



AJ Foundation

Empowering the Autism Community



The AJ Foundation and
Comprehensive Learning Center
2020-2021 Annual Report



Comprehensive
Learning Center
For Individuals with Autism

Dear Friends of The AJ Foundation,

It's hard to believe another year has flown by! We at The AJ Foundation continue to be so grateful for all the support you and your families have given us despite the challenges we continue to live with each day due to COVID. Because of your efforts, those served in our program, like my son AJ, were able to continue working towards their goals. For AJ, those goals were to continue living his day-to-day life of working for Adelphi Research and Giuseppe's Family Restaurant, attending CrossFit at his local gym, and playing the piano at night for his family. While most of us understand the difficulties of keeping motivated during a pandemic, it can be even harder for an individual with autism to not only find the motivation, but to access the resources needed to fulfill their goals and meet their milestones. Because of your help, our participants were able to receive the instruction and resources they needed to accomplish these day-to-day tasks and major milestones. Every day that our participants work toward these goals helps bring a richer life to them and their families.



When we opened CLC two decades ago, my family's focus was on helping our son and hoping to help other families along the way. We never dreamed that AJF and CLC would expand to serve as many students as it does today! I look at CLC with such pride and know that it's because of you that we are here. Thank you for believing in our vision and our mission! - Joanne Corless

Dear Comprehensive Learning Center Community,

As I look back over this past year, we have so many reasons to feel proud and grateful. We have had so much to celebrate! We welcomed new faces to our Education Program which means more children getting services they need! We saw some in our Adult Life Skills Program take on new and exciting job opportunities, forming new connections in our community. We saw more staff members excel in furthering their education and get credentialed in the science of ABA, and we welcomed new staff to the program. Additionally, we celebrated the graduation of Lucas and all he has achieved here in his time at CLC. On a personal note, my own son graduated, surrounded by family to celebrate his accomplishment. This really brings everything full circle in my own journey at CLC. My son wasn't even born yet when CLC first started. To see him graduate reminds me of the years of work CLC has accomplished for the autism community and how exciting it is to see our students graduate through their own journey.

Education is such a vital part of a person's growth and independence in life. I am so grateful that my son, our caring and committed staff, and our students and adults are getting the opportunity to reach their full potential. This would not be possible without amazing community members like the ones we have at AJF & CLC. Thank you for all you have done and continue to do!

Thank you! - Cindy Murphy



Graduations

Congratulations Lucas! This year we celebrated the graduation of Lucas H. on June 11, 2021. After 15 years in the CLC education program, Lucas was prepared and excited to enter the Adult Life Skills Program. In the months leading up to his graduation, Lucas participated in writing his graduation speech by sharing his favorite memories as well as skills he learned during his time at CLC. After the speech was written, Lucas practiced delivering his speech daily with appropriate posture and articulation. He also helped to prepare a PowerPoint presentation with pictures of himself over the years that was played at the beginning and end of the graduation ceremony. Additionally, he spent time meeting with Chris O'Toole, the Director of the Adult Life Skills Program, to learn more about the program. During this meeting, Lucas shared with Chris his own strengths, expectations, and job interests.



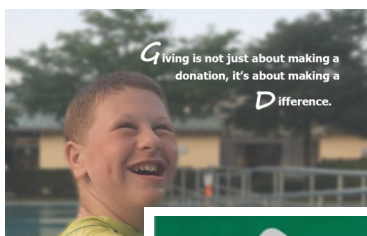
Celebrations - Fundraising in a Pandemic



The AJ Foundation held its 13th Annual **AJF Ride 4 Autism** event in September, 2020, raising over \$127,000!! Shout out to Team Blackthorn Rugby Bicycle Club who won the 2020 Team Challenge trophy!



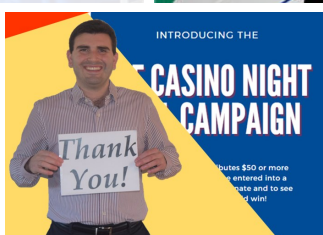
The AJ Foundation held its 24th Annual **AJF Golf 4 Autism** event in October, 2020. This event raised over \$115,000!! Special thank you to Makefield Highlands Club for hosting a wonderful day of fun and a delicious evening of food!



The **Annual Drive Campaign** was a success, raising over \$75,000!



The AJ Foundation hosts its first ever **Virtual Texas Hold'em Tournament** and raised over \$26,000! This fun-filled night offered the chance for participants to play from the comfort of their own home.



The AJ Foundation hosts its 2nd **Casino Night Mail Campaign** in lieu of the in-person event. This campaign raised over \$26,000 and offered great prizes to donors! Congrats to those who won!

Understanding Autism

When attempting to understand the life of an individual with autism, one should consider not only the aspects of his or her current day-to-day life, but also the journey to get there. We would like to share the story of a CLC student, Noah, who has made tremendous progress in his journey! To give the full picture of his story, we spoke with Noah's family and the team of staff who have worked with Noah since his enrollment at CLC in 2016.

"The first year of Noah's life was pure joy. He was healthy, his development appeared normal, and he was such a happy baby," says Noah's mom. "After his first birthday, we started noticing concerning behaviors like not making eye contact, not responding to his name, and the flapping of his hands and fingers. It became so frequent that it led us to a developmental pediatrician who then confirmed his autism diagnosis at 27 months old. A year later we learned that he was non-verbal.



As you can imagine, we did everything we could to get him help. We started with in-home therapy services for Speech, OT, and Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), while he also attended an early childhood special education preschool program. We did this for about 3 years. While in preschool, we were able to see what was working for him and what was not, which helped us determine the necessary qualities his next school must have in our search for placement at a kindergarten level.

We toured 13 different schools before we found CLC in December of 2015. We were hesitant about this visit at first because of the one-hour distance it was from our home, but our feelings quickly changed after completing the visit. The ABA program, the general school environment, professionalism of the staff, and high teacher retention were some of the qualities that attracted us most to CLC, qualities that were not being met by other programs we toured. Knowing what a great fit CLC would be for Noah and our family, we made the decision to enroll in the fall of 2016."

The beginning of a journey at CLC for Noah meant the hope for a brighter future for both he and his family. The work that Noah, his family, and his team of teachers at CLC would do over the next few years would not always be easy, but the outcomes would make it all worth it! Join us on a journey of the progress Noah has made since joining our Education Program at CLC.

When Noah started at CLC, his parents saw much progress. "The first major improvement we saw right as he started was the increase in his eye contact and his response to his name," says Noah's mom. "Since then, his successes to date have been using the toilet and dressing independently, tooth brushing, less need for hand flapping, tolerating some parts of a doctor or dental exam, and zipping his jacket."

As Noah was making great strides in many areas, he still needed an effective way of communicating his wants and needs due to his non-verbal diagnosis. An Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Device had been introduced early on in Noah's life, but time showed that due to the high-tech, computerized format of the device, the type of errorless teaching he needed was not achievable. As one can imagine, being unable to communicate was very frustrating for Noah and his family. Common to children with a diagnosis like Noah's, he began expressing his frustrations with challenging behaviors. To compound matters, Noah was diagnosed with a complicated medical condition which was clearly causing him discomfort and pain. Without the ability to communicate his feelings and needs to his family and teachers, his situation became even more challenging when

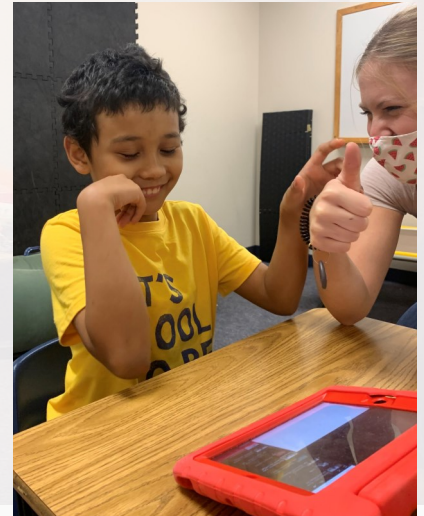
Understanding Autism

he began displaying aggressive and self-harming behaviors. This was a scary, sad, and extremely difficult time that took a part of Noah's childhood from him. But the team of staff at CLC, dedicated to improving Noah's situation, intensified their focus on giving him the tools needed to express himself and get his needs met.

This was a long and concentrated process with the most important part being the team approach. Noah's family and CLC staff were in constant communication every step of the way. His accomplishments showed just how paramount this team approach would be.

Noah's team at CLC and his family communicated daily so that they could see the whole picture of Noah's day-to-day experiences and, understand what was going on with him medically as well as the effect this all had on his challenging behavior. With a clear view of what was happening across both home and school, the team learned where the errors were occurring in Noah's attempts to use his AAC Device.

The first step to promote the type of errorless learning that Noah needed was to introduce a different AAC system that was not computerized. This system involved using picture icons that represented a few of his basic needs. Over time, Noah became proficient with his device and could independently communicate regardless of where he was. This was huge for Noah's success!



Noah, now having a way to communicate with his team at CLC, was able to tolerate demands, noises, and potential discomfort knowing he could express when things were becoming too difficult for him or when he wasn't feeling well during the school day. This helped his team to understand his needs and limitations within his classroom so that he could focus on academic skills and engaging with his peers. This was another major success for Noah and his family. "More memorable accomplishments came for Noah with his successful first movie theater trip and his participation in a group gymnastic class program with other peers." - Noah's mom.



Fast forward to today, where Noah is now making meaningful progress with his academic and independent life skills. He participates in school day activities with his peers, completes tasks at home with his family, and continues to build his communication using a more complex device. "Through our struggles, and a few losses along the way, the one thing that never wavered was the support from our team at CLC. They did not give up on Noah," says Noah's mom. "Today Noah is in a much healthier state, and we have no regrets in the healing journey we have chosen for him. Despite the setbacks, we are seeing an amazing comeback with his communication skills. We are so excited and looking forward to seeing his continued progress!"

"We at CLC could not be happier for Noah and his family. This is a success story for the ages; a family and school team working together with the same goals and outcomes. Way to go Noah!" - Noah's team at CLC



Employee Sponsored Campaign 3%

Casino Night 7%

Texas Holdem
Tournament 7%

AJF Ride 4 Autism 33%

AJF Revenue

\$384,553

Annual Drive
Campaign
20%

Golf 4 Autism 30%

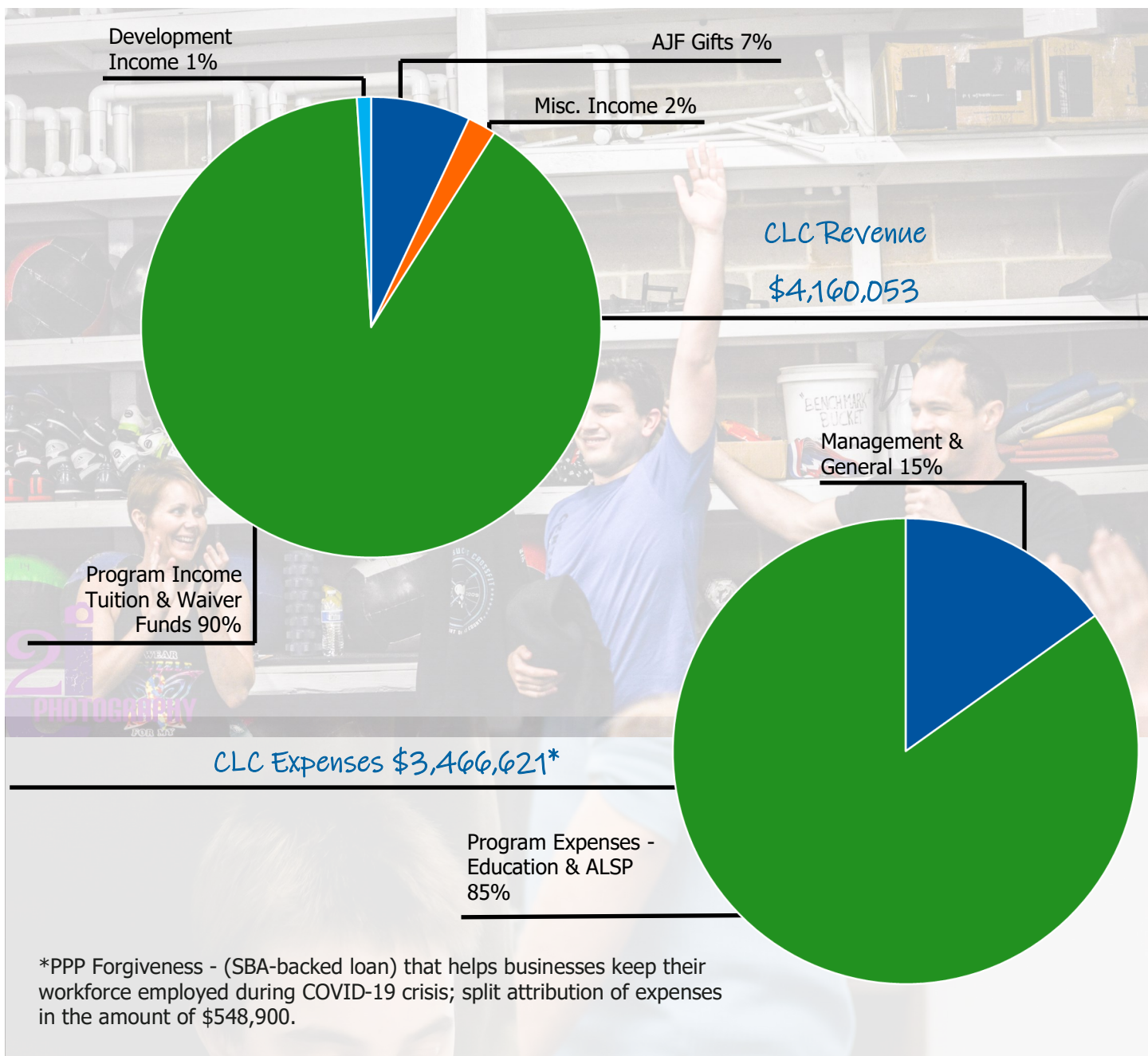
Management
& General 18%

AJF Expenses \$369,177

AJF Gifts for CLC 82%

The AJ Foundation For Children With Autism (AJF) is a non-profit organization formed by parents, family members, and friends of children with autism. Our mission is to support quality educational programs that are based on the principles of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and are dedicated to improving the lives of individuals with autism and their families within their communities.





The Comprehensive Learning Center (CLC) focuses on maximizing the potential of individuals with autism from preschool through adulthood by providing intensive and comprehensive state-of-the-art education and behavioral services based on the scientifically validated procedures of Applied Behavior Analysis.

Through the intensity of our program and by working closely with our families through collaboration and training, we prepare our learners to be as independent, self-sufficient, and socially adept as possible so they may be active, contributing members in their communities where they live, work and play.



We have so many to thank for yet another great school year.

Thank you to our event coordinators and volunteers, as well as the vendors who make these events possible. Thank you to our community partners who support our needs of volunteer work, vocational practice, and work placement for our students. And thank you to the community of supporters who help us spread the word!

Thank you for supporting our mission, students, and families in the 20-21 School Year!

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Thank you to everyone who made a donation to our 20-21 Fiscal year. No matter the size of your donation, every penny goes towards our mission. Your donations help bring more opportunities to the students of the Comprehensive Learning Center. We appreciate you!



Mark your calendars for our upcoming events!



AJF Virtual Texas Hold'em
Tournament
February 18, 2022



AJF Casino Night
April 23, 2022



AJF Texas Hold'em Tournament
May 21, 2022



AJF Ride 4 Autism
September 10, 2022



AJF Golf 4 Autism
October 17, 2022