



A Heartfelt "Welcome Home" for Executive Director, Cindy Murphy

Most people who are familiar with The Comprehensive Learning Center (CLC) know that the school was founded by Joanne Corless in an effort to help her son, AJ (namesake for the school's fundraising arm, The AJ Foundation), as well as other local children with autism. But only those who were around for the first five years of CLC's operations truly know the pivotal role that Cindy Murphy, our new Executive Director, played in having CLC become a reality.

The year was 1994 when this story began. It is a story of a mother - desperate but determined to make sure that her son, who had been diagnosed with autism, would be able to lead a fulfilling life as a productive member of society. That mother was Joanne Corless; that son was AJ; and the individual who turned out to be the life-changing catalyst for the entire Corless family was Cindy Murphy.

"I had been working at a school that served children with autism, but there was a long waiting list for student admission," Cindy recalled. "Joanne was growing increasingly frustrated that she could not get AJ enrolled. She had placed him in a mainstream pre-school and kindergarten program, only to become more frustrated and just heart-broken with their inability to accommodate AJ's special needs. That's when she asked me if I would work with AJ as a private tutor."

The impact on AJ was immediate and dramatic. "Cindy was just so skilled and experienced with children like AJ. She had, and still has, this tremendous ability to connect with them in a very deep and meaningful way. She has



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Congratulations to Aileen Tschirlig, our new Director of Education!

We are very excited to welcome Aileen Tschirlig to her new position as Director of Education at The Comprehensive Learning Center!

Aileen first began at CLC back in 2008 while working as an instructor and her potential to thrive in this role was evident from the start. Over the next several years, Aileen continued to expand her skills and knowledge while working with many different learners teaching many different skills. She became a natural leader, helping junior staff learn to effectively work with the students.

Aileen's skills advanced so much that she was appointed to the position of Trainer in 2013 where she was responsible for staff training and student programming for all in her Module. During this time, Aileen was very successful in her role as Trainer and also began pursuing an advanced degree in Psychology with an emphasis in Applied Behavior Analysis, all while starting a family of her own.

As CLC's Director of Education, Aileen is continuing her path of success by mentoring CLC's instructional staff and trainers. Our students are flourishing under her guidance and we couldn't be more thrilled!

We are very appreciative of Aileen's dedication to our school, our learners, and their families. We are very fortunate to have such an outstanding professional to help guide our program into the future.



Louis Esposito CLC 2015 Graduate

It was a memorable day in April 2002, when Louis was accepted to The Comprehensive Learning Center. "We knew it was his lucky day when we found out that CLC had just moved to their first brick and mortar location on **Louis** Drive in Warminster," said Louis' mother, Gloria. Louis was 8 years old at the time and 13 years later, Louis is relishing life with his family and is fully integrated in the community. He enjoys taking care of his home, cooking meals, celebrating events with family, walking dogs, riding bikes, roller skating, rock climbing, going to the movies, fine and casual dining, concerts, walking in the city....the list goes on and on! We are extremely proud of Louis and all of his amazing accomplishments. Louis is an incredible young man with many wonderful opportunities that lay ahead.



CLC Program Highlights

From Student Volunteers to Paid Employment for Adults: It's Working!

The Adult Program at CLC has officially come to fruition after many years of planning and development. It represents the culmination of a vision established by both the AJF and CLC Boards of Directors to extend its support beyond primary and secondary education and into early adulthood. That vision is now a reality, thanks to the hard work and effort of all involved.

Lauren Ferguson, Director of Adult Services, explains, "We are dedicated to serving young adults with autism and other developmental disabilities in order to maximize their potential to become independent, productive and meaningful contributors of society."

Currently, there are two CLC graduates who are participating in the Adult Program which provides placement and ongoing monitoring of paid employment positions and volunteer opportunities in the local community, as well as providing support with daily living goals.



In addition to volunteering at his community public library, **Dan** works two part-time jobs totaling 17 hours a week. Dan is assigned the important task of scanning patient charts into the computers at a local medical office. He also works at a grocery store where he is responsible for stocking and fronting shelves.

AJ, a 2011 CLC graduate, has part-time

employment at three different organizations working a total of 35 hours a week. In addition to being Dan's co-worker at the local grocery store, AJ works at an accounting firm as well as a marketing research firm where he collates invoices, creates expense reports, downloads interviews, binds projects, assists in setting up/cleaning up after events, etc.

According to Lauren, those types of placements could not have been possible without the ongoing efforts to build the volunteer program at CLC over the years. "Both Dan and AJ had

the opportunity to learn those employable skills by participating in various volunteer positions as students," explained Lauren. "They had proven their dedication, skills and ability to these companies who then offered them paid employment once they graduated. This is precisely the type of outcome we would like to see for all our learners."

CLC students, as young as 15 years old, can participate in volunteer work where they can acquire skills and "sample" jobs to determine their abilities as well as their preferences.

The program includes a wide range of volunteer opportunities some which are listed below:

- **Medical offices** where students' responsibilities include scanning authorizations and doctors' orders into patient electronic charts, filing patient paper charts, etc.
- **Community gyms** where student volunteers assist by cleaning gym equipment.
- **A non-profit organization** where students help prepare packages of clothes, shoes, books, toys, baby safety equipment and school supplies which are then sent to over 87,000 children in Massachusetts and the Philadelphia area.
- **A local religious center** where the responsibilities include vacuuming and setting up for events.
- **A non-profit organization** which helps transform lives and the community by building and repairing homes in partnership with families in need.
- **A law firm** where students handle document shredding.
- **An organization providing food and friendship** for the homebound, where CLC volunteers help with meal preparation.

"Preparing our learners to navigate the world after graduation begins with assisting them to gain marketable skills as students," explained Lauren. "Marketable skills lead to fulfilling job opportunities that can provide a financial and inter-social foundation for their lives moving forward. This is a critical component of our mission here at CLC."



CLC Students Work it Out in the Community!

Among the many life lessons learned at CLC is the importance of physical fitness. Students in every module spend time in the school's gym each day to exercise, while working on important skills such as following individual and group instructions, being actively engaged, and interacting with peers. This year, we have focused on assimilating students, who are ready, into programs at local community gyms.

Our younger students participate with non-disabled peers through weekly classes that teach basic sport skills. The kids also do a variety of other activities including obstacle courses, building better balance and agility while also having fun! These classes are an excellent opportunity to work on building social interaction skills as well.

Our older learners get their cardiovascular workouts by using treadmills, elliptical machines, the track, and one young man even does Zumba! They balance their workouts with strength-building routines using weight machines and free weights to build and tone muscles. After their workouts, some enjoy a relaxing soak in the hot tub before heading back to school.



For each, the focus of community programming is to increase independence. During these visits to the gym, learners receive various levels of support by CLC instructors. Some, who are learning new skills, receive direct teaching to participate in their gym activity. Others, who need less support, only receive occasional supervision with the long-term goal of full independence.

Aileen Tschirrlig, Director of Education, helps support the community gym program and is proud of the progress each student has made in the past year. "We are looking forward to getting more students involved in community gym programs as the school year progresses" said Aileen.

A Heartfelt "Welcome Home"

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made a significant difference in my son's life and I will be forever grateful," commented Joanne.

By 1997, Joanne and Cindy worked with a local school district to create an in-district program that would serve AJ and other children as well. While this was a great step towards better program options for children with autism, the two realized that there was a much greater need in their local community to address.

On September 5, 2000, The Comprehensive Learning Center was officially established, with the help and support of countless donors and volunteers, including Joanne's extended family. But for Joanne, it was Cindy's talent, persistence and dedication to the field of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) that was the "rock" upon which CLC was built.

In 2005, Cindy made the difficult decision to leave CLC to concentrate on raising her son who was two years old at the time. This decision also included a move to Berks County so she could be closer to family. But her heart and mind were never far away from CLC and the children that she loved.

"Of course, I kept close ties to Joanne and many of the families, and have been amazed at the progress that has been made over the past 10 years," Cindy said. "I watched as more and more fundraising events were created and as the enrollment grew. I am just blown away by what a powerful and positive role CLC has become in the local autism community."

It was in early 2015 that Joanne and Cindy began having conversations about bringing her back into the fold. By late summer, it had become a reality, and CLC and its entire extended community had the opportunity to welcome Cindy back home. "Her love and support for this program is just unprecedented," explained Joanne. "It is a tremendous honor to have her serving as our executive director again. We are confident that Cindy will capitalize on her repertoire of skills and vast experience in the field of ABA and guide the future success and expansion of CLC. The children and families of CLC couldn't be in better hands!"

An Update on our CLC Students

Module A (*preschool age to kindergarten*)

Module A students have been doing an extraordinary job in the community. They are excelling in many areas such as community gym classes, dental and doctor exams, community outings with parents and bike riding at the local park.

Ben is expanding his recreational skills through riding a bike and playing games on the Smart Table with his peers.

Sammy is independently creating art projects through his coloring, cutting and gluing skills.

Sabrina is working on increasing her independence in learning to get dressed all by herself.

Ian is currently learning how to follow group directions as an active participant in morning meeting.

Luke O. is developing math skills such as learning to count.



Module B (*early elementary phase*)

Module B students have been working really hard to promote their independence. From working together during small group instruction to following a classroom gym routine, the students have done a remarkable job working with each other.

John is developing home living skills by learning to sort silverware and carry his meals to and from the table.



Brynn loves to go to the grocery store to purchase her food items for the week. She continues to develop food preparation skills at school.



Luke S. enjoys spelling, rhyming and reading. He is learning to answer a variety of questions based on the passages he reads.



Jamie expands his love for technology by creating PowerPoint presentations.



Meet Liam: Liam is 9 years old and our newest student in Module B. Along with his mom, dad and sister, Liam is very excited to be at CLC. He loves big trucks, electronics and tickles from his mom and his sister!



Module C (*mid-elementary phase*)

Module C began the school year with many exciting changes. The module moved into a new building as well as a new classroom. The students have transitioned seamlessly to their new setting all while enjoying getting to know the instructors in Module C.



Brian has recently started spontaneously requesting preferred items through an application on his iPad.



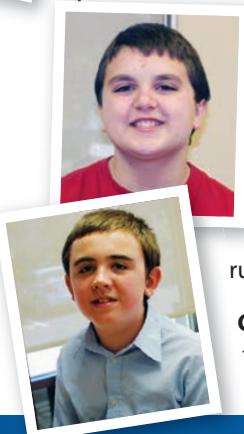
Sean loves books and is beginning to read in sentences from sight words he has learned.



Jack always seeks out opportunities to assist others. He is especially excited when presented with the chance to help with the younger students.



Tony is acquiring safety awareness skills in the community; he is learning to cross the street with an adult.



Brandon has recently shown an increased interest in engaging in physical activities. For example, he enjoys "breaking records" for time while running on the treadmill.

Connor B. is an all-star while transitioning from school to the bus at the end of the day.

Module D (*middle school phase*)

Module D students are spending time giving back to their community by volunteering at local non-profit organizations. They also enjoy extracurricular community activities such as going to the gym where they participate in the various programs offered.

Connor F. constantly gets rave reviews from his supervisors at work about his manners and work ethic.

Remi has improved her abilities in the areas of independent living and vocational skills. She is learning to answer the phone at home and performs scanning, electronic filing and shredding in her work setting.

Drake completes various responsibilities at a medical office including scanning authorization forms and doctors' order forms with minimal supervision.

Lucas started working multiple volunteer jobs this year. He loves using his natural gifts in a way he can contribute to the community.

Michael's volunteer work consists of making photocopies and collating documents at a local law firm plus packaging meals for shut-ins!

Patrick is excelling in multiple areas including creating power point presentations, reading current events and sharing the information he learns with adults.

Madison loves dancing with her friends, cheering for the Spartans football team and completing exercise videos.



Module E (*pre-graduation phase*)

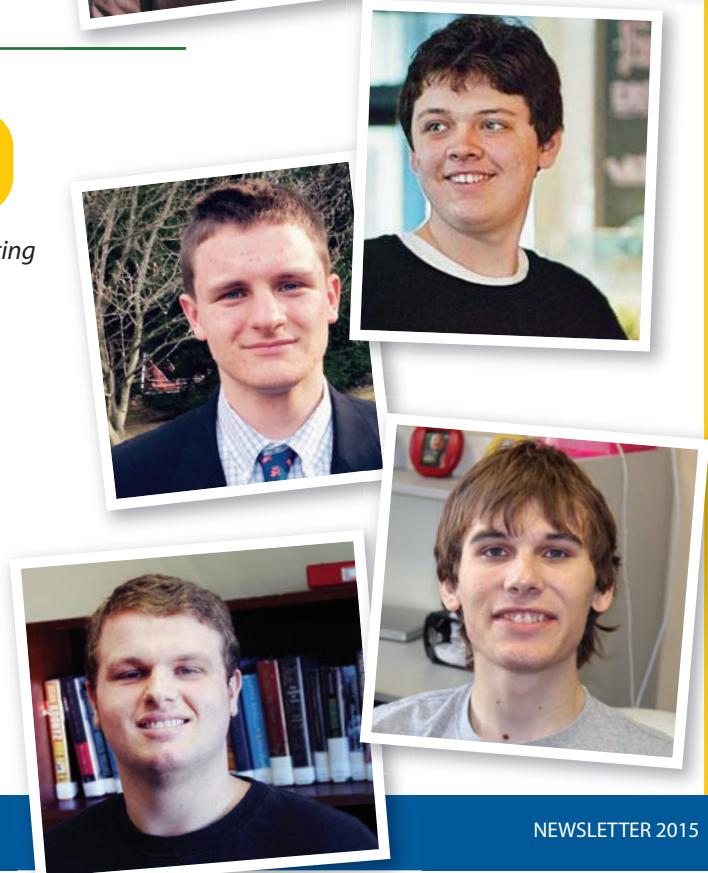
Module E is working on increasing their independence while completing various vocational tasks in multiple settings for longer durations.

Connor M. volunteers at three work sites performing a variety of tasks thus preparing him for the transition into CLC's adult program.

Ryan's responsibilities at local businesses continue to increase due to his competency of skills.

Will is increasing his time spent in the community targeting skills such as exercising at a nearby gym, grocery shopping and leisure activities at a local park.

Colin has recently volunteered at a local non-profit facility where he is sorting and packaging school supplies for a full 2 hours with no breaks.



A Look Back at our 2015 Campaigns and Events!



Annual Drive

Each December, CLC's Annual Drive marks the beginning of our fundraising efforts for the coming year. Once again in 2014, our supporters did not disappoint. Our mailing to over 6,500 individuals and companies brought in more than \$49,000. We'd like to thank all of the 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 2015**. Keep an eye out for our annual drive mailing during this special time of giving!



Texas Hold'em Tournament

Thanks to all who attended our Texas Hold'em Tournament on **January 24, 2015**, held once again at Giuseppe's Family Restaurant in Richboro.

Participants might recall that it was a frigidly cold night with the threat of more snowfall, but 90 determined poker players were in attendance and the competition heated up quickly! By midnight, there was one person left holdin' and not foldin'. Eric Smith was our champion for the evening, with honorable mentions going to Bill Edelman, Sandie Lehner, Mike Farrell and Ken Purpura.

As always, Tony Giaimo of Giuseppe's Family Restaurant was our gracious host (serving delicious food) and our friends at Tumbling Dice were our tournament directors. Special thanks to them as well as all of the players and volunteers who made AJF's first fundraising event of the year such a success raising over \$20,000.

Our 2016 Texas Hold'em will once again be held at Giuseppe's Family Restaurant on Saturday, January 23, 2016. Be on the lookout for registration information in the upcoming month!

Casino Night

Casino Night at St. Bede's is one of our most popular fund-raising events and this year, it proved itself a winner again. We had another year of record breaking sales with over 500 tickets sold raising more than \$61,000!

In addition to the thrill of the games, including black jack, roulette and craps, we had some exceptional prizes this year totaling over \$20,000, such as tickets to Philly's professional

sporting events, iPads, computers, designer handbags and tickets to a Taylor Swift concert!

Special thanks go out to our event sponsors, Gloria and Louis Esposito and Elise and Jeff Weisman, and all our volunteers who made this special night such a success once again.

Next year's Casino Night will be held on **April 16, 2016**, so mark your calendars!





AMRAP for Autism

Our second annual AMRAP for Autism Event was held on Saturday **April 25, 2015** at Central Bucks Crossfit of Ivyland, PA. This year, we had 75 teams competing for the top women's and top men's prizes. Crossfitters and non-Crossfitters alike were challenged to go through an exercise routine for "As Many Rounds as Possible" (where the acronym, AMRAP, comes from) to not only experience a great workout, but also raise money for individuals with autism.

Participants were treated to great food by the Grill Cheese Food Truck and over \$7,300 was raised. A special thanks to Mike & Kathy Weidner, owners of Central Bucks Crossfit, for donating their time and workout home to our great cause.

AJF Ride 4 Autism

This year marked the 8th Annual AJF Ride4Autism held on Saturday, **September 12th**, and once again, it was a record-breaker.

Thanks to the wonderful outpouring of support from all our riders, teams, volunteers and sponsors, we were able to raise over \$83,350. This is 75% more than the amount raised for the 2013 ride and 15% more than last year's ride; a testament to the growing popularity of this event.

Once again, Michael Jacobson/Team ISI was our top fundraiser, followed by The Blackthorn Rugby Club and Team Connor/Adam Brittain. But it is the effort and dedication of all our riders and volunteers which makes this event so special. Thanks to all and be sure to check your emails for an announcement about the September 2016 date for the AJF Ride4Autism.

Results of our 2016 Team Challenge:



First Place: Michael Jacobson Team ISI (\$8,000)



(Above) Second Place: The Blackthorn Rugby Bicycle Club (\$5,700)



(Left) Third Place: Team Connor Brittain (\$5,000)



AJF Golf 4 Autism

What better way to spend a crisp autumn Monday than playing 144 holes of golf to help raise funds for The AJ Foundation? That's precisely what Michael McCormick did (breaking his prior year's record of 120 holes) along with 117 other golfers on **October 19, 2015**.

This was our second year at Philmont Country Club and once again, an early frost delayed our first round. But our enthusiastic golfers didn't let it hold them back for too long as they quickly heated up the course with their marathon rounds of play. Behind leader Michael McCormick, who raised \$25,000 with his record breaking total, our next top three fundraisers were Lou Esposito at \$11,000, John Silverthorn at \$8,000 and Mike Feeney at \$5,000.

Together, over \$90,000 was raised, which matched last year's record and made the golf outing one of the highest profitable events in the AJ Foundation's fundraising history!

Be sure to save the date of **October 10, 2016** to join us again next year at the Philmont Country Club!



AJ Foundation

Empowering the Autism Community

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Mark Your Calendars for our 2015 Events!

Texas Hold'em Tournament:

January 23, 2016

Casino Night:

April 16, 2016

AJF Ride 4 Autism:

September 2016

Golf 4 Autism:

October 10, 2016

Here's a Sneak Peak at the New CLC Website!

We couldn't wait to share a "coming attraction".....a brand new website for CLC, which will be complete right after the first of the year.

Not only is the site a better reflection of the excellence and professionalism of our organization, it provides a number of added content to help both our current families as well as those who are interested in learning more about CLC and the programs we offer.

We firmly believe these enhancements will elevate CLC's exposure within the community and lead to additional resources to better serve our students and expand our program. We'll let you know as soon as the new site launches and will eagerly await your feedback!

www.clcschoolprograms.org



*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!*

