



Inside The Phoenix Center

March 2009

Volume 1.2

The Phoenix Center Calendar

March 19

Family Pasta Night

March 20

School closed
Staff in-service
Wellness Day

March 26

50's Rock-N-Roll
Diner Restaurant

April 1

Early dismissal
Parent/Teacher conferences
1:30 - 3:30

April 8

Family Night Out
5:30 - 8:30

April 10

School closed
Good Friday

April 13–April 17

School closed
Spring Break

May 5

Early dismissal
Staff appreciation day

May 8

Disney Buffet Restaurant

May 15

Early dismissal
Spring Concert
The Wizard of Oz
10:00am

May 25

School closed
Memorial Day

The Phoenix Center is 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 and adults five to 21 years of age and older in developing skills which will maximize their adaptation to everyday life.

The Courageous Pacers

The Courageous Pacers Program is up and running at The Phoenix Center! The Courageous Pacers Program (CPP) was created by a physical therapist, Tim Erson, to promote awareness and implement a program of physical activity into the school curriculum. Recognizing the epidemic of overweight and obesity affecting our nation, this program educates and trains students in simple daily exercises that can have a life long effect on their overall health and wellness.

The program was introduced to the Phoenix Center through our relationship with professors at Seton Hall University (SHU). Following training, we began a collaborative pilot program in one classroom during the 2007-08 school year. Doctor of Physical Therapy students (DPT) at SHU visited this classroom once a week for 4 months. During this time, they developed motivational themes and plans, trained the staff and students in simple exercises and encouraged activity and movement throughout the rest of the school week. Our students responded with great enthusiasm. The mascot for SHU is known as "The Pirate," so the theme of a "pirate ship" went a long way. The students "walked the plank" around the gym several times a week, followed treasure maps to special rewards, lifted weights of filled with blue water and sea creatures. All of these activities added exercise, movement and activity to their daily routine.

With this success underway, we expanded the program to three classes in September 2008 and have just added another three classes in January 2009. Once again, during the spring semester, the DPT students from Seton Hall will visit the classrooms once a week to lead the exercises, motivate the students and share their wealth of knowledge in physical activity. Activities and materials are modified for each classroom and individual students as needed. This program is adaptable to many levels.

This year we are working on a carnival theme where the students ride the roller coaster around the classroom, the gym and through the halls. They have decorated water bottles for strengthening exercises and stretch to reach the top of the Ferris wheel.

To evaluate the effectiveness of this program for the population at the Phoenix Center, we continue to work collaboratively with professors at SHU to collect data on the health statistics of our students involved in this program. With parental consent, this data will be analyzed by the staff at SHU and results will be submitted for publication in physical therapy journals.

It is exciting to watch this program grow and succeed. The benefits are expected to have a life long effect. Over time, we plan to have a version of the program in every classroom in the school. For more information, you can visit The Courageous Pacers Program online at www.courageouspacers.com, or contact the nurses or physical therapists at the Phoenix Center.



The Phoenix Center
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- Douglas A. Berrian, Ed.D.**
Education Director
- Julie Mower, M.A. Ed.**
Assistant Principal
- Audrey Poggjoli, M.A. Ed.**
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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 common sense 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 included 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, Nutley Public Library, YMCA of Ridgewood, and 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 may 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 was held in Trenton on Thursday, February 26, 2009, to discuss this topic. 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 would like to learn more about the legislation, please log on to www.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 drgibbia@phoenixcenterinc.com.

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



Aquatic Program

Since the beginning of the 2008-2009 school year, The Phoenix Center has been affiliated with The Pediatric Rehabilitation of North Jersey, located in Wayne. On Fridays, scheduled classrooms have the opportunity to attend this facility and utilize their swimming pool. The students continue to be excited to engage in pool activities and are motivated to work on improving their swimming ability. During their time in the water, the students participate in fun games with their peers, all while receiving therapeutic benefit.

Being in the water promotes for improved function by allowing the students to work on overall strengthening, endurance, movement control, range of motion, coordination, and provides sensory information. There has also been positive feedback reported by staff members on the safety of the facility, as well as it being a relaxing water experience. This swim program follows the **PLAY** principle of the fish philosophy, as well as having our students swim their way to improved wellness.

Choose Your Attitude...
Play ...
Make Their Day...
Be Present....



Bridge News

The John Victor Machuga Bridge to Learning Program (Bridge) will soon be celebrating its fifth anniversary. The Developmental, Individual-Difference, Relationship-Based (DIR®) model was introduced in the program's second year and remains the backbone of Bridge intervention. The Bridge continues to positively impact the lives of our students and their families. Our talented and dedicated Bridge team educators and therapists are committed to developing individualized and comprehensive programs that incorporate relationship-based intervention for our most challenging and complex students. The Bridge team expanded this year and welcomed the following related service providers: Christine DeLoughry-Lama, Mali DeSantis, Phyllis Gordon, and Lauren Martini.

Thanks to administrative support and the generosity of the John Victor Machuga Foundation, Bridge team and other Phoenix Center staff members participated in exceptional learning experiences this school year. On October 2, Dr. Sima Gerber, Associate Professor of Queens College and faculty member of the DIR® Certificate Program, was the keynote speaker at the Youth Consultative Services (YCS) Institute Sixth Annual Professional Conference. Through Dr. Gerber's brilliant and entertaining presentation, we learned about contemporary models of language acquisition and how "working" with children with challenges in language development need not look like "work" at all. On the following day, Lynn Abelson, Bridge Coordinator, participated in the Scholar-In-Residence program that featured Dr. Gerber. Seton Hall professors and students, YCS interns, and DIR® clinicians discussed case studies and focused on exploring language development through a DIR® lens.

Kean University sponsored a full day workshop entitled Autism: Putting the Pieces Together. Jake Greenspan, the keynote speaker, opened the workshop by presenting an overview of the DIR®-Based Model. Administrators and Bridge team members attended excellent panel discussions on communication and social skills, early diagnosis and intervention, and the challenges of Autism Spectrum Disorder from a parent's perspective. A father of one of our Bridge students opened the parent panel discussion by eloquently sharing his journey from despair to hope in raising a child with Autism. Jim Watkins, a co-anchor of the WPIX11 News at Ten, was the featured speaker. He closed the workshop with his open and touching portrayal of the special bond he has forged with his son who has Autism and profound developmental challenges. During his presentation, Mr. Watkins showed clips from the documentary Autism Every Day. Christine Saladino, Professional Development Coordinator and Bridge team member, showed this powerful and poignant documentary during the school wide February in-service program. Staff members were touched by this thought provoking documentary and gained a deeper understanding of the daily struggles of families raising children with Autism.

Some Highlights from Music Class

- ◆ **Will H.** has improved tremendously in music class. He enjoys playing the keyboard and singing.
- ◆ **Jonathan N.** sings entire songs with all of the lyrics! (Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, Head Shoulders Knees and Toes are his favorites right now.)
- ◆ **Nicky S.** played on a keyboard 1:1 with Rachel for a whole two minutes before wanting to move on to another activity.
- ◆ **Trisha C.** sings many parts of Disney songs on pitch
- ◆ **Sam F.** sings the entire hello song some days!
- ◆ **Tony C.** asks to sing the song his class will be singing for the concert almost every day.
- ◆ **Issay A.** has begun to drum his drum to the rhythm of the song being played.
- ◆ **Henry C.** has begun to sing and learned many of the words to the Kwanzaa song in the last concert.
- ◆ **Robert K.** has shown interest in learning how to play the guitar.
- ◆ **Pete P.** has been singing in class, though he hadn't enjoyed it in the past.
- ◆ **Ian A.** chose the song he performed during his solo last spring, and shows continued interest in the guitar.
- ◆ **Isaiah T.** comes to music consistently, sings and likes to play guitar.
- ◆ **Edwin R.** has natural musical talent on the drums and is expanding that by learning guitar chords and improvising rhythms and melodies on the piano.
- ◆ **Benedick V.** has the ability to play the piano by ear, and also to hear a melody once and reproduce it on the piano. He can read music, and shows interest in drums and guitar.



Fun at Barnes and Noble

On January 19th, students from Room 103 embarked on their first CBI trip of the New Year. Accompanied by their teacher, Jacky Maddi, and two 1:1 aides, Jonathan, Nicholas, and Issay went to Barnes and Noble in Clifton. They read a variety of books, played with the wooden train set in the Children's Section, and rode up and down the escalator, which was a first for some of them.



After enjoying the bookstore the class headed over to Stop & Shop where each child was able to choose a favorite snack to enjoy back in the classroom. It was wonderful to see the children out in the community enjoying some of what the local area has to offer.

Veggie Venture

The students in Room 107 recently participated in the "Veggie Venture" contest. In their cooking classes, the students have been learning the importance of healthy eating and have been working on identifying healthy foods. To put their learning to the test, the students were presented with a variety of vegetables and they were encouraged to try each different vegetable. To the amazement of many, there was a six-way tie: every student who was in the class tried each vegetable!! To make it even more exciting, some of the students even LIKED the vegetables! We are so proud of the students for trying new things and for giving up cupcakes and potato chips for one day and eating carrots, peppers, and broccoli instead. Good job Room 107!

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