishment, plans to serve beverages and a finger food buffet at the kickoff, and there also will be a magic show.

Kids will be able to return to share Wii experiences with CP Rochester's young clients in the coming months as well, according to Pellow. Kids Miracle Making Club plans to hold gaming gatherings at CP Rochester every second Friday

through April 11, though transportation won't be provided on those days. The club asks that anyone wishing to attend those sessions reserve a place beforehand.