



Focus on Phoenix

The Phoenix Center is a private nonprofit school committed to offering a well-integrated program focusing on the development and education of the whole child and his/her family. Our team approach provides diversified programming with the emphasis on student independence, social-emotional growth, career development and integrated employment opportunities. The Phoenix Center's primary goal is to assist students five to 21 years of age in developing skills which will maximize their adaptation to everyday life.

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Volume 14, Issue 1

Fall / Winter 2010

Student Spotlight

The Phoenix Center is proud to introduce Rachael S. as our featured star! Rachael came to the Phoenix Center four years ago. Now, at age 16, she is making strides and becoming more independent at home and at school.

Rachael's teacher, Lewis Odige reports "Rachael is doing very well in the classroom. Her behavior has improved and is under control. She's a good student and is working really hard."

Lewis and the staff who work with Rachael at the Phoenix Center also report that she is becoming much more social with them. She gives them a high five and says "hi". Rachael is also independently initiating conversations with staff members. This is a huge step for Rachael. Bebe Cherian, Rachael's case manager says "Rachael will stop me in the hall to say hello and give me her hand. She also decided to join a lunch group with me one day." These actions are something the staff at the Phoenix Center had not seen before.



Rachael has become quite adept at using her assistive communication device called a DYNAVox4. She began using the DYNAVox4 device three years ago. Before using the device, she had a difficult time communicating her wants and needs and as a result, her behaviors increased. Since beginning to use the device, Rachael is able to communicate her needs more clearly and her challenging behaviors have dramatically decreased.

Rachael is also participating in her first class, Morning Meeting, with minimal help from her one-to-one aide or teacher. She uses her DYNAVox4 to answer the questions about the weather, calendar, and season. Courtney Regula, a Speech Language Specialist at the Phoenix Center says, "Rachael does a very nice job participating in Morning Meeting. She needs little help from the staff to answer questions. It is definitely the highpoint of her day." Additionally, Rachael also uses her device during her occupational therapy sessions to identify the items needed for the task. She also uses it to sequence the steps to making the bed or doing the laundry.

Rachael is making excellent progress in Occupational Therapy as well. Mary Roeder, her Occupational Therapist, said "Initially Rachel would show problem behaviors when she was challenged. But as she became more comfortable with the tasks, the behaviors decreased. Now, she is more confident doing the laundry or making the bed and the challenging behaviors are gone. Rachael is very proud of herself and now at home uses a folding board to fold her pajamas and also helps her mom make the bed and tucks the corners in."

Rachael's great strides can be contributed not only to the staff at the Center, but also to her mother, who is very involved. Theresa S. attends every parenting workshop The Phoenix Center offers in order to help her daughter even more, "I always learn something I can use at home with my kids. It is a great service the Center offers for parents."

"Overall, I love the approach the Phoenix Center takes with my daughter and all of their students. They always say ok, I love you, but let's get to work! It is not the approach of let's give my daughter everything she wants and it is not too strict. It's just right," said Theresa.

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All of our students have abilities and disabilities and we will focus on their abilities rather than their disabilities.

Save the Date!
May 6, 2011
20th Anniversary Gala



**The Phoenix Center
Administrative Staff**

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Principal

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“Believe &
Succeed.
We cannot
change yesterday.
We can only
make the most
of today, and
look with hope
toward
tomorrow.

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A Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends and Supporters,

An anniversary is a day that commemorates and/or celebrates a past event. On **January 16th, 1991**, The Phoenix Center was incorporated. On **September 1st, 1991**, The Phoenix Center, started its first school year with **16 students** and **12 staff members**.

Within a few months, in January 2011, **The Phoenix Center will be celebrating its 20th Anniversary** with **142 students from 69 towns in nine New Jersey counties**.

We will be paying tribute to this wonderful milestone with a **Twentieth Anniversary Gala on May 6th, 2011** at the beautiful **Newark Club** with panoramic views of the New Jersey and New York skylines!

Looking back over the 20 years, the Phoenix Center has had several milestones. In **1991**, it was housed in a 13,000 square foot building in West Paterson. Outgrowing this facility, in **1996**, we moved to Little Falls into a 22,000 square foot building. In the beginning of the new millennium, **2001**, we moved into our current and permanent location, a 44,000 square foot building in Nutley. Through the years, our programs have continued to improve and expand. Some highlights are our **Supported Employment Program** which was approved by the New Jersey Department of Education in **1993**. We were the first private school in the state to receive such approval. Also, in **1993**, we started our **Community Based Instruction Program** which moves the classroom into the community. Ahead of our time, we forged relationships with area businesses, restaurants and libraries and exposed our students to real-life functional activities in the community. In **1997**, before inclusion was a “buzz word” in educational circles, we partnered with our sending public school districts to **develop an Inclusion Program**. Each year since then, we have included two to five students on part-time or full-time schedules back into their public school settings. In **2003**, Phoenix Center became an **NJDOE-approved testing site** for NJASK, GEPA, and HSPA. In **2004**, to insure the care, safety, security and welfare of all of our students and staff, the entire staff was trained in the **Non-violent Crisis Intervention Training Program**.

We have also enriched our academic programs by providing recreational, life skills and extra-curricular activities. Some of these include **The Restaurant Program, Percussion Ensemble, Therapeutic Horseback Riding, a fully equipped Media Center, Drama Club, DIR-Bridge Program, and an Augmentative Alternative Communication Device Lending Library**. All of these programs and other additions (a complete list of all of our milestones can be found on our website www.phoenixcenterinc.com) have been made possible through the generous donations and contributions of our individual supporters, corporations, foundations, and fund raising events like our upcoming 20th Anniversary Gala. To all of our past and future supporters, and especially our parents and sending districts, we owe a world of gratitude.

In closing, as I reflect on the past 20 years and all we have accomplished, I would like to compare our efforts to the story of the miners and rescue workers at the San Jose Mine in Chile. As a speech pathologist and special educator for more than 30 years, if there is one thing I have learned, it is that having a child with a disability is an unexpected and unanticipated event. Nurturing, raising, loving and educating that child and his/her siblings is an extremely challenging job which requires much courage, strength and hope. Sometimes, like those miners who were trapped underground for eight weeks, our parents' journey can be dark and scary. They see no light at the end of the tunnel. I like to think of our staff as the rescue workers, scientists, engineers, and idea people who develop and create programs and services for our students and their families. We, like the rescue workers in Chile provide light at the end of the tunnel. We believe in our students, research new strategies, provide hope and make a difference. It is curious, don't you think, that the name of the rescue capsule was **Phoenix?** I don't think that was a coincidence.

Gratefully,

Dr. Geri Gibbia



Volt Fitness Program

In the Spring of 2010, the Phoenix Center selected nine students to sample a new community-based exercise program for six weeks at VOLT FITNESS in Glen Rock, NJ. The program with VOLT FITNESS featured a non-traditional approach to exercise using an interactive fitness circuit specifically designed for children. "The VOLT FITNESS Circuit combines video games and fitness equipment to deliver a fun workout for each student that is also effective" says Evan Carlson, a co-founder of VOLT.

The result of the six week program was excellent. The students felt great and did not realize that they were working out. The circuit at VOLT FITNESS has ten 12'x20' areas with a recumbent bike, row machine, abdominal machine, stepper, motorized rock wall, agility training device, Dance, Dance Revolution platform, two stations with a light up tower and wall for tapping, and a trampoline in combination with the Wii gaming system. The creators made each area "fun" with the technology they incorporated. As the children ride the bike or use the rowing machine, they are "racing" on a video screen. As a result, they do not realize they are also exercising.



Student Adam T. playing Dance, Dance Revolution with VOLT FITNESS co-founder Evan Carlson.



Donnie C. participating in an interactive workout.

"It is a wonderful complement to the other therapeutic programs we offer at the Phoenix Center," said Dr. Gibbia. Most of the students at the Phoenix Center are not motivated by traditional gym activities. But all of them have an affinity for technology, specifically video games. VOLT FITNESS's combination of fitness and technology make it a perfect fit for students on the Autism Spectrum, as well as students with other developmental disabilities. Students, who don't enjoy gym class, or any physical activity, really enjoyed the program. "I'm in first place! I'm in first place!" said Zion, a student at the Center, while exercising at VOLT FITNESS. He was working really hard without realizing he was exercising.

But the experience with VOLT FITNESS did not stop after the six week trial. The Phoenix Center was awarded a grant from Seton Hall University's School of Health and Medical Sciences for the collaboration.

The Phoenix Center has a long history with Seton Hall University. The Center has hosted interns from the Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, and Speech Language Pathology disciplines for more than five years. Additionally, The Phoenix Center collaborated with Seton Hall University's department of Physical Therapy and had doctoral-level physical therapy interns collaborate with the Physical Therapy department, as well as the school nurses at The Center. They piloted a new program called Courageous Pacers. The program took baseline readings of students' heart rate, blood pressure, and weight. It was a very successful program, with six classrooms participating in the program. The success of this program as well as the great relationship with Seton Hall University led the Phoenix Center to explore more opportunities to meet the specific physical fitness needs of our students.

As a result, The Phoenix Center was able to select 60 students who will benefit from the exercise program. These selected students are participating in groups of ten for eight week sessions at VOLT FITNESS. So far, the new students are having a great time. Eileen Mulcahy, an organizer of the program says "VOLT has opened doors of interest in exercise and activity to a wide range of students who may not typically experience an exercise program in their daily lives. They are working out, playing games and remaining engaged in these modified activities for an hour straight. The five minute pace is quick and keeps every activity interesting and fun. The ease of use and the modifications makes this the ideal activity tailored to our students. I am amazed each week as the learning curve shrinks and students are getting on or off equipment easier and learning exactly what to do at each station. I am looking forward to the continuation of the expansion of this program reaching so many students this school year!"

Phoenix Center staff are working side by side with VOLT FITNESS employees as well as Seton Hall University students in implementing the exercise program. It gives the students from Seton Hall a new opportunity to implement occupational, physical, and speech-language therapy goals.

This collaboration among The Phoenix Center, VOLT FITNESS, and Seton Hall University is another example of how the Center is always looking for new ways to integrate educational and therapeutic programs focusing on the development of the whole child and his / her family. In particular, the program aims to increase independent functioning, improve health and wellness, and encourage a healthy lifestyle for students and their families.



Karell is trying to beat his opponent while riding a stationary bike.



Fundraising / Development

May 6, 2011 20th Anniversary Gala

The 2010-2011 school year marks the 20th Anniversary of the Phoenix Center. To commemorate that milestone, The Phoenix Center will be celebrating with a **20th Anniversary Gala** on **Friday evening May 6, 2011** from **7 p.m.-11:30 p.m.** The festive event will be held on the 22nd Floor of the beautiful Newark Club, which provides glittering vistas all the way to the skyline of Manhattan!

The event organizers, Maria Sedlack, Paul Panicali and Chris Ruymen, along with a stellar committee made up of Phoenix Center parents and Board Members, are busy planning and soliciting sponsors for this fabulous event. The evening will include cocktails, a sit-down dinner, dancing, silent auction, 50/50 raffle and anniversary journal, and is set to raise \$100,000 for the Phoenix Center's programs. Sponsorship packages are \$5,000, \$3,500 and \$2,500. Individual tickets will also be available. For more information on sponsorship opportunities or to volunteer, see our website at www.phoenixcenterinc.com or email nrahaim@phoenixcenterinc.com.



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THE PHOENIX CENTER CURRENTLY SERVES STUDENTS FROM EIGHT COUNTIES IN THE FOLLOWING NEW JERSEY SCHOOL DISTRICTS: Belleville, Bergenfield, Bloomfield, Boonton, Butler, Carlstadt/East Rutherford, Clifton, Cranford, Cresskill, Dover, East Orange, Elmwood Park, Fair Lawn, Glen Ridge, Hanover Park, Harrison, Hasbrouck Heights, Hawthorne, High Point Regional, Hoboken, Irvington, Jersey City, Kearny, Kinnelon, Lakeland Regional, Leonia, Lindon, Livingston, Lodi, Manchester Regional, Middlesex, Millburn, Montclair, Montville, Morris Hills Regional, Morris School District, Mt. Olive, Newark, New Providence, North Arlington, North Bergen, Nutley, Park Ridge, Pascack Valley Regional, Parsippany, Passaic, Passaic Valley Regional, Patterson, Perth Amboy, Pequannock Township, Pompton Lakes, Ramapo/Indian Hills, Ramsey, Ridgefield, Ridgefield Park, Ringwood, Rochelle Park, Rockaway, Roselle, Roxbury, Secaucus, Tenafly, Union City, Vernon, Verona, Wayne, West Essex Regional District, Westfield, West Milford, West Morris Regional, West New York, West Orange, Westwood Regional.