



## MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, KURT OHLFS

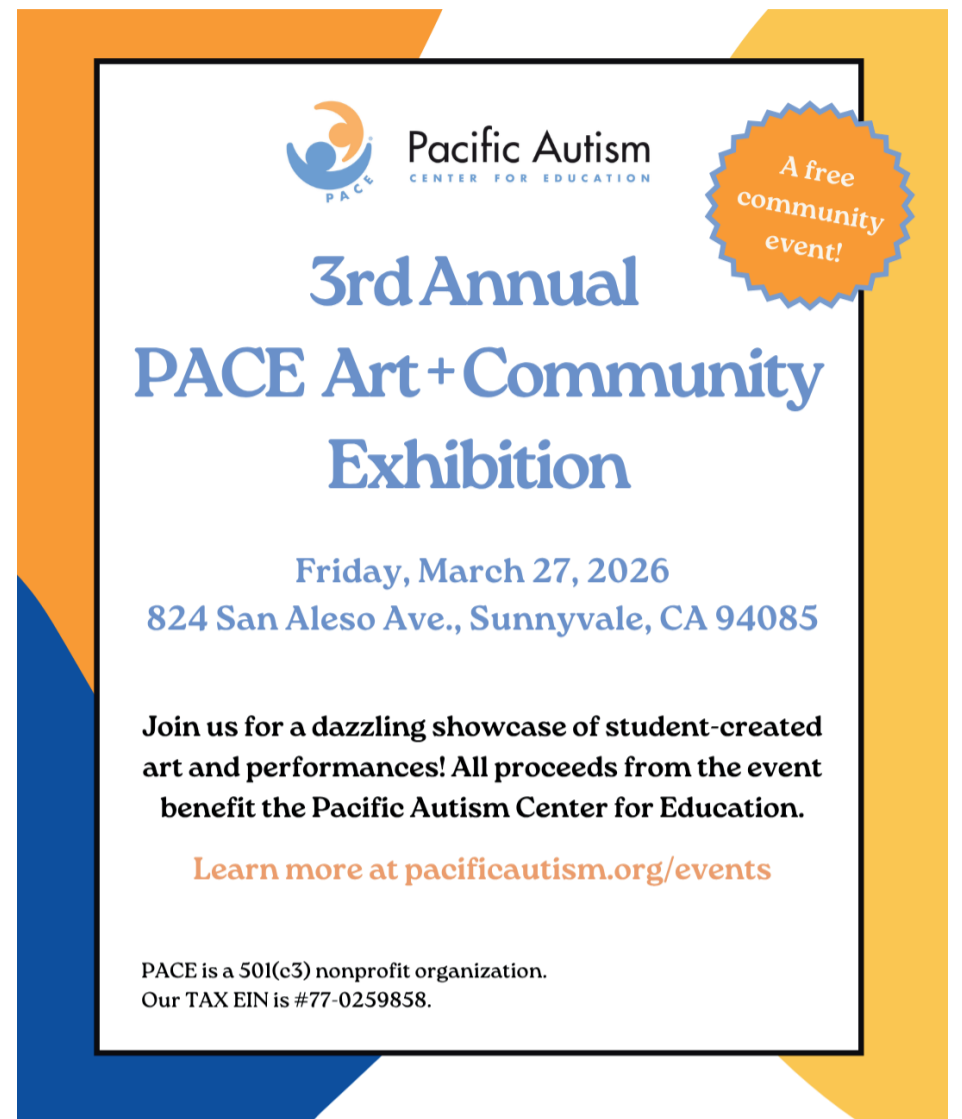
As 2026 continues, PACE is proud to celebrate an exciting new partnership with the Stanford men's basketball team. In February, the team hosted an Autism Acceptance Night during a home game, welcoming PACE staff and families for a special evening of recognition and community. More than 100 members of the PACE community attended and were honored both on the court and in the stands. It was a powerful and joyful night that highlighted the strength of our community and the growing awareness of autism acceptance across the region.

The momentum continues this spring with more opportunities to come together. On Friday, March 27, we will host our 3rd Annual Art and Community Show. This meaningful event showcases the creativity and talent of our students while also serving as an important fundraiser to support PACE programs. We look forward to celebrating the incredible work of our students and sharing that joy with families and supporters.

We will also kick off Autism Acceptance Month in April with a spirited evening at the San Jose Sharks Autism Acceptance Night on April 1, 2026. Events like these help raise visibility and foster understanding within the broader community.

Autism Acceptance Month invites us to reflect on the importance of inclusion, compassion, and opportunity for individuals on the autism spectrum. At PACE, we are committed to building a supportive environment where every student can grow, thrive, and shine. Your continued partnership and generosity make this work possible, and we are deeply grateful for your support.

To stay informed about upcoming events at PACE and the community, you can visit [www.pacificautism.com/events](http://www.pacificautism.com/events). You can also subscribe to our newsletters by emailing [marketing@pacificautism.org](mailto:marketing@pacificautism.org).



**Pacific Autism**  
CENTER FOR EDUCATION

**3rd Annual PACE Art + Community Exhibition**

**Friday, March 27, 2026**  
**824 San Aleso Ave., Sunnyvale, CA 94085**

**Join us for a dazzling showcase of student-created art and performances! All proceeds from the event benefit the Pacific Autism Center for Education.**

**Learn more at [pacificautism.org/events](http://pacificautism.org/events)**

PACE is a 501(c3) nonprofit organization.  
Our TAX EIN is #77-0259858.

*A free community event!*

## SJ Sharks Night Returns!

The San Jose Sharks, in partnership with PACE, will host their 4th Annual Autism Acceptance Night at their home game at SAP Center on Wednesday, April 1, 2026, at 7:00 PM against the Anaheim Ducks. This special event will help raise awareness of neurodiversity in the Bay Area and showcase the importance of inclusion and accessibility for families of all backgrounds to enjoy professional sports.

The Sharks will offer a sensory room for families, which will be designed with input from our own PACE Occupational Therapists. PACE is proud to partner with the SJ Sharks on this important occasion. PACE has a special block of seats that includes access to the sensory room (located on the Club Level).

\$10 of each ticket sold will be donated to PACE. To purchase tickets, visit <https://www.gofevo.com/event/Autismacceptance68>



**AUTISM ACCEPTANCE GROUP NIGHT**

SHARKS VS DUCKS

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1, 2026  
7:00pm, SAP CENTER

Tickets include access to a sensory room located on the Club Level. A portion of ticket sales will be donated to PACE!

**Pacific Autism**  
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## Stanford Autism Acceptance Night



In February 2026, Stanford Men's Basketball hosted an Autism Acceptance Night that brought together PACE staff, families, and community members for an evening centered on inclusion and connection. The event took place during a home game and created a welcoming environment for families to come together and be recognized.

Players wore PACE-branded warm-up gear, showing visible support and setting the tone for the night. Attendees also received Autism Acceptance shirts, which could be seen throughout the arena as a show of unity and support.

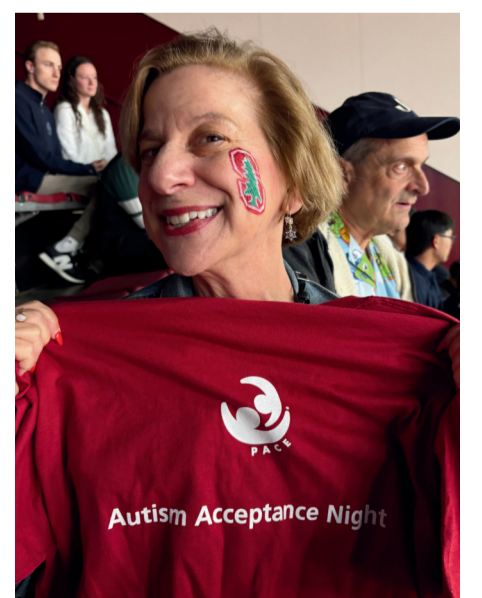
During the game, PACE staff and families were featured on the big screen, giving them a moment of recognition in front of the Stanford crowd. A dedicated sensory space was available for individuals who needed a quieter, more comfortable environment during the game, helping ensure the event was accessible to everyone.

Several PACE staff members were invited onto the court and acknowledged for their work and commitment. This on-court recognition was a

meaningful moment for staff and families and was met with strong support from fans in attendance.

The night held added significance as the head coach of Stanford Men's Basketball, Kevin Smith, is also a PACE parent. That personal connection underscored the purpose behind the event and reflected the shared commitment to inclusion across the Stanford community.

Autism Acceptance Night highlighted the power of athletics to bring people together, celebrate neurodiversity, and create spaces where all members of the community feel seen and supported. A big thank you to everyone who helped organize the game and came out to support PACE.



# 2026 PACE Golf Classic



**Thursday, September 24, 2026, 12:30 PM Shotgun Tournament  
Cinnabar Hills Golf Club, San Jose, CA**

The 18th Annual PACE Golf Classic will take place on Thursday, September 24, 2026, at Cinnabar Hills Golf Club in San Jose. One of PACE's largest and most successful fundraisers, the event supports our programs and ongoing residential enhancement projects. We look forward to a fun and successful day on the green in support of our mission. **Learn more about sponsorships and player registration at [pacificautism.org/events](http://pacificautism.org/events).**

# Meet Stephanie DuWang

Stephanie joined the PACE team in August 2025, bringing with her over 20 years of experience supporting children on the autism spectrum. Throughout her career, she has worked in a wide range of settings, including clinics, center-based programs, home services, and school districts. Her experience spans a broad age range as well, from toddlers as young as 18 months to high school-aged students.

Stephanie was drawn to PACE because of its commitment to using behavioral science in a proactive, student-centered way. She is passionate about helping students build meaningful skills that lead to long-term positive change, rather than focusing solely on managing challenges in the moment. PACE's philosophy strongly aligns with her belief that lasting growth comes from thoughtful support.

She was also impressed by the sense of stability and collaboration

at PACE. Hearing that many staff members have been with the organization long-term, along with receiving positive feedback from school district Program Coordinators, reinforced her desire to join the team. Stephanie values the opportunity to work at a single school site, which she believes fosters stronger teamwork, consistency, and better outcomes for students and staff alike.

In her role as a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), Stephanie supports students' behavioral needs by developing effective strategies that promote skill building and positive behavior. She works closely with classroom staff to support structure and consistency, and collaborates with service providers and families to ensure strategies are aligned across settings.

Outside of work, Stephanie enjoys spending time in nature through walks, hikes, and



exploring new places. She is also a self-proclaimed foodie who loves trying new foods and checking out different restaurants whenever she can.

We are excited to have Stephanie as part of the PACE team! Her experience, dedication, and positive energy make her a wonderful addition to the community.

# Toilet Training and Autism: Start Simple

Melanie Saez, FACES Clinical Supervisor, MS, BCBA



Toilet training is an important developmental milestone, and for many families of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), it can feel both urgent and overwhelming. It is common for parents to wonder whether their child will need highly intensive or complicated procedures to be successful. From an Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) perspective, however, toilet training is a teachable skill and many children can learn through simple, structured, reinforcement-based strategies that prioritize encouragement and consistency.

### What Is Behavioral Toilet Training?

Behavioral toilet training focuses on predictable routines, clear expectations, and positive reinforcement. Rather than relying on pressure or punishment, the goal is to break toileting into manageable steps and reinforce progress along the way. This often includes scheduled bathroom sits, consistent routines, and meaningful praise or small rewards when the child is successful. Accidents are treated calmly and neutrally as part of the learning process, not as failures, but as information that helps guide the next step.

### Common Misconceptions:

It is often assumed that children with autism require extreme or highly intensive methods. In reality, research suggests that many children respond well to simple, structured, reinforcement-based approaches (Perez et al., 2020). Another common belief is that accidents mean a child is not ready. Like any new skill, toileting takes practice, repetition, and patience. Progress may not be linear, and that is okay.

### Practical Applications:

Begin with a consistent bathroom schedule and switch to underwear when appropriate to help increase awareness. Provide immediate praise or a small motivating reward for successful toileting. Keep responses to accidents calm, brief, and supportive. Track patterns in timing to make thoughtful adjustments. If progress slows, collaborate with your BCBA to individualize the plan rather than immediately increasing intensity.

Toilet training can feel daunting, but many children with autism are capable of learning this skill with structure, encouragement, and consistency. Starting simple allows families to build success step by step and fosters confidence for both the child and the adults supporting them.

### Reference

Perez, B., et al. (2020). An extension of commonly used toilet-training procedures to children with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 53(4), 1882–1895.

# YLC in Action

Sydney Zitzer, Marketing and Community Engagement Coordinator



The PACE Youth Leadership Committee has been working hard this season to raise awareness and support fundraising initiatives. In November, members participated in the San Andreas Regional Center's Holiday Craft Fair, raising over \$300 in support of PACE. Several members have also gone above and beyond by organizing their own independent fundraisers.

YLC member, Leon Le, led one such effort through his nonprofit origami and STEM initiative, FoldEDU. Leon raised funds at Santana Row by educating the public about PACE and encouraging donations, while also handing out free origami models.

In December, the committee came together for a meaningful, hands-on activity by creating holiday cards and bookmarks for the PACE students. This project allowed members to give back in a personal way and spread some holiday cheer.

Looking ahead, the Youth Leadership Committee is actively preparing for Autism Acceptance Month and is excited to play a key role in raising awareness, promoting inclusion, and advocating for the community. Their efforts will begin with significant involvement in the organization and support of the PACE Art Show. Throughout the month, members will also lead an online acceptance campaign, highlighting a new topic each week to educate the community and encourage meaningful conversations around autism. Through social media outreach, educational posts, and advocacy-focused content, the committee hopes to engage a wider audience and inspire continued learning and support beyond the month of April.

Be sure to follow along on social media to stay updated!



## Celebrate Autism Acceptance Month!

April is Autism Acceptance Month! This is a time to amplify the experiences of individuals on the autism spectrum and foster a culture of acceptance, kindness, and inclusion in our community. At PACE we are committed to empowering individuals impacted by autism through innovation, exceptional education, and compassionate care.

Throughout the month of April, we are looking forward to continuing to celebrate our neurodiverse community and uphold the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion. We invite you to celebrate with us throughout the month by participating in our upcoming events and online campaign.

### Upcoming Events

#### PACE Art & Community Exhibition

Friday, March 27, 2026 | 5-6:30PM | 824 San Aleso Avenue, Sunnyvale, CA 94085

The students and staff at the PACE School are proud to host the 3rd Annual PACE Art + Community Exhibition, showcasing inspiring works from our talented students and community members! The event will feature live performances and an array of handmade art projects created by our PACE School students and community members.

All proceeds from this event will directly benefit the Pacific Autism Center for Education. To learn more, visit [www.pacificautism.org/events](http://www.pacificautism.org/events)

#### Sharks & PACE Autism Acceptance Group Night

Wednesday, April 1, 2026 | 7:00PM | SAP CENTER, San Jose, CA

PACE is partnering with the San Jose Sharks for their fourth Annual Autism Acceptance Night, Wednesday, April 1, 2026, 7PM versus the Anaheim Ducks. The special event ticket includes access to a sensory room located on the Club Level. To purchase your ticket, visit: <https://www.gofevo.com/event/Autismacceptance68>

#### Panda Express Virtual Fundraiser

Monday, April 6, 2026 | All locations nationwide

Apply code **9013264** in the Fundraiser Code box during online checkout at [www.pandaexpress.com](http://www.pandaexpress.com) or via App



**APRIL IS AUTISM ACCEPTANCE MONTH**

Celebrating kindness, inclusivity, connection, community, and neurodiversity today and every day!

Learn more at [www.pacificautism.org](http://www.pacificautism.org)

## Welcome to Our New Board Members: Ani Varro and Lisa Kalmanash

We are excited to welcome Ani Varro and Lisa Kalmanash to the Pacific Autism Center for Education Board of Directors. Each brings valuable experience, deep care for our community, and a shared commitment to supporting students with autism and their families.

Ani Varro is a familiar face to many in the PACE community. Her connection to PACE spans many years, including six years as the organization's chief financial officer. With a long career in nonprofit leadership, Ani has held multiple CFO roles and most recently served for 17 years at Gideon Hausner Jewish Day School before retiring in 2024. During her time at PACE, Ani supported not only financial operations but also facilities, marketing efforts, and fundraising events. She is excited to return to PACE in a board role and looks forward to supporting the organization's long-term growth and stability.



Lisa Kalmanash brings more than 30 years of experience as an educator serving students with special needs across the South Bay. She holds a master's degree in special education and has worked in public schools as a resource specialist, reading intervention specialist, literacy intervention teacher, and mentor to fellow educators. Lisa is currently on special assignment with the Sunnyvale School District and is eager to share her knowledge while learning more about nonprofit leadership through her service on the PACE Board.

We are grateful to welcome Ani and Lisa and look forward to the insight, care, and dedication they bring to the PACE community.

## Join the PACE board!

Are you a working or retired professional looking to make a meaningful impact? The Pacific Autism Center for Education Board of Directors is seeking engaged leaders to support strategic direction, financial oversight, and community engagement. Board service offers a rewarding opportunity to share your expertise while advancing a mission that makes a difference.

### How to apply:

Please send an email with a copy of your resume to [board@pacificautism.org](mailto:board@pacificautism.org).



## Sunny Days Preschool

Karen Kennan, Assistant Executive Director

### Four Reasons Your Typically Developing Child Thrives in an Inclusive Preschool

Sunny Days Preschool is part of Pacific Autism Center for Education's Early Intervention program, and while the majority of our students may be neurodiverse, we are also an inclusive preschool. This means children who are typically developing learn and grow alongside children on the autism spectrum in a warm, supportive classroom community.

Parents sometimes ask, "Is an inclusive classroom mainly beneficial for children with special needs?" The answer is no - inclusive environments offer powerful benefits for all children.

Here's how:

#### 1. Small Class Sizes = More Individual Attention

All children benefit from strong student-to-teacher ratios. At Sunny Days, we typically maintain no more than a 3:1 student-to-adult ratio for all students.

That means your child receives individualized attention, guidance, and support every day. Each child - whether typically developing or on the spectrum - has a personalized learning plan tailored to their current development and future goals.

#### 2. Highly Qualified, Passionate Staff

Our teachers and instructional staff are specially trained to support children on the autism spectrum. Their expertise, creativity, and a deep commitment to inclusion and child development benefit all children.

In addition, therapists and specialists regularly collaborate with classroom teachers, modeling effective strategies that benefit all students. This level of professional collaboration enriches the classroom experience and creates a joyful, supportive learning environment.

#### 3. Responsive Teaching Builds Kindergarten Readiness

Our responsive teaching approach adapts learning experiences to each child's needs, strengths, and interests. This supports creativity, curiosity, and exploration while also providing targeted support where needed.

By building on strengths and reinforcing emerging skills, children develop the confidence and readiness they need for a successful transition to kindergarten.

#### 4. Strong Emphasis on Social-Emotional Growth

In an inclusive preschool, social-emotional development is just as important as academics. Children learn essential skills such as taking turns, sharing, problem-solving, and effective communication.

They also naturally develop empathy, patience, confidence, and an appreciation for diversity. Many parents share that their children leave Sunny Days not only academically prepared, but also compassionate, confident, and ready to be leaders in their kindergarten and elementary classrooms.

At Sunny Days, inclusion isn't just a philosophy; it's a daily opportunity for every child to grow, learn, and thrive together.

### LEARN MORE:

Families interested in learning more about our preschool program can contact us at:

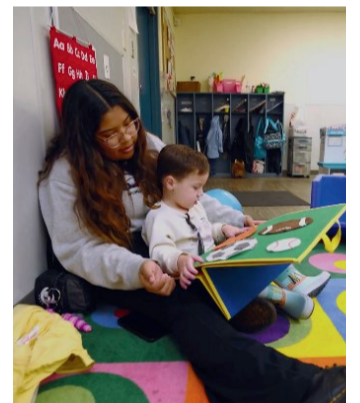
<https://www.pacificautism.org/programs/sunny-days-preschool/>

Or by calling: 408-625-6198

Families interested in learning more about our Faces Behavioral Therapy services can contact us at:

<https://www.pacificautism.org/programs/faces-aba-behavioral-services/>

Or by calling: 408.785.0102



# PACESetter

PACIFIC AUTISM CENTER FOR EDUCATION



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**Mission:** To enhance the lives of people impacted by autism, through innovation, exceptional education, and compassionate care.  
**Vision:** A world in which people of all abilities live fulfilled lives.



## 2025-2026 PACE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Marina Djordjevic, President  
Nancy Brown, Vice President  
Ani Varro, Treasurer  
Joe Dermer  
Mark Gilfix  
Lisa Kalmanash  
Dave Setti

## SUPPORT OUR MISSION

**Donate:** by mail at 1880 Pruneridge Avenue, Santa Clara, CA 95050, online at [www.pacificautism.org/donate](http://www.pacificautism.org/donate), or by phone 408.625.6174. Double your gift! Make a matching gift contribution at your workplace. Please contact [development@pacificautism.org](mailto:development@pacificautism.org) for giving options. PACE is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. Our TAX EIN# is 77-0259858. Contributions made to PACE are tax-deductible as specified by the current tax law.

Bay Area Real Estate  
ROUNDTABLE

# Save the Date

Tuesday, May 26th | Wednesday, May 27th

# 2026

Real Estate Panel Discussion  
with Dinner & Golf  
Ritz Carlton & Links | Half Moon Bay

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Pacific Autism  
CENTER FOR EDUCATION

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## Great Givers

At PACE, our "Great Givers" take many forms, those who share their time, talents, ideas, and financial resources to support our mission. In this edition of the PACESetter, we are pleased to honor Equinix, a global digital infrastructure company headquartered in the Bay Area, as our Great Giver.

During the holiday season, Equinix staff members came together in a wonderful show of generosity to assemble sensory kits for our students, classrooms, and clients. This effort was not only about gathering materials, but also about learning more about our programs and taking into account what would best support sensory needs. Each kit included items such as Expo markers, weighted stuffed bunnies, silly foam, beaded bracelets, fiber-optic sticks, sensory snails, 3D animal pop toys, liquid motion bubblers, chewy necklaces, and paint brushes. These items support regulation, comfort,

engagement, and fine-motor development, making a big difference in daily learning and therapeutic activities.

In addition to the individual sensory bags, Equinix also donated bulk essentials used across our programs, including large quantities of wipes, bubble solution and bubble wands, light-up sensory floor tiles, and Kleenex. These materials are not only fun and engaging but also practical, helping us sustain high-quality care and enriching environments throughout the year.

We are very appreciative of Equinix's generosity and partnership. Their involvement reflects not only corporate generosity but the kindness and commitment of the individual staff members who volunteered their time to assemble each kit.



A free event for PACE families!

PACE families are invited to  
**WINGS FOR ALL®**  
THIS FALL! MORE DETAILS TO COME.



DELTA AIR LINES

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

SJC  
SAN JOSE  
MINETA  
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AIRPORT

