

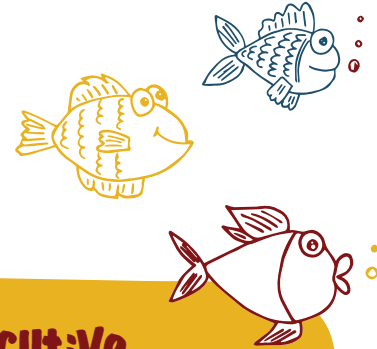


FALL 2022: GRATEFUL FOR OUR COMMUNITY

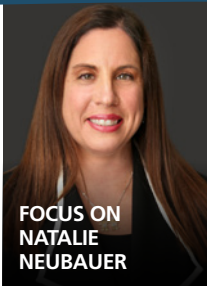
PREPARING STUDENTS FOR
**LIFE BEYOND THE
CLASSROOM**

est. 1991

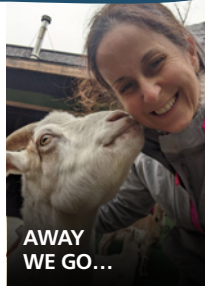
FOCUS ON PHOENIX



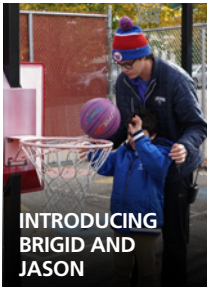
What's inside



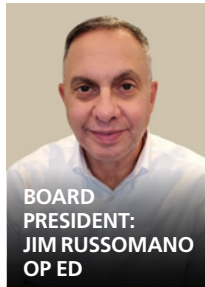
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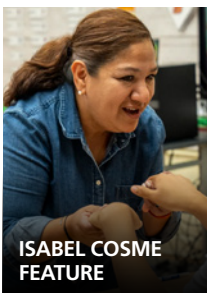
AWAY
WE GO...



INTRODUCING
BRIGID AND
JASON



BOARD
PRESIDENT:
JIM RUSSOMANO
OP ED



ISABEL COSME
FEATURE



GIVING
TUESDAY

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

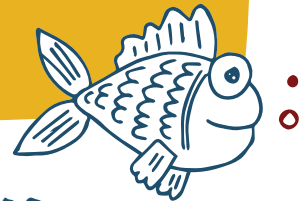


I am very excited to share our Fall TPC newsletter with you! We are calling this the "Grateful for our Community" edition as it focuses on the many gifts and talents of some members of our learning community. We are on the cusp of the

holiday season, and with that comes a time for reflection – as the Executive Director, I am so grateful for the amazing kindness, generosity and talent that is shared within The Phoenix Center learning community. In this issue, you will read about Board members', teachers' and supervisors' inspiring generosity with TPC and how they positively impact our program. As we enter the season of giving, we share with you the worldwide philanthropic initiative called #GivingTuesday. I hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as we enjoyed preparing it for you. Sending well wishes to you and your family for a healthy and happy holiday season ♥

Until next time, take care, be well and stay connected.

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



The Phoenix Center is hiring!

TO FIND OUT MORE VISIT OUR WEBSITE

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.



Tell US ABOUT YOUR ROLE at Seton Hall...

I work at Seton Hall Interprofessional Health Sciences Campus as Assistant Dean for Undergraduate and Clinical Education, supporting all of our undergraduate dual degree health science programs and meeting the clinical education needs of our graduate health science curriculum. Prior to this, I was Director of Clinical Education and Assistant Professor in the Masters Speech-Language Pathology Department (also at Seton Hall University). My area of specialty is in pediatrics, particularly with early language, pediatric feeding and the autism population.

What led you to become a BOARD MEMBER at TPC?

I chose to get involved with The Phoenix Center based on their integrative philosophy, innovative programming, collaborative team planning and inclusive nature. They make a profound difference on the students they serve and the community.

I have seen incredible gains in the students at TPC given strong school supports, behavioral training, community resources, parent involvement and a model of interprofessional practices.

Given the highest quality, evidence-based collaborative approach which The Phoenix Center employs, there are no limits on what the students at TPC can achieve.

Individuals on the autism spectrum and with other developmental disabilities have global needs, so it is critical to implement an interprofessional approach that includes the collaboration of special educators, behaviorists, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, school counselors, neurodevelopmental pediatricians amongst other professionals and parents. It allows for looking at these children from a holistic perspective and supporting their overall growth and development by working towards common goals. This is the philosophy at The Phoenix Center.

DO YOU have a FAVORITE TPC SCHOOL tradition OR activity?

I appreciate the Family Night Out events, as this gives an opportunity for families to network, share their experiences, and have time to relax as a parent. This builds the home/school partnership and promotes community between parents and the school's staff.

FOCUS ON: Natalie Neubauer, Ed.D., CCC-SLP, BOARD MEMBER

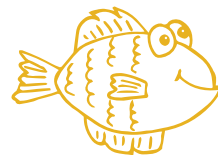
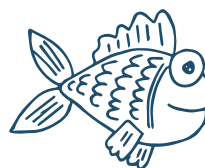
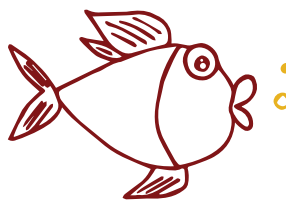
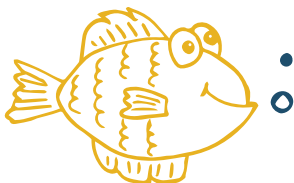
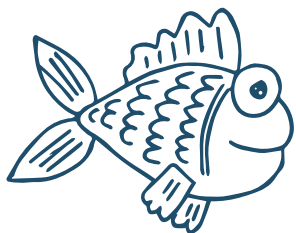
Natalie Neubauer Ed.D., CCC-SLP came to The Phoenix Center with experience and expertise in special education that is both professional and personal.

As the current Assistant Dean for Undergraduate and Clinical Education at Seton Hall University, she has always worked with the ASD population from the time she was a teenager. She treated the population for about ten years as a Speech-Language Pathologist then became an advocate as a Speech-Language Pathology alumni from Seton Hall and subsequently found herself recommended to TPC.

Natalie's research and expertise revolves around interprofessional, inter-disciplinary and inter-collaborative practices. Her own life, students, job function and also the Board level-work she does at TPC benefits from that focus.

Tell me ABOUT YOUR JOURNEY—how did you get INTO SPECIAL NEEDS education?

Since I was a little girl, I have always been passionate about wanting to help others achieve their greatest potential. I started volunteering when I was 15 in the hospital where my cousins received speech therapy and fell in love with making a difference in an individual's ability to communicate their wants and needs.



IS THERE AN ACCOMPLISHMENT YOU'RE PARTICULARLY PROUD OF DURING YOUR TIME ON THE BOARD AT THE PHOENIX CENTER?

I've been very proud to provide opportunities for interprofessional collaboration between SHU and the school. Over the years, I have made arrangements for a number of Seton Hall speech students to intern at TPC, as well as facilitated the multi-disciplinary collaboration towards the development of the school's Soars program (which focuses on post-21 preparedness).

AFTER GRADUATING, WHAT DO YOU HOPE THE STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES TAKE AWAY FROM THE PHOENIX CENTER?

I believe students who graduate from TPC are well prepared for "life beyond the classroom" and have been given opportunities to be productive, happy, and fulfilled members of society.

I am particularly impressed with the level of differentiated instruction provided to prepare students for the real world. The life skills training and community integration/vocational preparation begins from early on to maximize outcomes.

The Phoenix Center also works closely with families to determine what their needs are, as well as their child's academic, social and career interests and preferences. They also effectively train families to support in-school and community curriculum goals.

There is a continuum of care and support beyond school, which includes transition planning, vocational training and post-graduate guidance.

TELL US ONE THING ABOUT YOURSELF THAT NOT VERY MANY PEOPLE KNOW.

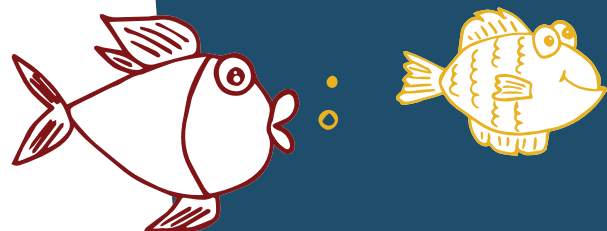
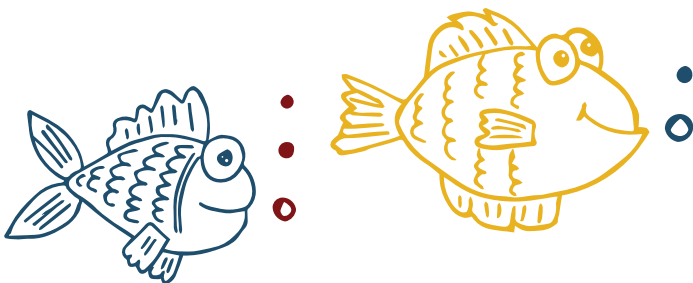
One of my twin boys, now age 7, is on the Autism Spectrum. Because of my background, I saw some behavior early on that caused me to have him evaluated and by 16 months, we started ABA, with a functional and naturalistic approach, teaching him functional skills, speech, OT in combination. That inter-collaborative team approach allowed him to go to regular public school at age four. As a first grader, he was accepted into a gifted and talented program with a shadow, which I am so proud of. He is an interesting and very bright young person and I am sure will keep me on my toes as he gets older!



AND AWAY WE GO...

Autumn always has a refreshing energy to it: the summer heat fades, the leaves change, and the students return back to school. The Phoenix Center has set itself apart by wielding technology to give students interactive experiences by "visiting" far away places otherwise inaccessible due to the restrictions of the pandemic - all thanks to a very creative and determined staff member.

Amy Bolliger, M.S. CCC-SLP and Unit Supervisor/ Speech Therapist, puts it this way, "It is such a relief to be back in-person, being able to provide hands-on learning and therapeutic care, in real time, right there for our students again, where we can see for ourselves their movement, growth, learning, and development. Simultaneously, technology has given The Phoenix Center students the special opportunity to enjoy more than just the classroom online: we've seen zoos, animal sanctuaries, and plenty of other locations that have widened our students' perspectives and given them engaging field trips without having to leave the school."



Amy has been an employee at The Phoenix Center for the past 22 years. Beyond her professional passion for special education, she has a passion for helping animals. Amy frequents animal sanctuaries with her family in her free time. One of Amy's favorite animals is the elephant.

“I find elephants to be fascinating because of their connection to their tribe and their family.”

-Amy Gollinger, M.S. CCC-SLP

“I find elephants to be fascinating because of their connection to their tribe and their family. Elephants have strong family bonds, they celebrate together, they grieve together. Elephants mourn the loss of a loved one with tears and a burial ceremony and frequently go back to their burial sites to pay homage. This social emotional intelligence combined with strong family bonds, truly speaks to my heart - just as the field of special education speaks to my heart. During the pandemic, the students and staff had limited transitions throughout the building and very limited trips into the community, something we once loved doing,” she said.

Amy then said she had a lightbulb moment one night when checking in on a favorite elephant, Nosey, on Facebook. “I had previously been campaigning for Nosey to be removed from her abusive and neglectful owners and she was finally sent to The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee (TES). It turns out, TES was also missing their human connection with students through their educational programs and had decided to create a virtual field trip experience for schools. I admired TES for this innovative thinking because The Phoenix Center was in the same position - how can we be as creative as possible to provide enriched experiences for our students?”

Amy approached the TPC Administration with this idea, where she was met with an astounding yes. “Initially, classrooms were a bit hesitant because it was such a new adventure,” she noted. “We started out with three classrooms and by the time word got out about this new venture, every classroom wanted to attend.” Amy turned this venture into an annual professional development goal. “It was especially exciting to “take” our students on not one but two international journeys to Costa Rica and Australia!”

TPC virtual field trips focused on animal sanctuaries around the country because of Amy's hard work and outreach. She realized in this process that employees at these various sanctuaries, farms, and other animal-focused organizations were also missing human and animal interactions. The animal caretakers also loved seeing our students on the screen, watching them smile, interact, and ask smart questions.

“We did other virtual field trips, too,” Amy said. “Some of these included Catskill Animal Sanctuary, The Cape May Zoo and Frederick Farm Goat Sanctuary.”

The trips didn't just stop in the United States. “Costa Rica was our first international field trip. Costa Rica has toucan and sloth sanctuaries, and we learned about deforestation, and the care of orphaned or injured sloths. Their educational process in the sanctuary teaches them different life skills, such as tree climbing and foraging, before they are sent back out into the wild with all of their needed skills,” Amy shared.



At TPC, teachers noted that students would come up to SMARTBoard presentations of the sanctuaries and try to engage with the animals as if they were right there with them! Students would stop Amy B. in the hallway to ask if they would be having another field trip soon. Staff were thanking Amy in personally for setting up the trip. It was something that was really pulling the staff together again while the pandemic tried to make us feel otherwise.

Amy added, “I am so fortunate to be able to work in a place where I can share my passion for animals and show how animals thrive in tribes with a focus on the importance of families. That is The Phoenix Center way, to share our passions, to let parents and families know each day that we are all a part of this tribe and how important each and every one of us is in making a difference.”

“During my time at The Phoenix Center, I have learned so much from the students and their families. I have been so very fortunate to work alongside the most talented, knowledgeable, and stellar staff who have taught me everything I know today. The support of my “TPC tribe” helped me gain the confidence to do something I have always wanted

to do - in addition to my job at TPC - become an adjunct professor at Montclair State University, teaching Evaluation and Treatment of Autism for future Speech and Language Pathologists. I am thrilled to be able to impart my knowledge to up and coming educators of our most precious children.”

Thank you for being part of the TPC family and staff, Amy!



If you would like to learn more about the sanctuaries and zoos your child has visited with The Phoenix Center, please feel free to check them out below. Each website has lots of great resources for our children.

The Farm Sanctuary in Watkins Glen, NY

Here we learned about the care of rescued farm animals. The host serenaded us with a guitar.

The Catskills Animal in Sanctuary in Saugerties, NY

Here we learned about going vegan and caring for rescued farm animals.

The Bergen County Zoo in Paramus, NJ

Our local Paramus zoologists taught us all about Yellowstone. If you would like to visit this Zoo in person, check out their website! They have a carousel and a train too.

Frederick Farm Goat in Sanctuary Naponoch, NY

Our staff are still talking about farmer Meagan's corniest goat jokes! What is a goat's favorite TV show you ask? America's GOAT Talent!

Marine Mammal Stranding Center in Brigantine, NJ

Our selfless Staff approached the MMSC after our field trip about volunteering to help stranded marine life.

Duke Farms in Hillsborough, NJ

We got to see their bald eagles nest. You can visit the farm with your family on Saturdays and explore their farmer's market and 1000 acres of hiking trails.

Atlantic White Shark Conservancy in Chatham, MA

We got to see the marine biologist private video in a shark cage. We weren't scared at all!

The Turtle Hospital in Marathon, FL

Amy adopted one of the turtles for the students and we got to meet our own Montel the Sea Turtle.

Toucan & Sloth Rescue Ranch in San Isidro de Heredia, Costa Rica

Our students learned all about sloth and toucan rescue, rehabilitation, and release.

Acadia National Park in Bar Harbor, ME

We had a one on one interview with an Acadia National Park wildlands firefighter who showed us all of his cool gear for fire fighting in the mountains.

Koala Hospital in Port Macquarie, Australia

In 2020 when the wildfires hit Australia, TPC students and families hosted a school-wide, week-long fundraiser for this hospital. They don't offer virtual field trips but when I reached out to them, they were so happy to hear from us because of our donations, so they made us their own special video tour just for TPC! Please let us know if you would like to view it and we can send it home.

Arthur's Acres Pig Sanctuary in Parkville, NY

The owner of the sanctuary, Todd, posts videos on social media where he reads bedtime stories to kids with the pigs.

Cape May County Zoo in Cape May, NJ

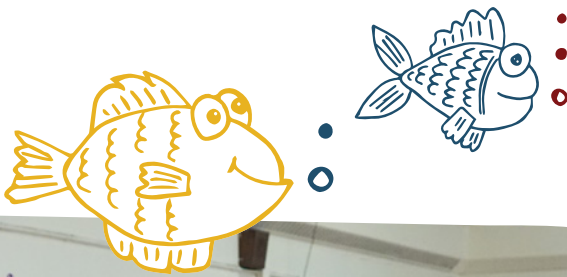
Feel free to visit the Zoo the next time you are headed to south Jersey.



INTRODUCING BRIGID AND JASON - OUR DYNAMIC ADAPTED PE TEAM!

At The Phoenix Center we are fortunate and grateful to have two Adapted Physical Education (APE) teachers. Adapted Physical Education (also called specially designed PE) is instruction in physical education that is designed on an individual basis to meet the needs of a child with a disability. Our teachers, Brigid Prufer and Jason Conroy bring that extensive hands-on learning to TPC!

Brigid's first school year at TPC was 2021. She brought with her prior experience, working with students with special needs in an inclusion setting. In that setting, hands-on thematic units of study were the focus for each month. Brigid liked the concept of giving students this type of structure, while providing variety in their activities and learning modules, so she developed a rotation of daily activities for our students here at TPC to look forward to. Examples of her thematic instruction include:



learners. This supports the Adapted Physical Education instruction philosophy I am so passionate about. While it was not as engaging as being in-person, we were still able to get the students to learn the importance of movement, while also having fun."

“ The students are offered opportunities to access a variety of gross motor centers. Which are highly motivating”

-BRIGID PRUFER

Day & Focus Areas:

- **Mindful Mondays:** Stretching, mindfulness, movement, being calm, being present.
- **Tabata Tuesdays:** Fitness level and gross motor skills with fitness stations (from battling ropes, HiIT, weight lifting, fitness stations and obstacle courses).
- **Wildcard Wednesdays:** Variety included tag games, volleyball, sport-specific activity; team-focused/oriented games.
- **Themed Thursdays:** Health day. Hygiene (toothbrushing, handwashing, etc.) healthy nutrition (healthy vs. unhealthy choices); food groups, body systems (bones and muscles, for instance) and the care and maintenance required.

- **Fun Fridays:** Warm ups, walking, stretching, Brigid creates a fun environment that encourages students to try something that they find enjoyable.

Brigid said, "Since Health was virtual last year as a result of COVID, I would come in and out of classrooms and provide the students with modules of these themes that we could adapt via Zoom or Google classrooms, with a focus on wellness."

"I was able to create lots of interactive Google slide presentations with choices and images and click and drop activities for health. Thankfully, the classroom teachers were hugely collaborative and helped guide the format, so we were able to engage each classroom and each student in a way that would be most successful for those particular

Brigid has a Bachelor's degree in Health & PE/Fitness from West Chester University of Pennsylvania, an Adapted Physical Education certification, and a Master's degree in Education with a focus on Special Education from Towson University. She developed and managed TPC's Adapted PE Google Classroom in order to help families access instruction as part of Distance Learning Procedures during COVID. Now that TPC is fully back to in-person instruction, you can find Brigid consulting and collaborating with teachers, parents, administrators and other professionals (OT, PT, SLP) on behalf of the students' individual physical education and health needs on a daily basis. Brigid added, "As we transitioned back to in-person learning, we have been

working on developing a predictable and consistent class routine, as well as understanding individual student interests. Keeping to my thematic approach, the students are offered opportunities to access a variety of gross motor centers, which are highly motivating. These centers often yield positive results and encourage student independence."



This past school year, Brigid was joined by Jason Conroy, a native of River Edge, NJ who went to West Virginia University for his undergrad degree, where he majored in Adaptive Physical Education. He fell in love with the program there and then went to the University of Virginia for a Masters in Kinesthiology for Disabilities in Adaptive PE.

Jason was committed to finishing his studies, while also getting hands-on learning experience resulting in him juggling teaching during the day and pursuing his advanced studies in the evening. At one point, you could find him traveling to about seven different organizations and schools working with 35–40 students.

Jason explained, "I grew up in River Edge, NJ and knew that I wanted to come home to be close to family and friends. My previous local experience was The Kohler Academy out of ARC of Union County for about three years.



“Fitness, Wellness AND SUCCESS GOALS CAN LOOK DIFFERENT FOR EVERYBODY AND EVERY STUDENT here.”

-JASON CONROY

That, and my experience in Virginia, set me up well for my job here at TPC. The staff are so helpful and collaborative, and are always by my side. We share ideas and the environment is open to different styles, which is so refreshing."

Both Brigid and Jason comment that TPC offers them a family environment where teachers and staff are always helping each other with certain students and their particular behaviors, preferences, and learning and engagement styles. The teaching and professional staff all understand the importance of individualizing the students' learning. Together they said, "Our focus is to help them stay healthy, fit, and make the right choices throughout their lifetime in a way that they enjoy."

Jason added, "Fitness, wellness and success goals can look different for everybody, and every student here. We want them to be successful for where they are at. Getting to know them on a personal level and interacting really helps. PE class does not have to be a chore... it's about getting the student to move in the way that they like, so that they are motivated to do it on a regular basis, daily. It's about gamifying it a little bit to get them to participate in movement activities, not just desk activities. If you

don't engage multiple senses at the same time, it has less impact. Hands-on learning impacts that, no question."

Welcome to the family Brigid and Jason! We are glad you are here!



JIM RUSSOMANO'S OP-ED IN HONOR OF NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH

Jim Russomano, our Board President and owner/dealer principal at Nutley Auto Kia, shared his perspective as an employer of people with disabilities—in honor of National Disability Employment Awareness Month. His op-ed appeared in NJ Spotlight News entitled *Five Reasons to Employ Students with Disabilities*. Jim declared in his op-ed, "it's time to recognize the value of an inclusive workforce...in particular the benefits to both employer and employee." To continue reading Jim's five reasons more businesses should employ students with disabilities, you can find the full article in **NJ Spotlight News** or on our **website** under About, click "News"!

ISABEL COSME FEATURED ON NORTHJERSEY.COM

Isabel Cosme, Spanish teacher and curriculum specialist was featured on video, NorthJersey.com and in print in The Bergen Record last month. Isabel has been working at TPC for 25 years in different roles. As an Ecuadorian American, she has found a mission helping to teach our student body about Hispanic and Latino language and culture in her World Language class. Thank you Isabel! Please check out her article on North Jersey.com under the name 'A 'golden' North Jersey teacher brings Spanish language, culture to kids with disabilities' or on **our website** under About, click "News"!

GIVING TUESDAY

REMI~~N~~DER!

Giving Tuesday is November 29th!
Don't forget to support your
favorite charities!

REMEMBER TO SHOP
USING AMAZON SMILE!



PLEASE HELP US SAVE TREES & TPC MONEY!

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



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SAVE THE DATE
**CASINO
NIGHT**
FRIDAY,
APRIL 28, 2023



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