

Illuminations

A Bi-Annual Newsletter From Morgan Autism Center

Fall 2021



The Importance of Culture

By Brad Boardman,
Executive Director

"Culture trumps strategy every time." A friend and guiding light to me, Kathy Burke, once quoted me this little tidbit originally attributed Peter Drucker. She said these words as I was breathlessly describing the qualities that make Morgan Autism Center so special: kindness, respect, support and joyfulness all guided by a diligent work ethic and a sense of shared community. But what makes Morgan Autism Center so special is not just our interactions with students and clients. Our high standards for interactions with students and clients is implemented across our community and extend to each person connected to the program. I love the above quote but at the time I did not completely grasp its true meaning. I now understand that *how* we do this work is just as important as *what* we do. There are thousands of schools and institutions that do the same work as Morgan Autism Center. It is the



THUMBS UP ALL THE WAY: Staff encourage and cheer on students as they walk laps for the Move-for Mac event. Modeling positivity is one of the standards that really shines at MAC.

"how we do it" that sets us apart.

Early on in Morgan Autism Center's history, a few of our directors (I attribute authorship to Louise Emerson and Jennifer Sullivan, though there may have been others) came together to write a simple list of dos and don'ts to guide staff interactions with students and clients. We refer to this list again and again: in training, in meetings, in problem solving behavior challenges. But the list holds a little secret: its advice works for everyone. Because we adhere so adamantly to its guidance with our students and clients, we also adhere to its guidance with others. This document and our reliance on its advice are the backbone of the special culture at Morgan Autism Center. It pre-

scribes the *how* of what we do with our students and clients. That its magic permeates our culture is an incredible side benefit.

As we move into the post-pandemic period (wishful thinking, I know) and a complete return to campus, it is important for us all to brush up on implementing the cultural standards that give our students and clients the best possible chance to live in a community that is caring and loving. It's not always convenient to implement these standards but there is advice here for anyone. Read it and tell me I am wrong! I have re-worked our list for print (shortened and tweaked).

- Do focus your energy on positive interactions

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Student and Client Spotlights

Delightful Energy in Room 1-Elijah

Elijah, or “Eli” as he is known, is a bright and energetic 11-year old boy who started at the Morgan Autism Center just one week before Shelter-in-Place kicked in! With only a week’s experience at MAC, Distance Learning had its challenges for Eli and his team. When the opportunity to come back on-site came about this last Spring, we were thrilled to be able to welcome him back and really get to know him.

Within the first few weeks of being back, Eli settled in to his new routine. He quickly bonded with the staff, bringing lots of playful energy to his interactions with them. He is making great strides in learn-

ing the new routine and developing the skills to communicate his wants and needs. He really looks forward to some of his favorite activities such as our morning Calendar Time!

Eli is very curious and enjoys playing on the iPad, listening to stories with his teachers, and playing with cars. He likes helping to water the garden and loves water play (he thinks water balloons are hilarious!) Eli is extremely active. He loves hiking and spending time with his family in the hills and trails near their house. At school, he enjoys exploring the campus, discovering what’s behind all the different doors,



GARDENING IN ROOM 1: Eli and Instructional Aide, Crisanta, enjoy caring for Room 1’s beautiful flower garden.

and checking out every nook and cranny. He’s particularly fond of climbing and sliding on all of our play equipment.

We are so glad to have Eli as a part of Room 1 and to be constantly surprised and delighted by his ability to pick up new skills.

*-Rob McPhee,
Room 1 teacher*

Adult Client Who is a Friend to All-Leticia

Leticia, who also goes by Tish, is a compassionate and kind young woman. Tish started at the Morgan Autism Center School Program when she was just twelve years old. Over the years, she has grown into a mature individual who truly values her ability to care for herself, and independence as well as her relationships and responsibilities. Throughout her time at Morgan Autism Center she has developed strong friendships with many of her peers and staff in the Adult Program. Tish enjoys listening to music, dancing to her favorite songs, and doing karaoke with her friends. Her interests also include reading about her favorite celebrities like Oprah Winfrey and Serena Williams. She

is considered the fashionista of the group and likes changing her headband to match her outfit of the day. Leticia plays a huge part in the Adult Program. During lessons Tish is always there to impart a thoughtful compliment to a peer or words of encouragement. Staff and clients in the Adult Program can always count on Tish to contribute positively



DEAR FRIENDS: Tish, (right) and her friend Ellen, (left), watch our 2019 Annual Variety Show while enjoying snow cones.

and with empathy, something much needed after an incredibly challenging year like 2020. Her compassion for others radiates.

When Leticia was asked why she loves the Morgan Autism Center she said she thought of the people here as her extended family. Tish explained that she lost people very close to her within the last two years and her family at MAC helped her get through it. If one can learn anything from Tish it’s that in order to persevere through the tough times you have to stay positive and lean on the people in your life.

*-Aya Sasaki, Adult Program Director
-Sara Cedano,
Community Integration Program Assistant*

Thank you Nena Montgomery

Long time Board President Nena Montgomery officially resigned her position in June 2021. She began her service to the MAC Board in 2010, serving in the leadership position from 2015 -2021. Her relationship with MAC began many years earlier when daughter Katie was placed in our school program.

Nena proved to be a tireless advocate for Katie specifically, but expanded her reach to support Morgan Autism Center through

leadership, fundraising and service to our community. Her devotion to our program has continued well past her daughter's enrollment, adding to her commitment to the MAC mission beyond expectation. Although Nena has stepped down from the Board President position, she will still be serving as a member of the board. Thank You, Nena, for your continuous support!

*-Judi Campbell,
Program Consultant*



DEVOTED TO MAC: As a former MAC parent, Nena has served on Morgan Autism Center's board for 7 years and 5 years as chairman.

What Have We Learned from COVID?

March 13, 2020, is a day that will be ingrained in my memory for many years to come – the last day of in person programming at MAC. At the time I remember thinking, “Wow...we could be shut down for weeks!”

The following months brought many challenges, but I cannot help but note a few positive takeaways from the experience as well.

I am continually impressed, and sometimes surprised, by the resilience of our students and clients. Without suggesting it was a walk in the park, the vast majority of our students and adults adjusted to the new normal and established routines at home relatively quickly. Our entire community – parents, caregivers, students, clients, teachers and more – should be commended for pulling this off.



TOGETHER AT LAST: Asa works on his fine motor skills during art time demonstrating the importance of learning in person.

The notion of distance learning at the Morgan Autism Center forced our instructional staff outside the box...and into a Zoom box. New strategies were conceived in a very short period of time, and in some cases has led to lasting improve-

ments to our in-person programming. Virtual field trips, Boom Cards and Interactive Social Stories are just a few of the new tools discovered during distance programming. In the future, we may be a little less intimidated to try something new as a result of this experience.

Lastly, I think we have all been humbled by the realization of the vital need for in-person contact and interaction in our lives. It seems there is no replacement for the intangible connection experienced when we share physical space with the members of our community. A world full of Zoom sessions has highlighted this basic human need. I for one will never take a real high-five, let alone a hug, for granted again.

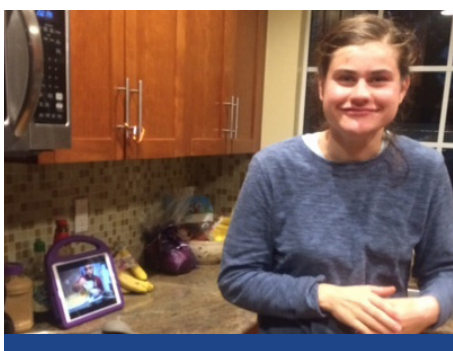
*-Mark Nielsen,
Program Director*

A Tribute to Our Families and Caregivers

The MAC community response to Distance Learning was awe inspiring. Technology was used by teachers and parents alike in dynamic and interactive ways to bridge the miles between us. Our students and clients would show up each day as best they could. Showing up meant that families and caregivers were on the other side of the screen, making the time and the digital connections possible. They became teachers as time and space allowed.

Our success through the pandemic was directly linked to our community of families. While MAC has always taken pride in high levels of communication, we cannot deny that COVID required that we take it to a whole new level. The volume of digital communication went through the roof.

While every circumstance was different, what became clear was our entire community needed to maintain stability during this very stressful period. Our students revealed their specific distance



COOKING IN THE KITCHEN: Distance learning allowed for students/parent time to connect and practice many independent living skills like cooking.

programming needs over time. Some families began the day with morning calendar time on screen. Others allowed for their students to sample distance programming in short bursts. For yet another group, the best approach meant supporting and organizing family life with educational support that didn't feel or look anything like school. Screen time was not always a viable option, and we all had to be mindful of maintaining positive home and learning environments. Learning opportunities were oc-

curing in the context of daily living and our parents, siblings and caregivers were the key to finding and implementing teachable moments.

Morgan Autism Center has always held our families and caregivers in the highest regard. We respect that parents are the first experts on their loved one/s and that MAC is the guardian of their educational services. We work for a culture that is trusting and transparent so that we all have the information we need to support our students and clients, no matter what the circumstances. Our families have been beyond generous with their time and trust in us. The enhanced partnership that was created by the circumstances of the pandemic was of great value to the Morgan Autism Center and the effort it took from every single caregiver is held with the deepest gratitude.

-Judi Campbell,
Program Consultant

(Continued from page 1.)

- Do focus on what you want your student to do NOT on what you don't want her to do
- Do sound friendly, helpful and positive
- Do use and encourage the individual's communication mode at all times
- Do know your students well, and anticipate their stressors/triggers. Monitor the environment constantly for potential problems

- Do structure each student's environment to ensure success at each task
- Do observe other staff, teachers/speech therapists/OTs working with your students whenever possible
- Do ask for help if you feel overwhelmed or unsure
- Don't sound/act impatient, negative, exasperated or angry
- Don't say "no," "You can't...," "I don't like that"

- Don't get involved in negative interactions with students/clients such as limit setting, power struggles and physical struggles
- Don't lose your sense of humor!!!

If you are reading this newsletter, you are likely a part of this culture. Do you have any do's and don'ts to contribute? I'd love to hear them.





Jillian



Benji



Jack



Hannah



Madison

Congratulations
2021
Graduates!



Thomas



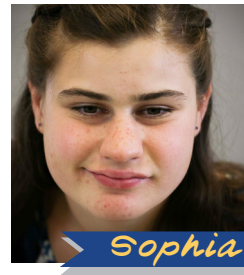
Matthew



Johnny



Matthew



Sophia



Regis



Harry

Adult Program Welcomes New Leadership Team

After more than 37 years at Morgan Autism Center, Sue Taylor, our beloved Adult Program Director, has retired and the torch has been passed to a new generation of leaders. We sat down with the new leadership team – Aya Sasaki, Adult Program Director, and Sara Cedano, Community Integration Director, to get to know them and find out why they think the Adult Program is so special.

What are the main functions of your roles in the Adult Program?

Aya: As the Adult Program Director, my role is to facilitate enriching activities and experiences for our clients while they are on campus.

Sara: My role as the Community Integration Director is to manage our Community Integration Program (CIP) which provides opportunities for our clients to venture out into the community. They visit various sites such as the Guadalupe Park Trail, West Valley Food Services, and local grocery stores and are able to practice social skills and get to know the community that they live in.

What do you love most about the Adult Program and what is the most rewarding about working there?

Aya: I love the interactions with the clients and having the opportunity to watch them grow. The friendships the clients have with their peers and staff is just so sweet to see. While this past year and half has been really challenging, you could really see the clients building connections with one another. What is the most rewarding? Getting to be a part of our clients' lives and having the opportunity to provide a stable and consistent program.

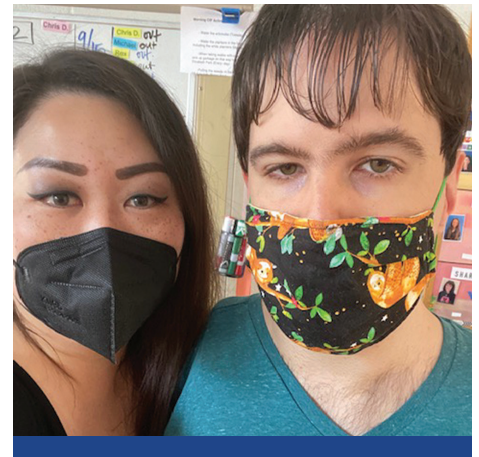
Sara: The most rewarding thing is being able to be a part of the clients' everyday lives. The happiness and ease that comes over the clients when they arrive in the morning is nice to see. What I love most is getting to witness the clients experience success. When one of them finishes a task and beams with pride it is such a special thing to see. I also love the encouragement that clients independently give each other. They really care about one another!

Why is the Adult Program important? Not only for our clients, but for the community?

Aya: The Adult Program is important for our clients because it is a safe place, a place where they are a part of a community that supports and understands them. It's important for the broader community because it helps break down stereotypes of people with disabilities and provides opportunities for the community to get to know our clients.

Sara: The Adult Program and its Community Integration Program is important for our clients because they are being immersed into their own communities by volunteering. Clients are learning new skills, or they are able to practice skills they need to work on. The CIP benefits the general community by breaking down stereotypes of people with disabilities and autism. A majority of the general public do not have day to day interactions with disabled individuals. This means that people in the general public get a chance to learn to respect our clients like they would any other stranger when our Adult Program takes on the community.

While a lot has changed over this past year and a half, our clients remain engaged and supported. Aya and Sara attribute the successes they have witnessed to a strong team, incredibly resilient clients, and supportive families. Morgan Autism Center is like a family and that couldn't be more apparent than it has been during this transition.



BESTIES: Our clients are always ready for a photo opp with longtime friends, Aya and Sara.



- Haley Sepulveda,

Communications and Development Administrator

Fundraising

Starry Starry Night Goes Virtual

This past year has had a lot of firsts for Morgan Autism Center, including the first time we have ever hosted a virtual Starry Starry Night Fundraising Gala. Instead of joining together for good food, good company, and good fun, supporters logged on to their computers to watch our Executive Director, Brad Boardman, and Emcee, Craig Silverman, share what's been happening at Morgan Autism Center since our last event. Supporters heard from Shubi Jain, brother of one of our students, about the progress his brother has made since coming to Morgan Autism Center, even during COVID. We held a live raffle, conducted our annual Fund-a-Need, and auctioned off some incredible auction packages, including one-of-a-kind art pieces created by our talented students and clients. While we couldn't be together in person, participants were very lively in the chat and we are so grateful for their kind words, encouragement and their contributions.

We would like to thank all of our donors and supporters for making this event so special, even if it was different from our usual event. Because of your support, over \$200,000 was raised in support of Morgan Autism Center.

Thank you to our generous sponsors for helping make this happen: *the Evensen Family, Star One Credit Union, Nena Montgomery & Michael Edson, Peninsula Associates Speech Therapy Services Inc., CULytics, Fremont Bank, Tech CU, Wilson Sonsini Foundation, Heritage Bank of Commerce, John & Alice Davis, the O'Day Family, Charlene Tuchman, the Hofstetter Family, Jack Tuchman's Adoring Aunts, the Koenig Family, the Munoz-Bergman Family, the Sadiq Family, the Vodinh-Ho Family, and the Wilder Family.*

Morgan Autism Center Hosts its Second Move-for-MAC Fundraiser

Back by popular demand, we hosted our second annual Move-for-MAC from September 1-18. Our students, clients, staff, families, and supporters pledged to get out and move to help raise awareness and funds supporting Morgan Autism Center. Some walked every day, some went for weekly hikes. Others chose to ride a bike, go for a swim, or do some yoga or golf.

We concluded the 2.5 week-long move-a-thon with some laps at school followed by tasty popsicles. On September 18th, participants and their families joined us on Zoom for a virtual dance party.

We can't thank our supporters enough for making this another successful Move-for-MAC. Over \$20,461.00 was raised to support our students and clients while staying active and healthy together.

Thank you to the following sponsors for supporting this year's Move-for-MAC: *Eric Stark Interiors and The Law Offices of Braid Pezzaglia.*



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.

starry starry Night

Gala Celebration & Fundraiser

2022

Stay tuned for more information.



KEEPING COOL: Students and staff cool down with yummy Otter Pops after walking laps for Move-for-MAC.



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BLOOMING AT MAC



Students and adult clients show off their gardening skills thanks to the help of Gardening Coordinator, Flo Fuller. The new flower boxes and other gardening tools were purchased thanks to a generous grant awarded by San Jose Rotary Club.

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Nena Montgomery,
Ted Moorhead, Joe Moriarty,
and Jennifer Young

Staff and guest writers:

Brad Boardman, Judi Campbell,
Rob McPhee, Mark Nielsen,
and Haley Sepulveda

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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