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Kindering center: 'I don't know where we would be without them'

KEN LAMBERT / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Kindering early-childhood special educator Caroline Lemmens uses a flashlight as a visual guide on a drum, while working with 21-month-old Franco Calvo, who another Kindering therapist describes as "just a little sunshine."

KEN LAMBERT / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Franco Calvo doesn't realize that playing with a drum at Kindering's Bothell facility is also helping him to learn.

The Calvo family of Kirkland is seeing 21-month-old Franco bloom, thanks to the center's parent-centered approach.

By SANDI DOUGHTON
Seattle Times staff reporter

November has been a good month for Franco Calvo and his parents.

First, the youngster made a breakthrough in feeding himself, thanks to patient coaching at home and at Kindering center, which provides therapy for children with special needs.

Then a brain scan found the seizures that struck the 21-month old soon after birth appear to have ended.

"That's probably the best news we've had in two years," said Franco's dad, Rodrigo Calvo.

The Kirkland family has been grappling with worry and uncertainty since medical tests during Elsa Calvo's pregnancy gave conflicting results on the possibility of Down syndrome. The moment he saw his newborn son's face, Rodrigo knew the possibility had become reality.

The couple embraced their baby with love, joy — and concern for his future.

"The feeling was: Welcome to this world. We're going to take care of you," Rodrigo recalled.

But until they connected with Kindering, the Calvos didn't really understand the kind of special care their son would need, or how best to foster his development.

"I don't know where we would be without them," Elsa said.

One of a dozen nonprofits that

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ABOUT THE SERIES

The Seattle Times Fund For The Needy raises money for 12 local charities that help children, families and senior citizens. You can donate online at seattletimes.com/ffn.
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Families still reeling after shootings, disasters

How do you give thanks after experiencing so much sadness?

By JACK HEALY
AND JULIE TURKEWITZ
The New York Times

Some will sit down to Thanksgiving dinner wearing T-shirts that honor a slain loved one. Others will serve turkey and pie to a congregation devastated by gunfire. They will eat at friends' tables because their own kitchens and homes were charred to ash.

For many families — too many, really — across an America battered by wildfires, hurricanes and mass shootings, this Thanksgiving is the first major holiday since life was ripped apart. There will be familiar meals and rituals. And a haunting new question this year: How does one give thanks after losing so much?

Some are dreading the day, their grief

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NO TURKEY, NO PIE: The truth about Thanksgiving, and the search for a black Pilgrim > A3

JIM WILSON / THE NEW YORK TIMES

The Condron family visits the remains of their Santa Rosa, California, home on Sunday. It was destroyed by wildfires.

Seattle's income tax ruled illegal

WOULD HAVE IMPOSED TAX ON HIGH EARNERS

City says next stop is State Supreme Court

By LEWIS KAMB
AND SANDI DOUGHTON
Seattle Times staff reporters

Seattle's income tax on wealthy households failed its first legal test Wednesday, with a King County Superior Court ruling that the measure is illegal.

In a summary judgment, Judge John R. Ruhl agreed with multiple challengers that the city ordinance adopted in July is not authorized under state law.

Opponents of Seattle's so-called "wealth tax" immediately hailed the ruling as proof that the city long has known the tax was legally flawed, but nonetheless pushed it into law.

"The city knowingly violated several laws in imposing this tax," said Brian T. Hodges, a senior attorney for the Pacific Legal Foundation, which represented several Seattle residents challenging the law. "This ruling is probably the worst scenario for the city and the best scenario for the opponents of the income tax."

While Wednesday's decision is disappointing, the city intends to appeal it directly to the State

See > SEATTLE, A12

Bosnian Serb Mladic gets life for 1990s war crimes

By MIKE CORDER
The Associated Press

Ratko Mladic

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — An unrepentant Ratko Mladic, the bullish Bosnian Serb general whose forces rained shells and snipers' bullets on Sarajevo and carried out the worst massacre in Europe since World War II, was convicted Wednesday of genocide and other crimes and sentenced to spend the rest of his life behind bars.

With applause inside and outside the courtroom at the International Criminal Tribunal

See > CONVICTED, A15

U.S. SAYS Myanmar's crackdown on Rohingya minority is ethnic cleansing> A2

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< Kindering

FROM A1

share in The Seattle Times Fund For The Needy, Kindering was founded in 1962 by a group of mothers struggling to raise disabled children at a time when social services were scarce.

Today, the organization serves more than 4,000 families a year with campuses in Bellevue, Bothell and, most recently, Renton. The focus is on the critical window from birth to 3 years of age, when children's brains are at their most flexible and therapy can lay the foundation for a better future.

"The earlier the intervention occurs, the more skills they get earlier on, the more successful they are going to be throughout their lives," said Courtney Nolan, a special-education manager at Kindering.

Franco's therapy regimen through Kindering's Bothell center started when he was 2 months old.

Like any baby, he was soaking up information about the world and learning to navigate through it. Down syndrome complicates the journey with an array of challenges, from weak muscles and imperfect vision to cognitive problems, all of which Kindering's programs are designed to help counteract, Nolan explained.

Franco was doing well — until the seizures started.

It was a terrifying time, and horror stories on the internet were not helpful, Rodrigo said. "You see an innocent baby going through this, and there's nothing you can do to comfort him."

Franco was diagnosed with a rare condition called West syndrome, a severe form of epilepsy. Much of the progress he had made in therapy was erased.

Drugs helped calm the spasms, and Kindering's staff started anew with occupational, physical and speech therapy.

Through Kindering, the Calvos got to know other parents with disabled children, who shared their stories and advice. The organization also welcomed Franco's big sister, Josefina, now 3½, to a program where siblings get special attention and share their feelings about having a disabled brother or sister.

"Kindering not only helps Franco move along in his development, it helps all of us to understand we are not alone," Elsa said.

Working with the entire family is fundamental to Kindering's approach, Nolan said. Parents are the primary caregivers, so it's important to equip them with the skills they need to help their child.

Kindering's experts helped Elsa and Rodrigo learn to better read their son — what his body language says about his moods and how to figure out what he wants.

They've also learned to examine and adjust their own expectations.

Elsa, 36, is used to rushing around. Now, she has to slow down to match Franco's pace. Rodrigo, 40, has always been a stickler for table manners. But Kindering's therapists explained how important it is for Franco to play with his food in order to feel the texture and become familiar with it.

On a recent morning at Kindering's Bothell campus, Franco demonstrated his touch technique, grabbing and squeezing chunks of a fig bar. Bringing a tidbit close to his mouth earned applause from his enthusiastic teachers.

In other lessons, all couched as play, Franco leaned in to feel the rhythm of a drum, followed a flashlight beam with his eyes and smiled at soap bubbles floating past his face.

"Franco is making amazing progress," said occupational therapist Jennifer Shull, who's been working with the family from the start. "He's just a little sunshine."

The Calvos are bilingual, so Franco's therapists speak to him in Spanish and English. Across the region, Kindering helps families that speak 90 different languages.

With a staff of more than 180, the organization doesn't turn anyone away. Funding comes from state and federal programs, school districts, private donations, insurance and modest fees from families who can afford them.

Kindering serves children with a wide range of disabilities, from cerebral palsy and autism to less-severe delays in development. The organization's own research shows that nearly half of kids who get early intervention catch up with their normally developing peers and don't need special-education services in school. That can be a big money-saver for school districts, since special education can cost more than $50,000 per student.

Children with genetic disabilities like Down syndrome and more profound brain damage may never catch up with typically developing kids, but Kindering's programs help narrow the gap and can set them on the road to a more independent life, Nolan said.

Rodrigo, an operations manager for a cellphone company, is certain the outlook is brighter for his son than it was for his aunt. Born with Down syndrome in Mexico in the 1940s, she never got special education or therapy and spent much of her life with only her mother for company.

Today, people with Down syndrome hold jobs at Microsoft and other major companies, Rodrigo pointed out. "That's my hope for Franco," he said. "To get a degree. To get a job. To develop as normally as he can."

And if higher education is in Franco's future, the Calvos will be ready. They've already started a tuition savings account for him, just like they did for their daughter.

Sandi Doughton at: 206-464-2491 or sdoughton@seattletimes.com

KEN LAMBERT / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Elsa Calvo tracks bubbles with her son, Franco, who has Down syndrome. He attends a weekly program at Kindering to work on developmental and sensory exercises. "Kindering not only helps Franco move along in his development, it helps all of us to understand we are not alone," his mom said.

Where your dollars go

Kindering provides education, therapy and support for children with disabilities or developmental delays — and their families — from birth to 3 years of age.

Samples of what Kindering can buy with your donation:

$25: Colorful, high-contrast toys for visually impaired children

$50: Weighted therapy balls

$100: iPad applications that help children communicate

Source: Kindering

KEN LAMBERT / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Franco sits in a sensory bin at Kindering in Bothell, wiggling a piece of corn between his toes.

Assange told not to meddle in other countries

The Associated Press

QUITO, Ecuador — Ecuador on Wednesday again urged Julian Assange to not interfere in the affairs of other countries after Spain complained about his contacts with Catalan secessionists, although the government said the WikiLeaks founder would continue enjoying political asylum in its London embassy, where he has been since 2012.

President Lenin Moreno is to visit Spain in December, and his government said Assange's comments do not reflect its own views.

Ecuador's message came two weeks after Spain objected to Assange's contacts with secessionist Catalan leaders.

Assange has commented frequently on international issues, at times leading his host to ask him to stop it. The biggest crisis came in October 2016, when the embassy cut his internet service after WikiLeaks published damaging emails from U.S. presidential candidate Hillary Clinton's campaign.

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