



# 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.

The Phoenix Center, Inc.  
16 Monsignor Owens Place  
Nutley, NJ 07110  
Phone: (973) 542-0743  
Fax: (973) 542-0687  
www.phoenixcenterinc.com

Volume 13, Issue 1

Fall / Winter 2009

## Student Spotlight

The Phoenix Center is proud to introduce Vir M. as our featured star. Vir has been enrolled in the Phoenix Center since March of 2002. He is an amazing young man who has made remarkable strides at our school.



Lynn Abelson, Vir's speech language pathologist, was fortunate to begin working with him when he first arrived at the Phoenix Center. Speech and language sessions focused on expressive language and social communication skills. Shira Marks, Vir's occupational therapist, used sensory integration as an approach to address body awareness, motor planning, attention, focus, and awareness of his environmental surroundings. These goal areas are foundational skills necessary to actively and effectively participate in age appropriate social groups and settings.

Vir's excellent manners, strong memory skills, willingness to work hard, sensitivity, friendliness, and good sense of humor were always apparent. However, it soon became obvious that Vir needed another approach to help him realize his potential and to express his needs, problem solve, create and share his ideas, and engage in basic social interactive exchanges. In the summer of 2005, The Phoenix Center's Bridge team embraced the DIR® (Developmental, Individual-Difference, Relationship-based) model as the program's foundation for intervention. The program was funded by the John Victor Machuga Foundation. This exciting and innovative model was developed by Drs. Stanley Greenspan and Serena Wieder. It involves using social interactions to help the student regulate feelings and emotions. Students learn to engage with other individuals, share attention, communicate with intent and think creatively. When the team decided to pilot the DIR® model with four students, Vir's name was on the top of everyone's list. Vir was chosen based on his potential to benefit from this approach and his parents' willingness to work collaboratively with his teachers and therapists.

Vir has made notable gains in initiating and maintaining a conversation. His teacher, Kelly Horst, says "Vir has always had an amazing sense of humor, but, he is more verbal now. He is able to joke around and hold conversations with his peers." In addition, Vir has become more spontaneous, self-reliant., and it has shown significant growth in his ability to problem solve, connect ideas, express feelings, and participate in social competitive games. Vir has become more aware of the concept of competition and is beginning to appropriately display emotions related to winning and losing. Vir's increased self-confidence shines through, especially when he performs beautiful piano solos at our school concerts.

Vir's mother, Sunaina, is a tremendous proponent of the DIR®-Based Bridge program. Her intelligence, creativity, and insightfulness have made this partnership a very enriching one. Sunaina and close family members have observed the following positive changes in Vir.

- "His ability to focus and attend during his piano lesson has improved a lot. Vir doesn't read music so he has to watch and listen to what his teacher plays and then reproduce it."
- "Close family members have remarked on how calm and composed Vir is compared to just a few years ago. He's mature and seems surer of himself."
- "On our most recent trip to India, there were very nice interactions and simple communicative exchanges between Vir and his grandparents."
- "He is much more aware of his environment and displays problem solving skills around the house. For example, if kitchen items are running low, he takes the initiative to travel to the basement to refill those items."
- "He definitely has a sense of self. He wants to be independent and is proud of when he is complimented on his work."

Student growth and development such as Vir's emphasize the impact not only on customized programming, but also of the tremendous importance of positive relations between parents and staff.

### Inside this issue:

Student Spotlight	1
A letter from the Executive Director	2
Professional Development Update	3
Yoga Program	3
SMARTBoards in the Classroom	3
Fundraising / Development	4

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



**The Phoenix Center  
Administrative Staff**

**Geraldine Gibbia, Ph.D.**  
Executive Director

**Douglas A. Berrian, Ed. D.**  
Director Personnel /  
Staff Development

**Julie Mower, M.A. Ed.**  
Principal

**Audrey Poggioli, M.A. Ed.**  
Assistant Principal  
Curriculum and Instruction

“Whoever is  
happy makes  
others happy  
too.”

~Anne Frank

**The Phoenix Center  
Board of Directors**

**Rick Claydon  
Rosemary LaGamma  
Karen McNamara  
Maria Sedlack  
John Siracuse  
George Spina  
George Reinhardt  
Karen Reinhardt**

## A Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends of the Phoenix Center,

**Even if something is left undone, everyone must take time to sit still and watch the leaves turn.\***

The beginning of a new school year is always very hectic...in fact, for most educators, it is nonstop. New procedures to learn, classrooms to organize, children’s names to learn, parents to meet, bulletin boards to decorate, student files to read, IEP’s to review, core curriculum content standards to learn, work binders to create, lessons to plan, materials to develop, the list goes on and on. In the midst of all this, it may appear to be impossible; yet, we must take time *to stop, to sit still and watch the leaves turn*, especially, during this beautiful autumn season.



The Phoenix Center’s greatest *natural resource* is its staff of dedicated and passionate individuals who try to live the Center’s Core Values every day. At the beginning of the Phoenix Center’s 19<sup>th</sup> year, these values bear repeating:

- Each learner is someone’s daughter, son, brother, sister, niece, nephew, cousin, grandchild and as such, the learner is respected and loved.
- We look at our learners as individuals with abilities, not disabilities.
- We conduct ourselves with honesty and integrity at all times.

We live the four principles of the **FISH!** Philosophy: *Choose your attitude, Play, Make someone’s day, and Be present.*

To help our staff live the core values and *take time to sit still and watch the leaves turn*, we invest in them. We conduct weekly team meetings, share monthly birthday breakfasts, offer wellness activities to nurture their spirits, such as chair massage days and hands-on creative activities and we provide ongoing professional development on and off-site to continue to develop their minds.

As the saying goes: *To teach is to touch a life forever.* As we begin this new school year, we are grateful for our staff—administrators, teachers, instructional aides, related service providers, consultants, nurses, office personnel, and our custodians. Together, they make the Phoenix Center what it is... a caring community that challenges its students to become the best they can be.

We are also thankful to our sending school districts and of course, to our parents who entrust their children to us. We do not take this responsibility lightly. We look forward to a productive and busy school year and to those times during which we can recharge as we *sit still and watch the leaves turn*.

Best Wishes,  
Dr. Geri Gibbia

\*Elizabeth Lawrence in **Taking Time To Just Be.** Helen Exley  
Giftbooks, 2005, Spenser MA.

## Upcoming Holiday Events...



- The Phoenix Center’s Holiday Concert will be held on December 18th at 12:00pm. Snow date for the concert is December 21st.
- Santa is coming to the Phoenix Center to bring Holiday cheer to the students on December 23rd.

## Professional Development Update

In an effort to allow staff to create customized approaches for our students, we have established a stronger training component. The Phoenix Center is proud to announce that Dr. Doug Berrian, one of the co-founders of the center, has taken on a new role: the Director of Personnel / Staff Development. This position gives Dr. Berrian the opportunity to conduct workshops focusing on training the Phoenix Center's teachers, employment specialists, and instructional aides. The focus of Dr. Berrian's new role is to educate the staff on aspects of their job that will make them more proficient and ready to help students. Dr. Berrian follows a schedule that allows him to meet with small groups of classroom teachers for two hours to discuss important issues in the classroom. During these times, the topics include ways to integrate technology, new behavior techniques, and how to challenge students academically. In addition to meeting with the classroom teachers, Dr. Berrian also meets with classroom staff and employment specialists for one hour to train them on various topics related to their day to day tasks. The training also consists of classroom observations. Dr. Berrian will visit classrooms to see how the Phoenix Center staff is implementing and integrating the topics and techniques previously discussed in training meetings.



Dr. Berrian's training program offers valuable lessons from an experienced educational administrator who has been teaching college courses on this subject since 1984. His goal is to share his knowledge, as well as, spark interest in learning new ways to help our staff grow more at the Phoenix Center. Dr. Berrian says "My hope is that I can inspire staff to continue learning and enjoying the climb."



*Students participating in Yoga with their instructor, Karin Wynne.*



## The Yoga Program

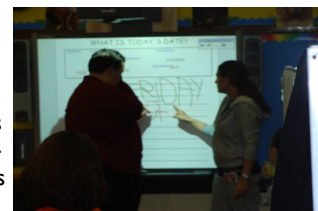
At the Phoenix Center, we are always looking for new ways to improve the health and well-being of our students. We know that yoga can be extremely beneficial for increasing flexibility and improving balance, strength, and focus. Due to the vast health benefits yoga offers, we are excited to announce our new yoga program at the Phoenix Center.

Karin Wynne, one of the Phoenix Center's social workers, received her certification last spring to teach yoga to children with special needs through "Yoga for the Special Child". This past September, Karin began to use her training to teach small group yoga classes of four to six students at a time. This therapeutic program can be used with students with autism, cerebral palsy, Down Syndrome, ADHD, and students with learning disabilities. The students are learning to practice yoga poses that will increase body awareness, strength, and flexibility. They will also work on breathing exercises, eye exercises, deep relaxation techniques, and music and sound therapy. Aside from being a lot of fun for our students, some of the additional benefits will be increased mental clarity, emotional stability, greater concentration, balance, and self-confidence.

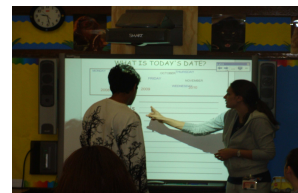
## SMARTBoards in the Classroom

The Phoenix Center installed new SMARTBoards in two classrooms after receiving a grant from the Catholic Human Services Foundation. The two SMARTBoards are excellent additions to the two classrooms, and the teachers are ecstatic to be able to use them with their students. The SMARTBoard is an interactive whiteboard. It is a large, touch-controlled screen that works with a projector and a computer. The projector puts the computer's desktop image onto the interactive whiteboard, which acts as both a monitor and an input device. Users can write on the interactive whiteboard in digital ink or use a finger to control computer applications by pointing, clicking and dragging, just as with a desktop mouse.

Michelle DiDonato, a teacher at the Phoenix Center says "Providing the students with access to technology such as the SMARTBoard has truly made an impact on their motivation to learn. Because the SMARTBoard makes virtually every activity an interactive experience, the students are more actively involved in their learning. Students who were struggling to manipulate writing tools, are now finding success in using their finger or hand to mark their answers. Students who were struggling to focus on the work presented to them in worksheet form are now showing an improvement in their attending skills as they can focus on the same worksheet as their peers on a larger scale. The students are truly enjoying and growing from the opportunity to use the SMARTBoard technology." Because the SMARTBoard is so engaging, it can hold the attention of all our students with minimal redirection. It offers many advantages to teaching our students with special needs.



*Student using the SMARTBoard to write the weather.*



*Student using the SMARTBoard to match words.*



### Fundraising / Development

**Annual Appeal:** Last year's annual appeal theme came from the movie, *Miracle on 34th Street*... "Faith is believing in something when common sense tells you not to." Because of the faith we had in all of you and you had in us, we had a very successful appeal. So, look out for your Annual Appeal request in the mail in the next few weeks. While the Phoenix Center receives public support from the school districts that place students at the Center, it must supplement the tuition these school districts provide due to the increasing costs of special education programs and the budget constraints of the sending districts. We still believe...

**Honorarium and Memorial Gifts:** Honorarium and Memorial gifts are a great way to pay tribute to a special person especially around the holidays. Printable donation forms can be found on our website at [www.phoenixcenterinc.com](http://www.phoenixcenterinc.com).

**2009 Holiday Gift Giving Program:** We invite you to join local businesses, corporations, and community groups in helping us ensure that our students receive some special gifts this holiday season. If you and/or your group are interested in purchasing some gifts for our students, we will provide you with the names of the students and their wish list items. You and/or your group can purchase and wrap the items and either deliver them to the Phoenix Center or we can arrange for pick-up during the first week in December. If you would like to participate in or receive more information about our Holiday Gift Giving Program, please contact Karen McNamara, our Holiday Gift Program Chair, at [kbmac411@aol.com](mailto:kbmac411@aol.com)

**GoodSearch.com: Go to [www.GoodSearch.com](http://www.GoodSearch.com).** Designate The Phoenix Center as your charity. Set [www.GoodSearch.com](http://www.GoodSearch.com) as your Home Page on your home and work computers and use it for all your web searching.



The Phoenix Center, Inc.  
16 Monsignor Owens Place  
Nutley, NJ 07110

**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.