

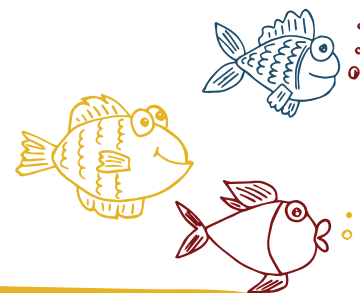


SUMMER 2025: CELEBRATING OUR HEROES

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR
**LIFE BEYOND THE
CLASSROOM**

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FOCUS ON PHOENIX



What's inside



THE PHOENIX CENTER'S
HERO PROGRAM



GRADUATION & SPRING FORMAL



CELEBRATING THE SUCCESS
OF CASINO NIGHT 2025!



SPRING CONCERT



THE VOICE OF THE PHOENIX CENTER



TPC IS HIRING!

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Welcome to our summer newsletter, *Celebrating Our Heroes*. This season, we're highlighting the many role models in our community.

Our Hero Program, now in its 21st year, continues to spotlight students who embody the FISH! Philosophy. Whether it's mastering a new skill, using a device to communicate, or showing kindness, each act is a reminder that progress looks different for everyone, and all of it matters.



We also proudly celebrated our **graduates**, honored at a heartfelt ceremony that reflected their hard work and readiness for life beyond the classroom. Events like **Casino Night** and our **Spring Concert** brought our community together, raising funds and spirits while showcasing student creativity and talent.



Lastly, we are celebrating the **voices of TPC - our Administrative Assistants**. These amazing staff practice the Fish Philosophy through their daily encounters with our parents, families, districts and the community at large.

These moments reflect what makes The Phoenix Center special: a place where students are seen, supported, and celebrated. Thank you for being part of our community.

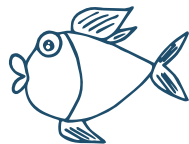
With gratitude,
Julie Mower, M.A.Ed.,
Executive Director



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.

The Phoenix Center's Hero Program:

Nurturing Potential & Celebrating Progress



At The Phoenix Center (TPC), we believe that progress deserves to be seen, named, and celebrated. The Hero Program is our school-wide tradition of shining a light on students who demonstrate one or more of the FISH! Principles (Be Present, Make Their Day, Choose Your Attitude, and Play). Since its launch in 2003 our Hero celebrations have nurtured confidence and pride across every age and ability group.

What Makes a Hero

A student is nominated by any TPC staff member for a myriad of reasons - some examples have included:

- Communicating or interacting in a new way – for example, a non-verbal student using an AAC device to join a class discussion in real time
- Mastering a new skill that moves them closer to life beyond the classroom – from tying a shoe to running a cash register simulation
- Demonstrating initiative, resilience, or kindness that lifts peers and staff

Small spark or big breakthrough, each act reflects the four FISH! Philosophy pillars embraced by our entire community: Be Present, Make Their Day, Choose Your Attitude, and Play.

**"EVERY STUDENT. NO
MATTER THEIR ABILITY
OR AGE. HAS THE
OPPORTUNITY TO SHINE.
IT'S NOT ABOUT BEING
PERFECT. IT'S ABOUT
PROGRESS. AND
PROGRESS IS WORTH
CELEBRATING."**

Grayce Hennessy



A Positive Call Home

Each marking period, the Hero Committee gathers to review nominations and organize a well-deserved celebration.

Our committee chair personally reaches out to families, letting them know their child has been nominated as a TPC Hero for their success and accomplishments. This positive outreach is incredibly meaningful for parents and guardians. We know that, for many, calls from school have historically been about difficulties. Now, the "call from school" is a source of joy, highlighting their child's triumphs!

"This program builds confidence not just in our students, but in everyone around them," says Grayce Hennessy, Speech Therapist and Hero Committee Chair. "It's a reminder that our students are capable of incredible things. By recognizing these moments, we're helping them see themselves as successful, valued, and capable."

Why it Matters

By focusing on strengths, the Hero Program:

- Builds self-esteem through public acknowledgment
- Motivates students to pursue their own milestones
- Reinforces a positive, playful culture of belonging
- Aligns every celebration with our mission of preparing students for fulfilling lives in the wider community

When asked what makes the Hero Program so special, Hennessy explains, "It's inclusive. Every student, no matter their ability or age, has the opportunity to shine. It's not about being perfect, it's about progress. And progress is worth celebrating."

The Hero Program is a wonderful reinforcement of TPC's mission and promotes a supportive and nurturing environment for students, their families, and staff. Each Hero reminds us that ability is revealed when opportunity meets encouragement. In honoring these moments we help every learner rise – just like the phoenix that inspires our name – toward a future of greater independence and joy.

HONORING the CLASS OF 2025

A CELEBRATION OF MILESTONES AND CONTINUED SUPPORT

Graduation at TPC is more than a ceremony, it's a powerful celebration of progress, community, and what comes next. This June, we proudly honored ten remarkable students as they crossed this important milestone:



**Alexis C.
Anthony H.
Camron L.
Felipe G.**

**Gabriel S.
James H.
Kevin F.**

**Kyle H.
Yadhavan V.
Yusra E.**



These graduates leave TPC not only with lasting memories, but with a personalized plan for success beyond the classroom. Thanks to our *Graduate Support Program*, each student and family receives hands-on guidance through the complex transition to adult life. Led by Transition Supervisor Tracy Hanna, the program includes post-graduation check-ins, support with new placements, and ongoing access to Phoenix Center staff. From Exit IEP planning to guardianship and Medicaid workshops, the foundation for a strong future is set long before graduation day.

One of the most memorable moments leading up to graduation? The annual TPC Formal. Students 17 and older celebrated in style—dressed to the nines, enjoying music, refreshments, and the joy of dancing with friends and staff. A heartfelt thanks goes to Ashley Agresti, Community Family Life (CFL) instructor, for her incredible coordination and to Jimmy Hemp Productions for donating their time and talent to make the event unforgettable.

Graduation may mark the end of a school journey, but at The Phoenix Center, it's also a beginning. Our graduates remain part of the TPC family, with several yearly alumni events, including Restaurant Nights, Bowling, Fall Picnic, as well as invites to our twice-yearly concerts. Once a Phoenix, always a Phoenix!

Here's to the Class of 2025!

CELEBRATING the SUCCESS OF CASINO Night 2025!

OF ATTENDEES

145

OF SPONSORS

17

OF TRICKY TRAY PRIZES

50

OF SILENT AUCTION PRIZES

15

OF VOLUNTEER STAFF THAT HELPED PUT TOGETHER THE EVENT

20+

OF COMMITTEE MEMBERS

13



The VOICES OF TPC: OUR AMAZING ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALS

At TPC, our four administrative assistants truly are the voice of our organization. We're incredibly grateful for Betty, Diane, Nancy, and Stephanie who are the backbone of our daily operations. These remarkable individuals are often the first warm welcome families and visitors receive. They embody our commitment to the Fish Philosophy, bringing energy and a spirit of "play" to their vital roles. Their professionalism, efficiency, and unwavering commitment ensure everything runs smoothly and create our positive, supportive environment.

Betty, Diane, Nancy, and Stephanie live the spirit of The Phoenix Center every day. Their dedication allows our staff to focus on providing exceptional care, while they keep our culture vibrant. Please join us in celebrating these invaluable team members. The Phoenix Center wouldn't be the thriving community it is without their hard work and infectious positive energy. Thank you for everything you do!



From left - right: Betty Astacio, Diane Hayes, Stephanie Smith, Nancy Hellerman

" My favorite part of working for TPC: The family atmosphere and being friends with some of the staff for over 33 years. Many of us started our careers at William Paterson College together. And I have loved every minute of it! "

Diane Hayes

" My favorite part of working for The Phoenix center is contributing to a mission that truly changes lives. While my role working with the Executive Director doesn't involve direct student interaction. I take pride that the work I do helps ensure the school operates efficiently and strategically. It's fulfilling to know that my contributions support the dedicated educators and staff who work so closely with our students and their families. "

Betty Astacio

" My favorite part of working at The Phoenix center would definitely be the students! Watching them reach their own individual goals and grow is amazing! I have worked here for 14 years and have made great friends. "



Nancy Hellerman

" September starts my 13th year at The Phoenix center. And the best part continues to be seeing our students grow and succeed. While my current office position is quite different from the seven years I spent in the classroom as a paraprofessional. It has its own rewards. It's knowing that I am still contributing to the students' success. Just in a different capacity. "

Stephanie Smith

SPRING CONCERT Hits the AIRWAVES WITH 'MUSIC THROUGH the Decades'

This year's Spring Concert at TPC wasn't just a performance, it was a full-on production, reimagined as a live radio show that had students, staff, and families tapping their feet and singing along. Hosted by music teacher Tyler Roberts, the show took the audience on a nostalgic journey with a creative twist: a simulated call-in radio format broadcast from "16 MSGR Phoenix Center Radio."

Titled "Music Through the Decades," the concert featured hit songs from the 60s through today, with themed call-ins, heartfelt dedications, and even faux commercials voiced by staff members. From the YMCA to One Direction, student solos and a high-energy finale by The Phoenix Center Dance Troupe, every moment was packed with joy, talent, and community spirit.

A standout moment came during a dedication to former student Josh's family, who donated a beautiful baby grand piano in honor of his late grandmother, Lenore Turteltaub. The baby grand made its official debut during a moving performance of "Can't Help Falling in Love," played and sung by student Donnie P. It was a touching tribute and a lasting gift that will continue to support music education for years to come.

The concert closed with a mashup of boy band favorites performed by the student Dance Troupe, leaving the crowd smiling and inspired. With creativity, collaboration, and celebration at its heart, this year's concert was truly *larger than life*.



TPC is hiring... We Need TEACHERS!

Are you passionate about making a difference in the lives of students with special needs? Do you want to be part of a supportive and innovative educational community? Look no further than The Phoenix Center!

As we continue our mission of providing exceptional education and support to our students, we are excited to announce that we are expanding our team. We are currently seeking dedicated professionals who are committed to empowering students with special needs and helping them thrive.

Join our remarkable team of educators, therapists, paraprofessionals, and support staff who are committed to creating a positive and transformative educational experience for our students. Together, we can make a real difference in their lives and inspire them to reach their full potential.

To learn more about the current career opportunities at The Phoenix Center, please visit our careers page by using the QR code or at thephoenixcenternj.org/contact/career-opportunities. We encourage you to share this opportunity with anyone you know who might be interested in joining our exceptional team.





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save the date

Saturday, MAY 2, 2026
TPC's 35th ANNIVERSARY GALA

