

Illuminations

A Bi-Annual Newsletter From Morgan Autism Center

Spring 2022



On Loss and Grief

By Brad Boardman,
Executive Director

Maybe it's just a part of growing older and being more attuned to the changes that happen over the course of one's life, but, at least for me, life in the past few years feels as though it is punctuated by loss. These times have been like that for many in our community. Whether we experience that loss as the death of a loved one, lost opportunities for social contact and community participation, or the (temporary) loss of educational programming, we have all felt it in one form or another.

When a death occurs in a community like ours, many of us worry about just how to address it adequately. Losing a MAC parent presents its own difficulties. Families, teaching staff, students, and clients can all be affected. It is immeasurably sad and there are grave impacts. We must scramble to try to fill the void. And the tragedy of any life cut short makes us all ponder larger questions about the meaning of it all. In a strange sense though, losing

a parent or older family member upholds what most of us think of as the natural order of things. But when a student or client dies, it can upset our understanding of how our stories "should" play out.

Morgan Autism Center is a rare kind of school-based community. We often have the chance to serve an individual for years or decades. As staff members, we get to know families in a way that ties us to the trajectory of their life's journey. When we lose a young student or an adult client, it turns the world upside down. We wrestle with a whole new set of questions: How can this happen? How can we possibly console the parent? How can we console ourselves, and...How do we talk about this with our students, and clients? Most vexing is the question of: How can we ensure that a student or client who is nonverbal or has significant challenges in communication and processing receives and feels the love and support they need to cope with loss? Answers are difficult to find but the inescapable experiences of the past few years have asked us to do our best. While we sometimes feel like we are fumbling in our attempts to "do it right," it turns



REMEMBERING THOSE WE LOVE: Our MAC community comes together to find comfort and support in each other over the last year.

out that, while there is no way to stop the hurt, simply addressing the loss by bringing together the community to share, can help us all. An example can be found in an experience our community members shared when we lost an adult client. As only could happen in the world of the pandemic, we found ourselves in a giant Zoom Room, sharing stories, talking plainly about death and remembering the good times. As so often happens for our teaching staff at MAC, our clients led the way, courageous and willing to talk about difficult subjects. Those who could share, rose to the occasion, offering tributes to their friend, and describing the qualities and interac-

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Student and Client Spotlights

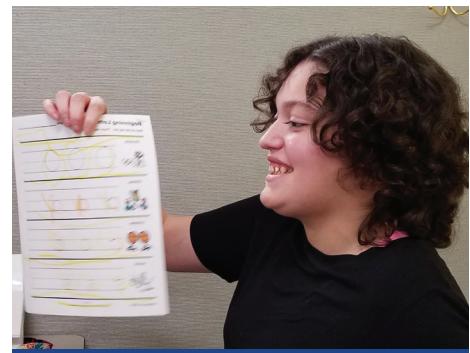
Social Butterfly in Room 7-Selah

Selah is an 18-year-old bright-eyed student here at Morgan Autism Center. She has been attending the school program for around a decade. When she joined our program she was primarily interested in hanging out at the playground. Now, she spends her school days going over the daily calendar, cooking, doing science, coloring, tracing, and riding a bike. Selah is deaf and is quite enthusiastic about ASL and Deaf Culture and loves to show off her signing ability. If you want to see the brightest smile on earth, all you have to do is greet her and ask her

to sign “butterfly,” “bug,” or “silly” with you, and she’ll often immediately start laughing. Selah has an active imagination and is continually showing books and pictures to her dolls and conversing with them. Socially, she is all about her friends and adores waving at them and greeting them with their name signs. In addition, Selah is focused on fashion; whether it’s admiring the outfits of Disney Princesses, signing about someone’s “nice boots,” or showing off how soft her sweater is, she’s very intrigued by aesthetically pleasing clothing. Selah

is happy to be at Morgan Autism Center and we are happy that she is here. She’s amazing!

-Steve Mix,
Room 7 ASL Interpreter



SELAH IN ROOM 7: Selah shows off her worksheet on cooking.

Outgoing Client in the Adult Program-Andrew

Andrew is a talented young man in the Adult Program (AP) who enjoys being helpful to his staff and peers. Before starting at Morgan Autism Center, Andrew and his family were in search of a program that would meet Andrew’s desires to be a part of his community. They were elated when they discovered the Adult Program and joined the Community Integration Program (CIP), a service within AP designed to support participants in the community through a variety of engaging outings and activities. Throughout the ten years Andrew has been at Morgan Autism Center, we have seen Andrew grow and become much more social and interested in the world around him.



HELPING HANDS: Andrew helps the School and Adult Program's staff by laminating icons.

If you ever find yourself visiting the Adult Program, chances are Andrew is one of the first people who will greet you by asking your name. Andrew

is especially interested in names and their spelling. Andrew’s other interests include completing office jobs, studying flags from around the world, and reading stories. Andrew also has a love for the dentist and staff members’ own dentist visits. He is often helpful in reminding them about their upcoming appointments with the exact dates and times. Over the years, Andrew’s participation at Morgan Autism Center has proven to many that he can do just about anything he sets his mind to and excels at everything he does.

-Aya Sasaki, Adult Program Director

-Sara Cedano,
Community Integration Program Director

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tions they would miss. For those who could not or would not participate for their own personal reasons, just being a part of the event seemed to offer solace. I am constantly amazed by the lessons our students and clients teach us: there is no art required, no best way in. Instead, they show us that we just need to start talking, asking questions, and sharing the good times. Before these recent, difficult losses, and the dark days that followed, I was afraid of the mistakes we, as educators might make in trying to help the community to heal from the tragedy of losing a cherished member. Now,

thanks to the leadership of our adult clients, I am not so afraid, and the absence of fear brings its own kind of light.

Thanks to Jaymie Byron at KARA Grief support for helping our staff members through this difficult period and for confirming our instincts to address the big topic with our adult clients and community members.

In memory of Molly Todd, Moshe Ren, Craig Hofstetter and Irmgard Koenig.



Top photos: Molly Todd, Craig Hofstetter
Bottom photo: Moshe Ren

New Endeavors for Amy and Ching

The time has come to say goodbye to a beloved member of the Morgan Autism Center family, Amy Horan.

Amy, who has been with us for 20 years, has moved to Ohio. Since joining us, Amy has worked in almost every classroom and has been an integral part of our school program. In 2018, Amy took the position of Administrative Associate and has been gracing every visitor and caller to our center with her smile and friendly demeanor. Her knowledge of our program's philosophy and her close relationship with staff and students made Amy a perfect person for the front office position.

When asked what she will miss the most about Morgan Autism Center, Amy, without a moment of hesitation, said she will miss the interaction with our students and Adult Program clients. There is no doubt that they

will miss her just as much.

We wish Amy well in all her new endeavors and hope that she will come back to visit us.

We now welcome Ching Young who, like Amy, started working in a classroom as an Instructional Aide. Ching has been with us for 7 years, and after a brief maternity leave has returned to take up Amy's position. Ching has a deep connection to our program, knows our students and staff, and is committed to furthering our mission. If you have not met Ching, please introduce yourself next time you come in and join us in welcoming her to her new position!

-Sally Hird,
Office Manager



PASSING THE TORCH: We wish Amy a fond farewell as we welcome Ching to the Admin team!



Our Budding Garden

I have always loved gardening. I love getting my hands in the dirt, caring for a seedling, watching it grow, and the reward of eating fresh produce or sharing a beautiful bouquet with a friend.

At the beginning of the pandemic, I was trying to think of how to keep our garden going with the adults, and decided to give it a try on Zoom. Virtually, we planted seeds in seedling pots, discussed their health, and kept a record of their growth. Once the seedlings were big enough, I went to MAC and planted them in our planters. My daughter filmed and we created videos to share so the adults could follow the process. I was amazed at how many of the clients were interested in following the



GARDEN HELPERS: Student Hannah and Desiree carefully plant tomatoes in Room 1's garden.



BUSY AS A BEE: Taking care of a flower garden is a full-time job. Adult client, Christiane, helps water the beautiful Dahlias in the AP garden.

garden via zoom. I think it gave them a sense of connection to the program and the campus from the safety of their own homes.

By the time our students returned to campus in the Spring, we were able to grow some seeds and plants together. We were really fortunate to be the recipients of the Los Gatos Rotary grant which enabled us to purchase soil, shade structures, tools, a shed, outdoor sinks and compost bins for our new gardening program. With the help of a few wonderful volunteers, we have had a fruitful Summer and Fall harvest of tomatoes, marigolds, cucumbers and basil. Our drip system is installed, and we have started a sensory garden and pumpkin patch too! It has been especially beneficial to have an outdoor activity during these times.

In working with the Water Valley Rain Barrel Rebate Program we were able to purchase several rain barrels and get a rebate. So far, we have saved over 1, 200 gallons of water and counting. We are able to use that water to hand water the plants around our campus.

I love gardening because it provides opportunities for all kinds of learners. Whether it is watering, weeding, harvesting, making food from the

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SWEET PICKLES: AP clients, John and Phillip, couldn't wait to pickle and can the cucumbers they harvested this season.

MAC-N-CHEESE



Photos (Top to bottom, left to right):

School Program student, Daija, making delicious fried rice during her cooking lesson in Room 5.

Justin and Anna enjoying a visit from Animal Assisted Happiness.

AP client Lucas showing off his amazing smile.

Garden Program Coordinator, Flo, and Adult Program client, Ellen, cutting the lettuce they grew!

Adult Program client, Chuck, making some fresh squeezed orange juice.

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harvest, composting, sitting in the shade or just enjoying the flowers and pollinators, there is something for everyone. Carrying water, pushing wheelbarrows and digging in soil all provide sensory input. There is also a sense of cooperation, teamwork and pride that comes from sharing chores, caring for the environment and growing nutritious food. MAC is planning for the Garden Program to become school wide as a curriculum is created.

Thanks to Amy Milani and Bev Lewis for dedicating so much time weeding and caring for our gardens and also a special thank you to Nicolette Heaphy from Hidden Villa in Los Altos Hills for her gardening tips and guidance.

Our next project is to create a pollinator garden in an area which was all weeds. If you have skills in working with wood, or are just interested in helping out the garden program, please contact me at: flo@morgancenter.org. I

am hoping to hold a few volunteer days and will keep a list.

Wish list: Harvest Supreme Soil bags, gnomes, Gift cards to Summer Winds Nursery or Central Wholesale Nursery.

-Flo Fuller
Gardening Coordinator

Mentorship - Above and Beyond

When you come to work at Morgan Autism Center, what you expect to find is a community of warmth and support. What may come as a surprise is how much you will grow, learn, and perhaps find an unexpected career path. This phenomenon exists largely because of the philosophy and culture established and maintained by our veteran teachers and staff.

Claudine Pitpit, who has been with MAC since 1998, is one such teacher who has mentored numerous Morgan Autism Center staff to expand their careers. Those who have worked under Claudine have gone on to become MAC Teachers, our PE Coordinator, and even a Program Director.

Mark Nielsen said it well, "When you have the opportunity to work under Claudine, you can't help but feel inspired to do something more." Mark went onto get his teaching credential and is now a Program Director at MAC. Isela Lopez attributes her drive to pursue a teaching credential to her time spent in Room 2 working as Claudine's instructional aide. Isela admires "her passion for teaching and her love for each and every student that comes into her classroom. She truly cares and shows that she cares for every single one of her students."

Many of Claudine's proteges are quick to point to her organizational style. With a program that revolves around structure and predictability, a keen sense of planning and organization is critical. Tyler Jakaitis, MAC's Adaptive PE coordinator, shared what he learned from Claudine, "I learned how important it is to be organized and prepared during every session with a student."

With a single glance around her classroom, an observer can see this on display: clean, clearly written visual labels throughout the room, neatly organized materials, and a group of aides who know what to do at any given moment. As any teacher can tell you, this coordination and managing effectively takes skill and dedication.

Claudine's compassion and care for her students and their families is apparent in her work. Her love comes through in her leadership and organizational style in her classroom, and resonates throughout the Morgan Autism Center organization. Thank you, Claudine!



MENTORSHIP: Claudine with her mentees!
Front row, left to right: Kristin, Claudine, Isela, Taylor.
Back row, left to right: Rob, Mark, Shaila, Ron, Tyler.



- Hailey Barker and Mark Nielsen,
Program Directors
-Sun Kim Garcia M.Ed
Program Specialist/Consultant

Photos Left to Right:

MUSIC: Room 2 staff Geney and student, Sean enjoying all school music on Halloween with Claudine.

FIELD DAY THROWBACK: Claudine and Tycoon enjoying face painting at MAC field day!

Fundraising

Loma Prieta Region Porsche Club of America

In October, the Loma Prieta Region Porsche Club of America hosted their annual event "Kill-A-Kone." At this day-long event, drivers race for their fastest time around a crazy course, with the goal of not hitting a cone! Morgan Autism Center would like to thank the LPR PCA for hosting this event on our behalf, and a very special thank you to all who contributed in raising \$4,451!



Giving Tuesday 2021



Giving Tuesday was November 30th, 2021. We asked for your help in taking our biking program to the next level. We are in need of indoor storage to keep our bikes, trikes, and adapted cycles safe, clean and in good condition. We are also in need of new bikes, tools, bike parts, and funding for constructing a dedicated bike path. With your generous contributions we raised a total amount of \$24,763 toward our goal of bike program awesomeness!

Sound And Shade

In 2020, we received a grant from the 100 Women Charitable Foundation that helped us create a sound garden: an outdoor space with instruments to play during our weekly drum circle and recess or just to experience the wonders of sound and rhythm. During our virtual Starry Starry Night's Fund-A-Need in 2021, we asked for help in funding the sound garden project and help with purchasing shade features. We are happy to announce that our sound garden is officially installed, and our newly installed shade features covers parts of our playground and amphitheater. The shades enable our students to get on the swings, participate in music, dance, and school wide activities during all seasons.

Results From Starry Starry Night Gala 2022

Our second virtual Starry Starry Night Gala Celebration and Fundraiser was a success! Attendees participated in the Live and Silent Auctions winning packages like a trip to Hawaii, beautiful art created by Morgan Autism Center's students and clients, and won raffle prizes like a Fit Bit and \$500 cash. Stay tuned for the final results from our spectacular event. Visit www.morgancenter.com for results.



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.

PHOTOS (Top to bottom):

FAST CARS: An LPR driver rounds the last cone at Kill-A-Kone benefit for MAC.

WHEELS IN MOTION: School Program students, Kyle and Kayden, racing around the bike track.

AND, ACTION!: Starry Starry Night Sibling Speaker, Sarah Wilder, getting ready to film her video with ICV Digital Media Company.





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Getting Creative In the AP



Each week, adult client Chris Hofstetter joins art with Morgan Autism Center's art instructor, Nicole. He draws mandalas, Zentangles, landscapes, and other guided sketches. Chris has a great eye for color and always puts his own special touch on each piece. When it's time to share his creations, he is excited to show them to other clients, signing in ASL the names of each subject in his picture.

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Mark Nielsen, Aya Sasaki, 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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