



Preparing students for

life beyond the classroom

FOCUS ON PHOENIX

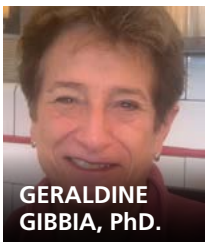
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A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



As we begin another great year at The Phoenix Center, it is my privilege to announce this year's school theme: **DREAM**. It stands for **D**etermination, **R**esilience, **E**mpowerment, **A**ttitude and **M**otivation.

Here at The Phoenix Center we all **DREAM** big! We aspire to be amazing and impactful educators. We are **determined** to help our students as they grow and learn. We are **resilient** in the face of our day to day struggles and always strive for better outcomes. We **empower** our families and their children to never settle. We do our best to choose a good **attitude** in all things we do. Lastly, we are here to **motivate** each other as educators, our students as learners, and the community as our supporters.

Our ability to **DREAM** provides the power to positively affect our students and their families. It is my hope that all of what we have been able to accomplish in the last few months and the people featured in this issue will inspire you. Until next time, be well, be safe, stay connected and DREAM big!

With gratitude,
Julie Mower, M.A.Ed.
Executive Director

The mission of The Phoenix Center, working in partnership with families and community, is to develop the potential of each student with developmental disabilities and those on the autism spectrum ages five through 21 and to provide customized, unique, and individualized programs aligned with the New Jersey Student Learning Standards. Promoting the development of the whole student, we care for, educate, and empower our students and graduates so that they will develop life-centered skills which will prepare them for life beyond the classroom.

SPOTLIGHT ON: THOMAS REYNOLDS, TEACHER OF ROOM 204



"I am the teacher in Room 204 with students who are 16-19 years old. I have had some of them since the first day I started as a classroom teacher in 2015. I took over the classroom in January of 2015 and have been here ever since. What I love about my group is that

while we can cover topics you would find in a public school, my job is to present the subject matter in a way that they can grasp it. Today, we talked about the American Revolution and the five zones we can identify in the ocean."

"I love The Phoenix Center and talking about this place. What stayed with me since I started was something that Dr. Gibbia said, "Everybody here is someone's son or daughter, niece or nephew...and it's true. I am grateful that here, we have the resources to provide our students with the services and people to accomplish the goals that we have set for each student, whether it be speech, OT, counseling, etc."

What got you into special needs education?

"It was the suggestion of a friend. When I went to college for the first time, I majored in History and really did not have a plan for what to do with it. After graduating, I worked a few different jobs but nothing that I would consider to be a "career." A friend of mine worked as a paraprofessional at a school similar to The Phoenix Center and thought it could be something I might be good at. After being hired and completing my first week in the school, working with students with special needs truly made me feel like I was doing something right. Now, I am committed to the field and doing coursework at William Paterson which will eventually lead to a Master's degree in Special Education."

What separates The Phoenix Center from others that support students with special needs?

"The people. There are roughly 200 employees at The Phoenix Center and all 200 are here for the same reason! The staff here are unique in the fact that they are genuinely here to make an impact on our students' lives and they work incredibly hard to accomplish that. Our administration has an unwavering support for all of us here and they ensure that we have the resources that we need to help our students reach their goals."

What is your favorite day of the year?

"When Santa comes to visit The Phoenix Center. Christmas is my favorite holiday to begin with, but there is nothing better than when Mr. and Mrs. Claus come through the door to bring presents to all of our students! It is always amazing to watch our students' faces fill up with joy on that day."

What specific accomplishment of yours stands out to you?

"There isn't any specific accomplishment of mine that particularly stands out to me, rather it's the accomplishments of my students that I take pride in. Any kind of gain that one of my students makes, whether it be academically, behaviorally, socially, or emotionally, gives me more than enough gratification. At the end of the day, I just want to know that I did my job, and that I did my job well."

I am a huge fan of Jim Harbaugh who is the head coach of the University of Michigan's football team. When he took over as the head coach, he was asked what he will ask of his players from the upcoming season. He said, "I ask my players to get 1% better at being a football player, a student, and as a person for every day of the year. If they do that, they will be 365% better a year from now." This has stuck with me and is something I try to encourage my students to strive for. It shows our students that little gains can add up to huge gains over time. I think this approach has been successful in the accomplishments my students have attained."

What will you want your students to remember when they graduate?

"I hope they remember they always have a home here at The Phoenix Center. I hope they remember that they always have our support and we are here for them even if they are not a student here anymore. The Phoenix Center's mission is to prepare students and their families for life after graduation. It is our hope that they take what they have learned here and apply it to be successful once they have graduated."

How does The Phoenix Center provide opportunities for parents to be integrated into the culture and education?

"It does so in multiple ways. Besides the normal parent-teacher conferences and Back to School Night, The Phoenix Center holds classroom visitation days for parents to observe lessons. There is also a daily communication book that teachers use to provide updates for parents and for parents to communicate any happenings occurring at home. Throughout the year, The Phoenix Center holds events such as a Family Picnic, Restaurant Nights, Bowling Night, and a night at a New Jersey Jackals baseball game, just to name a few." ■

SUMMER HIGHLIGHTS



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1. Graduation Day: June 21st

Terry L. gets a well-earned hug!
Other graduates included: Wayne J., Victoria F., Rachel C., Carl M., Karen P., Daniel P., Rowland B., and Erin H.

2. Field Day (first time program!): June 18th

Amani S. jumping to new heights!

3. Pop Earth Day: June 17th

Ashley Agresti (CFL Teacher), Debbie Stone, Founder of Pop Earth, Julie Mower, Executive Director & Chef David Buico.

4. Jackals Baseball Outing: June 21st

Aidan J. gets a heartfelt kiss from Dad, Brian, on the sidelines.

5. Beach Day in Manasquan: July 9–10 & 16–17

Mohamed Ali D., Room 106, aka: "Captain" flanked by hosts, George & Mary Forshay.

6. Fidelians Pool Outing

Students pictured from left to right: Kristyna M., Agni M., Ashley A., Amanda A., Tiffany O., Isabella R., Lindsay L.

7. Krispy Kreme Fundraiser

Devoted Krispy Kreme fans (from left to right): Curriculum Specialists Tanya Taibl, Isabel Cosme, Erin Miceli, and Kristin Calderone.

8. Employer Appreciation Breakfast

From left to right: Joe LaRosa (Employment Specialist), Bob Egan (Owner, Sunset Pub and Grill), Colby D. (Room 209), Rachel Nielsen (Manager, Sunset Pub and Grill), Jonathan Andolino (Job Developer).

Please see below information for a close up of Dr. Geraldine Gibbia, Co-Founder of The Phoenix Center and how she is continuing a legacy for the school and herself and the special interest story on one of our long time supporters, Joseph Cox.

GERALDINE GIBBIA, PhD.

"As the Co-Founder of The Phoenix Center, I could not be more proud to be including The Phoenix Center as a beneficiary in my will. The work that we did—and the work that continues to be done at 16 Monsignor Owens Place in Nutley is just incredible. The foundational premise at TPC is to start with our students' strengths and unique gifts, not their disabilities, and to acknowledge that every student is someone's son, daughter, niece, nephew, grandchild. This is one of many reasons there are such strong bonds between the students, the staff and the parents. That is the legacy I left when I retired a few years ago and want to have continue, even beyond my lifetime. What better way to do that than gift a portion of my estate to an organization that does so much good and makes such a difference in the lives of hundreds, even thousands of children?"



As a member of Women United in Philanthropy (WUIP), which is a women's giving circle, I have learned about the importance of philanthropy. It is important to me that in the busy and hectic world in which we live that those of us who can make an impact, do so. I would invite anyone who takes their philanthropy seriously to consider including The Phoenix Center in their planned giving or estate planning." ■



From left to right: Ethan , Susan, Zachary & Joseph Cox

JOSEPH COX

"The way that I became aware of The Phoenix Center was through The Knights of Columbus and their God's Special Children Drive several years ago. I was active with the Knights and learned that TPC was the beneficiary of that drive. I give to other charities like American Cancer Society, and to the United Way through my employer The Guardian Life Insurance Company. But, the Phoenix Center had a really important criteria for me, it was a non-profit that I heard about in town, where my contributions would directly benefit an organization in town as well. That was a home run for me. My sons are in the Nutley school system and our family participated in many events and food drives to help out and support "local in-town giving." Our continued contributions to TPC are a way for me and my family to stay true to that mission, and know we are making a true difference in the lives of these special kids. I always tell my sons to be supportive of others...that you don't know how lucky

you are...to think about those who can use your help...and to remember your own community. The Phoenix Center is one of those organizations. We are proud to support that local family." ■

SPOTLIGHT ON MAJOR DONOR: ALLEN AND JOANN GALORENZO, THE DANNY GALORENZO FOUNDATION



*From left to right: Allen, JoAnn, Brad, Daniel Galorenzo
Inset: Danny G. Funtronic room*

Allen and JoAnn Galorenzo are the parents of Danny Galorenzo, who passed away in 2002 at the age of 16. Danny was a Seton Hall Prep wrestler who died from an aortic aneurysm. They created a Foundation in his honor called the Daniel Galorenzo Foundation, and have been staunch supporters and major donors to The Phoenix Center since 2011.

"We currently live in Cedar Knolls and I grew up in Garfield, so I am a local boy. I've known The Phoenix Center, specifically Dr. Geri Gibbia for a long time now, about 10 years or so. I was introduced to her by Susan Mitchell, who was a former business acquaintance and on the Board of TPC at the time. My objective was to memorialize the life of Danny, so I created the Foundation in his name. I wanted Daniel to be remembered by all of his family and friends, and impact the lives of so many others that would never have the opportunity to know him. Susan brought TPC to my attention because it fit our mission and she knew what I was trying to accomplish with the Foundation and she embraced it.

The Foundation has a simple mission statement: to help children with life challenging illnesses. Initially, our work was mostly 1-on-1 with each child. In the early days, our work was around a medical gift (paying for chemo, physical therapy, wheelchair, etc.) or something that would bring a smile to childrens' faces: a room makeover, "Princess for a Day", an iPad, a prosthetic leg for a Seton Hall Prep wrestling teammate of Daniel who was

afflicted with cancer; medical horse therapy for children with conditions such as Cystic Fibrosis, etc. We even sent someone to their high school prom that would normally not have gotten the opportunity to go and sent a teenage girl with ovarian cancer and her family to The Lion King on Broadway in a stretch limousine. The Foundation does all of the work, all they have to do is accept the gift. My goal is to establish a relationship and a bond with each child and their family. Our association with The Phoenix Center offers us the opportunity to change the lives of hundreds of children, which has been extremely fulfilling for us. Our life-long friends, Phil & Liz Orsi were instrumental in helping my wife JoAnn and I establish the foundation, and for that, and for them, I am eternally grateful.

One of the inspirations was my father, who, when he would see children that had a visible challenge, would get emotional. His eyes would tear up and he would encourage me to 'sacrifice something... 1 minute, anything, something... every day, to help others.' He would constantly do things to help others, whatever they needed and whatever he could do to help. I distinctly remember him getting notes from people thanking them for the contributions, whether it was suits, money, or whatever he contributed to them. By observing my father, I really learned the meaning of "philanthropy," which, for me, is about making a difference and making an impact.

The first year I formed the Foundation, we wanted to raise \$5K, and we raised \$35K! We started with a Golf Outing & Gala Dinner that attracted 300-400 people. It was a tremendous event which we did for 13 or so years. Although we have discontinued having this event, we are still raising money each year and I am very proud to say that we are one campaign away from reaching \$1 Million raised and gifted.

When we initially started supporting the grants from The Phoenix Center, we funded a SMARTboard. Our latest gift is called the Danny G. Funtronic Robot Experience, which is a ceiling projector that projects interactive games for students to practice gross motor and decision making skills, among other things. TPC is the only special needs school in the country with this level of state-of-the-art equipment. They are dedicating a room in Daniel's name that will house this new technology. I am both proud and grateful to making this impact with so many students at TPC, rather than just one. I am so happy that I am creating a legacy for Daniel. I know he would be happy and is perhaps smiling down upon us all (from heaven) as we speak." ■



HELP PHOENIX CENTER STUDENTS GET TO WORK BY SUPPORTING OUR 50/50 RAFFLE!

All proceeds will go towards the purchase of a new van for our supported employment program. Help support our vision to Prepare Students for Life Beyond the Classroom. Purchase a 50/50 ticket for \$50 or buy three tickets for \$100. Drawing will be on Tuesday, November 12, 2019 at 11:30 a.m. EST. Winner need not be present to win.

Contact Carolina Silva (csilva@thephoenixcenternj.org, 973.542.0743, ext. 305) with questions and to purchase tickets. Cash, check or credit card accepted.

RL# 39-19 | NJLGCC# 356-5-34980

*\$9,160 is the two year collection amount, not the current 50/50 dollar amount.



973.542.0743
info@thephoenixcenternj.org
thephoenixcenternj.org



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