MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, KURT OHLFS

PACE’s resiliency throughout an unprecedented global crisis comes from the unwavering support of our staff of teachers, therapists, instructional aides, residential caregivers, our administrative team, and our donors and community partners. This collective support enables us to carry on our mission, launch new initiatives, and grow our existing programs. It allows us to strengthen our impact in the community and serve more families in the Bay Area. As we enter 2022, we continue to assess the needs within the community we serve and work hard to identify solutions. We continue to focus on opportunities that mobilize and expand our expertise and knowledge to support individuals with autism and their families beyond our walls.

This April, we invite you to celebrate Autism Awareness Month with us by participating in our Kindness Matters campaign, dedicated to promoting inclusion, acceptance, and kindness for individuals of all abilities and backgrounds. You can find out more about our campaign by visiting our website, www.pacificautism.org. Thank you for being a part of our effort and supporting our mission.

WISHING YOU ALL A SAFE AND HEALTHY START TO THE SPRING SEASON,

KURT OHLFS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

ASK A THERAPIST: FORMS OF COMMUNICATION

Individualized planning within a team of stakeholders for functional goals is required for success. As a caregiver, this may be collaborating with your child’s BCBA on strategies that support your child’s needs. Functional communication can be improved using Augmentative Alternative Communication devices (AAC), which include but are not limited to: Picture Exchange Communication Systems, Communication boards, and Sign Language.

Alania Sabankaya, BA, RBT

As caregivers and therapists for children with ASD we often observe frustration in our students when they encounter challenges communicating their needs and desires. Our goal is to provide interventions that allow children to learn functional forms of communication that are specific to each child’s skill set. Here are some forms of communication most often observed:

Non-Verbal Communication

- Using signs or adaptive sign language
- Using gestures
- Physical aggression or self-injurious behavior
- Drawing pictures or writing symbols or words
- Crying or emotive sounds
- Physically directing someone’s hand to a desired object or environment

Echolalia

Echolalia might look like a child repeating a word or phrase heard or read in a different context and using it as a way of communication. Caregivers and therapists are encouraged to research the context of the phrase or word being repeated in order to understand the function of this communication.

Speaking with No Eye Contact

Individuals who can verbally communicate but lack the skill to maintain eye contact may be experiencing sensorimotor-related challenges. It is a sensory experience to make eye contact with another individual, just as speaking is a sensory experience. Doing both behaviors simultaneously could lead to sensory overload, causing the person to break or not make eye contact initially.

How Can I Support Functional Communication?

Functional Communication Training (FCT) is a methodology that provides a child with a reliable way to convey information using language, signs, and/or images to achieve a desired end. It was originally developed as a way to reduce undesirable behaviors that resulted from an inability to communicate effectively. In order for FCT to be effective it is important to keep in mind the Four Functions of Behavior: Escape, Attention, (access to) Tangible items, and Sensory needs. This helps us understand why behaviors occur. It is also important to identify a child’s likes and dislikes. These can be in the form of items, actions and environments.

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We love this graphic about visuals from “Long Story Shortz.” The graphic highlights some of the key benefits that visuals bring to the classrooms at PACE and beyond.


9 Important Reasons to Use Visuals from the very talented Long Story Shortz & @ kweins62 on IG and Twitter
We are excited to introduce a new column that highlights the amazing work of our Board members. This month we introduce Joanna Rashid and Marina Djordjevic, who joined the Board in November 2021, and Sruba Seshadri, who joined in February 2022.

Introducing Joanna Rashid. Tell us a little bit about yourself!
I am a Bay Area native. My husband and I are raising our two daughters on the mid-peninsula. Our first daughter, Etta, is 14 years old and has autism. Our younger daughter, Nola, is about to turn 13 and is neurotypical. We love to hike! We love to cook at home and enjoy the fantastically diverse bay area food scene.

What does it mean to you being a parent who is involved with PACE on a daily basis?
If you have a child with severe autism, you know that finding appropriate education and activities are a challenge. After years of searching, I’m so grateful to be able to send my daughter to a school she loves.

What makes our organization’s mission powerful for you?
PACE combines highly customized curriculum, program flexibility, and well-trained staff to create an impactful program. PACE’s strengths-based approach focuses on promoting independence rather than just compliance. When we first began at PACE in 2019, the school director, Sadie Randle, told me that “first we have to make the kids feel safe and happy to be here, without that they can’t learn.” I will never forget that moment. I think this mindset is the key to PACE’s success.

What is something you look forward to most being a part of the Board of Directors?
I am active in the Bay Area autism community. In talking with families, far too often I hear families struggling with the transition from secondary to post-secondary education, and then on to adult programs. In the Bay area, there is a lack of appropriate high-support, day programs. PACE’s focus on independence and preparation for adulthood aims to reduce the support they will need in adulthood. My hope is that as a board member, I can do my part to help bring pragmatic and effective programming to more teens and adults with autism.

Introducing Marina Djordjevic. Tell us a little bit about yourself!
I’m a proud mother of two; Sophia and David. My son, David, is a student at PACE and lives in one of the residential homes. I’ve lived in the Bay Area for most of my life and work at a startup company. I love hiking, museums, yoga and pilates. Looking forward to traveling again!

What makes our organization’s mission powerful for you?
PACE’s mission “To enhance the lives of those impacted by autism…” is powerful to so many families that are affected by autism. By offering education and residential programs, families have an amazing resource that is often very challenging to find. For any family with a child or loved one with autism, special needs or any disability, managing daily activities can be overwhelming. I am very thankful for PACE.

What is something you look forward to most being a part of the Board of Directors?
I’m looking forward to getting to know more about PACE as an organization as well as the other Board members. I hope to bring a parent’s perspective to the Board so PACE can continue to provide the programs needed to its community.

Introducing Sruba Seshadri. Tell us a little bit about yourself!
I recently joined the PACE Board in February 2022. Both of my sons have been involved with PACE. My older son was part of the YLC (Youth Leadership Committee) and Arjun volunteered in the Finance Department at PACE. My background is in technical account management application. In addition to my 25 years of engineering background, my journey has lead me to be the co-developer of Therapeutic Sensory bags.

What is something you look forward to most being a part of the Board of Directors?
I believe in the work done by PACE based on my association through my son volunteering at PACE and would like to leverage my skills and connections in the tech industry for a good cause.
RESIDENTIAL NEWS: REBUILDING TOGETHER DAY

Melissa Watkins, Marketing and Development Manager

We are incredibly grateful for the many volunteers and local community organizations who continue to support PACE’s residential program. In November of 2021, over 20 volunteers came together at PACE’s Meadows Group Home for Rebuilding Together Day, a bi-annual day of service hosted by Rebuilding Together Silicon Valley. For this day of service, we partnered with Rebuilding Together to provide essential home repairs to nonprofit agencies, veterans, and low-income households. Volunteers from Silicon Valley Mechanical transformed the backyard at PACE Meadows with new mulch and shrubs. In addition, they provided new picnic benches for the clients, built by hand onsite, and new outdoor games for the clients to enjoy. Volunteers also gave much-needed attention to the inside of the facility by repairing walls before giving them a fresh coat of paint. It was a significant improvement that brightened up the outdoor spaces and to provide comfortable and safe setting for children and adults with autism, enabling them to develop daily living skills and to lead more independent and productive lives built on the foundation of personal choice and independent decision-making. PACE currently operates two children’s homes and four adult homes throughout the South Bay area.

ABOUT PACE RESIDENTIAL:
PACE’s residential program offers a comfortable and safe setting for children and adults with autism, enabling them to develop daily living skills and to lead more independent and productive lives built on the foundation of personal choice and independent decision-making. PACE currently operates two children’s homes and four adult homes throughout the South Bay area.

UPCOMING PROJECTS:
PACE’s Residential Program recognizes the importance of sustainable energy and is committed to using renewable resources to contribute to a greener world. Over the last year, PACE has worked on an initiative to convert all six residential homes to solar power, allowing the agency to leverage natural resources to reduce energy costs and consumption. Matranga Group Home for adults will be the first home to receive the solar power conversion, made possible thanks to generous grants from the Crkvenjakov Foundation and the SPARK Foundation, and Fund-A-Need donations from our 2021 Golf Classic.

GOLF CLASSIC

14TH ANNUAL PACE GOLF CLASSIC
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 16TH, 2022
CINNabar HILLS GOLF CLUB

Come out and join us for a wonderful day at the 14th Annual PACE Golf Classic on Friday, September 16th, 2022 at Cinnabar Hills Golf Club. Your participation makes a significant impact at PACE. All proceeds from the event support PACE programs and services. We hope you are just as excited as we are to get outside and play a round of golf for PACE!

ALL PLAYERS WILL ENJOY:
- Beautiful Mountain & Lake Course fairways with golf carts
- Shotgun start
- Full lunch and refreshments
- Exciting on-course contests
- Complimentary swag bag
- Cocktail Hour and Dinner
- Silent and Live Auction

SPONSORSHIPS AVAILABLE!
Please contact Melissa Watkins for more information, at melissawatkins@pacificautism.org
Music therapy is distinct from simply Therapy, Applied Occupational Therapy, Speech Therapy, and other therapeutic modalities. Music therapy is different from simply physical, emotional, and spiritual health.” (MTAC)

At PACE, Music Therapy is one of the tools in our therapeutic tool bag along with Speech Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Applied Behavior Analysis, and a variety of other therapeutic modalities. Music therapy is distinct from simply using random music as a form of therapy because it uses evidenced based interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a specific therapeutic relationship. Chris uses musical techniques with our students to enhance a wide variety of skills including: speech, cognition, emotional expression, attention and focus and social and communication skills. For children on the autism spectrum struggling with communication challenges, music becomes a bridge for supporting and shaping their communication efforts. Studies show that music actually helps build and strengthen neurological connections.

Formerly a professional carpenter, several years ago, Chris went back to school to complete his degree. A chance meeting with a Music Therapy student inspired him to complete his BA and then the additional 2-year certification required to become a Board-Certified Music Therapist (MT-BC). While studying, in addition to giving guitar lessons and working as a Music Together teacher, he worked as a music specialist at the Arbor Bay School in San Carlos, providing adapted music classes for students with varying learning differences, including Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). He knew from that experience, that he was going to love being a Music Therapist. Chris has been playing guitar and singing since he was 10 years old, performing semi-professionally in bands, and as a solo act. He has spent many years working on his technique and repertoire, but more importantly, has come to place higher value on what the music “does to the audience.” This has culminated into a career where the “product” of the music during a session is less important than the therapeutic effect of the musical relationship with the client. Says Chris: “I don’t ever play to impress in this setting, only to relate, and the client’s musical output is only interpreted with therapeutic benefit in mind, rather than an idealized standard of music or musicianship. However, some really great jams do happen!”