

As Zack's Place stands at the threshold of its 20th anniversary, our hearts are full. What began as a simple dream for enrichment has grown into a community landmark, fueled by kindness and shared joy. To celebrate this milestone year, Norm and I want to share the memories that have shaped Zack's Place since day one. We owe everything to the people who believed in this vision and the participants who inspire us daily.

The story began with Zack Frates. Born in 1989 with Cerebral Palsy, Zack was a vibrant, cheerful child who lit up every room. Though he could not walk or talk, he loved being social and staying active in his community. As Zack became a teenager, Norm began to worry about what life would look like for him after aging out of the school system. Finding a lack of engaging local programs, Norm had a vision: "Let's purchase the Stone Building in downtown Woodstock and create an enrichment center." He wanted a place where participants would be central to the community, mingling with neighbors every day.

Within a week, we were under contract, and Zack's Place (ZP) was born. In those early days, we painted the building ourselves and spread the word to friends. ZP started with just five participants—Zack, Keegan, Jessica, Jessa, and Lindsey—meeting after school. Friends volunteered to teach the first classes: fitness with Bari, yoga with Tita, reading with Ron, and the 5th and 6th Grade Student Council partnered in several programs monthly. A turning point came when the Hanover Red Dress Dance named ZP their benefactor, providing a \$9,000 donation that allowed ZP to hire the first part-time director, Anthea LaValley.

From there, ZP took off. We formed a Board and received the non-profit status, and we watched participation grow from five to twenty-five people as ZP transitioned into a full-day program. The signature fundraisers soon followed: the first Turkey Trot in 2007 raised \$12,000 with 200 runners, and the "Stay at Home Tea" appeal became a beloved annual tradition. These events, alongside partnerships for music, art, and Special Olympics, became the cornerstone of the community enrichment center.

By 2010, ZP had outgrown the Stone Building. Ever the optimist, Norm found ZP's current home at 73 Central Street. The new location allowed ZP programs to flourish, but in 2011, we suffered a devastating blow: our beautiful Zack passed away suddenly. Over 1,500 people attended his service at Union Arena, including ten rows of his heartbroken friends from Zack's Place. Though our hearts were heavy, seeing the community gathered for Zack reaffirmed the importance of our mission and carrying on his legacy. We knew we had to continue.

ZP participants' creativity led to another enrichment staple: the annual musical. What started as a "musical revue" at the Masonic Temple—featuring a school bus trip around the world—has become a massive community event. Most recently, the 2025 performance of *The Lion King* was a flawless showcase of ZP participants' incredible talents.

While ZP's growth has presented challenges, our dedicated Board and staff have navigated them with resilience. In 2013, when the building in which ZP was renting, came up for sale, the ZP Treasurer, Jim Godfrey, led a capital campaign to purchase it. Thanks to overwhelming donor generosity, ZP Board and ED raised the funds in just six months and added a new kitchen. Jim also recognized the need for long-term sustainability, helping launch the Zack's Place Sustainable Fund. What began as a goal to "grow a backbone" for the organization has blossomed; through dedicated fundraising and a transformative one-time gift, the ZP Sustainable Fund now stands at over \$2,000,000, ensuring a future for the participants.

The ZP reach continues to expand through grants and partnerships, providing trips to museums, sporting events, and local farms via our ZP Van which was purchased in 2017 as well as seasonal sports with Vermont Adaptive. In 2025, ZP also celebrated the release of a documentary directed by Jim Sadwith. The film, which chronicles the making of the musicals, has already appeared in 15 film festivals, winning awards and showing other communities the power of enrichment.

As ZP enters its 20th year, we are profoundly grateful to the foundations, Board members, volunteers, staff, and participants who built this center. We look forward to many more years of thriving together as a community enrichment center.

Stay tuned for more details on the ZP 20th Anniversary Gala celebration, **Dancing with Z Starz**, on December 6 and more!

With deep gratitude,

Norm Frates, Co-Founder & President

Dail Frates, Co-Founder & Board Member