

Celebrating Our Past, Embracing Our Future -Tom Caulfield, Board Chair

There's a good reason Morgan Autism Center is considered the #1 autism education community in the Bay Area--if not all of California. It's because of the combination of two things: our history of maintaining a caring, supportive culture and our commitment to remaining the leader in implementing pioneering, leading autism education techniques. This June, those two qualities are presented in clear view as Brad Boardman, Executive Director, concludes his exceptional 30 years with us, and Josh Drake, our new ED, takes the helm. Their comments are below, and taken together--for all of us on the board--encapsulate why we finish this school year full of gratitude and optimism. Please join me in thanking Brad for all that he has done for Morgan Autism Center and wishing Josh well as he leads the way forward. A huge thank you goes to both Brad and Josh in what has been a very seamless transition.

Greetings From Our New Executive Director

-Josh Drake, Executive Director

I am very honored to have joined the Morgan Center community as its new Executive Director. This first month has been a wonderful whirlwind of beginning to get to know the students and adults that we serve, our wonderful staff, and how Morgan Autism Center does what it does. Everyone has been super welcoming and it's readily apparent what a special community we have. It is clear that there is love and joy throughout our community--for those we serve as well as for each other.

A little bit about me and who I am. I have been married for 23 years to my wonderful wife Licha. We are fortunate to have one son, Mason, who is a senior in high school this year and will be going to UC Santa Cruz next year.



(Continued on page 4.)

Lessons Through the Years

-Brad Boardman, Former Executive Director

This is it: my last article. The one that distills some (but by no means all) of the most important lessons I have learned during my thirty years at Morgan Autism Center. Importantly, this article also gives me the chance to introduce Morgan Autism Center's new Executive Director, Josh Drake. Josh comes with a wealth of experience in education (including special education) and business. His personal philosophy is in perfect alignment with the cultural and programmatic goals this community holds dear. I know that Morgan Autism Center will thrive under his guidance and support.

Being a part of this community has given my life shape and meaning beyond my wildest dreams. I cannot imagine another job that could have given me such a deep sense of belongingness and satisfaction that comes from serving others. I feel so fortunate to have had the pleasure to work with such an amazing group of colleagues. Their talent, kindness, patience and strength is unmatched in this field. To our parents: I have loved working alongside you to support your students and adult clients. Your strength, persistence and advocacy are inspirational to me. Thank you for the kindness and guidance you have provided me through the years. It's been said (I think by me) that no one ever really

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Student and Adult Client Spotlight

Joyful Young Lady in Room 6: Aneesha

-Jamilah Miller-Special Education Teacher

Aneesha joined our Room 6 crew in January 2023. She immediately formed bonds with staff members. Aneesha loves going on walks, meeting new people, telling riddles, listening, dancing, and singing to music, and playing her favorite game “copy cat.” Aneesha loves to do various movements for others to model such as clapping her hands, jumping, spinning, and making other sounds using her hands. She also loves to play her version of hide and seek which does not always include hiding, it’s mostly about the seek! Aneesha has been exploring new sport game skills here at school including practicing golf, basketball, bowling, and even doing obstacle courses.

She uses an Augmentative and Alternative Communication device (AAC) on an iPad to communicate with others. She is very efficient with her communication system and with support from her speech therapists, family, and classroom support staff, Aneesha engages and interacts with others and is able to really let her personality shine through. When meeting new people, Aneesha loves to give handshakes, ask them questions and tell them riddles using her AAC device. With people that she is familiar with, she loves to run up to them and give them a big hug. We are so happy that Aneesha has joined our classroom and are excited to see her progress in all the different areas of life.



LOVE IS IN THE AIR: Students celebrate Valentine's Day by trading valentine cards and creating fun decorations.

A New Friend Joins the Adult Program: Bailey

-Aya Sasaki-Adult Program Director

Bailey can be shy at first but loves to share stories with his staff and peers. He has the kind of smile that is contagious. Since joining in February 2023, Bailey has become a wonderful friend to many clients in the Adult Program. Many admire Bailey's impeccable sense of fashion. Bailey has a great sense of humor and you can often see him giggling as he likes to watch the hustle and bustle around him. Since joining the Adult Program, Bailey participates in many activities such as art and music classes with the Community School of Music & Arts, helping with recycling and gardening on campus, making art, and going on vocational outings with his peers. He enjoys listening to a variety of music and singing along to his favorite songs.



LUCK OF THE IRISH: Bailey and Lauren couldn't wait to take a photo at the St. Patrick's Day party.

Outside of Morgan Autism Center, Bailey continues to stay active and busy taking art and music classes at the Academy of Music and Arts for Special Education, playing in the outfield on the Rockies Challenger Little League baseball team, swimming for the Santa Clara County Special Olympics and attending the South Bay Adaptive Services afternoon program. This year he joined the Blue Devils Special Needs Color Guard team and played 3 characters in the Angels on Stage Season 15 presentation of Willy Wonka. We are so happy to welcome Bailey to the Adult Program this year.

Vocational Outings at Animal Assisted Happiness

-Flo Fuller-Garden Coordinator

A few of our students and adult clients started participating in monthly vocational visits at Animal Assisted Happiness back in September. During these visits, our group focuses on rabbit care and gets to work on a few different tasks such as cleaning cages, and refilling waters and food bowls. The visit lasts one hour and always ends with petting the bunnies. Clients work in groups and help each other get the task done. Some enjoy pulling the wagon with the hay, some like refilling the water bottles, while others are working on being more comfortable being around certain animals. Participants come away with a sense of pride from completing a task, a sense of accomplishment and the good feeling that comes from caring for others. These visits also provide sensory input: many students come back to campus more regulated and ready to continue their day at Morgan Autism Center.

We asked our Adult Program clients for their thoughts about their visits to AAH. They all responded with enthusiastic answers and many smiles. Ellen loves going to the farm! She likes the bunnies the most. She smiles wide when she talks about her job there: refilling the bunnies' water bottles and then, the best part, petting them after she is done with her work! Carolyn feels happy when she is at the farm, seeing the goats and the pigs. She loves cleaning the cages for the "cute, little bunnies" and exclaims, "I feel comfortable at the Animal Farm!" Julian said he feels lucky having this as one of his jobs. "As a matter of fact, maybe that's how I get a chance to stay there longer" (by being able to pet the bunnies at the end).

Community Integration Program Director, Sara, states that AAH staff member Kira is awesome with the clients and always makes sure they have the opportunity to pet the bunnies at the end of their task. Sara also notes that one client in particular who was not too keen on doing physical work at the farm has become increasingly willing to participate and even seems to enjoy himself. In turn, Kira makes her own observations about our monthly visits. "The students and clients have grown in leaps and bounds in teamwork, problem-solving, and independence among many other skills. It is a true honor to work alongside Morgan Autism Center's staff! They are a phenomenal team who have the biggest hearts and always work so hard to ensure that each of the students is learning while having the most fun!"



GENTLE CREATURES: Spending time with the small animals is the highlight of the trip.



THIRSTY BUNCH: Ellen helps fill up water bottles for the bunnies and guinea pigs.



HAY THERE!: Students take turns delivering hay to the chicken and goat pens.



REWARD FOR HARD WORK: Students and adult clients anticipate the moment when they get to pet and feed the bunnies after all the work they've done.

"Greetings From Our New Executive Director" (Continued from page 1.)

My whole career has been about social justice—how do we create a more equitable and just society for all. I got into education to deliver excellence for all children. Over the last fifteen years, I have worked at Denver Public Schools (DPS) and Rocketship Public Schools—leading on special education and how we serve the whole child. My focus has been how do we deliver excellence for all children—in particular those who have been most ill-served by our current systems and society. As a result of my work, DPS became the first district in the nation with all schools serving a full continuum of students with disabilities, we improved academic results for students with disabilities at Rocketship and dramatically reduced the suspension rate for all students at Rocketship.

This work has not just been a professional passion but also a personal one. When I began working in education was also the time that Mason began elementary school. Mason hated school—because he was struggling to read. Mason is dyslexic. Licha and I know what it is to be the parent of a neurodiverse child and to have to fight to get them identified, to get the

resources they need, to have to worry whether others have the same love and high expectations you have for your own children. We were fortunate to be able to provide Mason with supplementary support above and beyond what his school was providing—including a summer camp in Colorado specifically designed for children with dyslexia where he got the specialized tutoring and emotional support he needed to maximize his potential. As a result, he learned how to successfully navigate school, he worked extremely hard, such that he is now going to college next year.

For me, I have seen what is possible in the best schools and classrooms as well as for my own son and that is what I want to deliver for every individual we support—that they reach their full potential. It is what any parent would want for their child. It is what all parents deserve for their child. It is what Morgan Center does for every individual we serve.

Josh Drake, Executive Director



"MAC-N-CHEESE"



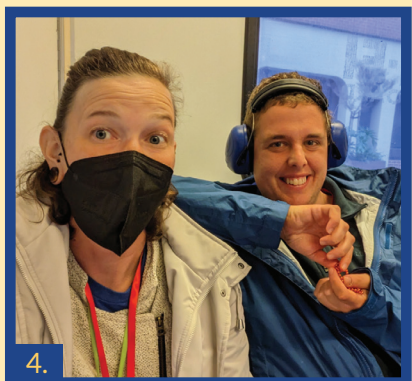
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1. School Program student, Hannah, works on her ceramic bowl for Starry Starry Night.

2. Meet Omelette! Omelette is MAC's Facility Dog who was donated by Monkey Tail Ranch. Omelette's job duties involve receiving hugs, reducing anxiety, helping students learn appropriate animal interactions, and provide an unconditional friend.

3. Get your popcorn, we are going to the movies! A group of clients from the Adult Program enjoyed the new Super Mario Brothers movie.

4. Room 5 teacher Heather, and student Sean took a ride on the light rail to Gong Cha in San Jose to grab some boba! During outings, students learn about navigating around town and being in the community.

5. The Milani Family had fun at our first in-person Family BINGO night at Morgan Autism Center. Attendees enjoyed catching up with one another, and of course winning prizes!

leaves Morgan Autism Center. It is true I am retiring, but I'll see you around.

-Brad

Here are the handful of lessons I've learned over the last thirty years. Enjoy!

1 Be reliable and people will rely on you. I learned this early on at Morgan Autism Center as a substitute. The most basic way to be reliable is to show up...on time. We all blow this one every now and then (my forgetfulness is the stuff of legend). No matter. The key is that when you do occasionally blow it, you own it and do your best to make it better. If you are not reliable, do not be surprised if people stop asking you to do things and your forward momentum in life stalls out.

2 Exalt the team over the individual. We live in an era in which we are encouraged to shout our personal accomplishments from the rooftops. But I find it so much more powerful to hear persons in positions of leadership exalt the contributions of their team rather than take credit for themselves. Wanna stoke out your colleagues? Make sure they know that it is the contributions of a cohesive team that are responsible for successes. Of course it is okay to call out individual contributions, but be thoughtful about how and when you do it. Most importantly, in an age when everyone is using their very sharp elbows to push their way to the front of the line and claim their own awesomeness, steer clear of trying to call attention to your individual contributions. A little secret: no one whose opinion really matters likes a claimer.

3 It's ok to feel like an imposter. Do the work anyway. Many years ago I remember giving former Executive Director Jennifer Sullivan a compliment about a diffi-

Laughter restores the spirit and endears community members to one another forever.

cult decision she made to move our school. Her response: "I have no idea what I am doing!" I loved that she admitted to her feelings. But there was a deeper message that said: "I am doing my best, and it is my responsibility to make the very best decisions I can with my current understanding of the situa-



CONNECT EVERYDAY: Kayden and Instructional Aide, Julia give each other a high-five to celebrate a great work session.

tion." I found her words to be extremely empowering. They gave me the confidence to "have no clue" about so many things, but to do the thing in front of me anyway. The truth of the matter is that we all have skills and we all have blind spots. Acknowledge the blind spots and do your best to figure it out.... And, it never hurts to have trusted advisors to help you along the way.

4 Find a way to laugh. A lot. Every ever-loving day. Nothing turns hard work into joyful experience

like a little goofiness with some shenanigans and a deep sense of the absurd thrown into the mix. Not a day goes by at Morgan Autism Center that I don't find myself and colleagues, students or clients laughing hysterically (usually at ourselves or, more specifically, me). Laughter restores the spirit and endears community members to one another forever. Laugh.

5 There is magic in supporting others along their career path.

After years in the field, I have had the chance to see many colleagues grow along their career paths. Morgan Autism Center's lead teachers (and administrators) almost all started as aides. These are exceptional humans: extremely effective leaders who truly understand how to run classrooms and support student learning. While I am sure that each of them would have found their way to making it a career on their own, it sure is fun to nudge them along that path and watch them grow. There is just no better feeling than doing what you can to help someone realize that they are capable and that they have the stuff to become a leader.

This article was originally written as a Top 10 list...but space will not allow all items to be printed here. You can find the last 5 items plus a bonus item at <https://morgancenter.org/autism-education-blog-bay-area/>.

Physical Education at Morgan Autism Center: Exercise For All!

-Mark Nielsen, Program Director

Here at Morgan Autism Center, we place a high value on movement, exercise, and other forms of sensory input. That is why every student and adult client receives 30 minutes of daily PE programming, containing a variety of fun and engaging activities.

Our PE Coordinator, Tyler Jakaitis, has been with MAC for nearly 20 years. He has worked as an aide in the youngest classroom, the adult program, and everywhere in between! That breadth of experience made him a perfect candidate to lead our PE program starting in 2009.

The skills Tyler learned working in the classroom and AP have served him well in executing his PE program. He understands the value of high level organi-

zation and communication to help the participants know what to expect and how they will be supported.

In addition to an array of visual supports available in the PE room, Tyler has also recently implemented a new communication tool concept. He now utilizes a large, painted plywood communication board with jumbo-sized icons to orient each group to the day's activity before they get started. Tyler reviews the steps of the planned activity, as well as any materials that may be used. The process takes only a moment or two, but provides the students and clients with valuable information before they engage in that activity.

Tyler brings a special perspective and skill set to our specially-designed PE



RIDING TOGETHER: P.E. teacher, Tyler Jakaitis rides around with a student to encourage daily exercise.

program, and truly understands how the whole team comes together at MAC to serve our students and clients. He is willing and eager to not only support the participants, but also the program at large. We're lucky to have you, Tyler. Keep up the good work!

A Perfect Partnership

-Hailey Barker, Program Director

At Morgan Autism Center we take great pride in our teachers. Talented leaders in our classrooms translate to high quality programming for our students. Unfortunately, we have not been immune to the effects of a nationwide shortage of qualified candidates for open teaching positions. Being a 1:1 program, we are constantly hiring instructional aides and have been lucky to continue to keep our school program staffed. However, hiring for a teacher position is much more complicated. A teacher at Morgan Autism Center needs to have a Moderate to Severe Education Specialist Credential and, more importantly, must possess the qualities that our Morgan Autism Center philosophy embodies: empathy, patience, flexibility and understanding.

When new Board Member, Debbie

Textor, offered us an opportunity to connect with a colleague at Santa Clara Office of Education to discuss a partnership, we were thrilled. As a result, we have now established a relationship with the Education Preparation for Inclusive Classrooms (EPIC) program, providing us with options for individualizing pathways to funneling the intern-credentialed candidates looking for placement to Morgan Autism Center.

While we are just beginning our journey with partnering with SCCOE, we are excited for what the future holds. We feel hopeful that this will be a symbiotic

relationship, offering interns needing teaching experience an opportunity to be in the classroom, and MAC with eager and qualified candidates who can learn our model and philosophy under the tutelage of an established MAC teacher.

Job openings in public education began to outpace hires prior to the pandemic, although the gap has widened since March 2020.

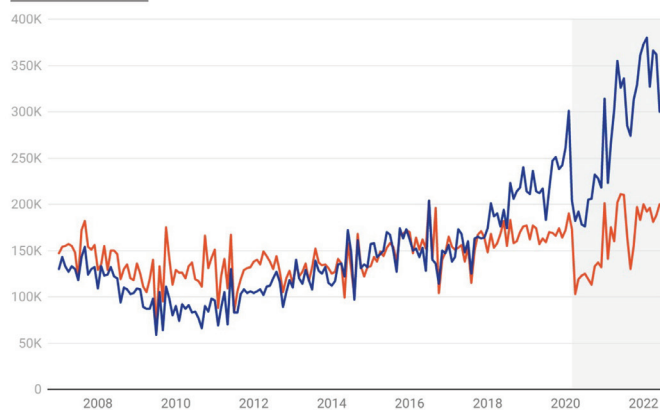


Chart: National Education Association • Source: NEA analysis of U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey, Seasonally Adjusted Data

THE SEARCH CONTINUES: Hiring is tough all over especially in education.

Fundraising

Starry Starry Night Success

-Haley Sepulveda, Development and Communications Manager

On May 6th our largest fundraiser of the year made its comeback to a live event after four years. Starry Starry Night is an event that brings our community together to celebrate the amazing students, clients, staff, families, and friends of Morgan Autism Center.

Our guests participated in our famous wine pull, raffle, and silent auction before heading into the ballroom for the spectacular program. During the program we heard from our sibling speaker, Sienna Neff, our new Executive Director, Josh Drake, and the live auction artists Julian, Mishal, and Kolya.

The lively crowd created an energetic atmosphere during the Fund-a-Need and broke the record for the highest raised in Starry Starry Night history. With the support of our donors, we raised over **\$108,000** towards our Farm-to-Table program. These funds will provide us the opportunity to renovate our kitchen and supply resources to our garden program.

We would like to thank all of our donors and supporters for making this event so special. Because of your support, over **\$340,000** was raised in support of Morgan Autism Center.

Thank you to our generous sponsors for helping make this happen: Tech CU, the Escher Family, the Evensen Family, Robert Todd and Clare McDermott, ASVB, the Tuchman Family, Exchange Bank, First Republic Bank, Something to Say Speech Therapy, Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati Foundation, Feldman Law Group, Heritage Bank of Commerce, Hopkins & Carley, LWG Construction, San Andreas Regional Center, the Vanacore Family, the Ching Family, the Flury Family, the Lewis Family, the O'Day Family, Ruth Su and James Wheat, Khurram Awan and Nisha Qureshi, the Devon Family, Trudy Grable, Yeochoon Lee, Alicia Levine, Richard Lopez, the Oller Family, the Sadiq Family, Sue Swezey, and the Wilder Family.



BIG WINNERS: An excited audience bid for Live Auction packages including trips to Hawaii, New Orleans, and beautiful paintings created by Morgan Autism Center adult clients.

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**

Employee Gift Matching

Many companies participate in matching gift programs. Ask your employer today to join you in supporting Morgan Autism Center.



HEADS OR TAILS: Executive Director, Josh Drake and Emcee, Craig Silverman flip a coin to see who will win the prize trip to Mexico in a game of Heads or Tails.



AMAZING ARTIST: Adult client, Kolya, painted a beautiful painting of "Big Ben" in London for this year's Live Auction.



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Who Let the Dogs Out

-Nicole Ferguson, Administrative Specialist



WOOF! : "Who Let the Dogs Out"
by adult client, Julian Devon.

Adult client and talented artist, Julian Devon created a vibrant piece of art for this year's much anticipated Gala Fundraiser, Starry Starry Night. Julian is a lover of all animals but is especially fond of dogs, which he chose as the subject and shared in great detail the best qualities of each dog breed.

Julian settled on his favorite dogs giving each of them a unique name: Envy the Labrador Retriever, Cooper the Labradoodle, Benji the Dalmatian, Puka the Boston Terrier, Pugsy the Pug, and Lassie the Pomeranian. He shared why he "really really" loved each dog and it shows in his artwork.

The final live auction bid of \$3,000 came from Bill Gerber, who is now the proud owner of a Julian original. Congratulations to our auction winner and to Julian for his fantastic artwork.

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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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