

Two Decades Behind Us; *Many More to Come!*

Like Abraham Lincoln said ... "In the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years."

As we approach the 20th year for The AJ Foundation For Children With Autism (AJF), I reflect back on the humble beginnings and the enormous unknowns when my son AJ was first diagnosed with autism. I only dreamed of the life I hoped he could have, and knew that I needed to do whatever necessary to add "life to his years." I never imagined he would be as independent and successful as he is today with full-time employment, many talents, a thriving social life and being actively engaged in his community.

When I watch AJ as an adult live his life with purpose, responsibility and happiness, I have deep gratitude for each of you who, through your gifts of time and resources, have helped improve AJ's and many other children's lives.

I also attribute his success largely to the skill, expertise and dedication of one of AJ's first teachers and our first and current Executive Director, Cindy Murphy. It was an honor to have joined forces with her in establishing The Comprehensive Learning Center (CLC) back in September of 2000. In those early years, our combined passion for creating quality, scientifically based education programs for children like AJ burned just as strongly as it does today, but our sphere of influence was small. That first year we had three students enrolled in our school, housed in a modular trailer, and were successful in raising \$5,000.

Today, our student body is 31 and our efforts this past year resulted in raising over \$340,000. We have successfully launched our adult program and currently provide services to five individuals in the community. We are in the early planning stages of a FOURTH geographic move to accommodate the growth of our program, and we continue to add to our exceptional instructional staff to support that growth.

(continued on back cover)



Welcome Leah Mehl, *CLC's New Co-Director of Education*

We are very pleased to welcome Leah Mehl as Co-Director of Education. Leah works alongside Aileen Tschirlig to meet the many needs in operating our education program.

For the past 14 years, Leah worked with children and adults with special needs and spent seven of those years with school-aged children with autism. In 2014, Leah was invited to present at the National Autism Conference on her work in using iPad technology for developing language skills for non-vocal individuals.

Leah obtained degrees in elementary and special education from Lebanon Valley College and Millersville University. She served as President of the Student Council for Exceptional Children and completed her master's research on Parental Involvement and Outcomes for Students with Autism.

We are thrilled to have Leah as the latest addition to our talented and dedicated staff!



Congratulations to CLC's 2016 Graduate: Connor McCann

On June 8, 2016, CLC held a graduation ceremony honoring Connor McCann. The students, staff and Connor's family came together to celebrate Connor's hard work, dedication and accomplishments as a student at CLC. Connor's successes have given him the opportunity to be a valued and welcomed contributor at four different work sites in the community, performing a variety of tasks including preparing and organizing for regularly scheduled events.

Connor started at CLC in January of 2008 when he was 12 years old, and has always been a fan of music, movies and dancing. He enjoys listening to music while he works, has attended all of CLC's school dances, and even got his own personal dance party to celebrate his graduation day!

Following graduation, Connor immediately joined CLC's new Adult Program. The staff at CLC is extremely proud of Connor and his accomplishments. His smile continues to light up the school and we feel fortunate to see him continue to thrive and grow with our program.



Another Outstanding Year



DECEMBER 2015: Annual Drive

Each winter, we conduct our Annual Drive Campaign by mailing holiday cards to more than 6,800 individuals and organizations who have been generously supporting our mission for many years. The 2015 Annual Drive contributed over \$38,000. Proceeds were used toward the purchase of computers and other facility expenses needed to accommodate our growing student population.

As the wonderful holiday season approaches, be on the lookout for our 2016 Annual Drive Card. We thank you in advance for your continued support and generosity. And, as always, we wish you and your family much happiness and many blessings throughout the holiday season and in the New Year.

JANUARY: Texas Hold'em Tournament

A January snowstorm of epic proportions postponed the first fundraiser of 2016, but on February 6th, 100 players placed their antes to see the "flops" and "rivers" at our annual Texas Hold'em Tournament.



Hearts raced and stakes grew with each hand, as everyone enjoyed fine hosting and excellent food from Tony Giaimo, owner of Giuseppe's Family Restaurant in Richboro, and a well-managed tournament by Tumbling Dice. This year's winner of all the chips was Richard Brittingham, followed by Gary Purpura in 2nd place, Rebecca Ortlieb in 3rd place, Barry Clipner in 4th place and Tim Mehl rounding things out in 5th place.

Special thanks to all players, table sponsors and volunteers for helping to raise over \$22,000 for the second consecutive year. Plans are underway for next year, so start practicing your poker face! Look for registration information on the website and be "all-in" at our 2017 Tournament event on January 28th.

APRIL: Casino Night

AJF's Casino Night event is always a sure bet! The 19th Annual Event was held on April 16th at St. Bede's Parish Center in Holland, PA. With 500 tickets sold, the fun and excitement spread across the roulette wheels, blackjack and craps tables, raising over \$78,000!

The house was packed with players who used their winnings toward silent auction gifts and fabulous raffle prizes that included an overnight stay at the Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa, Eagles, Flyers, Phillies and popular concert tickets, iPads, an iWatch, and tickets for "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert." Everyone worked up a hearty appetite and enjoyed a delicious dinner supplied by our good friends at Giuseppe's Family Restaurant.

As always, we are grateful for the generosity of Tumbling Dice, St. Bede's Parish and Giuseppe's Family Restaurant as well as our table sponsors, prize donors, attendees and volunteers. A special heartfelt thanks goes out to our event sponsors — the Esposito, Meyer and Weisman families!

Get your practice on so you can be hootin' and hollerin' around the craps table at next year's event on April 22, 2017.



for AJF Fundraising!

APRIL: AMRAP for Autism

Central Bucks Crossfit of Ivyland, PA once again hosted our third Annual AMRAP for Autism challenge on April 30th. Eighty teams of varying fitness levels challenged their endurance, fitness, and strength repeating an exercise routine for "As Many Rounds As Possible" to raise money for individuals with autism.

Trophies went to the 1st Place Men's and Women's teams, as well as Team Benner/Norris and Team Stuart for raising the most funds! This year's event mirrored last year's success, raising \$7,600.

Special thanks to Mike and Kathy Weidner, owners of Central Bucks Crossfit, for their donated hospitality, WTF Food Truck for the nourishment, and MBStix Apparel for the event support.



SEPTEMBER: AJF Ride4Autism

AJF friends and families pedaled it out for the 9th Annual AJF Ride4Autism event on Saturday, September 10, 2016. Participants of all ages and levels beat the 95°F heat to raise over \$96,000 as they made their way through scenic Bucks County, PA on four designated courses.

The "2016 AJF Team Challenge" ended in a tie with both teams raising \$12,000 toward our fundraising goal. The reigning champ, Team ISI Benefits (captain – Michael Jacobson) and Team Blackthorn Rugby Bicycle Club (captain – Allan Corless) accepted the AJF Team cup agreeing to share it throughout the year! Team Connor/Adam Brittain took 3rd place honors by contributing close to \$5,000.

Those who have participated know that it's the commitment and camaraderie between riders, sponsors and volunteers that makes this event so successful and why so many return year after year. A heartfelt thanks for your continued support! Be on the lookout for the announcement about our milestone 10th Annual Ride4Autism scheduled for September 9, 2017. We'll see you at the finish line!



OCTOBER: AJF Golf4Autism

The 20th Annual AJ Foundation Golf4Autism fundraiser held on October 10, 2016 at the Philmont Country Club was once again a huge success! Everyone in attendance enjoyed a BEAUTIFUL day full of sunshine, cool temperatures and unlimited fun.

An unprecedented number of golfers (120) came for a day on the links while showing their support for The AJ Foundation. Every golfer went home with gifts and memories. The annual tournament raised over \$100,000 towards continued support for our students and adult learners at The Comprehensive Learning Center.

The day began early for the marathon golfers with Michael McCormick breaking his prior year record by completing 160 holes and raising \$22,000! After registration and a hearty buffet lunch, players took to the course to post some impressive scores. Prizes were awarded for the top foursome, the closest-to-the-pin and longest drive contests.

THANK YOU to everyone who came out to golf and volunteer, and to those who donated raffle and auction items. A very special thanks to our many corporate and hole sponsors for their generous support in making this event a huge success.

Set your tee time for next year's event on October 9, 2017!

....“intensive and comprehensive state-of-the-art education and behavioral services based on the scientifically validated procedures of Applied Behavior Analysis”...

In the education of individuals with autism, Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) involves the highly disciplined application of learning principles and procedures based on scientifically validated behavioral studies. For our youngest students — where the foundation of all future learning must be established — great care is taken to ensure that our one-to-one learning approach (one student to one teacher) is complemented by individualized instruction.

Leah Mehl, CLC's Co-Director of Education, explains, “Each module has an assigned Trainer who is responsible for establishing the overall curriculum for students. The Trainer then works with each instructor to individualize the program to accommodate the unique needs and circumstances of each student.” The instructors are trained to bring an objective, analytical approach to observing each student's learning style

and motivation, and to also incorporate any facet of the student's family life that should be considered influential in his/her daily activities.

These observations are then factored into the student's lesson plan, which could include working in circle time, participating in a group activity, or learning to take turns and play together outside. This summer, the students also had the opportunity to interact with their siblings during two special fun days, “Water Play” and “Zoo Day,” where their social interaction and group play skills were applied.

Leah comments, “Everything that we do is about building an outcome and forming a foundation for the student to advance to the next level of independence, learning and social interaction.”



...“working closely with families through collaboration and training”...

CLC's Family Participation services are an integral part of each student's instructional curriculum, and provide families with the ability to be highly involved in their child's intervention. During regular home visits, family members are taught how to replicate procedures that are used during the school day so the child has consistency in how a new skill is learned or a certain behavior is modified.

These visits also provide an opportunity for parents to review their child's data that contains detailed graphs and information about all current skill acquisition programs and behavioral progress. This sets up an open, ongoing dialogue with the family about the student's current goals as well as to discuss future goals and action plans that can be supported both at home and at school.

“Our parents are deeply committed to being a part of their child's growth and development,” says Aileen Tschirig, Co-Director of Education. “Between the home and school visits, families are given the skills and instruction they need to confidently follow through with what is being taught at school.”

Instructors also accompany parents and their child to outside activities, such as attending medical appointments and community events or classes. One CLC parent commented on the value of family consultation for her family. “Not only does it improve our family life by increasing his level of independence but is also key in his continuing medical care. This service allows him to be more prepared for appointments, and having CLC staff available to assist during appointments has been monumental.”





Fulfilling Our Mission!

A great deal of thought and energy went into the development of CLC's mission statement. For the teaching staff, management and administrative team, it is more than just words on a page, written and then forgotten. Instead, these words are the embodiment of every program that we develop, every interaction that occurs within our walls and every thought, intention and promise that we make to our students and their families. Here are just a few examples of how we fulfill our mission throughout the school year.

The CLC Mission

The Comprehensive Learning Center's
individuals with autism from preschool

***intensive and comprehensive state-of-the-art
on the scientifically validated process***

Through the intensity of

working closely with families through
we ***prepare our learners to be as independent,***

so they may

contributing members in their communities



The CLC Instructional Team at the 2016 Autism New Jersey Conference.

on Statement:

mission is to maximize the potential of
ool through adulthood by providing

**art education and behavioral services based
dures of Applied Behavior Analysis.**

of our program and by

ough collaboration and training,

, self-sufficient, and socially adept as possible

y be active,

unities where they live, work, and play.



...*"prepare our learners to be as independent, self-sufficient, and socially adept as possible"...*

CLC's Transition Services give our students the skills to be independent, self-sufficient and socially adept, as well as provide them with the knowledge and abilities that can be applied to future paid employment. Students from Module E and F are currently volunteering their time — in exchange for the opportunity to gain valuable experience — at a local law firm, a family medical practice and a cardiology center. There they learn a variety of skills such as remaining on-task, problem solving, requesting assistance from a supervisor, data entry, filing, photocopying, and interacting with co-workers.

In addition, nine students are volunteering their time at two non-profit organizations where they also enjoy the chance to give back to the community. At Habitat for Humanity's ReStore, the students work to organize donations, set up displays and greet shoppers. At Cradles to Crayons, an organization which donates items to children from birth through preschool, the students clean and sort donations and package kits (like a Back-to-School kit) in an assembly line set-up.

"These organizations really rely on our program to help support their own missions," explains Amanda Fremont, Transition Services Trainer. "So while there are clear benefits in learning the skills necessary to work in a vocational setting such as working independently, increasing interaction skills, problem solving, and being a productive member of a team, the students also get the satisfaction of knowing that they are really helping others who may be less fortunate. That certainly builds their self-esteem and sense of civic pride."



...*"contributing members in their communities where they live, work, and play."*

The concept of "community" is very strong at CLC, and we incorporate community involvement into activities for our youngest learners, all the way through to those who are ready to graduate. Through our volunteer programs in both businesses and non-profit organizations, our students gradually develop the social interaction skills as well as real hands-on tasks and activities that they will draw upon throughout their future. But it was the formal introduction of CLC's Adult Program this year that has allowed us to more than deliver on this final phrase from our mission statement.

The adults we serve volunteer and/or are directly employed by eight local businesses or organizations, including a marketing research firm, fresh food market, fitness center, religious center, an accounting firm and two non-profit associations. Their responsibilities range from manual and electronic filing, filling grocery shelves, light cleaning duties, replacing outdated inventory, and even accounts payable processing assistance.

Explains Chris O'Toole, Director of Adult Services, "Our adult learners are considered highly valuable employees who demonstrate beneficial traits like dependability, attention to detail, enthusiasm for their work, and just a great overall team attitude." At Adelphi Research, where AJ has been employed for five years, the accolades are endless. "AJ is an extraordinary member of the Adelphi Research team," says Marlene, Global President, Adelphi Research. "Besides his great work ethic, AJ brings joy to the workplace. He is genuinely happy to be at work and has boosted employee morale through his attitude and palpable enthusiasm."

AJ was even asked to train a new staff member, Marlene's son who has autism, on how to download audio files and save them to the company's file server. "AJ was a wonderful teacher, patient and kind, and my son Alex really enjoyed the training," says Marlene.



AJ Foundation

Empowering the Autism Community

P.O. Box 234
Wycombe, PA 18980

Address Service Requested

NONPROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID PERMIT #11
SOUTHAMPTON, PA
18966

Mark Your Calendar for Next Year's Events!

Texas Hold'em Tournament:

January 28, 2017

Casino Night:

April 22, 2017

AMRAP:

April, 2017

AJF Ride 4 Autism:

September 9, 2017

Golf 4 Autism:

October 9, 2017



Continuing Our Mission

Families, Friends, Supporters & Volunteers:

Although much of this year's newsletter has been devoted to our progress in fulfilling CLC's mission over the past 19 years, our focus remains firmly fixed on how we can build on this foundation and expand our programs and resources to accommodate more individuals with autism.

Growth in our student population has dictated the need for a larger facility which we are in the process of researching as this year comes to an end. This student growth also requires us to invest in the professional advancement of our instructors and trainers. To that end, we were very pleased to be able to send our entire instructional team to the 34th Annual Autism New Jersey Conference on Friday, October 28th. More than 1,250 attendees gathered together to participate in expert-led workshops. Equally important to our staff's exposure to this professional enrichment is the chance to work with other professionals who share our passion for helping individuals with autism.

Your commitment of time and financial support is as important now as it ever was. You will soon be receiving our Annual Drive mailer which is one of our very important fundraisers. We thank you for your overwhelming support in the past and in advance for your generous response this year.

Sincerely,
Cindy Murphy, Executive Director

Two Decades Behind Us

(continued from front cover)

None of this would have been possible without the contributions of our families, friends, donors, volunteers, funding partners, community employers and of course, our students themselves, who continue to inspire us every day.

As we enter into our third decade, we have dedicated this newsletter issue to reflect on CLC's Mission Statement, which was carefully crafted to encompass our goals, processes and beliefs about the tremendous potential our program can unleash in all our students. The pages herein also provide a snapshot of our work, and highlight CLC successes, people and organizations that are leading our community forward in fulfilling our mission.

While there is still a great need in our community, your growing generosity and dedication is sure to put "life in *your* years," in addition to those of the children and families we serve. We thank you for all you do and look forward to celebrating our 20th anniversary with you and the entire CLC family.

Gratefully,
Joanne Corless, President, The AJ Foundation