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

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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Student Spotlight

The Phoenix Center is proud to introduce one of its current stars, Allen K. Allen came to us in 2003 when he was a seventh grader and has grown tremendously as a student, friend and citizen at The Phoenix Center. Allen is now preparing to graduate in June.



Allen has been doing a fabulous job at the Phoenix Center and at his after school job. He follows all four of the Phoenix Center's FISH! Principles: play, be present, make someone's day, and choose your attitude. Last year, the teaching staff selected Allen as a Peer Model and Physical Education Aide for the younger gym classes. In that position, he set up the equipment and interacted with the students, teaching them skills like throwing and hitting a ball. Donning a Phoenix Center tee shirt, he currently maintains this position.

Allen enjoys science and art classes and he is an "amazing artist." When he's not at school or working, Allen spends his free time being with friends, riding his bike, and playing sports outside, especially football.

During his years here at the Phoenix Center, Allen has developed a resume. He has worked in a paid position at the Montclair Public Library, The Phoenix Center's Monthly Restaurant Program and most recently, at Five Below. There he unpacks boxes, stocks the shelves, and helps customers locate items. Allen has also learned to save his money and use it to reach his goals – this past summer it was a new bicycle! He has really excelled at Five Below and because of that was given additional hours and a raise! His supervisor, George Settimo, the store manager, says, "Allen works better than other employees at the store. He is a wonderful worker and never needs to be given directions twice. He's a great listener and he clearly loves to work and work hard. I always know he'll do a great job with whatever I ask him to do."

Allen's father, Marvin, also sees how he has grown since coming to The Phoenix Center, saying, "Allen used to have trouble with being disruptive in class at his public school. The Phoenix Center has taught him to be a very good listener. Now he enjoys interacting with people and they enjoy spending time with him too."

Ciara Dagostino, Allen's classroom teacher says, "Allen is a joy to have in the classroom because he loves to do well and help his fellow students. The self-esteem, confidence and maturity he has developed over the years at The Phoenix Center have made Allen a wonderful role model for his peers." We feel that he will be an excellent member of his new community after he leaves our school community.

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. Kudos to Allen's teachers and to Allen for accomplishing this goal!



**The Phoenix Center
Administrative Staff**

Geraldine Gibbia, Ph.D.
Executive Director

Douglas A. Berrian, Ed. D.
Education Director

Julie Mower, M.A. Ed.
Assistant Principal
Administration

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

“Always bear in
mind that your
own resolution
to succeed is
more important
than any other.”

~Abraham Lincoln

**The Phoenix Center
Board of Directors**

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

A Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends of the Phoenix Center,

It seems like only yesterday that we were all preparing for Y2K. Now, it's nine years later, and we are in the midst of our 18th year. We are already making preliminary plans to celebrate our Twentieth Anniversary in 2011. Imagine!!



While it's been cold outside, our hearts have been warmed by the kindness and generosity of all of you. I want to thank everyone who made our end of the year celebrations so special for our students and their families.

Seeing the sparkle in a child's eye as she opens a package and watching the pride in a parent's smile as he watches his son sing and dance on stage are truly gifts. Also, I express my gratitude to all of you who have supported our Annual Giving Campaign. To date, we have raised over \$20,000! This is certainly miraculous during these times and it gives credence to the quotation from The Miracle on 34th Street, "Faith is believing in something when commonsense tells you not to." We believed in your kindness and you, in turn, by your support, have shown us that you believe in us. We do not take this lightly. It inspires us to continue to research and provide programmatic excellence to our students and their families.

Following our mission to empower our students and assist them in becoming independent and contributing members of society, we have focused our energy this year on improving and expanding our Transition and Employment Services. As of this writing, we have students working or volunteering in 26 community sites. These include the American Red Cross, JP Home Arama, Mike's Feed Farm, Montclair Public Library, St. Mary's Hospital, Total Expressions, St. Joe's Nursing Home, Staples, Stop and Shop, Five Below, Parisi Fitness Center, Courtyard Marriott, Parisi's World Gym, The Nutley Public Library, YMCA of Ridgewood, the offices of Dr. Martin Neilan and Dr. Angelo Bellardini. We are very grateful to all of the employers who see the value in hiring individuals with disabilities.

On the political scene, the New Jersey Department of Education has issued regulations describing the role of the new Executive County Superintendent which we feel will have a negative impact on the IEP (Individualized Education Plan) placement decision-making process, and may lead to the expansion of, and increased reliance on, self-contained programs operated by "public regional programs." We believe this could negatively impact students' ability to attend The Phoenix Center and other private schools for students with special needs. A meeting is tentatively scheduled in Trenton on **Thursday, February 26, 2009**, to discuss this topic. The Phoenix Center encourages parents of our students as well as supporters to attend the meeting in Trenton. We feel it is important for our students' parents and supporters to let legislators know the significant positive impact that private educational environments have on students' development. Students in Approved Private Schools for the Disabled are totally integrated into the curriculum. They don't sit on the sidelines to watch a basketball game. They ARE the team. They don't set up the chairs for a theater performance; they ARE the actors and dancers. For most of our students, we ARE the least restrictive environment, and our students flourish! If you are interested in attending this meeting or if you'd like to learn more about the legislation, please log onto asah.org. There you will find updates on the legislation and advocacy suggestions. Or, you may contact me at (973) 542-0743 or by email at dr gibbia@phoenixcenterinc.com.

My best wishes for a wonderful spring!
Dr. Geri Gibbia

Phoenix Center Fundraiser—February 24, 2009



In honor of **National Pancake Day** the Knights of York* organization will be hosting a fundraiser to benefit The Phoenix Center at **Brunchies Restaurant & Cafe**, home of the best pancakes in New Jersey. The fundraiser will take place on **Tuesday, February 24th from 8:00 a.m.—11:00 a.m.** Brunchies Restaurant & Café is located in Hackensack, NJ, at 450 Hackensack Avenue.

*The Knights of York is nonprofit organization dedicated to enriching the lives of children in need. The organization meets routinely during the year to plan and host special event fund raisers.

The Restaurant Program

The Phoenix Center's Monthly Restaurant Program teaches students to prepare food around a different theme each month. The participating students then serve the food to other students and faculty who purchase lunch as they would at any other restaurant. The Restaurant Program serves over 100 students and staff during two lunch shifts. The students participating in the Restaurant Program do everything from shopping for, preparing, cooking and serving the food, to weighing salads from the salad bar, running the cash register, decorating the restaurant in the appropriate theme, setting the tables and cleaning up after the program. Students complete applications, apply and interview for various jobs within the restaurant. Other students may partake in the luncheon specialties and answer trivia questions for each theme as they wait for their orders. The Restaurant Program involves all related service providers in its various aspects.



Students prepare pizza for an Italian food themed Restaurant Program day.

The Monthly Restaurant Program, underwritten by Inserra Supermarkets is an integral part of our in-house supported employment program. In existence since the 1998-1999 school year, the Restaurant Program added an Advanced Training Class during the 2007-2008 school year. This class teaches the most interested and capable students to take what they learn at The Phoenix Center's Restaurant Program and apply it to working in real restaurants. The students practice skills such as using appliances, assembling a recipe, preparing a dish, compiling a list of supplies and then shopping for them. Students prepare many different and complex foods including baked ziti, macaroni and cheese, rice dishes, pigs in a blanket, hamburgers, soups, salads, lasagna and desserts. The students then take these skills into the workforce at restaurants including, **The Office** in Ridgewood, **Sunset Pub & Grill** in Lincoln Park and **St. Joseph's Hospital cafeteria** in Paterson. We are excited to report that soon another restaurant will be taking mentorship of our students to the next level by creating a program where the restaurant's chefs will prepare lessons and coach our students on how to excel in a restaurant's kitchen.

Joe Poggioli, who heads up the Restaurant Program, says, "I feel that the success of the program has a lot to do with the patience and teaching of restaurateurs that work with this program. The restaurant field is a fast paced industry, and for them to take time for our students is extraordinary."

Each month, a holiday, era or country theme is selected for the Restaurant Program. Past themes have included Joe's Pasta Palace, 50's American Diner, Disney Buffet, All-Star Deli, Thanksgiving, and Tiki Boardwalk. This April there will be an Employers' "Thank You" Luncheon for the employers of Phoenix Center students to thank them for giving our students a chance and making a difference in their lives.



Students wash dishes after a successful Restaurant Program lunch service.

Students love the Restaurant Program and their employers in other restaurants have described them as possessing great attitudes, showing excitement to perform their duties, and being incredibly hard working. If you are able to connect one of our students with a place of employment within the restaurant industry, please contact Kevin Gaynor, Job Developer at (973) 542-0743 or send an email to kgaynor@phoenixcenterinc.com.

Bowling Program

The Phoenix Center started its bowling program in the 2007-2008 school year to give all students the opportunity to participate in a sporting activity. Our students find it difficult to fully participate in many sports. Bowling, however, can be adapted to meet varying levels of ability. Students can bowl on lanes as they are, with bumpers, or with bumpers and the assistance of a bowling ramp. Unlike basketball where student can constantly see winning and losing, students are able to compete as teams without constantly seeing results. This helps them focus on enjoying the game not just the score board. Too often students participating in sports don't get to score or contribute. When students are bowling, they are constantly scoring.

Staff member, Bridget Hickey, who assists with the bowling program says, "It's amazing to see how much the students enjoy bowling, and how their level of independence grows each time we go."

The Phoenix Center's bowling program takes place one afternoon a week at the Belleville Brunswick Bowling Lanes. This program was made possible by start-up grants from the Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation. In June, The Phoenix Center will hold its second annual Family Bowling Night where families and their children will get to spend the evening bowling together. Last year's Family Bowling Night was met with such enthusiasm by one parent who said she was so relieved and thrilled to finally have found an activity that both her child with a disability and her neurotypical child could enjoy together!



Students use adapted bowling ramps during a weekly bowling trip.



The Phoenix Center Continues Partnership with GoodSearch.com

We need your help now and it won't cost you anything! The Phoenix Center recently registered with **GoodSearch.com** and **GoodShop.com** to raise funds for the Center's important programs and activities. Thank you to everyone who has already signed on. For those of you that haven't, we need your assistance for it to succeed!

Please Help Now

- Go to **www.GoodSearch.com**. Designate the Phoenix Center as your charity. Set **www.GoodSearch.com** as your Home Page on your home and work computers and use it for all your web searching.
- Ask your friends, family and coworkers to use **GoodSearch.com** as their go-to search engine and **GoodShop.com** for all of their shopping needs. Each search and each purchase, brings us closer to our goal.
- Every little bit adds up! For example, if 300 people run four searches a day, **GoodSearch.com** will donate approximately \$4,380 to The Phoenix Center over the course of a year.
- It is so easy, there is no registration necessary and you will not get any emails from **GoodSearch.com**. It doesn't cost you a thing!

If you are interested in supporting The Phoenix Center, please contact **Dr. Geraldine Gibbia**, Executive Director at (973) 542-0743 or send an email to drgibbia@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, Cedar Grove, Clifton, Cranford, Dover, East Orange, Fair Lawn, Glen Ridge, Hanover Park, Harrison, Hasbrouck Heights, Hawthorne, High Point Regional, Hoboken, Irvington, Jersey City, Kearny, Kinnelon, Lakeland Regional, Livingston, Lodi, Long Hill Township, Manchester Regional, Middlesex, Millburn, Montclair, Montville, Morris Hills Regional, Morris School District, Mt. Olive, Newark, 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, Ringwood, Rochelle Park, Rockaway, Roselle, Roxbury, Secaucus, Tenafly, Union City, Vernon, Wayne, West Essex Regional District, Westfield, West Milford, West Morris Regional, West New York, West Orange, Westwood Regional.