

Illuminations

A Bi-Annual Newsletter From Morgan Autism Center

Spring 2021



Hopeful About the Days Ahead

By Brad Boardman,
Executive Director

If I had to choose just two words to describe the last year, I would choose *Psychological Whiplash*. In my definition, *Psychological Whiplash* is the experience of being violently bounced from one reality to another, repeatedly. Effects include exhaustion, mental anguish, increased self-medicating behavior and despair. This year has been one of false starts, and hope followed by disappointment followed by hope again. I lost a friend this year. Maybe you have too. We have all been affected, if not directly by illness, certainly by the way it has rearranged our lives and how we educate students and clients.

This article is written at the end of February 2021. Change is coming fast and it is very likely that by the time this piece is published, our reality will be markedly different. For now, the pandemic seems to be moving in the right direction and with the vaccine coming available to teachers (in the next few days!), I am very hopeful that spring and summer will return the Morgan Autism Center community to



HAPPY TOGETHER: Room 4 student, Azalea, and teacher, Anna, share a smile.

some only slightly altered version of what we remember as normal.

Along with the burgeoning sense of hope I feel, I am also grateful for the few good things that have come from this experience. The pandemic has forced a change in the way we do things and view ourselves. There has been much growth during these trials that will have long-lasting benefits for our future.

A forced emphasis on the lesson and creativity: When on campus, teaching is only a part of the job. I don't think I will surprise anyone by stating that things can get pretty chaotic in a classroom of 8-10 staff and 8-10 students. The physicality of teaching special education is a primary component of our workday. We are environmental engineers, constantly attending to the physical signs of dysregulation in our students and clients and

making decisions about how to optimize the setting for learning. It's one of the things we do best. The distance learning we have been forced to implement allows us to do none of it. We must concentrate solely on the lesson and the supports we can design to be implemented remotely. This pandemic has forced us all to think creatively and to bring technology into the program in ways we never have before. There are so many new skills and techniques we have developed and they will continue to be useful long after the world is back on its feet. *See Virtually Inspiring for more details for more information on how the pandemic has changed our teaching.*

Parental involvement: After a year of remote learning, most of us are fried. We are all eager to get back on campus and return to some form of normality.

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CONTACT US

P: 408-241-8161
F: 408-241-8231

VISIT US

www.morgancenter.org

ADDRESS

950 St. Elizabeth Drive
San Jose, CA 95126

Two Beloved Morgan Autism Center Staff Retire

Adult Program Director: Sue Taylor

When Sue Taylor interacts with the clients in the Morgan Autism Center's Adult Program, her genuine interest and care are immediately discernible in her voice, tone and manner. She cares deeply for the clients she works with as well as her colleagues. Throughout her 37 year career at Morgan Autism Center, Sue has embodied the principles that make our programming special. She is patient, kind, supportive and always quick to laugh along with others (quite often at something she has done herself). She truly loves the clients she serves, with some of whom she has had decades long relationships.

In March, Sue will retire. The Morgan Autism Center will lose one of its many "lifers" that have been instrumental in forging the positive philosophy and culture of Morgan Autism Center. It is important to discern why someone like Sue, with her breadth of experience and ability has remained with one mission, one organization for so long. Sue's answer is deceptively simple. "At MAC...there is always something new to learn. My days at MAC always challenge me to find a creative way to

help someone who learns differently to learn something new or to achieve a goal." This is a truth recognized by most of us who share in Sue's work: if you care deeply for others, you will open yourself to learn and grow in your abilities to help others.

One of the important differences of working at Morgan Autism Center from that of a typical educational environment is that we have an amazing chance to work with individuals for years and even decades. As Sue perfectly stated, "It has been incredibly rewarding to see people I knew as young children grow into amazing adults. During COVID we've watched the AP members become more resilient, patient, kind, and supportive towards one another. They've grown to understand fairness, diversity and equality." Sue's sentiments clearly capture the essence of Morgan Autism Center, a happy, positive place, where individuals are respected and treated as part of the MAC family.

Sue has been warming up to the idea of retiring very slowly. When asked why the idea of retiring has been difficult she replied through laughter: "I love what I do and who I spend my days with! I feel like I've grown up with many of these



SUPER STARS: Sue and former Community Integration Director, Flo Fuller, at one of our past Starry Starry Night fundraisers.



SPRINGTIME FESTIVITIES: Time to celebrate! Sue passes out some confetti Easter eggs for the Adult Program's annual egg hunt.



NOT SO LONG AGO: Sue shares a laugh with Jim Spelman and Charlene Schill, two very special former staff.

guys - they've become an extension of my family. I've spent more than half my life at MAC! Jonathan (one of our AP clients) will tell visitors he's known me since he was this tall (holding his hand low - he was 5). And he's known my son since before he was born!"

When Sue finally steps into retirement she will set her sights on traveling once the world returns to "normal." Until then, she will garden, hike, swim, volunteer and explore the area around her new home of Corvallis. But we, those she is leaving behind, will miss her and eagerly await her visits which we hope will be frequent. Congrats Sue!

-B.B.

Two Beloved Morgan Autism Center Staff Retire

Business Manager: Doug Stevens

During the last 5 years or so, the rumor of Doug's retirement has been greatly exaggerated. Most of us have learned not to take the rumors too seriously, but this year, we are all faced with the reality that, indeed, our wonderful Doug Stevens will be leaving us. Doug has been winding down his responsibilities for the past few years, gradually reducing his time, but never his dedication to this community he holds so dear. His influence on Morgan Autism Center's culture and community is immeasurable.

Doug started with us 37 years ago, in September of 1982. He had an MBA from Florida University and was here in California chasing the love of his life, Kathy. Doug had the idea that he would like to be a teacher and even worked at McKinnon Elementary in San Jose as a teacher's aide for 2 years while he worked toward both his multiple subject and special education credentials at San Jose State. While there, he ran into a Morgan Center (Autism was added later) teacher who told him about the program and that there was an opening for a teacher. Doug applied and got the job.

In 1985 Morgan Center began looking for someone to oversee the organiza-

tion's finances. Doug jumped at the idea of doing something different, something with his MBA but still in support of the school he loved. Morgan Center was small then and that afforded Doug the opportunity to create his own position as Business Administrator. Along with the job of "keeping the books," Doug took on other responsibilities, both administrative and... custodial! Doug is the model for the Morgan Autism Center work tenet that if a job needs to be done, you do it, no matter your job description. From loading up the van with supplies for Starry Starry Night, to jumping up and down on the dumpster to make sure all the garbage gets taken out, Doug understood and modeled how to get stuff done.

When asked about his career, his life really, at Morgan Autism Center, Doug said "I have always felt that when parents come to MAC they see an environment where people really care for and like their children. They accept them for who they are and work hard to teach them with patience and kindness. This is an extremely dedicated and professional staff. I think the teachers and the feeling now are just the same as when I started all those years



AP FAN FAVORITE: Doug shares a hug with Chris and former client, Wanda. Doug is a favorite visitor in the Adult Program!

ago. The support and community are really important factors in the success of Morgan Autism Center. I hope that people feel proud and appreciated about the work that they do because they deserve it. I have so many friends at Morgan Center, staff, students and clients."

As with all the staff at Morgan Autism Center, his love starts with the students and clients. Regardless of how busy his schedule was, Doug always found time to spend with students and clients. From checking in on a student as they pass by and telling jokes in the corridor, to scheduling time to be a part of lunch outings with adults, he has been an integral part of Morgan Autism Center's culture for almost 40 years. He will never be replaced and will always be missed.

Update: While it is true that Doug is retiring, he will continue to honor us all with his presence. He is already a regular participant during Zoom lunches with the Adult Program and this will continue once we are back on campus. Also, his phone number will continue to be on speed dial for many of us so that we can continue to tap his vast experience, knowledge and kindness.

-B.B.



THE GRILL MASTER: You can always find Doug behind the grill at MAC events.



LUNCH BUDDIES: Adult Program clients, Molly and Henry, never missed their chance to visit with Doug during lunchtime.

There Was Something About Molly

If anyone at the Morgan Autism Center was asked to describe Molly Todd, adjectives like sweet, kind, and a good friend would likely be the first words uttered. In addition, funny, caring, feisty, sincere, and loving were used to accurately describe her essence. Molly had a positive impact on everyone who knew her and our hearts were broken when we learned of her passing.

Molly possessed a generosity in her spirit and wanted to engage with everyone she knew. She was the kind of person you looked for to say hello, to share news, and for friendship. She had a wonderful lilt to her voice, greeted you and called you “hon” while reaching out to hold your hand. She remembered important people in everyone’s life, as well as their pets and would genuinely inquire about their well-being and happiness.

Molly’s life was rich with experience and joyful activities. Her family was front and center and she happily shared vacation destinations, family celebrations, menu recommendations from good restau-

rants and recreation experiences with her friends in the Adult Program. She attended weddings, baby showers and birthday parties and always had a sense of occasion. She loved to dress up and show up, and always brought joy and celebration with her. She was an attentive sister to Katie, Maggie and Emily, and was overjoyed to become Aunt Molly.

Molly participated in running clubs and cooking classes. She attended dances and weekend camp outings at Via West. A weekly “Girls Night Out” with her home-care staff was anticipated with joy each and every Friday. A good meal and a Diet Coke or two in the company of caring others was all she needed to be a willing participant.

Molly came to Morgan Autism Center’s Adult Program after attending high school in Palo Alto. She joined her sister Katie and immediately began making friends and adding to the happiness of the Morgan Autism Center community.

She will be missed by all who knew her throughout the Morgan Autism



FRIEND TO ALL: We will miss you, beautiful Molly.

Center community but her smiles and the joy she brought to us will never be forgotten.

*-Judi Campbell,
Former Program Director*

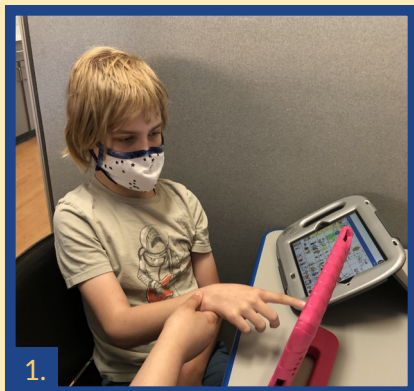


SWEET FRIENDSHIPS: Molly was a great friend to many, including fellow Adult Program client, Ellen.



CELEBRATING IN THE AP: Sharing a dance with Executive Director, Brad Boardman.

“MAC-N-CHEESE”



1. Room 4 student, Cash, uses his AAC device while working with his teacher.
2. Room 5 student, Sean, enjoying a virtual holiday celebration with his classmates.
3. Student Kayden gets some fresh air while enjoying a bike ride.
4. Benji from Room 3 shows his classmates how to light a menorah.

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However, this year has provided an unprecedented opportunity for our parents to have an open window to parts of Morgan Autism Center life that they don't often get to see. Distance learning has presented them with an opportunity to participate and support their child or adult in Morgan Autism Center programming in a very direct way. A direct result of this is that, over the past year, parents got to see how their children or adults interact and participate in the learning process and how their teachers create meaningful learning experiences. But also, this crazy year has provided a chance for our parents to observe other students and families with similar challenges. I believe this little window and shared experience has had a positive effect on our families and their feeling of shared

community and support. Furthermore, I expect that once this year is in the rear-view mirror, there will be moments when parents reflect on parts of it with, if not fondness, an appreciation of the little gifts that came along with disaster.

A New Appreciation: In December, Morgan Autism Center piloted a very small trial to make sure that when the time was right, we could bring students back on campus safely. Though there were only a handful of students in the pilot, each beamed with excitement about being on campus again. One student laughed to himself all day when he returned, clearly thrilled to be back with his teachers and friends. Another student initially refused to go home (we were able to talk him out of spending the night). My take: There is nothing quite like seeing the joy on a student's face as

he walks hand and hand with his teacher to a classroom he has not seen in nearly a year. Also, there is nothing like the sparkle in the eyes of a teacher as she leads her student back to his classroom where he is encouraged, respected and loved.

If the world keeps moving in a positive direction, I think we can expect most of our students and clients back on campus by summertime...and a return for the rest by Fall. Hopefully, that will be the end of the psychological whiplash for a while. I think we have all had enough for a lifetime.

By Brad Boardman,
Executive Director

A Tale of Two Christmases' - 1990 to 2020

Morgan Autism Center strives to celebrate the diversity on our campus. Classrooms discuss, learn about and celebrate many cultural traditions. Of course, Santa's yearly visit is one of the highlights. This is a tale of 2 Santa visits, 30 years apart. Each demonstrates the magic of the Morgan Autism Center, especially when times are difficult and solutions are needed.

Christmas 1990 Covington Campus – Morgan Autism Center was 20 years old and I was 3 months into my new job as the P.E. teacher. Santa's visit was hosted in the P.E. room. There was a decorated tree with gifts purchased by staff, wrapped and stashed out of sight.

The Adult Program was always scheduled first, so the P.E. room was filled with the hum of 25 clients and staff, waiting for the jolly guest to make his entrance. One by one, clients were given a turn to talk with Santa and receive a gift from him. Randy received a spinning top every year, Chuck got a train calendar, Wanda, a holiday sweat-shirt and holiday socks.

When it was Susan's turn, she rose, walked to Santa, and sat down tentatively. Susan is a person of few words. She is cautious with her movements. Her daily trip to the bus always started early, since she could literally take 3 steps forward, 1 step back. Susan needed the chance to traverse the 100-yard distance independently and that could take some time. Occasionally she would physically freeze and any pressure to hurry could increase her level of distress. When stress was evident, Susan needed time, space and much support to find resolution.

After completing her turn with Santa, Susan stood up to return to her seat, but only made it a half of a step before "freezing" in place. After a few verbal prompts, it was clear that she was not going to respond in a timely manner, yet there were others waiting their turn.

What I witnessed next was an unpracticed, quietly orchestrated response by staff. With glances of recognition and cheerful prompts to all the clients: "It is lovely outside, let's go out in the courtyard," a beautiful dance began. Even though Susan could not move, the rest of the group could. The clients were instructed and guided to move outdoors, chairs in hand; the Christmas tree was unplugged, picked up and relocated to the courtyard; Santa along



FLASHBACK: Adult Program client, Chris, enjoying his 1-on-1 visit with Santa.

with his red velvet throne followed. All the gifts were whisked out of the room and re-hidden behind Santa's chair.

Santa's session continued while Susan was given the needed space and support to resolve her challenge with dignity. It was a powerful Morgan Autism Center moment that forever inspired me to be creative and respectful in response to the myriad of behavior challenges that might arise.

Leap forward 30 years. While there have been uncountable Morgan Autism Center moments such as Susan's, the 2020 holidays presented challenges of a completely different sort. Yet, true to the MAC mission, and with intense commitment, creativity and passion from our staff, work went into support-

ing the long held Holiday traditions that have continued since before 1990. Visits with Santa were scheduled again, but this time through Zoom. He had a link for the Adult Program and a link for the all-school Holiday Dance later that day. Our incredible staff wrapped and delivered Teddy Bears that were donated by the Build-a-Bear Factory to our Adult Program clients to be opened live during their Zoom visit with Santa. This was a mammoth task considering that our programs serve individuals throughout Santa Clara, San Mateo, and Alameda counties!!!

This year, there were 40 Adult Program clients that would again "go first," having signed on to their daily Zoom link at 9:00. Given creative, behind the scenes tech support from staff, clients were spotlighted on the screen, opened their present, chatted with their old friend Santa, and had a screen shot Christmas photo taken. For over an hour, 40 clients participated together, demonstrating the comfort of friendship in the era of COVID 19. And while everyone may have gotten a bear this year, Chuck still got his train calendar, as he has for the past 40 plus years.

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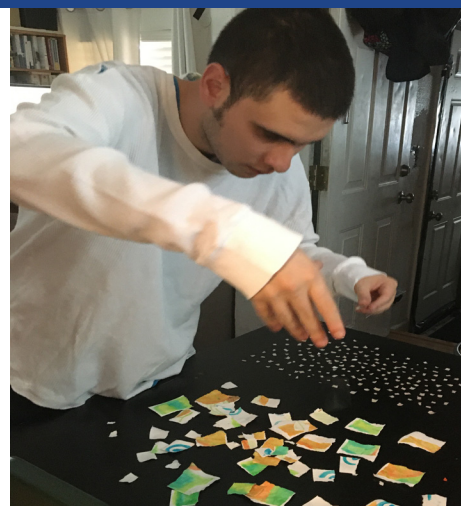
CUDDLY GIFT: Adult Program client, Matty, was so excited to share his teddy bear gift with Santa.

Virtually Inspiring

Everyone has felt the impact that COVID-19 has had on education in some way or another. Whether you are a student, a parent, or an educator, the shutdown of our schools has meant tremendous changes in each of our daily lives. Changes, that for the majority of the families we serve, mean challenges that at times seem insurmountable. School and other program closures for typical individuals are proving to be a struggle and the topic of many news articles around the country. Many students are falling behind and are not being properly assessed. Teachers are unsure of what skills their students have and have not learned. Add a disability that significantly impacts an individual and one can imagine how well that shift might go. In-person education for our population does not just include teaching a curriculum, it represents a critical safety net- a stable and structured environment where students and clients receive behavioral support, sensory integration, opportunities for communication and socialization, experiences with their community, as well as occasions for practicing independent living skills. All of these are supports from which they are now cut off.

Parents have suddenly found themselves tasked with the job of instructional aide, helping to support their very own child using the Morgan Autism Center Model strategies. They are learning skills they never thought would be added to their skill set. Many attend virtual trainings held by teachers and service providers on how to better support their child or client at home. Our Occupational Therapists send out a weekly handout with a variety of ideas, tips, and activities related to the theme of the week. Often those activities include videos made personally by the therapists that families can engage in with their students. Parents can be seen following the prompting hierarchy during a one-to-one Zoom session, exercising their own personal patience and allowing the necessary processing time for their child. They may also be seen half bent over during a morning meeting stretching activity or a P.E. yoga class with Tyler, (exercising this time their humility) while modeling the proper positioning for their child. While the in-home support is absolutely crucial, the programming these parents are supporting is virtually inspiring.

Many of the teachers and staff that work at Morgan Autism Center, who



ARTIST AT WORK: Student Benji works on an art project during distance learning.

have dedicated their lives to the children and adults they serve, would do anything for them. And they just about have. Our Distance Learning Programming has been designed to meet the individual needs of each student and client. Because of the creativity and out-of-the-box way of thinking about teaching, Morgan Autism Center teachers, directors, service providers and instructional aides have created a virtual program that is user friendly and accessible for all. During a time when many of us have wanted to throw in the towel, our staff continue to make lemonade out of lemons, seeing the glass half full and leveraging positivity to encourage struggling families to continue. As one of our speech therapists, Julia Caserta, notes:

“Since many of our learners are visual learners as well as AAC users, the virtual format has given us a unique opportunity to provide visual learning materials that correspond to each student’s AAC device. This allows us to not only teach the students how to better communicate with their unique systems, but to also teach the family members (parents, caregivers, and some siblings too!) how to use their student’s AAC device, or talker.”



CARTOON PUPS: Our After School Program staff and students share drawings of dogs they drew.

Just as Julia has done, classroom teachers and staff have tapped into the unique opportunity of having a 24/7 capability to supplement the activity being taught with a visual component, benefiting our students and clients in a massive way.

In many ways, virtual teaching is enhancing the underlying principles of the Morgan Autism Center Model and is in return enriching the learning experiences of our students and clients. Utilizing different forms of digital and oftentimes interactive visuals to supplement every activity is just one of the innovative ways our educators are providing virtual instruction. Whether using Boom Cards to create personalized decks (customizable and interactive cards designed to present questions, provide information or play a game) for individual work sessions or embedding books with customized comprehension questions into Edmark, students are able to be active participants in their learning, albeit virtually. Ron, a staff in Room 2, has taken an even more hands on approach, producing bespoke videos for classroom use. His Beach Scavenger Hunt video is a particular favorite and like many of his videos, exploits the students' preferred activities or most-liked characters to capture and sustain their attention. Tapping into

students' and clients' likes and preferences has been a defining teaching strategy for the School and Adult Program and continues to be a driving force for content creation despite going virtual.

Many classrooms do virtual field trips to teach socially appropriate behavior and provide community experience during a time when visiting places in our community, a highly desirable activity, is not an option. Take a ride on Space Mountain at Disneyland, brave the Haunted Castle at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, or visit the animals at Animal Assisted Happiness. These are just a few examples of the virtual library that has been compiled by our staff. These videos utilize a Point of View video recording strategy, which provides a much needed escape from the confines of one's own home, if only for a few minutes.

Sue Taylor and Aya Sasaki from our Adult Program shared that their curriculum of worldwide travel not only has provided some respite from the monotony of the day to day, but by incorporating education around inclusion, diversity and acceptance, has created a culture of respect and kindness among the clients and staff. As they travel from country to country, they discuss differences among people and why these differences should be not only accepted, but

celebrated. Clients have the opportunity to fill a proverbial bucket (in this case, a 2-dimensional hand drawn bucket taped to the wall behind Aya's computer) by giving a compliment to a peer or staff.

Adult Program Coordinator, Sara Cedano, said it best, "The staff are making the magic happen, right before our eyes." When we got the news that we were required to shelter in place, the world became very small very quickly. Little did we know that just through a small screen, students' and clients' worlds could be made bigger than ever before. Individuals are trying new things, meeting new people and making new friends. In some cases students and clients are accessing more content, making greater improvements and are more comfortable and confident to participate in a larger group setting. I'd be the first person to say that this process has been a long, exhausting and tedious one. That this pandemic has had and continues to have its challenges, sadness and strife is undeniable. I would be remiss, however, if I did not sing the praises of the work Morgan Autism Center educators have done and highlight the creative efforts and endurance from all. It is without equivocation that I can say our teachers, directors and staff have developed a renowned Distance Learning Program. They are forging a new way of instructing and enriching the lives of the students and clients every day and I can say without question, they will continue to serve because that is their true passion.

-Hailey Barker,
Assistant Program Director



PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT: Room 1 student, Nicholas, practices wearing a mask.



BIG STRETCH: Adult Program client, Chris, shows his snake pose while doing yoga with his dad, Craig, and staff member, Joahn.

Alex's MAC Journey

Alex started kindergarten at our local elementary school. Right from the beginning it was obvious it was not a good placement for him. The teacher fiercely disliked him and found the demands of his needs to be challenging. When Alex entered the first grade he was moved to another school district where he was, again, seen and labeled as problematic. After only 6 short weeks in first grade we were forced to keep him at home because the school situation was "unsafe" for him. We were facing a crisis with no hope of ever finding a place that would not only accept him but also meet his staggering list of needs. Our district suggested the Morgan Autism Center and I dismissed it as "too far from home." But after another failed placement and much cajoling I agreed to take Alex for a visit to MAC. That day felt like an audition for a very important part. Alex put on quite a show complete with throwing things, hair pulling and hitting. I was 99% sure that we would never be seeing the Morgan Center staff again. Another reason for not harbouring much hope was that Alex doesn't have autism. He was diagnosed with CHARGE Syndrome which I was sure was just too far outside of Morgan Autism Center's scope. But to my surprise they actually called an hour later to say that he was accepted. That phone call began one of the most important relationships that we have ever had.

It didn't take us long to discern that MAC was not just a good school but a remarkable place full of indescribable magic. Alex blossomed there, hitting milestones we never thought were possible. He became a member of a community that was like an extended family and the love that was shown to him made him stronger in every way. There was no longer the crushing feeling



CONGRATS, GRAD!: *Congratulations, Alex! We're going to miss you!*

that no one liked him or being on pins and needles that one more hair pull was going to send us back into forced homeschooling. We had found a home where we knew he could stay.

The years flew by. Occasionally Alex had to change classrooms and every time we met the new staff we always discovered that the magic of MAC is not contained to one room or one group of people. There were group games, back to school nights, talent shows, Halloween trick or treating, Santa visits, parent luncheons, school pictures and our beloved Starry Starry Night fundraiser. I loved MAC as much as Alex. He never complained about school or

refused to go. I got very involved with the Parent Group, my pet project being staff appreciation because I have always felt that making every staff feel valued is the most important job of a PTA. I also loved welcoming new parents, helping them relax so that the magic could brighten their lives as much as it did ours.

Alex's needs grew exponentially when he lost his eyesight, had retinal reattachment surgery twice and got paralyzed by a spinal surgery all in the same year. The MAC staff not only helped us out at home but reorganized everything at school to make him as successful as possible. And as Alex's eyesight slipped away forever, 3 years later, they took on the challenge of teaching a blind student even though this was a new concept for them and required additional training. I will never forget the time when Alex switched into his final classroom at MAC. His new teacher told me that she had spent the last weekend of her summer break on a webinar about teaching the blind because she wanted to make sure that Alex had a successful start in her classroom. The Morgan Autism Center staff always made our son feel special,

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HALLOWEEN AT MAC: *Alex celebrates Halloween with his friends Thomas and SeJin.*

Going Above and Beyond-Spotlighting Gennie Hansen

The Instructional Aides and Skills Trainers here, at Morgan Autism Center, are what make this place work. Our students depend on and benefit from our staff's dedication, flexibility, and creativity. Never before have those qualities been more apparent than during this pandemic. Every single person working at MAC has been impacted by the changes brought about by the pandemic, and has managed to navigate and balance their home life with distance learning while supporting our students and clients.

One of those amazing staff members is Gennie Hansen. She is an Instructional Aide in Room 7, and has been working at MAC for over a year. Gennie lives at home with her 11-year-old daughter Bayahni. Each morning, Gennie is on deck for getting them both ready for the day, navigating the occasional tech challenges, and ensuring her daughter is on Zoom for her classes starting at 8:30am. At the same time, Gennie joins her daily classroom meeting for MAC. Private space is at a premium in their studio apartment (shared with their Bombay cat, Miss Kitty), leaving few opportunities to find solace from the full day of Zoom calls. Gennie also manages to find time to assist her elderly neighbor, who has significant health issues. After a full day of Zooming, Gennie might find herself taking him to the doctor or running to the pharmacy to grab his medication, before coming home to care for her daughter. She admits that distance learning was particularly challenging at first, but that her family has found a routine that makes the best of a challenging situation.

Gennie's creativity, initiative and passion are apparent in the way she works with students and contributes



AMAZING STAFF MEMBER: Gennie hard at work while also supporting her 11-year old daughter, Bayahni.

innovative ideas during staff meetings. She is often one of the first to volunteer to help create materials or present ideas on how to improve the Room 7 program. Morning calendar time has benefited from her creations on Google Slides, and her students have enjoyed participating in the virtual field trips she has arranged. The Room 7 teacher, Shaila, has been grateful for Gennie's help in the classroom as well, preparing specially-designed materials for the eventual return to campus.

Despite the challenges of remote teaching, Gennie has witnessed progress and breakthroughs with many of her students. One special moment came when a student got 100% of the answers correct on the goal for the day. What was Gennie's response? Impromptu dance party! She has also helped struggling students re-engage with Zoom sessions by sending special materials to the parents to show their child what is waiting for them. We are

all suffering from some degree of Zoom fatigue, and the efforts made by staff members like Gennie help keep those interactions fun and fresh.

Gennie volunteered that she really enjoys working with everyone at MAC, including her team in Room 7, speech and occupational therapists and administrators to name a few. She feels at home working in Room 7, and shares that she is "blessed to be a part of this family."

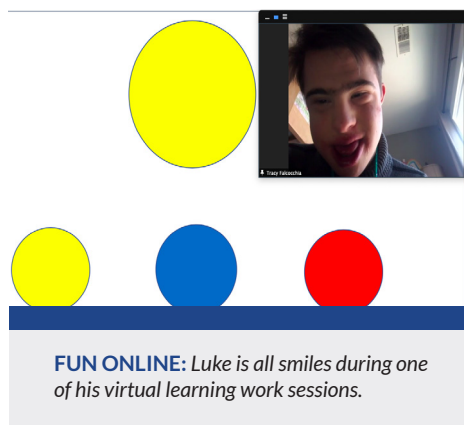
We are lucky to have you, Gennie! Thank you, and every one of your colleagues, for your inspiring hard work and dedication!

*-Mark Nielsen
Program Director*

Together Everyone Achieves More

On March 14, 2020 there was a shift in the way we looked at technology and the manner in which Special Education services were delivered. Morgan Autism Center teachers and service providers worked hard to move to an online platform and the students had to get accustomed to a new way of receiving education. Reflecting back on the time spent in distance learning we are proud of the response from our team, students and their parents. Parents have worked in collaboration with staff to ensure their child/children continue to learn and maintain skills.

Luke regularly joins us for online sessions. He enjoys social interactions, stories being read to him and usually chooses music as a reinforcer. He enjoys Frank Sinatra, Michael Bublé and other singers in the same genre. He will move his body and seems to enthusiastically experience the moment. Luke's mother has been diligently signing him up for live calendar time and 1:1 work sessions. She is his at home support encouraging him to participate using his communication device or touch a hand (when offered two alternatives) to make a choice if his device is unavailable.



Luke has been enthusiastically participating during the sessions, letting us know how he feels, answering yes/no questions, making choices on the screen, communicating his needs and wants and requests changes in activities. The staff talk to him about his family and he lights up especially at the mention of his sisters.

During sessions the staff have read stories to him and asked him comprehension questions with multiple choice answers he can make by touching one of the pictures on the screen. They have also used interactive PDFs to work on identification/labeling items such as colors, emotions, safety signs and

number to quantity, making choices or discriminating between pictures. Luke got a Llama Llama huggable toy from Santa and he likes to hold it when staff read his favorite Llama Llama books.

Luke continues to work on vocational skills of sorting, matching using Boom cards and has been successful during the sessions due to the support he receives from his mom and the variety of resources used by our staff to keep things interesting. He stays on for 25 to 30 minutes actively participating during the sessions. His mom reports that he looks forward to seeing his friends and teachers daily and always has a smile and wave to greet everyone when he signs on.

Our team is happy to be able to provide services online and continue to work on developing new material and resources to keep our students engaged and learning. 'It takes a village...' is an expression that we have seen in action during this pandemic. Our dedicated staff together with parents, students and service providers, have come together to collaborate, teach, learn and support one another.

*-Shaila Prabhu,
Room 7 Teacher*

(Continued from page 6.)



SANTA IS ONLINE: Even through virtual learning, Chris still got his 1-on-1 visit with Santa.

A special acknowledgement should be made of John Komo who has taken on the role of Santa for over 2 decades. He effortlessly managed to bridge the Zoom gap with each client while having delightful one-of-a-kind conversations at the same time.

As I reflect on the long held traditions of Morgan Autism Center, Christmas and otherwise, I am heartened to see the team and talent that is in place for our future. During COVID-19 required Distance Learning, new skills were developed and demonstrated daily. Staff mastered the art of keeping eyes and ears on the screen, to manage

muting when needed, and how to share screens while interacting during group activities. They learned how to prime clients and students for turn taking and how to use private chat messaging for providing information, reinforcement and support.

True to the original mission, our staff have bridged gaps in every way imaginable, maintaining the integrity of Morgan Autism Center's commitment to the students, clients and the community that it serves.

-J.C.

Fundraising

“Move-for-MAC” Move-a-Thon

Since the COVID-19 pandemic ended on-campus programming in March of last year, our fundraising efforts have been quite different. While summer months are usually spent preparing for our annual golf tournament, Santa Clara County’s stay at home orders prohibited such events. We thought we would try something different and thus, our “Move-for-MAC” move-a-thon was born.

Over the course of two weeks, participants engaged in a variety of exercises from the comfort of their homes and neighborhoods in order to raise awareness and funds for Morgan Autism Center. Some biked, walked, or ran. Others kayaked, practiced yoga, and even did chores!

“Move-for-MAC” offered our students, clients, staff, their families and the community an opportunity to directly participate in Morgan Autism Center’s fundraising efforts. Because of their participation, and because of the generosity of incredible donors, over \$40,000 was raised to support Morgan Autism Center! We wrapped up the two-week long event with a closing ceremony video and a virtual dance party. Click [HERE](#) to watch!



Join Us For Our Starry Starry Night Virtual Fundraising Gala

Please join us on **Saturday, May 15th, from 7-8 PM**, for our VIRTUAL Starry Starry Night Fundraiser!

This year, we’re moving our much-loved Starry Starry Night gala online and it’s FREE! This live-streamed event will feature student and client artwork, silent and live auctions, a raffle and heart-warming testimonies. Click [HERE](#) to learn more.



Ways To Give

Annual Giving

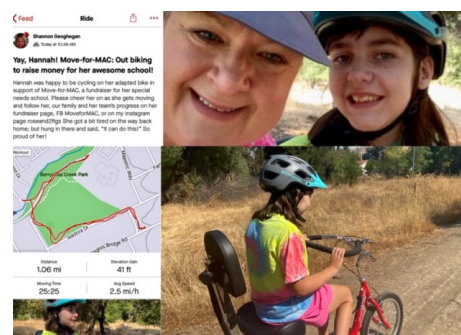
Morgan Autism Center graciously accepts monetary and in-kind donations. You can donate online at www.morgancenter.org/donate-bay-area-morgan-autism-center/ or send a check to 950 St. Elizabeth Drive, San Jose, CA 95126

Amazon Smile

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



ON THE MOVE: Room 1 student, Hannah, rode many laps for this year’s “Move-for-MAC” move-a-thon.



MOVIN' AND GROOVIN': Room 7 student, Jacob, enjoying the wrap-up dance party with his friends!

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loved as well as challenged. He was treated like a rock star and that love made him feel so safe when his world became blurry and unfocused. MAC was one of the few places where Alex felt really comfortable and which I can truly describe as his second home.

Sadly after 13 years at MAC our time has come to an end. Of course, yet another thing that COVID-19 has robbed of us were Alex's final months at MAC. He left school on a Friday, the last day of session before mandated closure thinking it was going to be a 2 week break, not knowing that he'll never be back again as an enrolled student. The heaviness of that and what lies in our future weighs on me daily as we have nothing in place for

him after the pandemic is finally over. We will research, observe and visit adult programs but, honestly, I know I will always be comparing them to the magic MAC provided. I will forever look back at the times we spent at MAC as the best times of our lives. We made so many lifelong friends and will always treasure the memories, tucked away in our hearts. The magic of MAC will be missed in our daily lives but I know it will be carried on in that special place. I will be forever grateful to MAC for all of the potential they unlocked in Alex, the love they showed him and the confidence they gave him to navigate his unique difficulties of this world. Morgan Autism Center is truly a magical place... so wonderful that sometimes words can



SENSORY PLAYTIME: Enjoying some table time with his former teacher, Shaila.

not be found to describe it and we will always carry its magic in our hearts.

*-Moriah Bettencourt,
Parent of Former MAC student, Alex*



"Bubbles Go Pop" by student artist, Annabelle.

STARRY STARRY NIGHT SNEAK PEEK:

Don't miss your chance to bid on beautiful artwork, created by Morgan Autism Center students and adult clients, in our silent auction at this year's Starry Starry Night Virtual Fundraiser and Gala.

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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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