

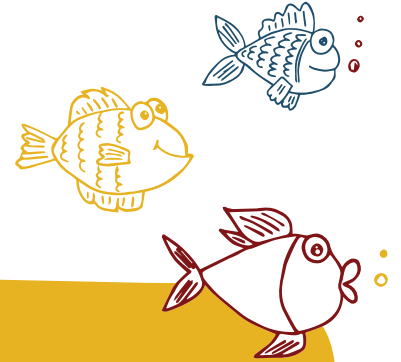


WINTER 2024: COMMITMENT TO KINDNESS

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR LIFE BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

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FOCUS ON PHOENIX



What's inside



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT:
OWEN, ROOM 209



PRINCIPAL PROFILE:
KATIE PASSAROTTI, MA



CULTIVATING KINDNESS: THE HEART OF
EDUCATION AT THE PHOENIX CENTER



CHEERS TO NEW ADVENTURES:
CLAIRE HOLDSWORTH



A NOTE FROM the EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Phoenix Center Family & Friends,

Join us, as we embrace the warmth of "A Commitment to Kindness!" This theme isn't just words on a page—it's woven into the very

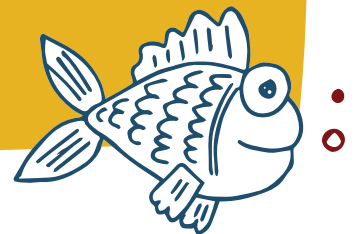
fabric of The Phoenix Center. This newsletter showcases how kindness fuels our classrooms, empowers our students, and strengthens our community.

We believe kindness is a superpower. It builds empathy, inspires generosity, and creates a learning environment where everyone feels supported and valued. Witness the ripple effect of small acts as students, teachers, and families join hands to make a difference.

More than just stories, you'll find inspiration. Discover how we amplify our mission and extend kindness beyond our school walls. See kindness come alive through these heartwarming stories and student achievements.

Until next time, take care, be well 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.



Pictured Above:
Amy B. and Owen, Room 209

**OWEN IS OUR NEWEST
KINDNESS AWARD WINNER!
PICTURED HERE WITH
PRINCIPAL KATIE PASSAROTTI**

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: OWEN. ROOM 209

In classroom 209 of The Phoenix Center, we find Owen, a 17-year-old student from Bergen County, NJ, whose charisma is as clear as day. "It's fun!" he says with a smile, summarizing his feelings about his favorite subject, Phys-Ed. When it's time for school activities, you can bet Owen's participating in basketball or immersed in music, two passions that clearly bring joy to his days.

Owen looks up to his mom—a role model who spends her days working with patients from Columbia University's Aortic Center, communicating about complex topics like anesthesia, thoracic and cardiovascular health. Her dedication to helping patients inspires Owen and it's evident he admires the difference she makes in people's lives.

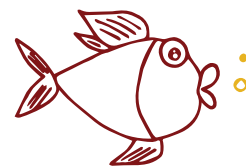
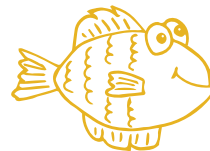
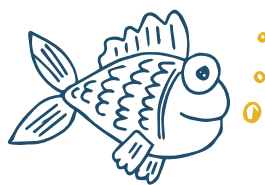
At TPC, Owen enjoys a variety of activities. From occupational and physical therapy to the excitement of PE class and the simple joy of playing with friends, it's a place that caters to his love for engagement and activity.

He mostly enjoys the warmer months, with spring and summer holding a special place in his heart. It's the love of the outdoors that makes these seasons his favorites. And when it comes to food, Owen's tastes are both hearty and diverse, favoring everything from cereal and pancakes to rice and chicken.

Owen has dreams for the future too. While some days he envisions a future in law enforcement as a policeman, his aspirations are as dynamic as he is, shifting daily with new daily experiences.

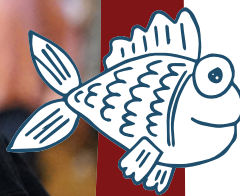
While Owen may not have a single favorite TV show, his interests are broad, enjoying the thrill of football and basketball games on TV, as well as diving into the world of YouTube video shorts.

In every aspect, from his academic preferences to his leisure activities, Owen's life at The Phoenix Center is full of variety, inspiration, and fun—a true reflection of his vibrant spirit.

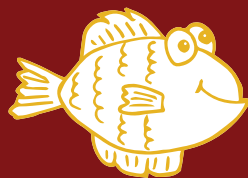


**"CARRY OUT A RANDOM
ACT OF KINDNESS.
WITH NO EXPECTATION
OF REWARD. SAFE IN
THE KNOWLEDGE THAT
ONE DAY SOMEONE
MIGHT DO THE SAME
FOR YOU."**

PRINCESS DIANA



PRINCIPAL PROFILE: Katie Passarotti, MA



Katie Passarotti, Principal of The Phoenix Center shares her journey into special education, when as a young dance instructor, she developed a strong bond with a student with special needs who loved to dance. This girl's joy and resilience, faced with a diagnosis of leukemia, showed Katie the profound impact of the basic joys in life, steering her towards a career in special education. Her path led her to The Phoenix Center, where she's been ever since her student teaching days, cherishing the daily achievements of her students.

As The Phoenix Center's Principal, Katie oversees a staff that takes a distinct approach to supporting students with special needs. It's a place that celebrates each student's unique abilities and customizes programs to their strengths, ensuring that no two students have the same journey. TPC's commitment to looking at the whole child, supported by a team of exceptional educators and therapists, sets it apart in its field.

Among her favorite TPC activities, Katie finds a unique joy in the school's Halloween celebrations, adapted to ensure every student can participate and feel safe. She's especially proud of establishing a dance program, aligning with her first passion and allowing students to shine through performance.

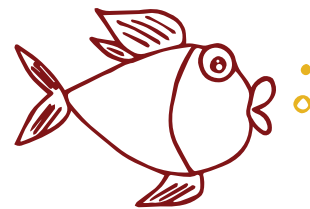
Looking ahead, Katie hopes her students leave The Phoenix Center knowing their value and feeling empowered to pursue their dreams with the knowledge that they are cared for and supported. She emphasizes the importance of parental involvement in creating a nurturing school culture and recognizes the invaluable support of donors who enable enriching experiences for the students.

The teamwork at The Phoenix Center is exemplified by events like the school-wide field day, where staff from all roles come together to provide an inclusive, fun-filled experience for all students. Katie recalls a playful water game during the event, a moment that reflects the heartwarming, collaborative spirit of the school community—a community where laughter and support are abundant, and everyone is united in their dedication to the students' joy and growth.

Reflecting on such events, Katie shares, "When I see our whole team 'in it' with our students, facilitating not just learning but genuine joy and laughter, my heart is just so full." This sentiment encapsulates her vision for The Phoenix Center, where educational growth is harmonized with moments of pure, shared happiness.

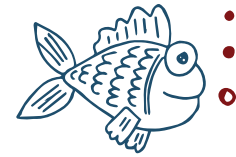
"Be kind
whenever
possible.
it is
always
possible."

The Dalai Lama



"Kind words
can be
short and
easy.
but their
echoes
are truly
endless."

Mother Teresa



The Great Kindness Challenge: Jayden (Room 201) and teacher Anya are pictured above "Rocking Out" for The Phoenix Center's Spirit Week.

CULTIVATING KINDNESS: The Heart of Education at The Phoenix Center

From Interviews and information provided by Katie Passarotti, MA, Principal and Amy Bolliger, M.S. CCC-SLP, Sunny Unit Supervisor/ In House Case Manager

As we journey through the 2023–2024 school year, our theme of **Kindness** continues to weave a tapestry of compassion and understanding throughout our halls. Rooted in our Middle States goal of nurturing character, this marking period's focus now shines brightly on **Kindness**, following a successful period of fostering Respect and anticipating an uplifting chapter on Positivity.

The Phoenix Center's initiative on **Kindness** transcends traditional teaching, integrating this fundamental virtue into every aspect of our educational framework.

At the onset, our dedicated staff embarked on this journey with a comprehensive orientation in September, ensuring a united front in championing the cause of character education. Highlighted by Katie's insightful *Week in Review* newsletters,

our community has embraced simple yet powerful acts like saying "thank you" and "please," reinforcing **Kindness** as a daily practice.

The cultural fabric of The Phoenix Center is inherently kind, a sentiment echoed by the heartwarming feedback from parents, districts, and visitors alike. This year, we've deepened that sentiment by purposefully teaching what it means to be a better citizen, a kinder individual, and a supportive peer. Our 'Hero Award' and the principles of the FISH philosophy—be present, make someone's day, choose your attitude, play—further celebrate the embodiment of these traits among our students.

Our approach is hands-on and collaborative. Each classroom teacher taps into our shared Google Drive, rich with activities and lesson plans, to bring the trait of **Kindness** to life. The beauty of this process lies in its tangibility—students not only learn about **Kindness** but also actively participate in its spread within and beyond our walls.

In the spirit of communal contribution, rooms 103, 105, 106, and 108 initiated

a new sock/mitten/glove drive, amassing over 400 pairs. This act of warmth, quite literally, will find its way to the hands and hearts of those at Toni's Closet in Montclair, thanks to the efforts of our students.

Our **Kindness** Tree, a collaborative effort with the sixth-grade ambassadors from Washington School, stands as a testament to our collective commitment to nurturing a kind environment, celebrated with an exuberant dance party—a symbol of joy and unity.

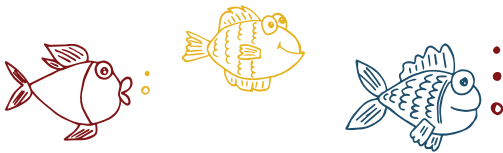
The introduction of Phoenix Flames has added a spark to our initiative. Each 'flame' filled out for a student exhibiting **Kindness** lights up our community, earning them recognition over the loudspeaker, a certificate, and a proud moment for their parents, shared by Katie.

TPC's soup can collection for Holy Family Church in Nutley and our staff's creative decorations add layers to our **Kindness** narrative, proving that every small deed contributes to a larger story of generosity.

Admittedly, the winter has challenged our outdoor expressions of **Kindness**, yet this has not dampened our spirits.



Students and staff delivering donated items to Toni's closet.



Instead, we joined a global movement, The Great **Kindness** Challenge, aligning with over 19 million students in a celebration of goodwill, documented through Marc Restaino's, TPC's Technology and Media Coordinator, vivid photography and videography.

Our Spirit Week epitomized the joy of **Kindness**, with themes like '**Kindness Rocks**' and '**Powered by Kindness**,' embracing fun and camaraderie as integral parts of learning. Even our email signatures carry inspiring messages, a ripple effect ensuring that every communication carries a seed of **Kindness**.

At The Phoenix Center, we understand that while academic excellence is important, the measure of our success is truly reflected in the kind-hearted nature of our students. As we continue to focus on these positive traits, we are building a culture that not only values academic achievements but also prioritizes the virtues of being kind, respectful, and positive.

Thank you for being an integral part of this journey. Your support and involvement are what make The Phoenix Center not just a place of learning, but a home of nurturing and **Kindness**. Remember, spreading **Kindness** starts with the smallest of gestures. Let's continue to make every day count! ☺



CHEERS TO NEW ADVENTURES: CLAIRE HOLDSWORTH

After 28 years nurturing The Phoenix Center's growth, Claire Holdsworth embarks on a well-deserved retirement, leaving an indelible mark on the school's heart and soul. Starting in 1996, Claire's journey began as a bookkeeper, but her impact far surpassed the balance sheet.

As the school blossomed, Claire embraced the evolving complexities, seamlessly transitioning from bookkeeper to financial manager. With each technological advancement, she navigated the demands, ensuring The Phoenix Center not only adapted but thrived.

Claire's dedication extended beyond finances. She cherished traditions like Casino Night and Birthday Breakfasts, weaving connections with colleagues and fostering a spirit of camaraderie. More than numbers, Claire saw people, fostering a positive relationship with the NJDOE and embodying the power of teamwork. Her unwavering belief

in the staff's exceptional quality resonates deeply within the community.

As Claire embraces retirement, her greatest hope is for students and families to carry pride in their Phoenix Center experience, remembering the collective effort and the dedication of its people. While family and friends await, Claire leaves The Phoenix Center in capable hands, confident in its future. Her tenure stands as a testament to dedication, teamwork, and a love for The Phoenix Center community.

WELCOME, DANYELLE KIERSTEDT!

We wholeheartedly welcome Danyelle Kierstedt, MBA, as Claire's successor. "I'm thrilled to learn about non-profit accounting and finance through the lens of an APSSD," shares Danyelle, "while embracing this unique work culture and mission." We have no doubt Danyelle will build upon the incredible work Claire has done, while adding her own chapter to The Phoenix Center's story.



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A JOURNEY OF KINDNESS: FROM THE PHOENIX CENTER TO MOTIVATIONAL SPEAKER



Recently, we witnessed a heartwarming homecoming. Lisa Lyons, who started her career as a teacher at The Phoenix Center, and is now an educational consultant and a sought-after inspirational speaker. Her journey from a passionate educator to a happiness expert and back to the place where it all began, to speak on kindness, is a story worth telling.