



**MORGAN
AUTISM
CENTER**

Creating Opportunities For Success

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MAC Chat

Fall 2015

A MESSAGE FROM BRAD *Executive Director*

“If you don’t know...you just don’t know.” I find myself saying these words from time to time to describe the difficulty in detailing the behavioral challenges and the possible impacts for individuals living with autism. Just the other day, I said these words to a parent after attending a training designed to foster community understanding of autism. As we left the training, we discussed the possibilities for giving professionals from community resources a greater understanding of the possible challenges that can present themselves when interacting with persons on the spectrum. An understanding? Sure. A deep understanding? For those of us who live life with autism, it sounds like a tall order. Without training and experience, the actions and behaviors of people with autism can be difficult to interpret.

A few years ago, I was at the bookstore on a Saturday with my family. On our way out, we walked into a challenging situation that left me feeling deflated. One of our former adult clients was being detained for “stealing” a CD, and the police officer was grilling him.

“You know what you did?” the red-faced officer asked him.

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Client’s story highlights need to expand Adult Program in its 30th year

By Shannon Carr
Communications & Social Media Specialist

As Morgan Autism Center celebrates the 30-year anniversary of its Adult Program, it is working to accommodate the growing demand for those on the leading edge of the autism explosion. The center has launched a multi-year initiative to open a new off-campus satellite site dedicated to expanding its Adult Program to a full capacity of 80 clients — a 90 percent increase.

“Current programs are already stretched to their limit in their ability to serve this population,” Executive Director Brad Boardman says. “With an estimated 80 percent of individuals with autism (served by the California’s Department of Developmental Services) under the age of 22, we are looking at massive shortages in the coming years of quality programming options.”

Since 1989, the rate of autism has soared 2100 percent, a number that does not include those with milder forms, according to the California Department of Developmental Services. Today, 1 in 68 children has been identified with autism spectrum disorder, according to the latest figures from the Centers for Disease Control.

Since 1969, Morgan Autism Center has offered an educational program for

preschool and school-aged children through 22 years old.

“When some of our adults turned 22, there were no programs especially designed for people with autism,” recalls Jennifer Sullivan, Executive Director at the time.

So Morgan Autism Center applied for and received a \$35,000 grant from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation in 1985 to found the Adult Program.

“In the beginning, there were only about seven to eight clients,” Jennifer says.

Today, the program, licensed by the California Department of Social Services, is operating at a capacity of 47 clients in two former classrooms on Morgan Autism Center’s San Jose campus.

“Most programs for adults with disabilities are created for developmentally disabled individuals, without taking into consideration the unique challenges presented by people with autism,” Jennifer says. “Because people with autism think and learn differently, training of staff is critical to understand these differences and program design with these challenges in mind is imperative.”

Rex’s Story

Fifty-six-year-old Rex, who joined the

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New community drum sessions offer therapy to students, adults

By Shannon Carr
Communications & Social Media Specialist

Mark Farley is keeping the beat for Morgan Autism Center's students and adults as they learn to express themselves through the universal language of music. In July, the Los Gatos resident began holding weekly community drum circles in the multi-purpose room on site.

"Making a joyous noise is one of the great experiences of being human," Executive Director Brad Boardman says. "The barrier to participation is non-existent and our students really enjoy it."

During the hour-long sessions, students and adult clients pull up a chair to one of the 20 available hand drums or grab a shaker of their choosing to become part of a gathering of people sharing rhythm and getting in tune with each other and themselves.

"My focus is not on the performance aspect as much as the therapeutic side of it," Mark says.

He explained the drum circles utilize the natural power of rhythm and sound for the purpose of tapping into layers of the mind and body that other modalities cannot.

Mark cited a study by Dr. Barry Bittman, which suggests drumming is good for the immune system. Barry's research has demonstrated how a group drumming session can create illness-killing cells, which could protect the body. His study says, "Group drumming tunes our biology, orchestrates our immunity, and enables healing to begin."

Mark begins each session by welcoming participants to the circle then introducing the history of a song he selects from a repertoire of traditional African folk songs, including "Fanga Alafia," a West African song of welcome, and "Jin-Go-Lo-Ba" (or "Jingo").

"These are the songs I've chosen because I know I can do group dynamic participation, the rhythms are easier for them to understand and they will get instant gratification because they are all playing together," he says.

Mark shapes the experience by beginning the beats needed to kick off the chosen song and maintaining them as needed, but the music is entirely improvised through a process of group interaction.

"Drumming is a very simple form of self-expression that appeals to a broad group



Above: John Farley, Dr. Naz Motayar and Mark Farley (left to right) perform a drum session with Room 16.



Left: Student Hayden enjoys finding his beat.

Photos by Shannon Carr

of people," Brad says. "Just seeing students who are typically reserved strike a drum for the first time is quite an experience."

The participants make up the music as they go along, using their listening and playing to express themselves in any way they see fit.

Student Zach, for example, likes to play the Taiko drum and hold down the beat.

"No matter what the distraction attempts are by other students, he consistently is there," Mark says.

Mark described the step-by-step process of witnessing some of the transformations taking place in students and adult clients after only a couple weeks, some of which happened even just after one one-hour session.

At the top of the hour, a student or adult client will sit by a drum and an instructional aide will rest their hand on top. Within five minutes, he often sees them hit the drum on

their own accord.

"And then, by the end of the hour, they're really engaged," he says.

He adds: "The second event, today, they walked in the door where they left off. We're not back to the beginning. We're actually moved forward. They're hitting the drum. They've got a relationship with it. It's not foreign to them. And they remember the music."

Mark explained there are a number of other benefits to participating in community drum circles.

"Clandestinely, they're learning focus exercises," Mark says. "But also what I'm seeing is that they're learning the concept of rhythm and how it affects them. They're getting stimulation, instant gratification from knowing that they created something — a sound — and they're participating in a group dynamic that allows them to be collectively sharing and giving."

For those with a disability, he believes the activity provides an even more important outlet.

Mark's goal is to facilitate the drum circles to teachers and aides so they can use the activity to help understand what's motivating the students and adult clients they serve. It would help them know, for example: How are the individuals engaged? Where are the points of losing them? What instruments are they drawn to?

"Here's an option that's easy, it's non-threatening and it's hard not to want to touch a drum," he says. "So there's a lot to be said about these students engaged in these drum circles."

FUNDRAISING EFFORTS

How you can get involved at Morgan Autism Center

Ninth Annual Golf Classic raises \$16,000

We would like to thank the participants of our Ninth Annual Golf Classic, which raised \$16,000 to support our school and Adult Program. Participants enjoyed 18 holes of golf at the beautiful San Jose Country Club followed by a delicious dinner, silent auction and raffle.

We would also like to thank our generous sponsors for supporting this exciting day: Milani & Associates, Young, Craig & Co., Chris and Lisa Marchese, Concept Systems Manufacturing, Daylight Foods Inc., Martin and Maryann Garcia, Clay Goodman, Curtis Heinz, Alan and Ute Ren, David and Diana Rose, Joe Wall, and Meghan and Joey Riley.

This exciting day would not have been



possible without the support of Mark and Amy Milani, our amazing event chairs, Board Member Reuben Zarate and volunteer Linda Novak.

WAYS TO SUPPORT

Annual Giving

Morgan Autism Center graciously accepts monetary and in-kind donations. You can donate online at www.morgancenter.org/donate or send a check to: 2280 Kenwood Avenue, San Jose, CA, 95128.

eScrip

Shop with participating grocery and retail merchants and they'll donate up to 5 percent of your total spendings to Morgan Autism Center. Visit www.escrip.com to learn more.

AmazonSmile

Amazon.com will donate 0.5 percent of the price of your Amazon purchases after selecting Morgan Autism Center. Visit www.smile.amazon.com to learn more.

Employee Gift Matching

Many companies participate in matching gift programs. Ask your employer today to join you in supporting Morgan Autism Center!

UPCOMING EVENTS

Lecture Series

Our 2015-16 Lecture Series is being scheduled. Visit www.morgancenter.org for more information.

Save the Date!
Starry Starry Night 2016
Saturday, May 7, 2016
Crowne Plaza Palo Alto

Starry Starry Night breaks records

Morgan Autism Center hosted its most successful Starry Starry Night yet! This year's gala was held on May 2 at the Fourth Street Summit Center in downtown San Jose. Roughly 390 Morgan Autism Center parents, family members and community members came out to show their support, generating a grand total of \$226,000 for our school and Adult Program!

Attendees enjoyed the talents of Tom Taksa, a client of our Adult Program at the time, who wowed the crowd on his saxophone alongside talented pianist Ron Borelli.

Katelynn Moriarty, a sister of two twin brothers who are students at Morgan Autism Center, was the sibling speaker of the evening. Her amazing story of what it is like growing up with two brothers on the autism spectrum touched the hearts of everyone in the room.

Morgan Autism Center presented the Outstanding Leadership Award to Ratermann Manufacturing Inc. for their support of the autism community. George Ratermann, founder of the company, has provided employment opportunities for several clients in our Adult Program since 1989. In addition to the heartwarming program, attendees also enjoyed appetizers and wine, a silent auction, raffle, games, a scrumptious dinner, an exciting live auction and Fund Our Needs.

We would like to thank all of the sponsors and supporters who helped make this gala such a success: CBRE, John Sobrato, John and Mindy Gray, Joe and Lisa Moriarty, Vilma Palette, Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati Foundation, Fremont Bank, Heritage Bank, Intel Corporation, Nena Montgomery and Michael Edson, Steve and Suzanne Gilbert, Focus Business Bank, Premier Nissan of San Jose, and all of our parent sponsors and donors!

Finally, a huge thank you to Event Chair Daren Tuchman, our hardworking and dedicated event committee and our AMAZING staff volunteers!

For more information on how you can support Morgan Autism Center, contact Development Director Lisa Lemke at (408) 241-8161 or lisa@morgancenter.org

Strong team needed in successful transition planning

By Krystle Wright, M.S. CCC-SLP
Speech Language Pathologist,
Peninsula Associates & Morgan Autism Center

I believe transition planning is a team effort that needs to include the teachers, aides, family, therapists and group home staff in order to occur successfully. During my first year at Morgan Autism Center in 2013, I was introduced to students transitioning into adult programs. Instead of the excitement typically experienced before most graduations, the tension was noticeably high in preparation for one of my student's transitions. Then 22-year-old Kate had been attending Morgan Autism Center since she was 10. The teachers and aides were familiar with her behaviors and anticipated meltdowns. Most importantly, they understood how she communicated.

This was my first year working with Kate and I had a lot of catching up to do, particularly in learning about her interests and how to work with her when she became upset. Kate loved to joke around, but I could hardly understand what she was saying without context or an Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) device to support her verbalizations. I was lucky enough to have an amazing teacher and classroom aides to support me. They helped me understand when Kate said



Kate with her mother Nena Montgomery, board chair.

Photo courtesy of Nena Montgomery

“Rarr!” she was referring to the cowardly lion in her favorite movie, “The Wizard of Oz.”

After a year of getting to know and build a relationship with Kate, I learned how to use her interests to motivate and expand her communication. Considering how long it took me to build a relationship with Kate, it made me wonder how she would acclimate to a new adult program scheduled to begin in just months. Her classroom teacher, Julie Asamoto, began by writing an “All About Me” book and a social story explaining Kate’s visit to a new program. I thought this was great but I wasn’t sure how I could support Kate’s transition. I brainstormed with Julie and she suggested creating a video to help explain Kate to new instructional aides.

In the following weeks, we regularly filmed Kate in an attempt to catch her verbal approximations and behaviors. We also tried to capture the precursor symptoms to Kate’s seizures and the subtle hints she gave when she needed to use the bathroom. After I reviewed the footage, I thought it would be helpful to translate Kate’s verbal approximations and how she uses her AAC device to communicate. I shared this video with the new program and her family.

While this was all helpful, it still wasn’t enough as I thought about who would be helping Kate with her device in the long run — her parents and group home. So I spent the last few weeks visiting Kate’s new adult program, training her new aide about Kate’s AAC device and checking in with her mother to ensure she knew how to program buttons on Kate’s device.

It takes a village to raise a child, and the same can be said for helping them make the transition to adulthood. As was the case with Kate, each team player has various ideas and plans that need to be implemented in order to ensure the next chapter of their lives has the possibility for success. I was fortunate to be able to learn this early on. And I continue using my skills as a speech language pathologist to help new students transition forward with whatever individualized means is required to do so.

Visit, share feedback about our new mobile-responsive website

Morgan Autism Center recently launched its new website. We gathered information from more than 15 stakeholders including parents, donors, educators and board members. The result? A modern, mobile-responsive website that helps our diverse constituents understand the center’s wide range of services.

We have created menu items (About, Blog, Calendar & Events, Donate, News & Stories and Team), which will allow people to quickly find any information they need about our programs and services.

And people can dig deeper into each tab by clicking through the sub-categories found on each page. Mobile users



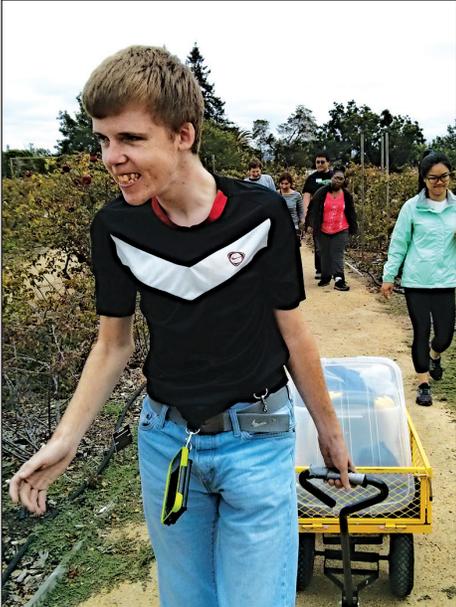
can simply click on the hamburger menu at the top left of their mobile device and choose the category they want to view. The website also provides much-improved integration with Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn, fostering greater cus-

tommer intimacy and public engagement.

Thank you for checking out our new website. Please feel free to send any improvement ideas or issues to shannon@morgancenter.org. We will be updating the website regularly, going forward.

MAC & CHEESE

Spending time with our students and adults



Left to right, top to bottom row:

Lucas participates in Guadalupe River Park Conservancy's Flower Power field trip.

Students Joshua and Caleb walk with employees Ashley Albers and Amy Horan during Guadalupe River Park Conservancy's River Explorers program.

San Jose Giants player Seth Harrison gives student Jacob an autograph.

Captain Mike Del Bando of the San Jose Fire Department fits student Aakash with a jacket and hat.

Employees Jeannie Ho and Kristina Guertin pull student Jacob during Field Day.

A group of clients from our Adult Program tour Levi's Stadium. A huge thanks to Clare McDermott, the mom of two of our clients, who bought the tour.



Parent is cooking up food, life skills

By Shannon Carr
Communications & Social Media Specialist

Parent volunteer Kirti Singh is cooking up life skills for students at Morgan Autism Center. Every Tuesday she joins staff and students from Room 18 — including her son — in the school's fully equipped kitchen, where she leads 30-minute cooking sessions.

"Morgan Autism Center has done so much for my son. I wanted to contribute and I thought cooking with his class is something I could do comfortably," Kirti explains of how the two-year partnership began. "I think fixing a healthy meal for oneself is not only a life skill but also an art that your taste buds can relish."

Kirti kicks off each session by introducing a recipe that is easy to prepare and children can enjoy, regardless of diet. Many students in the class are on a gluten-free/casein-free diet, commonly known as GFCE, or have other dietary restrictions due to medical reasons or otherwise.

"Some of the most popular items that we have cooked are potato latkes, coconut macaroons, chocolate avocado ice cream, brown rice tortilla chips, curried lentils, sprouted mung bean salad, zucchini noodles, cauliflower tortilla, chicken nuggets," Kirti says. "The list is endless."

She dishes out the necessary ingredients (which she brings with her) and equipment needed to make the recipe, and goes through the directions. The students are grouped up and they are assigned a step or take turns with the help of their aides. Once the session is over, the students compare what they have created to a picture of the finished product before sinking their teeth into the creation. In addition, Room 18 teacher Kristin Schaefer sends home the recipes each week.

"They get to experiment with different textures, colors and new foods which they may have never been exposed to," Kirti says.

Judi Campbell, Director of Student Services, sees many benefits to the classes.

"I think the thing that strikes me most, besides the happy noise coming from the kitchen, is that kids will try foods they have rejected in the past like curried cauliflower or roasted broccoli," she says. "They seem to have a greater curiosity to taste it when they have participated in making it."



Top to bottom:

Student Amogh preps food with his mom Kirti, who volunteers cooking classes once a week at Morgan Autism Center.

Selah juices a lemon during a cooking class, led by parent volunteer Kirti.

Justin enjoys trying new food after a cooking class.

Kristin says she has seen this ring true with many of her students.

"Kyle requests different kinds of food and healthier options, both at home and at school, and Stephen tries veggies or things that aren't his preferred items," she says.

There have also been other transferable benefits, which Kristin shares.

"Jack is better at waiting his turn during food preparation and following directions and written recipes, while Selah is able to sit still and may attend until finishing a product," she says.

Kirti says she is looking forward to seeing the students continue to grow through her weekly cooking classes.

"Volunteering for cooking classes at Morgan Autism Center is very fulfilling for me," she says. "I look forward to spending time with these kids every Tuesday. It has taught me a lot about acceptance and believing in their capabilities. I feel all of them are smart, but trapped in their challenging body. I am glad I can do something for them."

Check out some of Kirti's recipes online at www.morgancenter.org/recent-blog-posts

A MESSAGE FROM BRAD (CONTINUED)

Continued from page 1

"Yes," our former client said with a smile.

"You know you are in big trouble..."

"Yes," he replied. His smile broadened.

When this particular individual is anxious or doesn't understand what is happening, he will smile and agree with just about anything said to him. Knowing this, I introduced myself to the officer and tried to give him some context for better understanding the situation. Maybe I shouldn't have tried to intervene, but it was pretty obvious that the officer was misinterpreting the smiles of our former client for brashness or contempt. Unfortunately, in this particular case, the officer was not open to receiving any information from me. As I reassessed my strategy, the adult client's mom arrived on the scene. I quietly left with the sick feeling that my input was inconsequential, and hoped that she would be better able to bring understanding to the situation.

The incident comes back to me every once in a while. As someone who does Crisis Intervention Training for law enforcement and community personnel, it is often apparent to me that a lecture on autism doesn't do the topic justice. Real understanding comes with education *and* experience. We now offer law enforcement personnel the chance to come visit our school and Adult Program in order to further their learning.

I used to believe our students were the sole beneficiaries of community experiences. I now understand that we bring the community the opportunity of having interactions, relationships and practical autism training within the context of ordinary life. Each time we engage, we have the chance to plant seeds of understanding. In the story above, I missed an opportunity to begin an important conversation with a community member. I won't miss the next chance.

Brad Boardman, Executive Director
Morgan Autism Center

56-year-old Rex is among 47 clients served in Adult Program

Continued from page 1

program in 1993, is among those currently being served.

"The Morgan Center was a very small outfit when we met it in Los Altos," mother Nancy Smith recalls. "We went over and looked and I said, 'I think this would be great.'"

Nancy says she is grateful for those in the Adult Program, particularly director Sue Taylor, who has helped her plot and plan behavioral modifications for Rex.

"He is making progress," Nancy says. "Progress is slow with Rex. Rex is a sweetie really, and he wants to be friendly. And it's very hard for him. He tries."

Nancy explained she knew Rex was different from an early age.

"I said to the local doc, 'This child is not normal,'" Nancy says, of when he was a newborn. "He was very slow developing and we didn't get much speech from him."

Until the age of two-and-a-half, Rex talked sporadically. But at that point, talking became limited. She explained he would point at objects and repeat simple words. And if people didn't understand his demands, he would scream and throw tantrums.

He also showed other behaviors, since linked with autism, including self-stimulation (commonly known as stimming) to the sounds of washing machines and vacuum cleaners, and having an obsession with wires and electronics.

"You had to watch him because he would unplug everything whenever I went anywhere with him," Nancy says, adding, "One of his favorite things to do when I go to the store with him is stand around and look at light bulbs while I do my shopping."

Because little was known about autism when Rex was born in 1959, he was first diagnosed as educable mentally retarded (EMR) before being described as emotionally disturbed (ED).

"I didn't know he was autistic initially but I knew there was something wrong and I argued with his doctor about it," Nancy, a nurse at El Camino for 41 years, says. "I had worked with some children that were in a state institution with autism as a student nurse. ... I noticed a lot of their behaviors, and some of that I noticed with Rex as he



got older."

After taking special education classes most of his life and graduating from Cupertino High School, where they tried mainstreaming him, Rex was finally diagnosed with autism in his late 20s.

When they connected with Morgan Autism Center, Nancy says: "I knew after a week that this was just a wonderful fit for him. He looked forward to going so much."

Flo Fuller says Rex has made progress in the Adult Program, noting examples from the Community Integration Program (CIP) she directs. He participates in regular outings with other clients including recycling trips, walking at the mall and activities at San Jose Municipal Rose Garden, Community School of Music and Arts and Resource Area for Teaching (RAFT).

"RAFT is one where he has made the most progress," Flo says.

He used to visit for one hour a week, but would constantly get up from his work area to wander, go to the restroom and not really attend to his work task, she explained. Now, he attends and participates successfully up to twice a week for one hour.

"He is also more engaged with discussions in the van while transporting to and from the CIP outings," Flo adds.

Years later, Nancy says, they are just as happy with the service Morgan Autism Center provides.

"What he's gained here is a sense of belonging, for one thing," she says, noting he's also gained social skills, friendships and encouragement of his talents.



Fifty-six-year-old Rex (all pictures) is among the 47 clients in Morgan Autism Center's Adult Program. The program, operating at capacity, is working to expand to 80 individuals, a 90 percent increase.

Photos courtesy of Nancy Smith and Flo Fuller

Additional space sought

Despite success stories like Rex's which occur at Morgan Autism Center on a daily basis, the Adult Program does not have enough space to welcome additional clients due to space restrictions. That even includes those students who have been served at the site throughout their entire education.

"I worry that Cameron, who needs one-on-one help, will not have a place in the Adult Program because they don't have the capacity," parent Paola Luna says. Her son has been at Morgan Autism Center since 2009 and will age out in five years.

For some individuals with autism, the need for a highly supportive program does not end at age 22 (the year school district funding ends), but often diminishes as they age into their late 20s.

"Seeing people with autism through the many phases of the lifespan is an exceptional and extremely rare privilege," Jennifer says. "We see them through childhood, work with families dealing with the initial diagnosis, adolescence, puberty, menopause and the passing of some of their parents and the transition to group homes or supported living situations. ... This programmatic history is very important in maintaining the culture of Morgan Autism Center."

Major gift donations are critical in expanding our Adult Program. Learn more about how you can support this extraordinary project at www.morgancenter.org/donate or contact Development Director Lisa Lemke at lisa@morgancenter.org or (408) 241-8161.



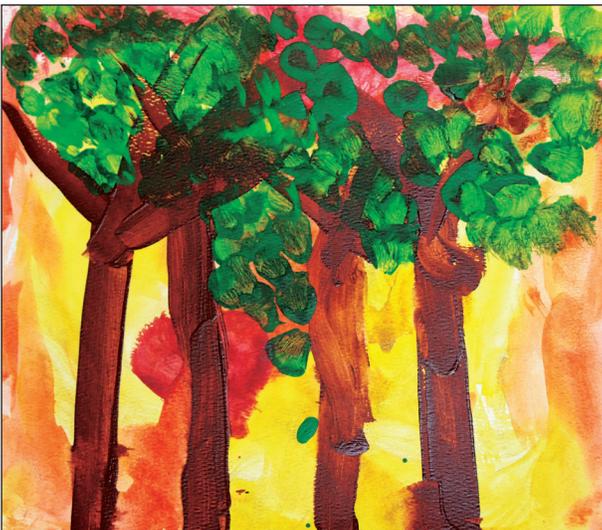
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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

Newsletter cover art created by student Ruben



Our students and adults create beautiful art on site with teacher Nicole Ferguson twice a week. We are pleased to feature a portion of 11-year-old Ruben's piece (left) on the cover of this issue's newsletter.

Ruben is a happy and hardworking student. He is a whiz using his communication device and there's not a jigsaw puzzle he hasn't mastered. He enjoys singing "Five Little Ducks" and saying hello to friends.

We plan to highlight a different artist in each newsletter.

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Mission and Vision Statement

Our mission is to help children and adults with autism or other developmental disabilities maximize their potential in a dignified, positive and loving environment.

Our vision is for our students and clients to remain in the community and lead a productive and happy life. We work to increase awareness about autism and to promote sharing of the latest research and information.