## my:Face minute

myFace Newsletter

**NEW YORK & CHICAGO** 

JULY - SEPTEMBER 2025

New York

## Races for Faces: A Community in Motion

myFace's 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Races for Faces—a fun-filled 5K walk and community celebration with music, raffles, a carnival, prizes and by popular demand the return of the beloved cleft puppies.

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Sunday, September 21, 2025 Hudson River Park's Pier 62 @ 23rd St, NYC 9am - 1pm

Join The 5K Walk <u>HERE</u>

### Summer Martin and Team Cat Hat Lead the Charge— And They Want YOU to Join Them!

Races for Faces
(www.RacesForFaces.org) has become a hallmark of the myFace community where we all come together united to support individuals with craniofacial differences. Every year, we are reminded just how powerful this community is—none more so than through the inspiring efforts of Team Cat Hat.

This year, Summer Martin (12) and her team will return for their 6th year at Races for Faces on Sunday, September 21st at Hudson River Park, Pier 62 (New York, NY).



Born with Pierre Robin Sequence and a cleft soft palate, Summer thrives as a vocal advocate for others, embodying resilience and strength.

Summer's iconic cat hat, which she's worn since she was a baby (yes, it still fits!), has become a symbol of how far she and her team have come.

In Summer's words:

"I want to see you at this year's Races for Faces! It's been an amazing 6 years of participating, and I'm looking forward to many more. Join me, and together, let's show the world what we're made of!"

Want to join the movement?

Starting your own page or team is a great way to make an impact. By participating, you'll help raise vital awareness and funds for myFace's ongoing work with individuals with facial differences and their families. Every step you take helps further myFace's mission to ensure that no one faces these challenges alone.

Let's make this year's Races for Faces the most impactful one yet!



## From myFace Celebrates to the Opera Stage: Mary's Story

At myFace Celebrates 2025, Mary Avella captivated the room with her solo performance of Somewhere Over the Rainbow, marking the start of an exciting new chapter—her opera debut.

For the Gala, she was cast by David Santiago, our Artistic Director, Board Member, and mentor, who quickly recognized her powerful voice, bright spirit, and gift for sharing music. "First, we gave her a platform to celebrate our craniofacial community and talent," he said, "and then

we took it to another level. I heard her voice and knew she had a gift worth cultivating and exploring."

This summer, Mary made her opera debut with Teatro Grattacielo at La MaMa in NYC, performing alongside emerging professional singers. With coaching from David in Italian and operatic

style, and support from pianist David Maiullo, she stepped onto the opera stage with confidence, grace, and joy. We at myFace are so proud of Mary and love seeing these special connections bloom —mentorship, talent, and community coming together in inspiring ways.



Reflecting on the experience, Mary shared:

"David has always been a great mentor because he saw talent in me when I didn't see it in myself. Like myFace Celebrates, the opera was an amazing opportunity to showcase my voice and sing without judgment."

### Fireside Chat Recap: Ali and Jim Stroker

On June 20th, myFace hosted its third Fireside Chat at the Harvard Club, featuring Tony Awardwinning performer and disability rights advocate Ali Stroker and her father, Coach Jim Stroker, an educator and motivational speaker. With 47 attendees, the luncheon created an intimate space for powerful conversation, connection, and community. itional parental support.

Ali shared her journey of growing up as a wheelchair user and how musical theatre became her outlet and "superpower," helping her build confidence and embrace who she is. Jim spoke about resilience and perspective, reminding us that while we can't always control life's challenges, "we can find growth and freedom in how we respond."

Together, their heartfelt dialogue underscored the importance of resilience, community, and uncond-



"As a parent—especially of a child with medical complexities or disabilitiesyou can often feel like you're carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders. It's easy to feel alone and to question every decision, emotion, or how others are managing similar struggles. Then you meet a fatherdaughter duo like Ali and Jim, who you so deeply admire, and you realize that your mindset truly matters. This was an incredible afternoon, and I look forward to future Fireside Chats with myFace this fall!" - Leah

## Second Annual myFace In-Person Adult Retreat

#### Healing through self-care.

myFace recently hosted its second annual Adult Retreat, bringing together twenty-two adults with facial differences from across the country for a transformative weekend of healing, connection, and self-discovery. Set in the serene surroundings of Chester, Connecticut, the retreat centered on the theme "Healing Through Self-Care" and provided a safe, empowering space to reflect, share, and grow.

Highlights included a moving portrait-printing workshop led by artist and educator Nitza Danieli, where participants painted one another's portraits on plexiglass and pressed them onto watercolor paper. Displayed together, the prints became a striking reminder of the strength, beauty, and uniqueness within the group.

In another standout session, *Turning Your Difference Into a Superpower*, led by Paige Billiot, attendees used makeup, glitter, sticker gems, and other expressive tools to celebrate their identities and honor the parts of themselves that make them extraordinary.

The weekend was a powerful testament to the importance of safe spaces, community, and self-expression. As one participant shared, "I wish we could have spent a few more days together. You all brought me so much joy this weekend. Thank you." Another added, "I enjoyed sharing with you. I felt like you were part of my family! Thank you very much."



We are so grateful to all who joined us for this special weekend, and we look forward to doing it again soon!

## The myFace Craniofacial Family Weekend at Camp Boggy Creek

We're excited to share that 33 families will be joining us for a fun-filled Craniofacial Family Weekend at Camp Boggy Creek in Eustis, Florida, taking place September 19–21, 2025!

This special weekend is designed for families of children with craniofacial differences to relax, connect, and make lasting memories through classic camp activities like boating, archery, music, and more, all in a supportive and inclusive environment. All expenses are covered, and limited travel assistance is available for families traveling from outside Florida.

We're excited to see you there!





## A Magical Night at Citi Field with myFace and the NY Mets

On Tuesday, August 5th, members of the myFace community—including three families receiving care at the myFace Center for Craniofacial Care at NYU Langone Health—were treated to an unforgettable evening of baseball, thanks to the incredible generosity

of the New York Mets and myFace. They were joined by NYU Speech Language Pathologist Meg Lico and myFace staff member and retired Nurse Practitioner Pat Chibbaro, who helped cheer on the team and share in the fun.

The summer skies were



clear, the stadium buzzed with excitement, and families enjoyed cheering, laughing, and simply being together. Each guest received a \$25 gift card to savor ballpark classics like hot dogs, fries, and cotton candy, and went home with Mets caps, "myFace is Beautiful" fans, and most importantly, joyful memories of community and connection.

Although the Mets didn't secure a win that night, the smiles and shared experiences made the evening a true victory for all who attended—a night of celebration and togetherness that felt like a home run.

## myFace Hosts First Story Hour at NYU Langone

On August 22nd, myFace launched its first Story Hour at the myFace Center at NYU Langone Health, a pop-up literacy program designed to bring comfort to children and families during medical appointment wait times.

Staff members Naomi Levinshtein, Jackie Smith, and Dina Zuckerberg created a welcoming space filled with books, toys, and resources celebrating differences. Naomi led the storytelling, sharing her experiences and introducing families to myFace programs, while Jackie supported Spanishspeaking families in connecting with our resources.

Highlights included children proudly identifying their favorite facial features while reading My Extraordinary Face—including a young boy with microtia who proudly pointed to his "little ear"—and playing fun games like miniature soccer with bendy straw robots.

The event was a wonderful opportunity to make meaningful connections, spread awareness about myFace, and remind families that they are not alone. We look forward to continuing Story Hour at NYU and expanding it to other hospital partners!







## myFace is Beautiful: Shining Across Boston, Chicago & NYC



This summer, myFace brought its message of acceptance and inclusion to New York City, Boston, and Chicago with the "myFace is Beautiful" campaign. For six weeks, families, commuters, and neighbors passing bus shelters and billboards have been seeing powerful images reminding the world of a simple truth: there is beauty in every face and every difference.

At the heart of the campaign are seven incredible individuals living with craniofacial differences—from Samara, age 8, to

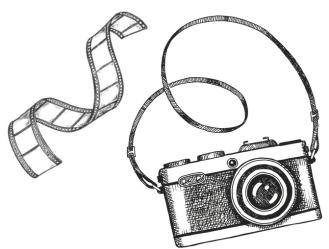
Elyse, age 40—who proudly share their faces and stories. Each reminds us that we are not defined by our differences but celebrated for who we are.

In Boston, 28 bus shelters have brightened neighborhoods. In Chicago, 54 shelters have sparked conversation across the city. And in New York City, 46 shelters and 9 billboards have reached thousands daily. Whether on the way to work, school, or a family outing, commuters are reminded: myFace is Beautiful.

## myFace: Through My Lens

A National Photography Contest Celebrating Identity, Depth and Visibility

"myFace: Through My Lens" is a national photography contest that invites individuals with facial differences— whether from birth or acquired—and their closest allies including parents, sibling, best friends and medical providers to share their worldview through their own lens—literally and figuratively. Whether it's a self-portrait, a favorite place, or a symbolic image, we



want to see how you see the world, and how you want the world to see you.

We welcome anyone affected by a craniofacial condition—individuals, family members, or close friends of any age—to participate. You don't need to be a professional photographer—just someone with a story to share.

Submit 1-3 Original Photographs that reflect who you are, a title for each photo, a short paragraph that describes the photo, and a short paragraph explaining who you are and how craniofacial differences have impacted your life. Three winning submissions will be selected to recieve a \$500 gift card each. These standout entries will be recognized for capturing the heart of the campaign and inspiring others to see beyond the surface.

Scan here for more details about the contest and send the myFace team your submissions.





#### Chicago

## myFace Chicago Cubs Game Outing!

On June 17th myFace took 10 people to the Cubs vs Brewers baseball game at Wrigley Field led and organized by Rena, Senior Program Officer—Chicago. Among the 10 attendees were four individuals with craniofacial differences, two parents, an Anaplastologist, Dental Assistant, and Nurse from UI craniofacial Center of Chicago. The family was directed to us via the RN, cleft and craniofacial coordinator from Advocate Children's Hospital in Chicago. The family has two children born with cleft, and drove nearly two hours to join us for the game. While the weather may

have been sticky, the threat of rain held up and the Cubs won! The response from the evening was unanimous, a wonderful time had by all.

One response on the survey was "Rena and all who coordinated are amazing" while the mom of the boys reached out personally and said, "Thank you so much, we all had an awesome time, the boys couldn't stop talking about it!" She also shared her interest in doing anything to help spread the awareness that myFace is in Chicago now and supporting our work



The anaplastologist who attended also shared that she would connect Rena with whomever she can across different hospitals to help increase our reach.

## myFace & Lurie Children's Hospital Head to the Lincoln Park Zoo

On Sunday, July 13th, myFace and Lurie Children's Hospital partnered for their first joint community engagement event—an exciting step in supporting families affected by craniofacial conditions in the Chicago area.

Thanks to the Inclusion and Accessibility team at Lincoln Park Zoo, several families from Lurie's Cleft and Craniofacial Team enjoyed an afternoon of connection, fun, and exploration.

Inside the Hurvis Learning Center, myFace set up a colorful display with giveaways, flyers, and custom coloring sheets, while the zoo hosted an engaging table with giraffe artifacts and hands-on activities for children to take home. Eight families had registered, with three attending in person—plus two more who discovered the event onsite and received myFace resources. One parent shared, "These events are important to the kids and the parents. Please keep doing them to help us all out!"

We are deeply grateful to Lincoln Park Zoo and Lurie Children's Hospital for making this event possible. It was a wonderful start to what we hope will be many more opportunities to connect and uplift families in the craniofacial community.





## myFace + YAB Installation Celebration!

On a warm summer evening at the You Are Beautiful (YAB) store in Chicago, nearly 50 guests gathered—some traveling from as far as Los Angeles and Michigan—to celebrate a meaningful collaboration between myFace and YAB. Together, they shared a message that is bold, deeply personal, and profoundly needed: myFace + You Are Beautiful = myFace is Beautiful.



The event marked the start of Cleft and Craniofacial Awareness Month and brought the community together in a vibrant, art-filled gallery. Guests were surrounded by more than 60 wooden plaques etched with the words "myFace is Beautiful," designed by members and allies of the facial difference community. Each piece served as a powerful reminder of self-expression, inclusion, and belonging.

Guests were moved by the creativity and heartfelt messages in the plaques and expressed admiration for myFace's work in raising awareness and celebrating individuals with facial differences.

A highlight of the evening was 12-year-old Bella, who traveled with her family to attend. Her radiant smile captured the spirit of the night, embodying joy, confidence, and community.



Bella's mother shared:

"The love and support myFace has for the community is absolutely amazing. Bella had a blast getting to meet everyone again and even meeting a few new faces in person. We can't wait to see everyone again."

The evening was more than a gathering—it was a celebration of visibility, voice, and the beauty found in every face. Guests left inspired, reminded of the importance of connection, representation, and the power of coming together to support and uplift one another.

## myFace, Celina Leroy and JCC Chicago: Inspiring Youth Through Art

From July 11–13, artist, educator, and myFace community member Celina Leroy visited Chicago to collaborate with Rena Rosen, Senior Program Officer myFace-Chicago, and Kevin Pease, Director of the Growing Hope Project at JCC Chicago.

This kickoff visit marked the start of a year-long collaboration bringing Celina's art and lessons to JCC programs, sharing myFace's mission and vision. Through education, art, and storytelling, the team inspired youth to recognize resilience, hope, courage, and beauty within themselves.

JCC Chicago, the nation's largest JCC, serves the community through Early Childhood sites, daycamps, Sunrise Day Camp, an overnight camp, and programs for all ages. Growing Hope encourages youth to combat anxiety fear and hopelessness by being upstanders in their communities. Rooted in the Jewish value of Tikkun Olam, it fosters empathy, creativity, and kindness to build a brighter future.

Celina will return several times over the coming months to continue programming with Rena and Kevin, bringing art, inspiration, and self love to Chicagoland youth.







## **Upcoming Events:**

## Creating Community Through Shared Moments

We'd love for you to join us in creating memories, making new connections, and celebrating all that makes each and every person in our community unique. Whether you're in New York or Chicago, we are always planning something fun and we can't wait to see soon!

#### **Upcoming Events**

#### September 12th

Dream Night at Lincoln Park Zoo (Booth) *Chicago* 

#### September 17th

myFace + Lurie Children's Hospital Picnic *Chicago* 

#### September 17<sup>th</sup>

Soccer Game — NYC vs. Columbus at Yankee Stadium New York City

#### September 19th - 21st

Camp Boggy Creek myFace Craniofacial Family Weekend *Eustis, Florida* 

#### September 20th

Cleft Puppy Yoga at Humble Yoga New Jersey

#### September 21st

Races for Faces, 5K Walk New York City

#### October 9th

myFace Sunset Boat Cruise New York City

#### October 17<sup>th</sup>

Fireside Chat Harvard Club, New York City

#### November 1st

myFace My Lens: Photo Gallery Party New York City













Dina Zuckerberg

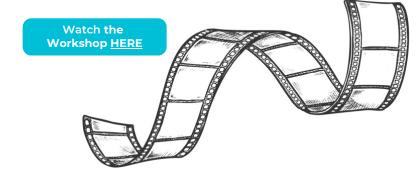
**Terry Healey** 

A survivor of a facially disfiguring and lifethreatening cancer, Terry Healey is an author, keynote speaker, and business strategist. Terry challenges audiences to face adversity and change, and apply his framework and principles to gain confidence, build resilience, and find joy in their personal and professional lives. Stay tuned for the release of this next podcast.

# my:Face: Through My Lens

#### Photography 101

To celebrate the launch of our *myFace: Through My Lens* Photography Contest, we hosted a lively Zoom session, *Photography 101*, led by myFace Photographer & Program Assistant Naomi Levinshtein and Board Member & Filmmaker Vincent DeLuca. This interactive workshop covered photography basics to help participants capture their unique perspective and prepare contestready photos. We had 18 people attend live and 40 total sign-ups to watch the playback.





## What If KIND Was Your School's Superpower?

Inspired by the book Wonder by R.J. Palacio



# CREATE A KINDER, MORE INCLUSIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Through in-person and virtual assemblies, the myFace Wonder Project is an interactive classroom experience for k-12 students

Inspired by the themes of Wonder, this program fosters empathy, kindness, and inclusion through storytelling, discussion, and hands-on activities.

- Learn about facial differences and empathy
- Embrace what makes each person unique
- Practice kindness and inclusion
- Become an Upstander— not a *Bystander*

Contact Info: Questions or ready to sign up?

Dina Zuckerberg | dina@myface.org 917-743-1939 | www.myFace.org/wonder



Patricia Chibbaro, CPNP, Pediatric Nurse Practitioner

Pat a nurse practitioner with over 30 years of experience at the myFace Center for Craniofacial Care at NYU Langone Health, is continuing to help our community by addressing questions from the craniofacial families on our myFace YouTube channel.

#### Some topics Pat has addressed:

- What is craniofacial microsomia?
- Do kids with cleft lip and palate need special dental care?
- How can I help manage the stress that I am feeling as a parent with a craniofacial condition?
- Why do some patients with craniofacial conditions need jaw surgery?
- Will the same craniofacial team be able to take care of my child throughout their life?

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Have Questions?
Need to talk?

Patricia Chibbaro, RN. NP. patricia@myface.org 917.720.4712

Catch up on Ask Pat Videos <u>HERE</u>

## my:Face

### **Virtual Support Groups**

Created for craniofacially affected individuals and their families.

#### **Our Group Offerings**

- Prenatal & Infant Parent
- Parent
- Drama Therapy (Age 10-14)
- Adolescent (Age 14-17)
- Adult Group (Age 18+)
- Grupo de apoyo para padres hispano hablantes

#### For More Information,

contact Dina Zuckerberg
Dina@myface.org







Scan Here to RSVP

RSVP by Fri. Sept. 26th to Karen Lazarus at Karen@myFace.org or 917-720-4715.

Space is limited!



THURSDAY, OCTOBER 9TH

6:00 - 9:00PM

BOAT SAILS AT 6:00PM

#### NY Waterway

PIER 79 FERRY TERMINAL 459 12TH AVE @ 39TH ST, NYC

Light Fare and Open Bar

CASUAL ATTIRE

### my:Face

For more information, or to learn more about the ways you can support myFace, please visit <u>myFace.org/waystogive</u> myFace is a recognized 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

U.S. Registered Charity EIN #13-6013760.All donations are tax-deductible in accordance with IRS regulations.

333 East 30th Street, Lobby Office, New York, NY 10016 • myFace.org • 917.720.4701 myFace is a non-profit organization dedicated to changing the faces - and transforming the lives - of children and adults with facial differences.