

Illuminations

A Bi-Annual Newsletter From Morgan Autism Center

Spring 2020



Maintaining Hope In The Face of Crisis

If you had told me back in December that Morgan Autism Center would suspend on-campus activities for months due to a virus and that all our programming would be based online, I would have been in utter disbelief and told you that would never, could never, ever happen. Both my imagination and my pollyannaish leanings have been kicked in the guts, dropped to the mat, and pinned. I am the kind of person who says "anything can happen" all the time. Usually I mean it in the rosiest sense. But this crisis has truly adjusted the scale of this phrase for me.

And yet, for all the hardship and real tragedy that plays out on the news, the stories of real challenge from our families, the endless Zoom meetings, long(er) days, and my feeling that if I spend one more minute in front of this computer I will lose my mind, I still find that though tempered, my outlook remains resolutely on the positive side of the "anything can happen" end of the scale. How can this be?

It is my belief that the people we know and the experiences we have are

largely responsible for how we handle our challenges. I just participated in a Morgan Autism Center community meeting via Zoom that has reconfirmed that I have won the lottery in this regard. The meeting dealt with some very heavy subject matter: When will on campus activities return? How can we be sure that all students, staff and families will be safe? Yes, the questions were big, and the answers have yet to be discovered, but in spite of the unknowns, the overwhelming tone of the meeting was positive. Our parents voiced both a strong support of our response to the shelter in place directive and faith in our collective ability to bring our programming back on campus when the time is right. Having the chance to hear from parents reminded me how thankful I am that for half my life I have been able to soak up the amazing models of resilience our students, clients, families and staff demonstrate, the tireless professionalism and solution oriented mindset of my colleagues, and the deep caring for others demonstrated by our entire staff and leadership. It is no wonder that in spite of the chaos that swirls around us now, I hold the underlying belief that everything is going to be okay. Eventually.

It won't be easy. And like the surprise of our physical campus closing



DISTANCE LEARNING: Adult client Brian is smiling ear to ear over a fun Zoom session with Community School of Music and Arts (CSMA) music instructor, Kyle, and other clients in his Community Integration Program.

temporarily, there will likely be more failures of my imagination and minor insults to my rosy leanings. But it is the nature of the Morgan Autism Center community to make the best of things: to learn, adapt and make good things happen. I have faith that in spite of the current challenges, the amazing resiliency, support and determination demonstrated by the culture of the Morgan Autism Center and its community will deliver us to the other side of this particular chaos.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brad Boardman".

By Brad Boardman,
Executive Director

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Generous Family Volunteers Go Above and Beyond

A Special Lady Honored For Her Volunteerism and Dedication

93 year-old Betty Della Dora has been a part of the Morgan Autism Center community for 19 years. She came to us as a grandmother of one of our students, Jason, but ended up being an invaluable part of the Morgan Center family. Upon her retirement as a book keeper around 10 years ago, Betty approached us and offered to volunteer in our office. She has a great attention to detail no matter if it's filing or lending support for our biggest fundraiser of the year, Starry Starry Night.

Betty has not only become an indispensable part of our administration team, but has also enriched the Morgan

Autism Center community with her presence and wisdom. Clients (including her grandson) make frequent visits to the office to say hello. One client even says she is like a grandmother to him.

This past February, Betty was honored for her volunteer services by the San Jose Junior League of Women. This is the second time she has been a recipient of this honor.

We are so proud of the well-deserved recognition of her many years of selfless service and hope that she will continue to honor us with her presence for many years to come.

*-Sally Hird,
Office Manager*



GIFTS GALORE: Betty is passionate about volunteering in the office and is always ready to help anywhere she is needed.

Morgan Autism Center's Parent Group Leader Passes On The Torch

The Morgan Autism Center Parent group began in 2006 when Moriah Bettencourt found herself a part of the MAC community. While spending time making sure her son Alex was settled in school, Moriah met a few other parents coming and going from campus and found those connections to be valuable and worth extending. From those connections, a parent group was formed. The purpose of the group was to meet two needs.

The first need was to provide a community of parent to parent support. Because Morgan Autism Center serves students across 3 counties, it can be

challenging to create a cohesive school community. Because we serve students significantly impacted by autism, a sense of belonging for each family can be a lifeline to others who share in the joys and challenges of family life.

The second purpose of the group was to acknowledge our over 100 employees by implementing a wide variety of staff appreciation activities. In the course of a school year, birthday gift cards are handed out, lunches are held, and a morning barista visits from time to time to help us start the day off right. All parents are invited to contribute time, talent or money in ways that work best for them.

The parent group has proven to be a wonderful connection between home and school. We extend a heartfelt thank you to Moriah for her years of dedication facilitating the group. And a new crew has stepped in to take the lead. We welcome parents Melissa Castillo, Shannon Geoghegan and Theresa Oller who will be coordinating our parent group activities moving forward.

*-Judi Campbell,
Program Director*



AMAZING PARENTS: Meet Morgan Autism Center's new Parent Group leaders - Melissa, Shannon and Theresa.



HUGS ARE THE BEST: Morgan Autism Center Parent Group founder, Moriah Bettencourt, and Executive Director, Brad Boardman, share a smile and a hug.



SWEET LUNCH: Staff enjoying a delicious Valentine's lunch of salad and sweets thanks to the parent group.

Shining Bright: Student and Adult Spotlights

Student In Room 5 Is A Friend To All - Paras

Paras (playfully known by staff as “PJ”) is a gleeful, energetic young man with an infectious laugh. He often beams with excitement and joy about the activities of the day. He loves being out and about in the community. Going on trips to the grocery store, laundromat, library, the Los Gatos creek trail, local restaurants, the YMCA and CSMA (Community School of Music and Art) for dance classes are just a few of his favorites. He also travels to different and exciting places with his family and caregivers outside of school. He recently traveled to Dallas with his family and did a fantastic job waiting in line at the airport and riding on the airplane.

Paras loves being around his peers and playing cooperative games. He

is a social guy and is continually improving his communication and interpersonal skills. During speech groups you will often hear him helping out his peers when they seem to be having trouble answering questions or greeting each other. Paras enjoys talking to staff about events of the day.

He is a tactile learner who excels at activities that involve physical manipulation and movement such as art, sports, science, and cooking. He is a hard worker and enjoys being a part of group activities and work. Room 5 is very lucky to have Paras!

*-Heather McClimans,
Classroom 5 Teacher*



SAY CHEESE: Paras smiles for the camera as he proudly shows off his face paint.

Adult Program Client Celebrates 42 years at Morgan Autism Center - John F.

John celebrated his 50th birthday this year with a pizza party for all his friends at Morgan Autism Center! His mother, sister and niece joined the celebration. This also marked John’s 42nd year at Morgan Center. John fondly remembers many of his teachers and classmates he has known over the many years and likes to share fun stories and memories with new staff.

John keeps himself very busy in the adult program. He earns money each month completing the Ratermann ring assembly job and is especially proud that he is the only one who can do the job with the metal clips. He looks forward to going to the bank to cash his checks and having spending money for movies and outings to KFC and Mod Pizza with Lauren, his girlfriend of 11 years.

In addition, he is a participant in the Community Integration Program (CIP) where he enjoys a variety of outings. His favorite CIP activities are going to the Campbell library and participating

in a weekly communication skills class at San Jose State University. He appears to really enjoy this class and always looks forward to meeting his new clinician and giving them a tour



SAFETY FIRST: John assembles safety rings for fire extinguishers as part of our partnership with Ratermann Manufacturing.

of our campus when they visit.

As we use vans for our CIP outings, John is very diligent at checking on the mileage on the vans and is sure to let staff know when the work vans need oil changes, another of his favorite outings.

Outside of program, John is very involved in Special Olympics. He participates in basketball, track, softball and bowling. He is proud to show friends and staff the medals he wins. When he was younger his mother took him to practices. Now he can arrange his own rides with VTA Access or Uber. Last year when it appeared Special Olympics was going to lose federal funding, John wrote letters to his CA Senators and Congresswoman. He received replies to each of his letters and was happy to see that his opinion mattered and his voice joined the many to reverse that decision.

John will soon be moving to a new residential home. He is looking forward to getting to know his new roommates and setting up his laptop computer and games.

*-Flo Fuller and Sue Taylor,
Adult Program CIP Director
and Adult Program Director*

Celebrating 10 Years Of Collaboration With Santa Cruz County Office Of Education

In early 2008, Morgan Autism Center was approached by the Director of Special Education for Santa Cruz County Office of Education (SCCOE). They wanted to collaborate with Morgan Autism Center. They were interested in implementing the MAC model for their existing county preschool autism program. This initial call began a successful partnership that is still vital today.

In that first year we tackled two preschool classrooms and over the years the collaboration has grown to six classrooms, serving grades preschool through high school for students with moderate to severe autism.

Initially, Morgan Autism Center supported the physical set up of classroom environments, extensive training of all teachers and instructional aides, parent trainings, behavior training, and curriculum support. Once the Chrysalis Center teachers and staff gained confidence in implementing the MAC model, our role as consultants and the level of support shifted. By the third year of the engagement, our support was more focused on specific needs of individual students and fidelity to the MAC model.

The goal for the Santa Cruz County Autism program is to function exactly like our Morgan Autism Center program. However, there are inevitably some variances between the two.



HANDS ON INSTRUCTION: Elementary grade students learning to do academic work on computers.

Here, at Morgan Autism Center, we are housed under one roof, whereas the Santa Cruz classrooms are on campuses that correspond to grade level of the students. This allows for daily mainstreaming opportunities for students to interact with their

fact that the MAC model is being implemented on an integrated campus, provides opportunities to learn for all.

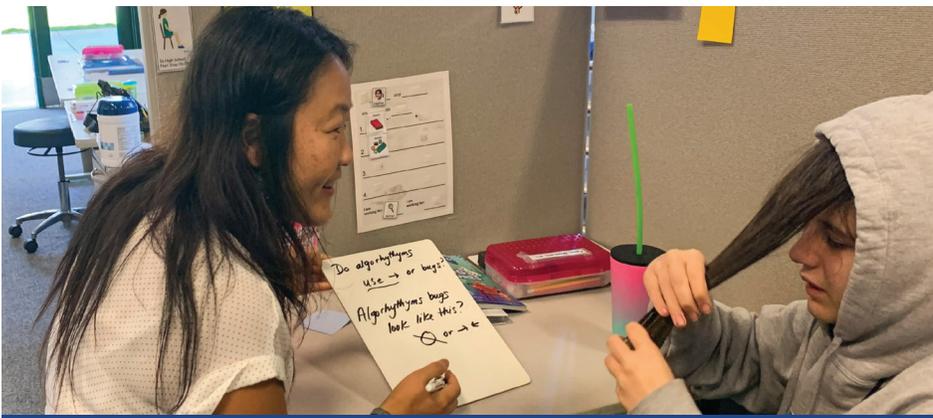
Our mission and foundational philosophy have been adopted and embraced by the amazing teachers and staff in Santa Cruz. We have instilled

“ **We have instilled our philosophy of kindness and respect through our mission as well as our MAC model..** ”

neurotypical peers. The integration of students has created greater awareness, inclusivity, and acceptance from the whole school population, teachers and administrators. The

our philosophy of kindness and respect through our mission as well as our MAC model approach. As we continue to work on academics, functional life skills and increased independence skills, our collaborative programming not only improves the well-being of our students with autism, but it also enriches the lives of families and makes a positive impact on the community in which they live.

-Sun Garcia,
Program Specialist/Consultant



A MODEL INSTRUCTOR: Morgan Autism Center Program Specialist/Consultant, Sun Garcia, demonstrates working with a student for teachers and staff.

(Right): Preschooler navigating his visual schedule.



Transition to Adult Programs - Making High School Years Count in Room 3

Room 3 has 9 students and 9 staff members with students ranging in age from 16-22 years old. When I returned to Morgan Autism Center 9 years ago after my stint with the circus (true story) and began working with this age group for the first time, I quickly realized how important it was to understand the adult living skills objectives my students would need to meet.

Through research, family interviews, and visiting adult programs in the area, I was able to get a better sense of the direction for our classroom. We focus on making sure that each student is developing the key skills that will best support him or her in the future. Communication, self-help, daily living, vocational, leisure, and social skills are our focus, with students spending increased time in small group settings and out in the community.

Once parents have had a chance to observe adult programs and fit and placement decisions have been made,



SNACK ATTACK: Room 3 teaches their students a variety of independent living skills through their MAC Store. It provides opportunities to practice communication and learn how to work with money.

we begin the process of transition. At first, we bring the student a couple of times a week to the new adult program setting. The goal here is to make sure our graduating student is supported, understands the demands of the new environment and that their early experiences in the program are positive. Additionally, these transition exercises are a great way for staff members of the adult program to observe their new client's communication style,

capabilities and support needs.

Critical to transition is an "All About Me" document that will help staff in the new setting learn about the client. For students with communication devices, we arrange trainings with our speech therapists so that new staff can familiarize themselves with the client's mode of communication.

The goal in Room 3 is to make sure these final school years from 16-22 count and to ensure students are as prepared as possible for the next stage in their lives. We truly value our students and want to see them grow and become as independent as possible. By providing them with a safe, nurturing, and loving environment that values each and every student for who they are, we have found much success in preparing our students for their adult lives.

-Julie Asamoto,
Room 3 Teacher

Room 6 Visits Rancho San Antonio

Room 6 students have been volunteering at Rancho San Antonio in Cupertino for years. They are always happy to take a trip up to the Ohlone Village, where we help with farm chores. Before leaving school, we read a social story about the outing as a reminder of the expectations when we are there. Social stories emphasize staying with the group, following a visual checklist of the jobs, and reminders that it is okay to ask for a break.

Once we arrive at the village, we meet up with Ellen Gartside who is the volunteer program lead and she lets us know what needs to be done. Typical jobs are sweeping and raking leaves in areas around the village, picking up trash from the picnic area or cleaning the picnic tables. After completing their assigned tasks, students put away their

equipment and go for a walk around Deer Hollow Farm where they see cows being milked, chickens running around, and other animals that are housed at the farm.

The bi-weekly trips to Rancho San Antonio have helped our students focus on tasks as well as develop and enhance vocational and job skills. The skills are also carried over to home activities where students can help parents with yard work. Our students also apply these skills at school where they help rake, sweep, pull weeds, and pick up trash to keep our campus clean. Our partnership with the group at Rancho San Antonio and the volunteer opportunities they provide have helped our students develop new skills and build confidence and pride in their new acquired abilities.



FARM FUN: Students get up close with a friendly cow while learning how Rancho San Antonio staff clean and feed each farm animal including this jersey cow.

-Jamilah Miller,
Room 6 Teacher

"MAC-N-CHEESE"

1. Working hard doesn't stop for our teacher Heather.

2. Student Maria and her canine companion join Zoom for their classroom's daily calendar lesson.

3. While at home, student Jacob is lending a helpful hand and mowing the lawn with his dad.

4. Student Nicholas practices safety skills by learning how to wear a mask.

5. Teacher Alyssa is working from home and facilitating Room 8's daily morning calendar meeting.



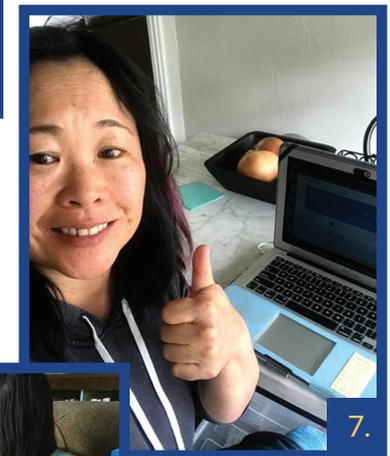
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Distance learning at MAC!



4.



5.



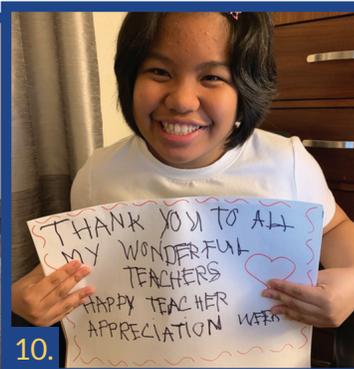
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8.



9.



10.

6. Student Hannah working on her sight words.

7. Thumbs up from teacher Julie as she gets ready to continue instruction on Google Classroom.

8. A client our from Adult Program prepares some yummy crepes inspired by the book "Crepes by Suzette".

9. Adult Program client Jack getting ready for his weekly virtual yoga session with P.E. Coordinator, Tyler.

10. Student Roselle showing her love for her teachers during Teacher Appreciation Week.

Fundraising

13th Annual Golf Classic

Morgan Autism Center's 13th Annual Golf Classic was a resounding success, raising over \$28,000 for our school and adult programs. We had 85 golfers join us at Coyote Creek Golf Club in Morgan Hill for a fun-filled day of golf, games, and good company. Thank you to all who came out to support Morgan Autism Center and the students and clients we serve. We would like to extend a special thank you to LWG Construction for co-hosting the tournament for the 2nd year in a row, and to our incredible Event Chair, Indira Madzar, for her hard work and dedication.



FUN IN THE SUN: Morgan Autism Center parent, Daren, her sister and friends, enjoying a day on the green at our annual Golf Classic.

Thank you to the following sponsors for their generous support:

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Ways To Give

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 P.O. Box 26188 San Jose, CA 95159

Amazon Smile

Amazon.com will donate 0.5% of the price of your eligible Amazon-Smile purchases. 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.



MAKING A DIFFERENCE:
Many hands make light work thanks to the volunteers from Avison Young.

Avison Young Volunteer Day

On October 24th, over 40 employees from Avison Young of Northern California spent the day volunteering at Morgan Autism Center for their 6th annual global Day of Giving. They rebuilt the fencing around our garden, worked on landscaping projects, and then presented us a donation of \$5,000! We are so thankful to Avison Young for choosing us as their benefiting nonprofit partner and for all of their support.

Giving Tuesday

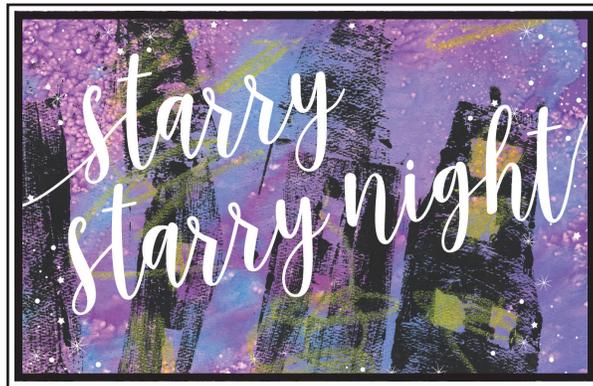
This year we joined other nonprofits around the world for TWO Giving Tuesdays, raising more than \$45,000 for our school and adult programs. On December 3, over \$20,000 was raised to purchase pergola structures for our outdoor learning areas. These structures will keep our students and clients comfortable in the sun when we return to campus. Then, on May 5, another \$25,000 plus was raised to support Morgan Autism Center during the COVID-19 crisis. Thank you to all of our incredible donors and supporters for their generosity during these special days of giving.

Starry Starry Night Art Spotlight

Since we had to cancel this year's Starry Starry Night Fundraising Gala, we thought we would share some of the beautiful artwork created by our talented students and clients. Visit us on social media or our website's blog page (www.morgancenter.org/recent-blog-posts/) to view some of these incredible pieces.



Thank You



We would like to thank the following Starry Starry Night 2020 sponsors for converting their sponsorships to straight donations.



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Young Actors Educate About the World of Autism

Morgan Autism Center takes its position in the community very seriously. Our first objective is to create the best programming available for our students and clients. But Morgan Autism Center is not just a school and adult day program. Our mission to help children and adults with autism or other developmental disabilities maximize their potential in a dignified, positive and loving environment does not refer to just our campus environment. It refers to the broader community. Through our outreach we work to maximize our mission and create awareness and understanding in the world our students, clients, and others inhabit. Our trainings for first responders, our relationships with public school districts, our reverse mainstreaming program are all ways for us to activate on our mission and to expand our impact on behalf of the autism community. We see these activities as crucial to the work we do.

Sometimes our partnerships lead us to creative new ways to impact the community. The results can be breathtaking. Back in November, Sally Brosnan from Archbishop Mitty High School approached Morgan Autism Center to ask about doing something special: an autism training for some of



BRAVO!!: Archbishop Mitty theater students perform in the production of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*.

the students in their drama program. They were putting on a production of **The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time**. The story follows sensitive and brilliant Christopher, a young man with autism, as he navigates the mysteries of a dead dog, a broken family and his own challenges.

Mitty has been a long-time partner to Morgan Autism Center in our reverse mainstreaming program. This new training felt like a natural fit! Students showed up in November, close to the start of their production rehearsals. In the span of one morning, the cast members learned about autism and explored important questions that would help to inform their character development. The questions were thoughtful and included direct questions about autism, family systems, school, teaching and community life.

In January I was lucky enough to see

the play with my daughter. It was truly incredible. Cast members used their careful study of the characters and combined that with their experience at Morgan Autism Center to tell a beautiful and heart-wrenching story. Because the Mitty students took the time to study autism, the result was a play that pushed understanding and compassion for audience members. We are proud of our partnerships with schools like Mitty because we know the power of educating the community. Because we have the opportunity to educate young people, we know this investment will contribute to building supportive communities for the future. A special thank you to Sally Brosnan, Doug Santana, Anethra Rhodes and the students of Mitty for diving deep to gain better understanding.

*-Brad Boardman,
Executive Director*

Reverse Mainstreaming - Supporting Peer Connections for Over 3 Decades

It is important for our students and clients to have ample opportunity to connect and engage with the community around them. One way our programs do that is through our reverse mainstreaming program here at Morgan Autism Center.

Students from Sacred Heart of the Nativity, Archbishop Mitty High School, Bellarmine College Preparatory, St. Nicholas Diocese and Girls Middle School visit our students in our school program on a regular basis. A group of students come from Queen of Apostles

(Continue to page 10.)



A LASTING IMPRESSION: (Left) St. Nicholas Diocese students from Los Altos play a fun game with our students back in the 90's.

(Next page) Girls Middle School students work with our adult clients to plant beautiful new flowers in garden boxes that they decorated together.

(Continued from page 9.)

to visit our adult program as well.

Before meeting students and clients, most visiting students spend time with one of our program administrators for a discussion about who our students and clients are and what kinds of supports they might need. We discuss topics like sensory regulation, communication, executive functioning, theory of mind and how those ideas relate to their own lives.

The visits allow our students to spend time and connect with their peers while enjoying fun activities such as bowling, bingo, and science projects like making slime. These activities give our students opportunities to practice skills such as expressive communication, social skills, and following directions. Our teachers and staff are present to help facilitate these interactions and guide the activity. They encourage our new friends to exercise their own teaching



skills to help our students navigate the activity.

For many of the visiting students, this experience at the Morgan Autism Center is their first introduction to someone on the autism spectrum. Having the opportunity to meet our students and clients in the context of a fun activity, with the support of our skilled staff members, demonstrates that our population is not so different

from their friends on a mainstream campus. Our students and clients like to laugh, explore and play, and the reverse mainstreaming program allows them to do those things with members of their community within a structured and supportive environment.

-Mark Nielsen,
Assistant Program Director

DRAFTING A MASTERPIECE:

One of our super talented artists has been at Morgan Autism Center since he was seven. John, who is now in his fifties, creates intricate drawings of architect floor plans. Just like an actual floor plan, his artwork includes detailed rooms, windows, doors and lighting. John sometimes creates pieces for lucky staff members adding special touches such as landscaping or a personalized mailbox. Last year one of our lucky Starry Starry Night attendees bid on and won a colorful floor plan of Morgan Autism Center. John's pieces are unique and showcase his attention to detail.



PROUD ARTIST:

John creating last year's Starry Starry Night silent auction piece that sold for \$400!

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Mission 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.

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