



### Remembering Jennifer Sullivan

by Brad Boardman, Executive Director

*Our Morgan Autism Center family faced another profound loss in July when former Executive Director (ED) Jennifer Sullivan passed away after a long illness related to frontotemporal dementia. Jennifer's contributions as both a teacher and ED at Morgan Autism Center left an indelible stamp on our program and its culture...*

The first time I ever saw Jennifer Sullivan, she was laughing. The year was 1994, and it was the end of one of my first days at Morgan Autism Center as a newly hired substitute. I crossed the Los Altos campus courtyard toward the exit on my way out, and situated right next to the exit was a picnic table where Jennifer was gathered with her students. It was one of those blue-sky days in October: warm, beautiful, and perfectly suited to being outdoors. As I approached, I found myself drawn in by Jennifer's manner and obvious joy. I slowed my pace to extend the time I could observe. Jennifer clearly loved being with her students and was demonstrably appreciative of their unique interactions with the activity. The scene was one of shared humor, laughter, enjoyment...and real work. Her students were engaged and having fun. What really struck me was that Jennifer's own engagement suggested that she did not find any of this to be work at all. She laughed playfully, yet was clearly in control and doing the real work of teaching.

To me, it seemed that Jennifer had won some kind of karmic lottery. She loved her job, cared deeply for her students, and exhibited the presence of someone deeply satisfied with her place in the world. She continued to exhibit this same presence throughout the years I worked with her at Morgan Autism Center. Watching her informed my own interactions



*Jennifer Sullivan served as Morgan Autism Center's ED from 2000 until her retirement in 2013.*

with students. Her model helped me form my own ideas about what I wanted from my career and how to approach the role of teacher. I had no idea at the time, but Jennifer would be a guide and organizing force in my career for years to come.

As ED, Jennifer had a way of inspiring growth. She employed her humor, skills, and incredible sense of character judgment to inspire confidence in others and to gently encourage personal and professional growth. I know many teachers and administrators who have Jennifer to thank for challenging us to re-think our capabilities and for pushing us to do more for our students and clients.

Jennifer's gifts were not just related to inspiring others. Culturally, Morgan Autism Center is something really special. It's the kind of place to which people are drawn—and stay. It is not uncommon for staff members to remain at the agency for decades to serve our mission and receive the kind of support, sense of agency, and feeling of belonging that Jennifer and others have cultivated over the years. Below are just a few of her accomplishments—both career-related and some more nuanced, yet equally important, cultural contributions.

- Jennifer moved our agency's entire operation twice, relocating us from Los Altos to Santa Clara and later to the San Jose Cory Campus. There were moments that our very existence was in peril. Jennifer persisted through the dark moments and made the decisions that kept Morgan Autism Center going.

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# Student & Client Spotlights



## Cash: Sharing Smiles in Room 4

*by Christy McCue Risner, Instructional Aide*

Cash is a sweet, kind, and affectionate young man who continually impresses us with his diligent drive to learn and please. He has been knocking it out of the park with achieving his goals and advocating for himself! He is very good at copying sign language and is making great strides at using his Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) device to express his needs and communicate in full sentences. Patient and helpful, he often assists fellow classmates by putting away their items and delivering their folder to them at the end of the day.

Cash likes taking adventures around campus to chat with friends and other staff. He is consistently improving his

social skills and enjoys seeing friends he might not see every day. When asked personal information questions by peers and staff, he happily answers with a big smile.

Cash loves making art and doing colorful science experiments. One of his favorite science activities is creating visual masterpieces with baking soda and multiple colors of vinegar. He also enjoys activities that keep his hands busy, such as typing, writing, popping bubble wrap, and cutting paper. When taking a break from lessons, he can be found smiling on the swings, rocking out to music, or cruising on a bicycle. You may also see him skating around campus—a new skill he picked up very quickly.

We are very proud of Cash and love having him in Room 4!



## Matty: Our AP Cheerleader

*by Sara Cedano, Community Integration Program Director and Aya Sasaki, Adult Program Director*

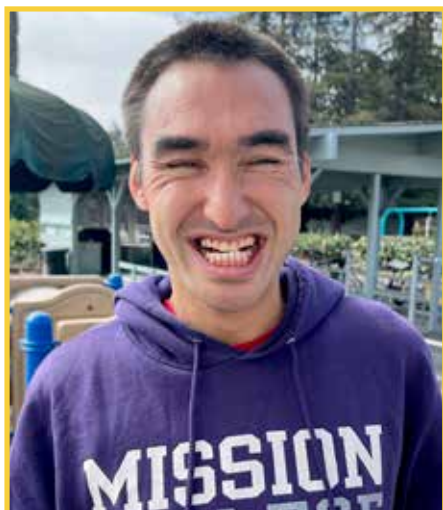
When one thinks of Matthew (Matty to most), the words friend, kind, and cheerful instantly come to mind. Matty is an animated and enthusiastic man in our Adult Program (AP) who has been

making peers and staff smile since the start of his Morgan Autism Center journey in January 2011.

Many would consider Matty to be the AP's number one cheerleader and a friend to everyone who crosses his path. Whether you are a visitor, staff, or peer, Matty is sure to greet you with a smile every morning and wish you well on your way out. Matty's positive energy radiates throughout the room, especially when he is joining others doing what he loves most: shooting hoops, playing games, and spending time with his friends. His friends are always impressed by his various skills, such as his ability to make a basket from anywhere on the court and his mastery of board games. Folks also admire Matty

for his unbeatable style. He enjoys rockin' his latest pair of trendy shoes with a shirt from his collection, many of which feature his favorite basketball team, the Golden State Warriors.

As part of the Community Integration Program (CIP), Matty also enjoys spending his time on outings in the community and partaking in CIP-related activities on campus. Every week, Matty joins a group at the local library and enthusiastically reads story books alongside staff. Throughout the week he also enjoys art and music classes with instructors from the Community School of Music and Art—where he is one of the first to encourage fellow clients and staff by letting them know that they have done a good job!



## Featured Artist: Henry

Adult Program (AP) client Henry was anxious for fall to come around this year because he couldn't wait for the weather to cool down. During one of his weekly sessions with Morgan Autism Center's art instructor, Nicole, he drew colorful fall trees with changing leaves!



Henry really enjoys drawing trees, witches, and ghosts. His favorite colors to be creative with are orange, black, brown, and red. When he has completed a project, Henry loves to share his artwork with AP staff member Karina.



## Remembering Jennifer Sullivan

*cover story continued*

- Jennifer pioneered programming that would support public school districts and share the benefits of the Morgan Autism Center Model.
- Founded Autism Conferences that shared best practices with parents and professionals across the Bay Area and beyond.
- Fostered the understanding amongst staff members that Morgan Autism Center has much expertise to share with the larger community.
- Jennifer always encouraged creative thinking and understood that this agency was free from bureaucratic constraints that can hinder innovation. Simply put: If we have an idea to help our students or clients, let's do it!

Shortly after she retired, Jennifer was diagnosed with frontotemporal dementia. Her illness seemed to progress

quickly and, simultaneously, stretch on forever. In the past few years, Jennifer's ability to have contact with the friends and family that cared for her was compromised by COVID. There is a terrible sadness I feel when I contemplate what losing her means to her family and this community. We all missed the opportunity to see Jennifer enjoy her retirement, contribute, and share her wisdom in her later years.

The last time I visited Jennifer, she had the same kind of spark and good humor I witnessed at that picnic table all those years ago. Her refusal to be diminished by her illness is a lesson I will carry with me for the rest of my life. I know the sense of loss I feel is shared by the entire community. Morgan Autism Center will continue to honor Jennifer by carrying on her legacy of celebrating individuality and providing a dignified, positive, and loving community for our students and clients.



# New Lunch and Breakfast Programs Serve Morgan Autism Center Students a Variety of Choices

by Sun Garcia, Program Specialist/Consultant

At the beginning of this school year, California became the first state to implement a statewide Universal Meals Mandate for school children. What this meant for Morgan Autism Center was that over the summer we needed to brainstorm ways to accommodate this requirement without expanding our staff. We're happy to report that our efforts to offer lunch and breakfast to our students are

not only running smoothly, but have resulted in unexpected benefits including opportunities for both students and Adult Program (AP) clients to practice their vocational skills.

Our new partnership with **My Green Lunch**, which provides healthy, environmentally sustainable lunches to Bay Area schools, has been nothing short of delectable! Their variety of offerings have expanded horizons for some; teachers have reported students trying new foods such as chicken tikka masala, turkey and bean chili, and colorful salads. The program runs like clockwork; our adult clients sort the main meals, snacks, fruits, and veggies for each classroom, including sorting to accommodate the various dietary needs of some students. This takes excellent coordination and focus, and they are doing an amazing job! Once the lunches have been divided, students in Room 5 help distribute the lunch crates to the correct classroom, using our newly purchased lunch cart for official delivery service.



*AP client Christy helps sort the fruit for lunch.*

Our program to provide breakfast—the most important meal of the day—is also off to a healthy start. **Eric Santiago**, our facilities technician, makes weekly or bi-weekly runs to Costco to ensure that we keep an adequate supply of yogurts, milk, oatmeal, cereal, fruits, eggs, and more on hand. Like a big family, students from Room 7 take orders from each classroom, circling their choices

and calculating the number of each item that they need for their students. Our Room 6 students then sort the items for everyone and deliver them to the classrooms.

Overall, our new meal programs have facilitated teamwork and collaboration among our students and clients. It has also been wonderful to see our students become involved beyond their own classrooms. We want to thank our entire lunch and breakfast teams for working together to make these new programs both practical and palatable!



*Ivy, an AP skills trainer (second from left), packages lunches with AP clients Bryan, Jeff, and John.*



# A Uniquely Morgan Autism Center Way to Start the Day

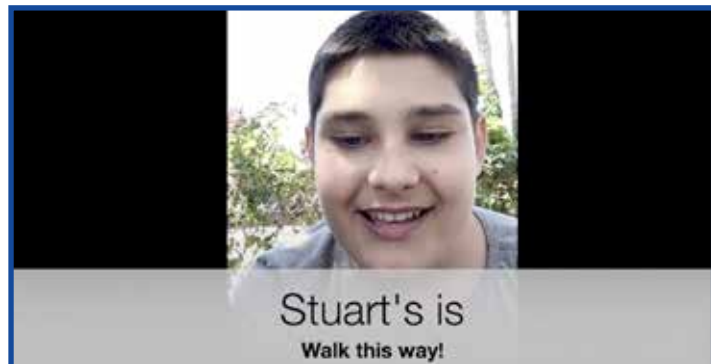
by Heather McClimans, Room 5 Teacher

Last year, the students in Room 5 decided to take on a new venture: Video production! Each week, the students create a "Morning Announcements" video highlighting the upcoming weather forecast, special events and activities, staff and student birthdays, and a "Question of the Week." Students

and staff love watching these videos, which are back on the air after a brief summer hiatus.

The high point of each episode is the "Student Spotlight." During this segment, a video or picture of a different student from around campus is shown and information about the student is

shared. This promotes social awareness all over campus as their peers enjoy watching and learning about their fellow students from every classroom. After the videos are recorded, our staff puts them together into a single video, adds closed captioning, and sends the final product to each classroom teacher to view with their students.



*In response to the Question of the Week, "What is your favorite Aerosmith song?" Stuart answers, "Walk this way!"*

*Hayden reports from San Francisco!*



*Weather man Danny reports the highs and lows for the week to help his fellow students plan what to wear.*

**This project provides Room 5 students with opportunities to practice communication, research, reading, and social skills while also enjoying making a fun video.**

Each student in Room 5 is able to apply their individual interests and abilities to benefit specialized areas. For example, some students are very good at remembering birthdays, so they are in charge of making birthday shout-outs. Other students love talking about the weather and seasons, so they provide the weekly forecast. Some students enjoy being social and learning about other students, so they share information in the Student Spotlight. And Room 6 student Stuart, who loves asking questions, handles the Question of the Week segment.

We are very proud of our students for coming together to create something that reflects the Morgan Autism Center culture in such a fun and unique way!





Room 6 Students Dresden and Jacob play Candyland with Instructional Aides Rob and Aga.



Annabelle is focused while practicing her yoga during PE.

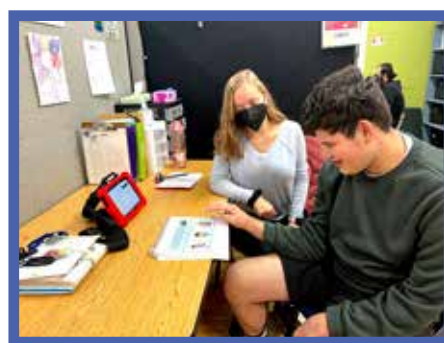


After working hard in their garden, Adult Program clients enjoy snacking on the fruits and vegetables that they grow.



Student Luke has a ball dancing with Instructional Aide Emmanuel during All School Music.

## MAC & "Cheese"



Instructional Aide Julia and student Kayden focus during their work session.



Occupational Therapist Alyanna stretches and works on balance with Room 6 student Carson.



On October 22nd, Adult Program (AP) Director Aya Sasaki, shown with past and present AP staff, was honored with a Service Above Self Award by San Andreas Regional Center.



AP client Chris and staff member Hector showed up to the program in matching outfits one day!



# Hybrid Speech Therapy Services Expand Options for Students

by Julia Caserta, AAC Specialist, Speech-Language Pathologist

Speech therapy started off with a bang for the 2022-23 school year, with two wonderful companies collaborating to bring our students the highest-quality speech therapy and Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) support.

This year **Something to Say**, operated by **Krystle Wright** and **Karen Patterson**, is providing in-person services to students. We are so excited to have Krystle and Karen back at Morgan Autism Center! In addition, **Speech Pathology Group (SPG)** is providing classrooms with virtual therapy from three experienced therapists, who we are pleased to welcome to Morgan Autism Center: **Erin Harris**, **Linzy Knaster**, and **Sherry Farley**. The collaboration between our two teams is seamless.

Many of our students are technologically skilled. Virtual speech sessions have given them a great opportunity to continue

***"I'm happy to say I feel like I've developed genuine connections with all of my students."***

**-Erin Harris**

Below: Daija works on her speech session with her virtual speech therapist, Erin.



Room 5 student Sean catches some rays during his virtual speech session.

***"The classrooms have been so supportive and helpful in the transition to teletherapy! One of my favorite parts of delivering service this way is the flexibility to easily find things to fit any student's interests!"***

**-Linzy Knaster**

expanding on their technological skills as well as to connect with new therapists with unique materials matched to their AAC systems and verbal skills. The virtual setting provides our teachers with a rare opportunity to learn directly from our speech-language pathologists (SLPs), increasing their knowledge about each student's AAC system and language goals.

This collaboration between teachers and SLPs is fostering increased generalization of speech and language skills in the classroom, and we are excited to see how these two teams continue to help our students foster language skills. Thank you, Something to Say and SPG!



Above: Speech Therapist Linzy works with one of our newest students, Cayden.



# In-Person Campus Events are Back at Morgan Autism Center—and We Love It!

Although Morgan Autism Center was back to in-person programming over a year ago, it took a lot longer for us to be able to open our campus to families and volunteers. Masks are still required of staff and visitors during school hours; however, slowly but surely, things are getting closer to a pre-pandemic sense of normalcy. We're finding that it does our hearts good to see old friends and connect directly

with our larger Morgan Autism Center community again! Enjoy these snaps from our first two such events: **Move-for-MAC's closing ceremony** on October 7th, and **Family Night** on October 12th.



Morgan Autism Center families and staff gathered in the amphitheater to watch presentations from our teachers and directors at Family Night.



Students Hannah (top), Blake (right), and Kayden (below), along with staff members Alejandra and Julia, had fun Moving-for-MAC by dancing to music in the amphitheater.



Room 5 Teacher Heather and student Jacob walk their laps during Move-for-MAC.



Program Specialist Sun Garcia, Room 8 Teacher Kristin Schaefer, and Kristin's daughter Hazel enjoy their slices during Family Night.



A sweet moment was captured between AP client Jack and his mom, Daren Tuchman, at Family Night.



Family Night: Everyone had sure missed gathering together for good conversations, not to mention good pizza!







Left: AP client Jack and staff member Joahn get ready to snag a popsicle at Move-for-MAC.



Right: Leo, a Room 8 student, hangs around in his favorite tire swing during Move-for-MAC.



Program Director Mark Nielsen and his wife and daughter chat with the Armijo Family during Family Night.

## More about Move-for-MAC

Our third annual Move-for-MAC fundraiser was a huge success this year, raising more than \$45,000 to build a green space on our campus for students and clients to stay active and healthy and to have fun! Our volunteer fundraisers played a key role in this effort by creating their own pages, spreading the word within their networks, and committing to healthy exercise in whatever form they chose to help raise awareness and support for Morgan Autism Center unique, life-changing programs.

On behalf of the entire Morgan Autism Center staff, Board, and the families we serve, we thank those who contributed to make this year's event a big win for us all!

**Congratulations to the Falcocchia Family, the fundraising team who won the Grand Prize Drawing!**



## Special Thanks to our Move-for-MAC Sponsors

### MAC Champions

The Perisic Family

### MAC Advocate

Roger Meade

### MAC Supporters

Joe Beltran

The Cuellar Family

John & Alice Davis

Anthony & Tracy Falcocchia

Tiffany Ho & Kevin Vodinh

George Ratermann

Richard & Janet Rowley

### MAC Friends

Anonymous (2)	Alan & Beverly Lewis
Jared & Ally Ajlouny	Rick & Tina Lieberman
Khurram Awan	Dan Schaaf
& Nisha Qureshi	& Terry Marks
Nicolle Berrocal	Terrence & Terry O'Day
Mark & Helga Devon	Maggie Prager
Jeffrey Eaton	Ruth Price
Reid & Jan Eggebraaten	Joe & Sue Shea
Jeff Graves	Doug & Kathy Stevens
& Lynn Vo	The Wheat Family
Rickey Green	Steven & Christina Wilder
& Cynthia Stewart	
Arlyn Jahde	
Brian Johnston	

### MAC Enthusiasts

Anonymous (2)	Yeochoon Lee & Jihye Kim
Christine Barker	David & Shana Middler
Alyssa Byrkit	
Linda Carr	Karl & Vanessa Simon
Barton & Marilyn De Palma	Tanja Smith
JACKS BIGGESTFAN	Matt & Kat Troyer



# It's a Win-Win: Help Yourself While Helping Us

by Lyn Balistreri, Development Director

You don't have to put additional strain on your wallet to make a difference! It is a win-win when you learn how to leverage your financial resources to benefit your favorite nonprofit organization(s), and that's what we call "Smart Giving!"

## Getting to Know You

In July, **Lyn Balistreri** joined the Morgan Autism Center team as development director. She brings 15 years of nonprofit development experience to the role, starting at Avenidas in Palo Alto and most recently at *San José Spotlight*. In-between she led the fundraising efforts at Community Health Awareness Council (CHAC) and Morrissey-Compton Educational Center, raising over \$3.5M to provide affordable local mental health services and help individuals with learning differences succeed in school and in life.

A third-generation San Jose native, Lyn earned her Bachelor's in Psychology from San Jose State and worked in accounting, high-tech public relations, and as an independent contractor before discovering her love of the nonprofit arena. She is an active volunteer and former board member of the Association of Fundraising Professionals Silicon Valley Chapter. A single mother to several cats, in her spare time Lyn enjoys creating pretty things and tending her garden.

Please try to stop by and say "Hi!" to Lyn the next time you visit Morgan Autism Center, she would love to meet you!



Planning ahead will also help ensure that Morgan Autism Center will be able to help individuals with special needs and their families far into the future—and we can't think of a more meaningful legacy. There are many possibilities for Smart Giving, including:

- Life insurance policies
- Stocks/securities
- Retirement plan distributions
- Bequests
- Charitable gift annuities
- Charitable remainder trusts
- Charitable lead trusts
- Retained life estates



We recommend that you speak to a financial planning specialist with expertise in charitable giving to explore how each of these ways to give might work for you.

## In the meantime, here is a bit more information regarding how you might donate a life insurance policy to Morgan Autism Center:

- Take out a new policy in our name. You'll receive a charitable tax receipt for the cash value of the policy and for any premiums you pay.
- Name us as the beneficiary of an existing policy. This is a good option if you already have a policy that your family no longer needs for financial stability. At the time of your death, the charity will receive the policy proceeds and your estate will receive the tax benefits.
- Transfer ownership of an existing policy to us and receive a charitable tax receipt for the cash value of the policy. If you owe annual premiums on the policy, you'll still pay them, but you'll also receive tax receipts in the amount of your payments.



# Fundraising

## Thrill-Seeking—for Good!

On October 16th, members of the **Loma Prieta Porsche Club** got together (as they do several times a year) to navigate treacherous twists and turns in a high-skill form of racing called autocross. The difference on this day was that, in addition to the usual adrenaline rush, it was also a fundraiser for Morgan Autism Center!

Last year, the event, called “Kill-a-Kone,” raised more than \$4,400. Gifts for 2022 are still coming in, but we are well on our way to raising more than \$5,500 this year. Thanks to community volunteer **Kris Vanacore** for championing Morgan Autism Center to become the beneficiary of club-members’ generosity starting in 2017, and for keeping the spirit going in what (after a COVID-related hiatus) has become a truly awesome annual event.



Executive Director and racing enthusiast Brad Boardman takes new Development Director Lyn Balistreri for an electrifying ride in his vintage BMW—completing his lap in an impressive 62 seconds!



Thrill-seekers from the Loma Prieta Porsche Club are encouraged to give to Morgan Autism Center in-between laps.

## Support Morgan Autism Center while You Shop for the Holidays

Don't forget that when you shop on AmazonSmile instead of Amazon, a portion of any eligible purchases will go to MAC! Here's how to do it:

1. Go to [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com)
2. Log in with your Amazon username and password
3. Search "Morgan Autism Center" to select us for your charity of choice; this can be changed/updated anytime.
4. Continue shopping on Amazon like you always do!

**amazon**smile  
You shop. Amazon gives.



## SAVE THE DATE FOR STARRY STARRY NIGHT!

**Saturday, May 6, 2023**

Our annual Starry Starry Night fundraising gala will be in-person for the first time since 2019! Mark your calendars for May 6 at the Crowne Plaza in Palo Alto.

Details to follow.

Artwork by Room 4



950 St. Elizabeth Drive  
San Jose, CA 95126

*Our mission is to help children and adults with autism or other developmental disabilities maximize their potential in a dignified, positive, and loving environment.*

### Staff

**Executive Director**  
Brad Boardman

**Program Directors**  
Hailey Barker  
Mark Nielsen

**Program Specialist/Consultant**  
Sun Garcia

**Administrative Specialist/Art Therapist**  
Nicole Ferguson

**Office Manager**  
Sally Hird

**Facilities Technician**  
Eric Santiago

**Administrative Associate**  
Ching Young

**Development & Communications**  
Lyn Balistreri, Director  
Haley Sepulveda, Manager

**Teaching Team**  
Room 1: Rob McPhee  
Room 2: Claudine Pitpitan  
Room 2: Taylor Gonzales  
Room 3: Ronald Manuel  
Room 4: Isela Lopez  
Room 5: Heather McClimans  
Room 6: Jamilah Miller  
Room 7: Shaila Prabhu  
Room 8: Kristin Schaefer  
Tyler Jakatis, PE Coordinator

**Adult Program Team**  
Aya Sasaki, Director  
Sara Cedano, CIP Director

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**Secretary**  
Christopher Escher

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## *Make a Positive Impact in the Lives of Individuals with Special Needs!*

Did you enjoy learning about the students and clients featured in this newsletter? Your gift to Morgan Autism Center directly supports the programs that enrich their lives. We are a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization and gifts are fully tax-deductible. Please consider making a gift in any amount today by scanning this QR code, or visit our website to explore other ways to give.



[www.morgancenter.org](http://www.morgancenter.org)

Phone: (408) 241-8161 • Fax: (408) 241-8231  
[info@morgancenter.org](mailto:info@morgancenter.org)

