



Preparing students for

life beyond the classroom

FOCUS ON PHOENIX

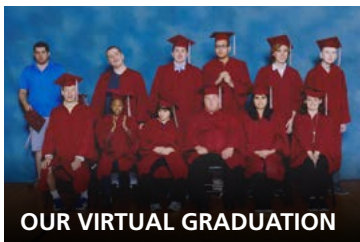
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A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



We hope this message continues to find you and your family well, safe, and healthy. After almost four months of distance learning, we are swimming in new waters, and we are successfully rolling with the tide!

I am seeing parents, families, staff, paraprofessionals, related service providers, and educators all working hard to engage our students in their daily learning. Despite the fact that we are apart from each other, this experience has shown us how collaborative we can be, bringing us together on a whole new level.

As a result of distance learning, we are all becoming more creative and flexible in how we deliver education and engage our students. This situation, although challenging, is having a very positive impact on us as educators, and in many cases, on our students as well.

To see exactly what I am referring to, I invite you to go to our website and view our recent video located in the Message from the Executive Director section on the home page and/or read this newsletter that features the thoughts of one of our families and four of our staff members.

If you have any questions, please call me at 973-542-0743 ext. 302 or email me at jmower@thephoenixcenternj.org. Although working from home, I am receiving all of my voicemail messages and emails.

Given the health concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the social distancing guidelines provided by Governor Murphy and the CDC, we have decided that our Extended School Year (ESY) Program will be conducted on a virtual basis.

We are all looking forward to being together in our classrooms, but until then, we wish you well from our homes to yours. Look for more updates from The Phoenix Center in the form of emails and videos.

As always, thank you for your continued partnership, trust and support of The Phoenix Center and its mission. Until next time, stay well, stay healthy and stay connected.

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.

GREAT NEWS: TPC PURCHASES CBI VAN

Our two-year fundraising initiative to purchase and pay for a needed school van (to transport our students to their Community-Based Instruction opportunities, among other off-campus activities) has come to a close. Here is a re-cap:

In 2018, we raised a total of \$5,300—from a combination of the 50/50 raffle and a donation made by Armando Rosales in honor of St. Phillip the Apostle Knights of Columbus in Clifton. In 2019, we netted \$8,550, including the \$2,000 donated back to us by our 50/50 raffle winner, Ms. Rosemary Moore.

In 2020, despite the difficult time we are experiencing, we had further good news with a \$10,000 grant received from a philanthropic New Jersey-based Foundation that funds capital, (but would like to remain anonymous), a \$3,000 grant from St. Elizabeth's Church, and reallocated sponsorship dollars from our Casino Night sponsors. Conan Ward/Financial Advisor in Wayne, NJ allowed us to reallocate his contribution and Mr. Jeff Hecker reallocated his donation as well. It was sad to have cancelled Casino Night, as we typically net over \$35,000 from that fundraiser, but we are very thankful to you both for your generosity and flexibility.

"I got involved with TPC through an old friend, Chuck DeMeola, longtime TPC accountant. Once we saw the school, that was it. That was a game changer...the environment is incredible, the people are remarkable in what they do, it is just a wonderful cause. I will always support their efforts, and be a Casino Night sponsor, or this year, help them buy a needed school van. I envision us as willing partners for a very long time," said Conan Ward.

We have recently purchased the van and are having it retrofitted for accessibility. Thank you Jim Russomano, Board Member and Owner of Nutley Kia for walking us through this purchase!

To all of our donors, sponsors, and ongoing supporters, thank you from the bottom of our hearts. Without you, none of this would be possible. ■



GIVING TUESDAY NOW! WAS A BIG SUCCESS

Thanks to the support of our Phoenix Center family, we raised more than \$14,000 from #GivingTuesdayNow! This amazing support has helped address the funding gap due to the cancellation of Casino Night.

You also helped raise over \$2,800 for The Phoenix Center Family Emergency Relief Fund. In the past, these funds have helped families pay for basic needs such as rent, their electric bill, groceries, healthcare needs and more. The need is even higher now due to the pandemic. Thank you so much! ■

ANNUAL APPEAL

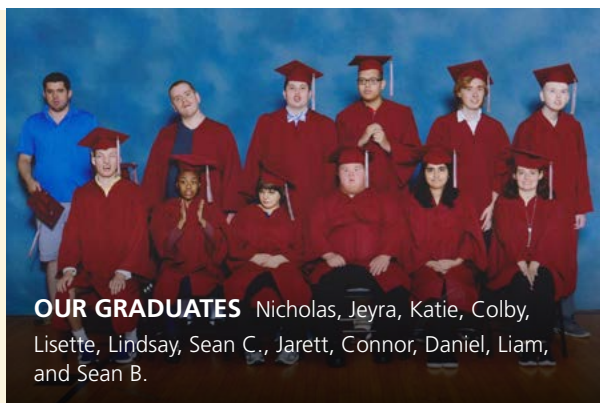
Thank you to all who made donations and supported our school. If you missed #GivingTuesdayNow and wish to donate now, please do so on the donate page of the website (thephoenixcenternj.org/donate-now).

Please feel free to share TPC with your friends, family, and colleagues.

If you would like to discuss planned giving, donor advised funds, or matching gifts, please contact Carolyn Sharaway, Development Associate at csharaway@thephoenixcenternj.org with any questions. Thanks so much!

OUR VIRTUAL GRADUATION

We had 12 students graduate in TPC's first "virtual graduation"—what a distinction! We will miss you all, and wish you continued luck and success in whatever you accomplish! Our transition coordinator, Laureen Protomastro, looks forward to checking in on you in this coming year! Congratulations to the Class of 2020! ■



OUR GRADUATES Nicholas, Jeyra, Katie, Colby, Lisette, Lindsay, Sean C., Jarett, Connor, Daniel, Liam, and Sean B.

DISTANCE LEARNING AT TPC... THE FULL STORY



Though distance learning was thrust upon us all at The Phoenix Center in a matter of days, we have a lot to be thankful for. We started with a very committed and engaged staff. We live the principles of the FISH! Philosophy: choose your attitude, be present, play, and make someone's day. Our challenge as a school, while continuing to engage our students in learning, was to replicate the spirit and positive energy you can sense when you walk into our school from home, on video...which was not an easy task!

We have amazing parents and families who are equally committed to the success and personal growth of their students. We had the distinct pleasure of interviewing parents, K.K. and Pooja whose daughter Tuhina attends The Phoenix Center (Room 105). Tuhina's parents reflected on their family experiences with The Phoenix Center and the journey of distance learning with their daughter.

In addition, we were able to highlight a staff meeting between Amy B. (unit supervisor/speech therapist), Colleen O. (PT), Ryan B. (teacher, Room 105), and Jacklyn M. (paraprofessional, Room 105). We captured their candid sharing about distance learning, the students, parents, families, and life lessons derived from the situation.

More Collaboration

Our educators and therapists have rolled up their sleeves and adapted a "we will do whatever it takes" attitude to providing value to our students and their families. The staff have been facilitating instruction remotely by helping parents and families as their surrogates while they cannot be with the students in person.

"At times like this, you have to keep a positive mindset, no matter what." —Jacklyn M.

"Now, we know exactly where we are relative to the IEP. The best thing to come out of this is how we are following it daily, rather than quarterly or monthly, and staying on track—between us and the teachers, we now know how to approach the learning process, daily!" —Mom, Pooja P.

"The teachers are doing really well, they are very helpful in helping us prepare for the lessons, get what we will need beforehand and guiding us through the process." —Mom, Pooja P.

"Distance learning is not a one size fits all, and can be very much a mixed bag but overall, it has been positive. We are seeing a lot of success with our physical therapy (PT) with Tuhina. The teachers help us with ways to make it fun and engaging. We reinforce her work with music, which she loves and we are all learning how to improvise on the fly." —Dad, K.K.

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"Like in the Apollo 13 space mission, we have to rise to this occasion." —Amy B., unit supervisor/speech therapist

More Visibility

Speculating what a student's home situation might be, and actually seeing it for yourself on video allows our staff to fully understand possibilities and limitations for therapies and related services. This may trigger the need to develop alternative service delivery methods or creative alternatives to replace items and equipment families may not have in their home. For instance, if the student requires intensive OT and PT, but the home has limited space to do these therapies, adjustments can be made. Stairs, siblings, pets, room layouts—all contribute to better awareness of what is and is not possible.

"Because I am home as well, my students can see my pets. Though I had not anticipated using them, sometimes using my dog has been helpful in engaging the student(s)."

—Colleen O., PT

More Flexibility

In order to make distance learning work, you need to be able to "let go" of the preconceived ideas about what a classroom or a therapy room should look like, and what it may have in it. Timing of sessions and lessons need to also be flexible due to parents' and family work schedules.

"Sometimes I ask for something that the student and their family just doesn't have in the house, so I need to think creatively and flexibly...if you don't have a small ball, grab a pair of socks. If it is a beautiful day outside, let's take advantage of it, find some movement outdoors...like the family's trampoline, for instance, and support the family functionally." —Colleen O., PT

"I decided to record all of my sessions so my students and their parents and families could play them back at their convenience. I understand that live classes are not always possible in the realm of distance learning from home." —Ryan, teacher, Room 105 ■

In an effort to save money, and some trees, The Phoenix Center is in the process of transitioning to an electronic newsletter. Please email csharaway@thephoenixcenternj.org to be added to our list! Many thanks!



973.542.0743
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SAVE THE DATE

TPC'S 30TH ANNIVERSARY GALA | Saturday, June 5, 2021 | Macaluso's, Hawthorne, NJ