myFace Monthly Pulse

September 2026

Small Gifts, Big Change

Donate to myFace Today!

Making Space for What Matters



Craniofacial Acceptance Month gave us an opportunity this September to celebrate the many voices, experiences, and perspectives within the craniofacial community, and to see those differences reflected across myFace programs throughout the month.

Friendships formed, relationships grew, stories were shared, and people learned from and celebrated one another. Some came to connect, others to learn, spend time with family, try something new, or simply have fun. Each experience was as individual as the people who participated.

That same principle shapes our programs: we listen to what people tell us matters, respond to what we hear, and offer different ways to take part.

September reminded us that acceptance is reflected in the opportunities we create, the voices we listen to, and the freedom each person has to decide what being part of myFace looks like for them.



September 11, 2026

Story Hour Returns to NYU Langone

Coloring sheets, conversation, and a few “mini Picassos” helped bring Story Hour back to the NYU Langone waiting room, where Program Officer Naomi Levinshtein spent the day connecting with families.

Two moments from the day stood out. A young boy from Brooklyn and his mother shared their interest in future myFace events, particularly opportunities where he could play and spend time with other children. Another connection began with a coloring sheet. Naomi met a 9-year-old girl with a cleft lip and palate who was there for a post-operative appointment. When her mother noticed a tiger with a cleft lip on the page and pointed out the similarity to her daughter, it sparked a conversation. Naomi shared her own experience growing up with a cleft lip, and the three began talking about some of their shared experiences.

Her mother shared that this was the first year she had begun talking with her daughter about what having a cleft meant to her, and that Naomi was the first person they had met who shared that lived experience. The family expressed interest in future myFace events, as well as the Spanish-speaking support group.

Story Hour creates space for moments like these to happen naturally, giving families an opportunity to learn about myFace, meet others, and explore what connection to the community might look like for them.

Every family’s experience is different, and there is no one way to be part of the myFace community. Whether your family is looking to meet others, attend an event, explore a support group, or simply learn what is available, we invite you to connect with myFace and find the opportunities that feel right for you and your family.



September 12, 2026

Family Fun Day at the Nashville Zoo

Familiar faces, new connections, and a day at the Nashville Zoo brought myFace back together with families from the Nashville-area craniofacial community at the 4th Annual Family Fun Day, hosted by the Cleft & Craniofacial Program at Monroe Carell Jr. Children’s Hospital at Vanderbilt. Senior Program Officer Jackie Smith and Grant Research Consultant Kris Summers represented myFace, reconnecting with families and introducing others to opportunities within the myFace community.

A highlight was reconnecting with the Shrum family, Miranda and Lee and their children, Levi and Anna, whom myFace first met during a previous Nashville visit. By the end of the day, the family was excited to apply for the Victory Junction Family Camp Weekend this October.

Jackie and Kris also spent time with the Owen family, Anna, Josie, Penelope, Harrison, and Charlotte, who first connected with myFace about a year ago and have since become active members of the community, helping introduce other families to myFace programming.

Throughout the day, families stopped by the myFace table to learn about support groups, webinars, family camps, and other programs. The event also provided an opportunity to continue strengthening myFace’s relationship with Jenn Tilton, Cleft and Craniofacial Program Manager, and the Vanderbilt team.

Events like Family Fun Day show how relationships can grow over time, from meeting a family for the first time, to welcoming them into a program, to seeing them create connections for others. As myFace continues to return to communities like Nashville, each visit creates another opportunity for families to explore what myFace offers and decide how they would like to be part of the community.

“Reconnecting with families like the Shrums and the Owens reminds us why this work matters. Watching a family we met on the road now excited to apply for camp, and seeing a family we welcomed a year ago now helping welcome others, is exactly the ripple effect that we hope to create.”
— Jackie Smith, Senior Program Officer



September 15, 2026

Building Belonging at School: A Zoom Panel Conversation

Nearly 100 people registered to join a Zoom panel conversation about what belonging at school can and should look like for students with craniofacial differences. Building Belonging at School: Strategies for Students with Craniofacial Differences, their Families, and Educators brought together 39 live attendees from across the United States and Europe, including parents, educators, medical professionals, and members of the craniofacial community. Many were connecting with myFace for the first time.

Moderated by Dina Zuckerberg, the panel brought together lived experience, parent perspective, and professional expertise. Panelists included college student Grace Anto; parent Dana Fernando; school counselor Regina Kennedy; licensed clinical social worker, former school social worker and Program Team Consultant, Suzanne Orlando; and myFace Program Officer and former special education teacher Justin Stewart.

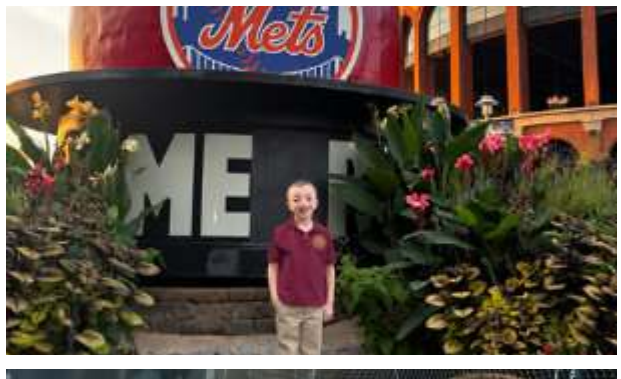
Together, they explored navigating questions, staring, teasing, and bullying; advocating for individualized support; strengthening self-advocacy; and creating more inclusive school communities.

Dana shared how her family created a letter introducing her son, Kiran, to his school community when he was younger. Now 17, Kiran writes the letter himself, choosing what he wants teachers and classmates to know, a meaningful example of a young person taking ownership of how he shares his story.

Attendee feedback highlighted the value of combining personal experiences with practical strategies. Participants shared plans to talk with their children about school experiences, practice responses to challenging situations, communicate individual needs, and advocate for appropriate support.

Building belonging is not about asking students to fit in. It is about creating school communities where every student is seen as a whole person, has the space to show up as themselves, and has a voice in how their own story is shared.







September 16, 2026

The myFace Brotherhood: Building Community Beyond Programming

The myFace Brotherhood brought community members and their families together at Citi Field for a night of baseball, laughter, and time together.

More than a night at the ballpark, the outing offered a chance to step outside of structured programming and simply enjoy a shared experience. Conversations in the stands, cheering together, and time spent getting to know one another unfolded naturally, exactly the kind of experiences the myFace Brotherhood hopes to create as it grows and offers community members and their families more ways to spend time together beyond formal programming.

A special thank-you to Steve Samson for generously providing the tickets and making the evening possible. Sometimes what stays with us most is simple: a shared experience, a new friendship, and memories that last long after the final inning.





September 17, 2026

Growing Hope Brings Communities Together

Music, joy, and a shared sense of community filled Gallagher Way for the 4th Annual Growing Hope Concert, presented by Hecktman Family JCC Chicago. myFace was proud to sponsor the event alongside the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation, Chicago Cubs, and Gallagher Way.

Bill Villafranco and Rena Rosen represented myFace, joined by myFace community member Halle Hoffman and her sister, Arianne Johnson. Growing Hope brings people with different backgrounds, perspectives, and lived experiences together around kindness, empathy, and connection, recognizing the experiences that make each of us unique while creating space to see and celebrate the whole person.

That spirit came to life throughout the evening. Tony Award winner, Ali Stroker, captivated the crowd with her voice, rapper Kosha Dillz brought humor and energy, and Chicago-based youth empowerment performer Zion Ali filled the stage with positivity and powerful messages.

As a committed partner of JCC Chicago's Growing Hope initiative, myFace is proud to help create opportunities throughout the year for communities to come together, learn from one another, and build meaningful connections. Growing Hope is a reminder that belonging doesn't require us to minimize what makes us different. It grows when people have the space to show up as themselves, share their experiences in their own way, and be recognized for the full person they are.

September 18–20, 2026

A Weekend of Connection at Camp Boggy Creek

For 33 families from the craniofacial community, including 38 campers, a weekend at Camp Boggy Creek in Eustis, Florida, created space to reconnect, form new friendships, and simply enjoy being together. myFace staff members Naomi Levinshtein, Justin Stewart, Jackie Smith, and Executive Director Bill Villafranco joined families for the weekend.

One of the most meaningful connections was years in the making. Two families who had adopted their children from India had been talking online for years but had never met in person, and neither knew the other would be at camp. When they recognized each other, a long-distance connection finally became an in-person friendship.

Throughout the weekend, families shared meals, rode horses, played mini golf, celebrated birthdays, laughed, talked, and enjoyed time together. Children formed their own friendships while parents found opportunities to connect and share experiences in ways that happened naturally.

Carla, mother of 9-year-old Eva, captured what the weekend meant for her family: *"As Eva's mother, so much of this journey has been spent looking ahead... thinking of the next appointment, the next decision, the next stage, and all the things I wish I could protect her from. This weekend made me look at what was right in front of me instead: Joy. Belonging. Understanding. Community. Hope."*

Weekends like this create something that can't always be scheduled or planned: time for relationships to grow, new connections to form, and families to experience community in the ways that feel meaningful to them. Our deepest thanks to the staff and volunteers of Camp Boggy Creek for creating the space for those moments to happen, and to the Toulmin Foundation for making the weekend possible.









September 27, 2026

Races for Faces: When Plans Change, Community Shows Up

A nor'easter may have changed the location of this year's Races for Faces, but it didn't change what brought people together.

When the September 27 event moved from Pier 62 to Riverside Church, approximately 135 volunteers helped transform Assembly Hall into a celebration filled with music, games, laughter, and plenty of improvisation. Around 250 people attended, including all three Grand Marshal families, with each family and volunteer making their own decision about whether they could safely join us.

The unexpected change created some memorable moments. Host Paige Billiot transformed the traditional walk into a conga line, while six-year-old Harlyn Mauriello stepped in to sing the national anthem when the scheduled performer was unable to travel. Familiar Races for Faces favorites—from Painter Sam and the Cleft Rescue Unit puppies to longtime photographers and volunteers—helped make the indoor celebration feel unmistakably like Races for Faces.

But the heart of the day belonged to our Grand Marshals. Ariana shared what being part of myFace has meant to her and her sister Anaira: *"Being a part of myFace has given both of us a community where nobody has to fear being judged. We can truly express ourselves here."*

Anaira added:*"When times are rough, and those wings of hope won't let you fly, you can find warmth under the wing of another because nobody has to be alone."*

The day also generated meaningful support for myFace, with the raffle raising nearly $1,800—approximately $400 more than last year—and Races for Faces reaching approximately $165,000 raised to date.

We are grateful to the families, volunteers, fundraisers, donors, and partners who made the day possible. The plans changed, but what people came for remained: a place to show up as themselves, spend time together, and make the day their own.



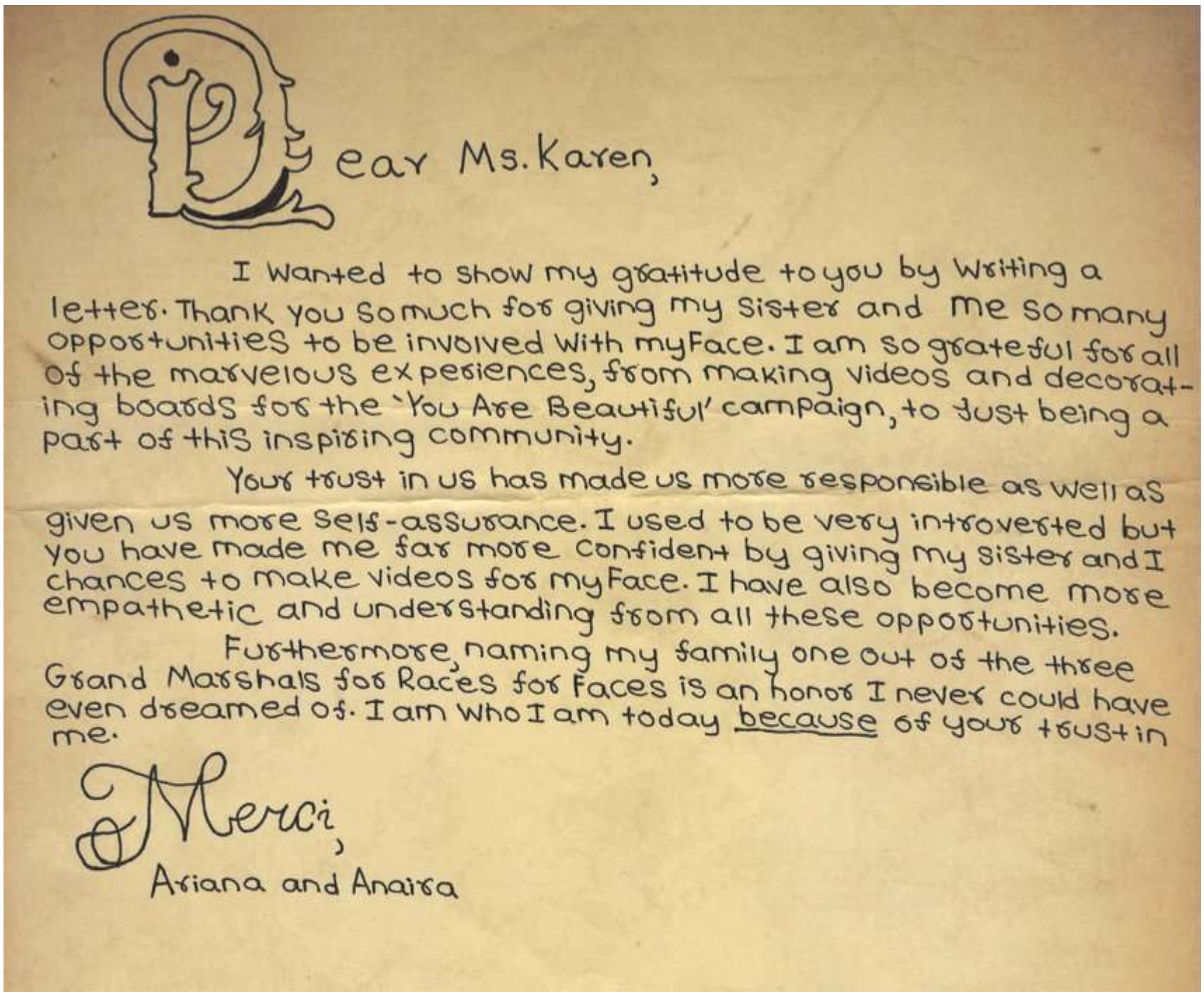




Community Voices

In Their Own Words:
A Letter from Ariana & Anaira

Two of our 2026 Races for Faces Grand Marshals, sisters Ariana and Anaira, shared this handwritten letter with myFace following the event. Their words were incredibly touching and beautiful to receive, and we wanted to share them exactly as they wrote them.



Dear Ms. Karen,

I wanted to show my gratitude to you by writing a letter. Thank you so much for giving my sister and me so many opportunities to be involved with myFace. I am so grateful for all of the marvelous experiences, from making videos and decorating boards for the 'You Are Beautiful' campaign, to just being a part of this inspiring community.

Your trust in us has made us more responsible as well as given us more self-assurance. I used to be very introverted but you have made me far more confident by giving my sister and I chances to make videos for myFace. I have also become more empathetic and understanding from all these opportunities.

Furthermore, naming my family one out of the three Grand Marshals for Races for Faces is an honor I never could have even dreamed of. I am who I am today <u>because</u> of your trust in me.

Merci,

Ariana and Anaira

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Fundraising Highlights

Exciting News: Grant from The Hearst Foundations

We are delighted to share that The Hearst Foundations have awarded myFace a grant to support our work with low-income individuals and families navigating life with craniofacial differences.

Established by William Randolph Hearst, The Hearst Foundations are national philanthropic organizations that support nonprofit work across health, education, culture, and social service. Their investment in myFace will help strengthen the medical, educational, and family support programs that provide critical resources and opportunities to individuals and families who need them most.

We are grateful to The Hearst Foundations for recognizing the importance of this work

Join the Conversation:
myFace Fireside Chats

The *myFace Fireside Chat Series* brings together compelling voices for intimate conversations about identity, belonging, advocacy, and the experiences that shape who we are.

The fall series kicked off on October 2 with James McLeod, known as “That Vitiligo Guy.” James shared his experience growing up with vitiligo and navigating the reactions and assumptions of others. Now an author, speaker, and advocate, he uses storytelling and humor to challenge perceptions of visible difference and encourage people to see themselves, and one another, as whole people.

If you missed James’s conversation, there are still two opportunities to join us this fall for a **FREE** myFace Fireside Chat at Centurion New York, 327 Madison Avenue, 55th Floor, New York City.



Upcoming Schedule

Jessica Cox — November 20, 2026
Born without arms, Jessica Cox became the world’s first licensed armless pilot. Join us for a conversation about challenging assumptions, navigating differences, and redefining what others believe is possible.

R.J. Palacio — December 14, 2026
The bestselling author of *Wonder* joins myFace for a special conversation about the story that became a worldwide phenomenon, and the conversations around kindness, empathy, and belonging it continues to inspire.

Space is limited. Register today for one—or both—of these upcoming Fireside Chats.

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