

Aging Well At Morgan Autism Center

By Brad Boardman,
Executive Director

There is a client in our adult program who just happens to be the same age as me (very late forties if you must know). Jeff is an extremely friendly guy, loves to visit with people, and just talk: about music (we love music), food (we love food), and other things such as health, people's ethnic backgrounds and sometimes we even talk about getting older.

Jeff has good things to say about aging. "I'm just getting better and better as I get older...I really am!" This is a sentiment Jeff expresses on a daily basis. There are many times when my own feelings about aging differ drastically from Jeff's. There are also times when, I suspect, Jeff isn't too wild about it either. But he never says so. And it seems to help us both to talk about the process optimistically. As I have observed Jeff and his journey through time over the twenty plus years I have known him, I have to say, Jeff is absolutely right. He

is getting better. I don't mean that Jeff is leaving his challenges behind, just that he has gained a comfort level about the world around him and the people in it that lets him enjoy life and be a productive part of the community. He is at once observant, caring, thoughtful, and truly appreciative of his relationships and the chance to spend time with others.

What is it about the aging process that has increased Jeff's happiness? There are probably many reasons for the changes: a decrease in the flood of hormones that courses through the bodies of younger people? Maybe. Most of us do mellow with time. Another possible reason? Jeff has had the benefit of being in an environment where people understand him and have built a daily structure that works for him. Jeff trusts that staff members have his back, he understands the expectations placed on him, and he knows that Morgan Autism Center will continue to provide the stability he needs in the future. Jeff is part of a community that is reliable and consistent and provides



TWENTY-YEAR FRIENDSHIP: Adult Client, Jeff, and Executive Director, Brad Boardman, reminisce over their long friendship at Morgan Autism Center.

opportunities for engagement and relationship building. The truth of the matter is there are probably many reasons Jeff inhabits his world with a sense of ease. It is impossible to tease all the variables apart that might affect the quality of life for any individual. But I do know that having a sense of purpose, strong relationships and a sense of stability are contributing factors for any person. I just think it is remarkable that Morgan Autism Center can be the kind of place where people like Jeff can find those quality of life indicators for 40 years plus.

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It Takes A Village



Cadets from Corrections Academy 12 haul away debris from the back property.



Entrance to the new nature trail.



Our beautiful new amphitheater works perfectly for our Variety Show.

Morgan Autism Center has been working hard to maximize the potential of its new campus for our students and clients. The workload had been monumental and we are so pleased to be able to thank some of the organizations that have helped us by sending volunteers to put in some serious work.

-B.B.

Thanks to the following:

- 49ers Foundation
- Corrections Academy 12
- Eagle Scout Devin Wong
- Eagle Scout Gavin Foolofatook
- Lowe's
- Morgan Autism Center Parents
- Rebuilding Together Silicon Valley
- Rotary San Jose
- Stantec



Thank you to Rebuilding Together Silicon Valley and volunteers from the 49ers Foundation for working together to build a nature trail, painting the outdoor amphitheater, garden fencing, and trellis.



Eagle scout, Gavin Foolofatook, gave this loved merry-go-round a new coat of paint.



"The Barn" was given a new coat of paint thanks to Eagle Scout Devin Wong and his friends.



Volunteers from Lowe's donated their time and resources to upgrade the center of the courtyard.

Dream Campus Campaign

To make a donation to support Morgan Autism Center's Dream Campus Campaign, visit <http://morganautismcenterdreamcampuscampaign.weebly.com/> or make a check to Morgan Autism Center **Attention: Dream Campus Campaign. Contact Lisa Lemke at lisa@morgancenter.org for more information.**

Parent Perspective

The Impossible Choice - Vanessa Baker

Two years ago, our family was forced to make a decision that brought the most soul crushing guilt, emptiness, and profound relief – all simultaneously. We placed our then 8 year-old son, Gavin, in a group home for severely affected children with autism who require protective supervision. It was a decision that took me years to come to terms with, and one that I swore I'd never make, despite extended family members telling me for years that our family was a "sinking ship," and that the only way to save ourselves was to get my younger son more help than our family could offer him.

One of the bright spots in Gavin's life was his school - Morgan Autism Center (MAC), where he would actually ask to go to school on the weekends! MAC provided Gavin with the highly structured, 1:1 support he required, and he was happiest during the school day. It also provided me with the peace of mind that he was not only safe and thriving at school, but the teachers and staff genuinely cared about him and his well-being. When Gavin's needs became increasingly challenging, I actually attempted to emulate the MAC school model of implementing highly structured activities in 15-minute increments to see if it would help him at home.

Despite Gavin's success at school, I knew he needed more, even after spending several hundred thousand dollars of our savings on caregivers to help with both of our sons who have autism and related medical conditions. The severity of Gavin's autism causes him to engage in scary, unsafe behavior. He bolted into streets, climbed out of windows, got out of the house and opened car doors on the

“ One of the bright spots in Gavin's life was his school-Morgan Autism Center... ”

freeway without any awareness of the dangers of his actions. Between the caregivers and myself, I ensured that there was twenty-four hour coverage for Gavin. Both of my sons needed to co-sleep with me. I bought a king size bed, placed it in Gavin's room, and put a deadbolt lock on the door so that I could lock it at night from the inside, thus ensuring their safety at night.



BUBBLES EVERYWHERE: Gavin plays with bubbles during breaktime.

Regardless of our around-the-clock hyper vigilance, one incident shook me to my core and made me realize that Gavin could no longer live in our home safely. Gavin wandered out of our house during a (rare) family gathering. After a frantic 911 call and an all-out search, my sister-in-law and I found him in the back of a police car. He had gone missing for almost an hour. As I sprinted to the police car, my heart pounded in my ears. The police officer took the opportunity to give me some advice: "You need to keep an eye on your kid. There are a lot of perverts out here!" His admonishment meant very little to me because in that moment I was more worried about how Gavin could possibly have managed to cross Hwy 101 to get from Redwood Shores to the other

side of Ralston Ave in Belmont!

Gavin has been in his group home for two years now. It was a difficult adjustment for him and for me those first few months. Since the beginning, he has come home each weekend to stay with us. The staff at the group home is great, and he has 1:1 supervision twenty-four hours per day and a peer group of 3 other kids in the home who also have autism.

Saying goodbye at the end of each weekend is hard on both of us – the first year or so I'd cry myself to sleep each Sunday night. To say I missed him understates how unnatural it is to separate a mother from her precious child. The unimaginable guilt I feel for not being able to be everything for both of my sons; feeling like I'm doing everything humanly possible to give both of them a happy and fulfilling life, yet hearing from my older son each weekend when my younger one is home things like "I feel lonely in the family on weekends because it's all about GAVIN!"

I still have hope that Gavin can return to his home with us someday. With the ever-increasing research and resulting breakthroughs in understanding the underpinnings of autism, I'm hopeful that the dangerous behaviors that forced us to place Gavin in a group home can finally be mitigated once and for all. Gavin is an intelligent, funny, and loving boy who deserves to enjoy a wholly fulfilling life with unlimited possibilities like everyone else. And I will not go to my grave without doing everything I can to make sure he gets that opportunity.

-Vanessa Baker, Gavin's mom

Shining Bright: Student and Adult Spotlight

Creative Artist and Loyal Sports Fan

Chris became part of the Adult Program in 2006. He has a great sense of humor and often likes to stump others when playing games, or yawns on purpose to make others yawn which makes all the peers around him laugh. Chris loves to tell jokes and do magic tricks to entertain his peers and staff. He is a great game player and always looks forward to playing Monopoly, Take Off, and Uncle Wiggly with a group of friends. It can be a rowdy group with lots of laughter and mischief.

Recently Chris has become interested in doing crossword puzzles. He was extremely proud of completing his first puzzle and really excited to show his mother who also does crossword puzzles.

During his free time, Chris likes to do art. He prefers to draw with colored pencils over painting. At art enrichment each week, he takes

his time drawing favorite subjects like the Blue Angels, basketball and his favorite, the Titanic. Last year Chris was part of the group who made the beautiful vases for Starry Starry Starry Night.

In addition, Chris likes to shoot baskets and play catch with his friends and staff. He is truly an avid sports fan and cheers on the A's, Giants, and Sharks, but especially Steph Curry and the Warriors. During the Warriors' winning streak last year, he wrote a letter to Steph Curry and enclosed a hand drawn picture of Steph shooting baskets. Chris is predicting another championship this season. We know that if Chris is tired while at program, there must have been an exciting game on TV the night before.

-Sue Taylor, Adult Program Director



CREATING A MASTERPIECE: Chris is quite the artist. He has made several unique vases for our Gala Celebration and Fundraiser, Starry Starry Night.



STYLE OF HIS OWN:

Chris' drawings are delightful with a unique and whimsical style.

Confident Entertainer Blossoms in Room 5

Hannah has been attending Morgan Autism Center for three years. Since that time, she has blossomed into a charming and endearing member of the school. Through the support of our staff, Hannah has grown into a social and joyful young woman and she will take every opportunity to tell you.

Hannah's physical capabilities and balance have increased with daily P.E. and walks in the community and Guadalupe River Park. She is also a talented bowler.

Hannah is outgoing and inquisitive. She loves to ask questions about what someone did last night and continues to increase her conversational skills almost everyday. This year, Hannah was the star of our Variety Show,

leading the Pledge of Allegiance and singing several songs.

Hannah has positive interactions with her peers. She is tickled by their actions and successes. Today, she commented to a fellow student, "You're my best friend." They like



LET IT GO: During Tuesday music, our once shy performer loves to sing Disney's "Let It Go." Staff and students help cheer her on.

to do math together. Hannah will also request a math worksheet when she does a good job at a task.

Hannah is delightful. Her sweet personality and beaming smile lights up the room and fills your heart with joy.

Hannah's compliments make the staff and students feel special. She likes to sing songs from the movie "Frozen." The first time she sang "Let it Go," her voice was very soft. Each year, her voice gets louder/clearer and her confidence grows. She is no longer apprehensive about getting on stage. She just loves to show her stuff!

-Christine Cipriano, Room 5 Teacher

Adult Clients Return to Waldorf School of the Peninsula

A small group of adults from Morgan Autism Center has been volunteering at Waldorf for at least 16 years now. Our volunteers work with Anastasia Sinclair, the gardening teacher at Waldorf. Morgan Autism Center clients and staff always look forward to these visits. We get to participate and partner with seventh and eighth graders in a variety of activities such as mulching, seeding, preparing soil, planting and maintaining the garden.

In mid-September we started our visits for the new school year. This first visit of the year gives us the chance to meet and get acquainted with the new seventh graders. After our introductions, Ms. Sinclair showed everyone which bushes could be trimmed. Everyone grabbed a pair of clippers and started to work on the bushes. One of the seventh graders helped Julian and Boris with some of the more difficult to cut branches. We also plucked leaves

from the delicious smelling lemon verbena plant. Our hard work was rewarded with a freshly made snack of salad in a wrap made by the students of Waldorf. All but one adult in our group tried and loved it.

Ms. Sinclair is passionate about her work and also about our partnership. She believes that, because Waldorf is a small school it is beneficial for her students to interact with community members outside of the school. By working together, this partnership can lead to meaningful learning and understanding in regard to both practical skills and differences. Our clients agree! Morgan Autism Center clients have a real sense of purpose at Waldorf. They know the garden, get to make new friends and relish learning from Ms. Sinclair and the Waldorf students. It is also a chance to shine. On this first visit one of the more seasoned adult clients enjoyed showing the new Waldorf sixth grade



GREEN THUMBS: A group of adult clients return to the Waldorf School of the Peninsula in Los Altos, California. Photo: Kenneth DeVera



Clients carefully trim back bushes with gardening teacher, Anastasia Sinclair.

students how to work in the garden. Thank you Waldorf students and Ms. Sinclair for this amazing opportunity. We look forward to another great year, filled with lots of gardening.

-Florence Fuller,
Community Integration Program Director

Ready For the World: Classroom 8

Room 8 is a post-secondary, community and vocationally based classroom. The curriculum focuses on functional academics, community integration, group cooperation and vocational work.

We have a weekly rotation of activities led by our instructional aides, that follow a weekly theme. Students may have an art project, science class, or cooking class, depending on the day. The curriculum also offers a CBI time (Community Based Instruction) that focuses on either a classroom store or going grocery shopping out in the community for the classes' snacks and lunches.

During our current events activity, "Today's News," students read an article of current events

and answer questions or engage in activities based on the article. Campus Cleanup is where students practice different vocational skills like sweeping and recycling cans to help keep our campus clean.



PUMPKIN DAY: Riding the train at Spina Farms.

Our class has always provided a school wide laundry service for the classrooms. Students take laundry to the laundry mat, they fold the laundry and return it to the correct classroom. We have partnered with Gold Rush Eatery at Sunken

Gardens Golf Course in Sunnyvale restocking straws, condiments, and wiping down tables. At this level, students are being encouraged to be as independent as possible.

In the classroom, we teach safety skills in the kitchen as well as who are safe people we can go to for help such as teachers or police.

With the support of the teachers and instructional aides, students are practicing and learning independent living skills, vocational skills and safety skills that will benefit them for their upcoming transition: graduating, moving on to an adult day program, and becoming a contributing member of the community.

-Hailey Barker & Alyssa Aiuto,
Room 8 Teachers

A Very Special Man: Remembering Jim Spelman

Independent Peer Socialization Program (IPSTP) was founded by Jim Spelman in November of 1980. For most, it is known as “Jim’s Program” or simply just “Jim’s.” His idea for the program was to bring typical teenagers to come and spend their afternoons with clients on the spectrum as their peers to model appropriate interactions and social skills.

The program that emerged was not only for the clients, but became a special place for the peers who worked there. The many generations of Jim’s Program peers all have different stories of how Jim and his program changed their lives.

Jim was not just a boss; he was a friend, mentor, a father figure,

and an inspiration. His unique ability to brighten the room with his daily “good afternoon boys & girls,” his singing, his guitar playing, his sense of humor, his stories, and his very presence are all greatly missed. We are all better to have known him.

As we keep the memory of Jim in our hearts, we are dedicated to continue his legacy in honor of him, our clients, and his impact on each one of us. Thank you Jim.

A note from Brad: It is impossible to describe the impact Jim had on Morgan Autism Center history, culture and community. He was an eternal optimist, a gifted musician, talented computer technician, witty



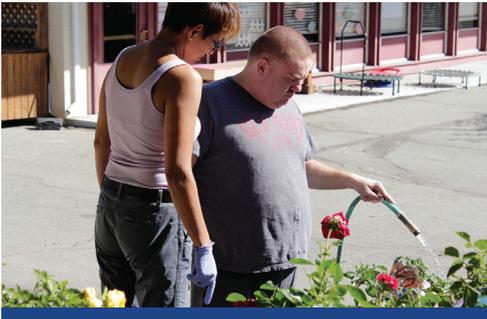
THE MUSIC MAN: Jim and two adult clients singing Jim’s song, “Velveeta Cheese”.

beyond compare and just fun to have around. We will remember the sound of his laughter and the magic of his music forever.

-Aya Sasaki, Molly Day, Hector Gomez, Amy Horan & Brad Boardman

SAY “CHEESE”

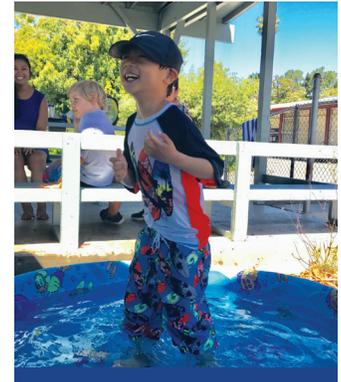
Adult clients and students enjoying the new areas on our campus



SMELL THE ROSES: Once a week, Room 5 students water the roses and tomatoes in a small garden near their classroom.



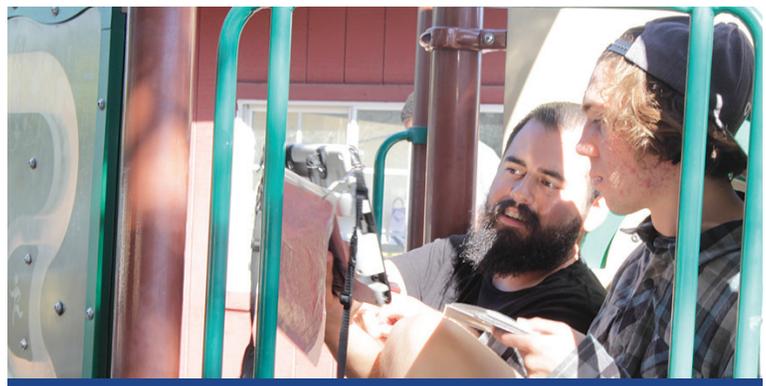
FEATHERED FRIENDS: Everyone is excited to see that the chickens and bunnies from Animal Assisted Happiness are back at our new campus.



FUN IN THE SUN: Our younger students keep cool by enjoying some water play.



VISITING THERAPY DOG: Retired pediatric dentist, Dr. Art Rabbit, brings his therapy dog, Missy, to visit our students and adult clients.



LEARNING IN NEW PLACES: Staff take advantage of break time to teach students using their augmentative and alternative communication devices.

FUNDRAISING

How to get involved at Morgan Autism Center

Eleventh Annual Golf Classic

On Monday, September 11th, Morgan Autism Center hosted its 11th annual Golf Classic at the beautiful San Jose Country Club. We would like to thank all of the golfers who came out to support our students and clients. Despite thunderstorms, hail and rain, the day was a success for all! Over \$10,000 was raised for our School and Adult Programs.

We would also like to thank our generous sponsors for their support -Milani, Lee & Associates, CPAS, Marchese Family Foundation, Maryann Garcia, Clay Goodman, Concept Part Solutions, Inc., Curtis Heinz, Service by Medallion, Marne Michaels and Fritz Geibel, Meghan Railey with Wells Fargo Advisors,



ABOVE PAR: Golfer makes an excellent shot on the 14th hole during the stormy weather at San Jose Country Club.

Daylight Foods, Realsource Property Management, Inc., Jerry Smith, and Fishwife Sweets for the delicious cookies.

This special day could not have been possible without the support of Mark and Amy Milani, our wonderful Event Chairs, and our dedicated event volunteer, Linda Novak.

-Lisa Lemke

WAYS TO SUPPORT

Annual Gift /Stock & Planned 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 950 St. Elizabeth Drive, San Jose, CA 95126.

Amazon Smile

Amazon.com will donate 0.5% of the price of your eligible AmazonSmile 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.

Starry Starry Night 2017 Recap

Morgan Autism Center's 10th Annual Starry Starry Night Fundraising Gala was an event to remember. Over 380 parents, family members, and community supporters came together on May 6th to celebrate our incredible students and clients.

Unique and beautiful pieces of art created by our students and clients were showcased throughout the evening. While guests bid on these one-of-a-kind pieces and other exciting auction items, they were treated to the musical stylings of Bernard Smith, a young musician with autism.

We were honored to present this year's "Outstanding Leadership Award" to Peninsula Associates, an organization that provides speech and language services. Morgan Autism Center and Peninsula Associates have partnered together for more than 40 years and we couldn't be more grateful for the extraordinary services they provide.

Joe Schymeinsky, a young man whose sister attends our school, delivered a heartfelt and extremely moving presentation about their relationship and what it is like having a sibling with autism. There wasn't a dry eye in the room after Joe's speech.

Thank you to everyone who attended and helped make this our most successful Starry Starry Night yet. Over \$280,000 was raised to support our students and clients.

We would also like to thank all the sponsors and supporters who helped make this gala such a success-Lane Partners, ASVB, Star One Credit Union, Dennis and Marie Campoy, Christopher and Linda Ludeman, Nena Montgomery and Michael Edson, Vilma Kennedy Palette, John M. Sobrato, Jon and Mindy Gray, Fremont Bank, Heritage Bank, Marchese Family Foundation, the Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati Foundation, Kevin Shannon, BBVA Compass,

Steve and Suzi Gilbert, Tech CU, Lionheart Wines, the Gott Family, Marlene Beumer, Anthony and Tracy Falcocchia, Alan and Beverly Lewis, William and Estella Moriarty, Terrance and Terry O'Day, Ahmed and Ghazala Sadiq, Robyn Ayers, Jay Berkett, Oscar and Shirley Hicks, Naveen and Vandana Jain, Jennifer Sullivan and David Rohrbaugh, Sue Sweezy, Steven and Christina Wilder, Dana Berkett, Kathy Glass, and Ellen Rothmann. Additionally, thank you to our many in-kind donors (for a complete list, please visit us at www.morgancenter.org/donate) and other supporters. Finally a huge thank you to Franca Cozzituro, our wonderful Event Chair, our hardworking and dedicated Event Committee, and our incredible staff volunteers!

-L.L.



CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED



UNDER THE SEA by Ellen Pfister

Ellen is a delightfully pleasant lady who always seems to be happy. During the week, Ellen goes to Community School of Music and Arts for music, art and dancing. As a part of the Adult Program's Community Integration Program, she participates in outings such as RAFT, Guadalupe River Park and the Rose Garden. Ellen also enjoys helping others during AP cooking and science.

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and Vanessa Baker.

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.

Connect with us at:
www.morgancenter.org

