

Integrated Pre-school Program: *Sharing the Gift of Fun, Friendship & Learning!*

The concept of Integrated Play Groups® (IPGs) – which brings together children with autism and their “typically developing” peers for interactive, imaginative play – was developed in the late 1980’s by researchers at San Francisco State University. A recently completed 3-year study reinforcing the benefits of IPGs (commissioned by Autism Speaks) has produced a number of recent news stories on the subject; both in the mainstream press as well as in the autism community at large.



CLC started its own interactive play group (or social skills group) last summer and, since it was so successful, offered it again this year. Our pre-school students were joined by six typically-developing children two full days a week sharing the gift of fun, friendship and learning. For CLC parent, Marcia Grady, it was a particularly enriching experience since both her 5-year-old son, Sammy – a CLC student – and 6-year-old son, RJ – a student at Grey Nun Academy – were part of the program.

“I had RJ enrolled in another program so he was only supposed to participate in the social skills group one day a week,” explained Marcia. “But when he got home after the first day, he told me he wanted to go both days and skip the other program. He enjoyed it that much!”

The days are structured like regular pre-school classrooms starting with free play, circle time, crafts, games, academic lessons and group activities. The integration with typically developing children gives CLC students the chance to learn age-appropriate social skills through observing and imitating their same-age peers. This concept provides a much needed “interim step” between the one-on-one teacher-directed activities during the school year and regular mainstream environments, (i.e. outside activities or programs) where students are primarily on their own to navigate the social scene. Explained Amanda Flavell, CLC’s Education

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Alexis Presti: *2014 CLC Graduate!*

Congratulations to The Comprehensive Learning Center’s 2014 Graduate – Alexis Presti! Alexis joined our program when she was 8 years old and has gained a tremendous amount of skills in her 13 years here at CLC. On June 19, 2014, Alexis accepted her diploma in a moving ceremony attended by members of her amazing support group of family, friends, students and faculty.

Led by her biggest cheerleaders – Georgia, Barry and John – she has worked incredibly hard to earn her diploma. She will continue to receive support services through PA’s Waiver Program along with CLC’s Adult Program. Her focus will be on securing volunteer employment in the community.

Amanda Flavell, CLC’s Education Director, shared her heartfelt experiences in working with Alexis for many years. “Alexis has a contagious smile that can brighten the day of everyone around her! She has always had a drive to be independent, which helped her learn countless skills to aide her in participating in the community and at home. It’s been amazing to watch her grow from a little girl into a beautiful young woman who will bring a smile to everyone she encounters in her journey moving forward. She has developed strong skills volunteering in the community and it will be a pleasure to see her continually succeed in her next chapter of adulthood.”

Congratulations and Best Wishes, Alexis!!!



Integrated Pre-school Program

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Director, "This group allows our students to learn and practice their social skills in a familiar environment in which they already feel successful and comfortable. While it is still teacher-guided, it is not as controlled of an environment as our standard school day so the children can develop in a more natural and spontaneous manner with children their own age."

And both Amanda and Marcia agreed that the benefits were not confined to just the CLC students. "I was thrilled to see the impact on my older son RJ," commented Marcia. "Throughout the four-week program, RJ learned that all kids like to have fun and should be treated equally with respect." Little brother Sammy was proud to show off his school and share his big brother with fellow students. "By the end, RJ told me that he thought CLC was cool and wished he could go to CLC with Sammy," Marcia said. "I think that made Sammy feel very special!"

Amanda and her team were very excited to see friendships form between the CLC students and their typically developing peers and noted that many of these friendships have been maintained through play dates outside of CLC.

As for Sammy, the experience and skills he developed through the program meant that this Fall, he was able to participate in an outside music class that his parents and teachers were not sure he was ready to partake in just yet. "We saw how much Sammy was flourishing in the integrated play group and realized that he was more prepared to participate in the outside music class than we thought," commented Amanda. "This is a perfect example of the impact a program like this can have on our students' ability to transition into a mainstream setting."

The CLC staff and families are eagerly looking forward to seeing the progression, successes and friendships our pre-school students will make during next summer's social skills program!



CLC/AJF News

It's hard to believe that September, 2014 began The Comprehensive Learning Center's 15th year of operation. The program continues to grow by leaps and bounds, both in terms of the curriculum offerings as well as the number of students it serves (there are currently 29 students enrolled).

The faculty, volunteers and Board of Directors of both AJF and CLC have been working on a number of exciting ventures this year that will continue to expand and enhance our impact on present and future students as well as the autism community at large.

Progress in the Development of our Adult Program

Over the last several years, we have been working diligently towards the development of an Adult Program for our graduates over the age of 21. With much progress under our belts, we have formally announced the appointment and promotion of **Lauren Ferguson** as CLC's Adult Program Coordinator. Lauren has been a teacher at CLC for almost 5 years. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Clinical Psychology from Kutztown University and a Master's Degree in Behavioral Counseling from St. Joseph's University. Lauren is currently studying for a Post-Master's Certificate in Applied Behavior Analysis and also to become a Board Certified Behavior Analyst. She is busy setting up support programs for our three graduates while securing approvals for CLC to become eligible for adult funding from the Pennsylvania State Waiver sources. We feel confident that the Adult Program is in good hands with Lauren at the helm. Congratulations, Lauren!



An Enhanced Image and Greater Exposure = *More Fundraising Muscle!*

As CLC continues to grow, so do their fundraising needs. As CLC's fundraising arm, AJF has been looking into more creative ways to raise the funds necessary to aid in the school's growth and expansion. As such, we recently embarked on a much needed marketing campaign to enhance our image, exposure and fundraising capabilities.

With the assistance of local marketing agency, WellStar Marketing, Inc., AJF has unveiled a new logo and graphic identity, which you will begin to see consistently throughout our marketing and communication materials.

Even more exciting is the launch of AJF's brand new website. Visit us at **www.ajfoundation.org** to see our amazing makeover!

Not only is the site a better reflection of the excellence and professionalism of our organization, it provides many added features that will allow us to better serve our various constituents. For example, visitors will be able to:

- Learn the various ways to donate to AJF including on-line donations
- Stay current on upcoming event announcements
- Link to current event registration pages
- Find a list of community groups, books and websites pertaining to Autism and ABA
- Keep up with the latest CLC/AJF happenings with the AJF Spotlight Blog
- See print and TV media coverage of AJF and CLC
- Read the "Success Stories" of CLC students

We firmly believe that these enhancements will help to elevate our exposure within the community and attract the attention of more donors and event participants. We are eager to hear your feedback! Please let us know what you think by emailing your comments to **info@ajfoundation.org**.



An Update on our CLC Students



Module A (preschool age to kindergarten)

We have a great group of early learners who have proven themselves to be hard working little men! They are learning many important skills that will take them down the road of education and independence as they grow older.

Luke O. joined the CLC family in September and is already gaining many new skills and adjusting to school routines. He is potty training and being taught how to play simple games with others.

Luke S. is our little reader! He loves to read and is beginning to create simple sentences.

Ben is starting to master math skills such as identifying numbers and counting objects.

Sammy is now going to a music class in his community where he is learning to follow the instructor's directions and to integrate with his peers.



Moving On But Not Soon Forgotten!

This past May, **Owen** graduated from CLC and is now attending a regular Pre-K program with CLC's support. He is learning how to play with his classmates, acclimate to the program's structure and follow teachers' instructions.

In September, **Aiden** began attending a regular Kindergarten class at a local school with CLC's support. He has made new friends and is adapting to a large group setting while following school routines.

We miss seeing these two adorable faces every day in our hallways but are so proud of their progress and thrilled for them and their families!

Module B (early elementary phase)

Our students in Module B are learning many new activities of daily living and are taking on a new level of independence!

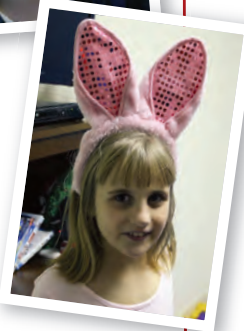
John is learning to put on and take off his coat, as well as dress himself.

Sean mastered the skill of riding his bike and has tried a variety of new foods including vegetables, hummus and smoothies. He even requests these foods for snack now.

Connor B. is learning to shower independently and to work in small group settings. He is starting to initiate interactions with his classmates and loves inviting others to play.

Julia is saying many new words and is learning to tie her shoes and fix her hair.

Bryn has become proficient in folding washcloths and towels and in unloading the dishwasher. She is a big help at home! She is also busy learning to read simple stories and answer questions about these stories.



Module C (mid-elementary phase)

Our students in Module C are working on some exciting new goals this year! A variety of academic and community skills as well as skills to increase independence are just a few examples of what this group is learning.

Brian is working on his typing skills and is beginning to prepare and sample new foods.

Tony is learning to identify safe and dangerous situations, as well as share experiences with friends and peers.

Jamie is acquiring a variety of academic skills including science, social studies and math.

Jack is currently working on creating a digital presentation using Prezi and sharing this with his peers.

Brandon is learning many new community skills including bowling with friends, interacting with community personnel, and advocating for himself.



Module D (middle school phase)

Our Module D students are working diligently both in the classroom and in the community! These students are learning a variety of vocational and community-based skills.

Michael and **Lucas** are mastering the use of all amenities at their local gym. They use the workout equipment, track and basketball court regularly.

Madison is learning to shop for grocery items and prepare many new foods.

Patrick is acquiring a variety of vocational skills, including filing and data entry at CLC.

Connor F., Remi and **Drake** are hard at work volunteering at a local medical office. These students are excelling at all tasks they are given including scanning and inputting information into a database, filing and copying.



Module E (pre-graduation phase)

The students of Module E are busy preparing for their time beyond the walls of CLC! They are working on learning time management, furthering their independence by completing tasks without direct supervision, and increasing their fluency with home living, self-care and vocational tasks.

Colin and **Will** are excelling at assembling school supply packages for a local non-profit organization that provides essential items to children who are homeless and living in low-income areas. They volunteer monthly at the organization and also practice preparing these packages at CLC.

Connor M. is boosting his vocational repertoire by volunteering at a local gym cleaning exercise equipment and is also preparing to shelf books at a local library. In addition, he and **Ryan** volunteer at a local church by cleaning the facilities at the church's recreational center.

Louis is learning to grocery shop and to interact with personnel in a variety of community settings. He also works at his family's business assembling boxes!



All of the students in **Module E** participate in assembling cardboard partitions for a local packaging company. Volunteer and assembly work has been provided through partnerships with local businesses which help the students in Module E prepare for successful employment after graduation. We thank our local businesses for their support!



A Look Back at our 2014 Campaigns and Events!



Annual Drive

The AJ Foundation's Annual Drive Campaign kicked off **last December** with a mailing to over 5,300 supporters. The campaign grossed over \$49,000! We'd like to thank all of our generous donors for their continued support over the years!!

This year's Annual Drive Campaign will once again begin during the upcoming holiday season in December 2014. Keep an eye out for our Annual Drive packet in the mail during this special time of year!!

Texas Hold'em Tournament

Our Texas Hold'em Tournament, held on **January 25, 2014**, was our best attended Hold'em to date with 98 pre-registered players and the remaining spots filled within 15 minutes of registration. This year's event grossed over \$22,000! Congratulations to our five amazing winners.

A special thanks to Tony Giaimo of Giuseppe's in Richboro for providing the venue, hospitality and delicious food, and to Tumbling Dice for their expertise in hosting this event. The AJ Foundation would also like to thank all of the players as well as the many volunteers for their generous support.



Our 2015 Texas Hold'em will once again be held at Giuseppe's Family Restaurant on Saturday, **January 24, 2015**. Registration is limited to 100 participants so hurry and register on our new website at www.ajfoundation.org to secure your spot!

Casino Night

Our 17th Annual Casino Night was held on Saturday, **April 26th, 2014**, at the St. Bede's Parish Center in Holland, PA. It was one of our best attended events with over 550 people.

Our crowd was extremely eager to play after being awestruck by the beautiful gifts worth over \$30,000. It was a fun evening filled with great friends, delicious food and lots of gambling action. The event grossed over \$71,000!

Thanks to all who attended to make this year such a huge success!! A special heartfelt thanks to our Event Sponsors, Lou & Gloria Esposito and Elise & Jeff Weisman.



AMRAP for Autism *(new this year!)*

On Sunday, **May 4, 2014**, The AJ Foundation teamed up with Central Bucks Crossfit of Ivyland, PA to host the AJF's First Annual AMRAP for Autism event. We invited all fitness buffs to step out of their comfort zone and join us for a great workout while raising money for individuals with autism.

To the uninitiated, AMRAP stands for "As Many Rounds as Possible": a credo to motivate fitness buffs to push beyond what they thought they could achieve. Two challenging team workouts were designed and scaled to meet the needs and fitness levels of the participants - both Crossfitters and non-Crossfitters. Over 100 teams participated and were treated to frozen yogurt donated by Eric and Annie Borell's "Love it! Frozen Yogurt". Also present were two vendors, Schuylkill Valley Sports and Bryn and Dane's, selling their wonderful sporting apparel and health food products!!

A sense of camaraderie was felt throughout the day as the atmosphere was filled with cheers and accolades!! Everyone left feeling fulfilled, energized and exhausted. Congratulations to AJ Corless and Connor Feeney, both CLC students, who teamed up to take second place in their division. A special thanks to Mike & Kathy Weidner, owners of Central Bucks Crossfit, for donating their time and workout home to our great cause. A profit of \$5,000 was made from this event which went to the much-needed development of The AJ Foundation's new website.



AJF Ride 4 Autism

The looming threat of rain did nothing to dampen the energy and enthusiasm that was on display at our 7th Annual AJF Ride 4 Autism Event held on Saturday, **September 13th**.

More than 300 riders, supported by 608 donors and 189 fundraising volunteers, made the most of the morning with the final participant crossing the finish line a safe 30 minutes before the rain swept into the area. But it was the smiles of all involved that shone through once the final fundraising total was tallied. In the end, \$72,020 was raised for CLC, up 50% from the prior year's event.

A special shout out to our corporate sponsors and our top 3 teams whose support is the foundation behind the event's success:

- Cognizant
- Beef International Corporation
- CBIZ Valuation Group
- Total Molding Services, Inc.
- ISI Incentive Systems
- Giuseppe's Pizza
- Tanner Brothers
- Bicycle-Pro

Our most sincere thanks to Mike and Michele Meyer for once again chairing this event, and to all others involved in making it such a huge success. Can't wait for next year!

Results of the 2014 Team Challenge:

First Place: Michael Jacobson
Team ISI (\$14,300)



(Above) Second Place: The
Blackthorn Rugby Bicycle
Club (\$7,800)



(Left) Third Place: Team Connor
Brittain (\$5,600)



AJ Foundation

Empowering the Autism Community

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Mark Your Calendars for our 2015 Events!

Texas Hold'em Tournament:

January 24, 2015

Casino Night:

April 11, 2015

AJF Ride 4 Autism:

September, 2015

Golf 4 Autism:

October 19, 2015

A Look Back at our 2014 Campaigns and Events! *(continued)*



AJF Golf 4 Autism

The AJ Foundation's Golf 4 Autism was held on Monday, **October 20, 2014**, at a NEW VENUE - the Philmont Country Club!! Changing to the Philmont CC coupled with our new AJF Golf 4 Autism website proved to be very

instrumental in the success of this year's event. The morning frost delayed the first tee off but that did not dampen the spirits or desires of our dedicated golfers. They were treated to breakfast, lunch, dinner and two rounds of golf at a historical setting where many challenging and prestigious golf events have been held. A special thanks to our returning marathoner, Michael McCormick, who not only golfed 120 holes but also raised over \$20,000. A shout-out to another golfer, Louis Esposito, for raising over \$10,000. We grossed approximately \$90,000 which is one of the highest profitable events in the AJ Foundation's fundraising history. We couldn't have done it without the support of all our golfers and sponsors. Thank you! Mark your calendars and join us next year at the Philmont Country Club on Monday, **October 19, 2015!**



*This is the time of year when United Way kicks off its annual fundraising season. **Remember**, if you (or your employer) participate in the annual United Way campaign, you can designate the AJ Foundation as your preferred donation recipient. Often, your employer will match your contribution dollar for dollar. All donations are most appreciated!*

