A commitment to connect, support and educate is at the heart of all we do at PACE. This commitment extends not only to our students, clients, and their families but also to our teachers, paraprofessionals, and therapists.

As the demand for autism services continues to outpace capacity, we recognize that our ability to meet this vision means leveraging our resources to attract people to the fields of special education and human services. To that end, PACE is enhancing our efforts to provide internships and scholarships for individuals to become special education teachers and therapists, and meet their requirements through their work at PACE. Our training commitment extends to our paraprofessionals by offering them real-world opportunities to learn how to work with the special needs population, manage classrooms and develop curriculum. With this goal in mind, we seek to provide resources for the community at large by increasing the pool of trained professionals prepared and eager to enter the field of special education.

Our ongoing success is also bolstered by our relationships with families, local businesses, and organizations. As we hop into spring we look forward to continuing the community partnerships that support our strength. In this edition of PACEsetter, you will read about fundraising partners and opportunities, parent, staff, and community highlights, and our upcoming “Voices for Autism” concert in April. I hope you will join us at Santana Row on April 29th to be part of the community of voices raising their voice in support of individuals with autism.

Thank you for your generous support and for being a part of a community that thrives when individuals of all abilities work together.

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, KURT OHLFS

Autism Awareness Night and Sensory Room

April 6, 2023
San Jose Sharks Hockey, SAP Center

The San Jose Sharks are hosting Autism Awareness Night at their home game on Thursday, April 6, 2023, at 7:30 pm against the Colorado Avalanche at the SAP Center. The evening will include access to an exciting one-night sensory room for individuals who need extra space to enjoy the game, and sensory kits, available at no charge for fans of all ages. The ticket prices will include VIP access to the private sensory room with a large screen, complimentary snacks, sensory-friendly activities, and seating in both the room and the stadium. Your ticket purchase will also include a $10 donation to PACE.

Visit pacificautism.com/events for more information.

SAVE THE DATE! APRIL 29, 2023

Voices for Autism

Benefit Concert at Santana Row

Presented by the PACE Youth Leadership Committee
Proceeds Benefit Pacific Autism Center for Education

April 29, 2023
1 - 4 pm

ask a therapist: communication

Leah Persing, M.S., CCC SLP
PACE Speech-Language Pathologist

Expressive language is how a person communicates with others. Building expressive language skills helps individuals grow their independence and self-advocacy skills. Below are some tips on how you can support someone’s expressive language skills.

Wait! Before asking more questions or moving on, first try counting to ten in your head. If they still haven’t responded, then consider restating or rewording what you said.

Create opportunities for your child to communicate. Where you might traditionally anticipate your child’s needs by giving them a favorite snack, wait and see if they take that opportunity to ask.

When your child says “car,” you can expand on that word by saying “red car,” or “car go.”

Children learn through imitation, so provide your child with opportunities to imitate by modeling language throughout your daily routines. When your child primarily uses their voice, model with your voice. When your child primarily uses an AAC device, model on that device!

Don’t forget - communication is fun! Try to encourage language through play and activities that your child enjoys.

Thank you, Leah, for guiding us through the effective ways of building expressive language skills.

If you have any questions, Leah can be best reached at leahpersing@pacificautism.org.
MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS AT THE PRESCHOOL CAMPUS
Karen Kennan,
Assistant Executive Director

We would like to introduce Rachel Harding, who is currently a student at Palo Alto University. Rachel is pursuing a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology, hoping to specialize in Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health. Previously, she obtained an M.A. in Early Childhood Education and spent eight years teaching children 0-5, in addition to working as Assistant Director of Aspen Leaf Preschool in San Diego, where she designed their infant/toddler program.

She recently enrolled in the Napa Infant/Early Childhood-Parent Mental Health Fellowship at U.C. Davis where she will be learning techniques for observing children and facilitating positive parent-child interactions. As part of this fellowship, she will be volunteering at Sunny Days Preschool/Faces in order to better connect theory with practice. Rachel will be on-site at the preschool/clinic once a week. In addition to observing and supporting the classroom, she is hoping to practice administering a few new assessment tools with parents that focus on child-parent relationships and mental health.

As a trained early childhood educator Rachel brings years of experience with her and the opportunity for us to collaborate around best practices for our children and families. We look forward to working with her.

JIAREN CAFE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP
Presented by
The PAC Youth Leadership Committee

Join us by supporting the PAC Youth Leadership Committee on their ongoing fundraising campaign. When you visit local nonprofit and coffee shop, Jiaren Cafe, and use the code PACE10, PAC will receive 10% of all proceeds.

INTRODUCING MADDI FRASER: GET TO KNOW HER
Karen Kennan,
Assistant Executive Director

On any weekday, if you visit the PACE Sunny Days campus, you might find Maddi sitting at the reception desk in the program office. Or you might find her helping out in a classroom. Or she could be outside organizing the supply shed, fixing a broken trampoline, or delivering lunches to students.

Maddi is the Sunny Days Campus Administrator, and with abundant energy and enthusiasm, she provides care and support for the entire Sunny Days campus.

Maddi joined the PACE community in the summer of 2022. Her previous employment experiences as a telemarketer, sales and general manager, preschool instructor prepared her well for her role at Sunny Days, where every day brings new opportunities and challenges.

In the eight months she has been with us, she has (among other things) enhanced the employee “lounge,” opened up a school “store” for students and staff, built and set up numerous pieces of furniture and equipment, reorganized our (limited) storage space, and, most importantly, she supports the teachers, therapists, and staff in their daily efforts to provide high-quality experiences for our students and clients.

As the connector between student families and campus, Maddi brings years of experience with her and the opportunity for us to collaborate around best practices for our children and families. We look forward to working with her.

15TH ANNUAL PACIFIC AUTISM CENTER GOLF CLASSIC
September 22, 2023
Cinnabar Hills Golf Club

The 15th Annual PAC Golf Classic will be held on Friday, September 22, 2023 at the incredible Cinnabar Hills Golf Club in San Jose, CA. Funds raised will support our day-to-day programs and a variety of ongoing residential enhancement projects. We are looking forward to a successful and fun day out on the green, fundraising for PAC programs!

Sponsorship and Auction Donations opportunities are now available!

Please reach out to the Marketing Department at marketing@pacificautism.org for more information.
PACE SCHOOL UPDATE: FEEDING STRATEGIES AND “MY GREEN LUNCH” PROGRAM

Roma Ibera M.S., OTR/L, CAS
PACE Occupational Therapist
Christina Ballaciqa, Development and Marketing Associate

PACE recently started a new program with My Green Lunch, bringing healthy lunches to our students on campus.

My Green Lunch, a trusted provider of healthy school lunches in the Bay Area since 2012, is now delivering delicious and nutritious lunches to our students. These daily lunch deliveries help introduce new foods to our students’ diets and provide opportunities to work on feeding training.

My Green Lunch meals are prepared fresh and in small batches from scratch each morning, and include fruits and vegetables sourced from local and organic family farms whenever possible. The program is a proud member of the CAFF (Community Alliance for Family Farmers), and strives to meet all students’ dietary needs and restrictions, including gluten-free, nut-free (of course), dairy-free, vegetarian, and vegan options in our menu offering.

Roma Ybera, M.S., OTR/L, CAS, PACE Occupational Therapist, has been working with our students on the “Six Steps to Introducing New Foods” chart. The steps include tolerating, interacting with, smelling, touching, and ultimately tasting a portion of new food. She has been pleased to see progress with many of our students in their willingness to try new foods.

Steps to Feeding

- **Step 1: TOLERATES**
  - Food being in the same room
  - Food halfway across the room
  - Food being directly in child’s space

- **Step 2: INTERACTS**
  - Child helps to set up food
  - Helps to stir or pour food onto plates etc. outside of comfort space
  - Help with clean up and bringing food to garbage
  - Child plays or holds an animal or feet in their space or on their plate

- **Step 3: SMELL**
  - Odor in room/table
  - Odor in child’s space
  - Food on fork or spoon held by someone and they lean in to smell it on their term
  - Food on animal and bringing it to own nose to smell

- **Step 4: TOUCH**
  - One trigger (e.g., finger tips, whole hand, shoulder)
  - Person holds or puts food on fork/ spoon and taps on child cheek
  - Child licks food
  - Taps food to teeth

- **Step 5: TASTE**
  - Licks lips or taps teeth
  - Bits with front teeth
  - Moved from front of teeth to molar chewing it then spitting it out
  - Chews and swallows some and follows with water
  - Chews and swallows whole bolus independently


AYRES SENSORY INTEGRATION AT PACE AND SUNNY DAYS PRESCHOOL

Kelly Schwarzhoff
Former PACE Parent and Client
Iris Yang, M.S., OTR/L
PACE Occupational Therapist

Many individuals with autism experience challenges with sensory processing and integration. During the 1960s – 1980s, using research and work from the Brain Research Institute at UCLA, A. Jean Ayres, an Occupational Therapist, developed Sensory Integration (ASI), a theory that studies the impact of sensory processing on these challenged individuals. She originated the theory to explain “the relationship between deficits in interpreting sensation from the body and the environment and difficulties with academic or motor learning.” Ayres Sensory Integration programs involve assessment and intervention by Occupational Therapists who have undergone specialized training and use specialized equipment in an “OT Gym.” ASI includes concepts from psychology, and occupational therapy.

ASI includes the following concepts:

- Sensory integration is a developmental process and many individuals with autism need additional assistance to help process sensory stimuli functionally. Most neurotypical children experience development in a sequential order of milestones, and these experiences lay the foundation on which higher-level sensory-motor activities, social skills, and academics builds.
- The “just right challenge” provides the basis for sensory integration to occur.

Occupational Therapy uses the concept of the “just right challenge” to meet each individual’s unique needs to facilitate learning.

- Sensory integration allows for neuroplasticity of the central nervous system, which may result in new patterns for learning. This may help the individuals learn to self-regulate as well as form/reorganize synaptic connections for increased tolerance for previously- intolerable sensations or stimuli.

The PACE school and Sunny Days preschool serve students on the autism spectrum. Both schools have an onsite OT gym that the students use throughout the day and includes various soft and therapeutic equipment such as swings, crash pads, balance balls, stepping stones, etc for students to meet their sensory needs.

Dr Ayres defined sensory integration as “the organization of sensations for use. Our senses give us information about the physical conditions of our body and the environment around us... The brain must organize all of our sensations if a person is to move and learn and behave in a productive manner”

References:


Collaboration for Leadership in Ayres Sensory Integration, ASI Certificate program. ASI Certificate Program — CIAS (cias.org)


Randomized Controlled Trial in Brazil. The American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 2022, Vol 76(4). Occupational Therapy Using Ayres Sensory Integration: A Randomized Controlled Trial in Brazil.


Karen Kennan, Assistant Executive Director

Support for PACE comes in many forms. It comes from the volunteers who dedicate countless hours to our cause. It comes from the corporate world in the form of sponsorships, in-kind donations, and matching gift programs. It comes from the foundations that are tasked with making the world a better place. And it comes from individuals who, in their generosity, support our work with financial contributions. Over the years, PACE has benefited from the support of many; in this issue of PACE Setter, we remember Henry Buffalo who knew how important it is to support the causes and programs that make a difference in the life of our community.

PACE lost a great friend and supporter with the passing of Henry Buffalo, Jr. on December 7, 2022. Henry will be remembered by his family and community for many things: his service in the U.S. Navy, his expertise in environmental engineering, his love of family, and his belief in “service over self”—at PACE he will long be remembered for his steadfast commitment to our agency, his energy and enthusiasm for making the world a better place for others and for his “roll up your sleeves, hands-on support for our autism community.”

I was privileged to meet Henry more than ten years ago when he was the House Captain for the Cupertino Rotary’s Rebuilding Together project refurbishing two of PACE’s residential homes. Since that initial venture, the Cupertino Rotary, under the guidance of Henry, has partnered with PACE on numerous occasions to work on projects, both large and small, that upgraded and enhanced our program and facilities. Over the years, these have included, for our children’s residential programs: painting the interiors of two homes, replacing flooring in the homes, facilitating upgrades to the landscaping, constructing an obstacle course par course, and funding our enrollment in the Cupertino Rotary Flag Leasing Program. In addition, the Rotary supported our Sunny Days Children’s program by painting the interior and exterior of the school buildings, building planter boxes, providing sand for an outdoor sandbox, purchasing and donating a mobile outdoor canopy to shade our children’s program blacktop, and designing and painting a beautiful “hands-on support for our autism community.”

Henry was instrumental in helping us find volunteers to design and construct a beautiful 16” by 18” mural that welcomes people as they enter the campus. Henry will be remembered by his family and community for his steadfast commitment to our agency, his energy and enthusiasm for making the world a better place. And it comes from the volunteers who, in their generosity, support our work with financial contributions. Over the years, PACE has benefited from the support of many; in this issue of PACE Setter, we remember Henry Buffalo who knew how important it is to support the causes and programs that make a difference in the life of our community.