



# PACE Setter

PACIFIC AUTISM CENTER for EDUCATION  
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## PACE EXPANDS SCHOOL PROGRAM

**A Message from the Executive Director** -- We are thrilled to share the exciting news of our PACE School program's expansion and the opening of our new PACE San Aleso Campus in Sunnyvale, CA. The new campus opened its doors to students and staff in September 2023. The expansion of our school program marks a significant milestone that reflects the dedication, commitment, and excellence of the entire PACE community. With this expansion, PACE will extend its reach and impact, enabling us to support more students and families seeking high-quality educational programs for those impacted by autism in the Bay Area.

The PACE San Aleso Campus provides a state-of-the-art school facility, individualized education programs, and a team of passionate educators and therapists committed to creating an inclusive and nurturing environment for our students and their families. The campus, which



will serve our upper-grade levels, is equipped to accommodate up to ten classrooms and will feature an innovative Occupational Therapy gym, dedicated vocational training rooms, and indoor/outdoor space designed to fit the sensory needs of our students.

The current PACE School campus in Santa Clara, referred to as the PACE Pruneridge Campus, will continue to operate classroom and therapy services for elementary grade levels. Our Sunny Days Preschool campus in San Jose, CA, will continue to house our

early intervention programs, including Sunny Days Preschool and Faces Behavioral Services. With the expansion, our early intervention programs will be able to deliver Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA), and communication and social skills to more children and their families.

The opening of our new campus was made possible through the collective dedication and boundless support of our entire community. We thank our students, staff, families, and community partners for being an integral part of this journey, and we look forward to continuing

to work together to make a difference in the lives of those we serve. For additional updates and news about our expansion and future events, follow us on Facebook, LinkedIn, or Instagram, or visit our website at [www.pacificautism.org](http://www.pacificautism.org).



KURT OHLFS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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## MEET LORI STRICKLAND, PACE SCHOOL DIRECTOR



PACE welcomes Lori Strickland as PACE School Director. Lori brings over 16 years experience as an administrator in the Education sector. Prior to PACE, Lori was a Community College Guidance Professor, a high school Special Education Administrator, and a Principal in for both elementary and high schools. Our Marketing Team sat down with Lori to learn what PACE's mission means to her and what she looks forward to in her new role as School Director:

### What excites you about working for an agency like PACE?

Lori: I love working with our staff who are dedicated to creating a safe and productive space for our students. The teamwork and collaboration is exceptional! I also enjoy seeing the smiling faces of our students as they learn, and work together with their fellow students. I love the opportunities, and safe spaces we are creating for our students.

### What does PACE's mission mean to you?

Lori: The mission is noble and something we can accomplish if we are all working together. The mission outlines the heart-work we

do each and every day to make a positive impact on our students and their futures.

### What are some of your favorite moments at PACE so far?

Lori: In the few months that I've been at PACE, I have witnessed many incredible moments, milestones, and achievements: our fun, planned learning activities for students, such as water day, science projects, student store, and the Occupational Therapy gym; our whole staff collaborating each month on how to best serve our students; our monthly school newsletter so we can keep our families connected to our school community with events and activities; our parent club we just started in August and the possibilities are endless; the events we are planning for our students that support real-world learning; the discovery of our Panda mascot and our themed school spirit days each Friday!; the additional flex and learning spaces created by the campus expansion; the roll out of the Unique Learning System curriculum designed specifically for students with special learning needs, and the completion of the WASC Self-Study that revealed PACE is a great school with great staff!

**There are certainly many achievements to be proud of!**

### Can you provide more detail about the WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges) process?

Lori: The WASC accreditation process provided our school the opportunity to review our methodologies, philosophies and school program. This process involved the school having Schoolwide Learning Outcomes (SLOs). Consequently, a survey was sent to our families and staff members. The results of our survey resulted in our revised outcomes, which I refer to as C.A.R.E.S.: *Compassion, Adaptability, Respect, Education, Sociability*. Our students upon completion of our program will reflect these outcomes. Additionally, these learning outcomes will be embedded in the school day as a way to continually enhance the lives of our students through innovation, exceptional education, and compassionate care.



In her role, Lori oversees both PACE San Aleso and PACE Pruneridge campuses. Her passion for community, student success, and school spirit has made a palpable impact at PACE. Welcome, Lori! (And it is true, the PACE School mascot is a Panda!).



## #GIVINGTUESDAY IS NOVEMBER 28!

Mark your calendars! #GivingTuesday is **Tuesday, November 28, 2023**. #GivingTuesday is a global online movement that kicks-off the season of giving and harnesses the collective power of individuals and communities to make a difference in the community. **This year, our goal is to raise \$10,000 for PACE programs. Will you help us reach our goal?** For ways to support PACE this #GivingTuesday, check out our tips below! Learn more at [www.pacificaautism.org/giving-tuesday](http://www.pacificaautism.org/giving-tuesday)

# 5 ways to support PACE on #GIVING TUESDAY

- 1 Add NOVEMBER 28, #GivingTuesday, to your calendar!
- 2 Make a tax-deductible donation on [pacificaautism.org/donate](http://pacificaautism.org/donate)
- 3 Spread the word! Share why you support PACE on your social media.
- 4 Double your impact through your employer's matching gift program!
- 5 Create your own #GivingTuesday fundraiser for PACE!



[pacificaautism.org/giving-tuesday](http://pacificaautism.org/giving-tuesday)

## JOIN THE PACE BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Are you a working or retired professional looking to use your time and talents for a good cause? Do you want to grow your professional expertise, expand your network, and make a difference in the community? The PACE Board of Directors is interested in meeting you! As a PACE Board Member, you will make a tangible impact on current and future initiatives of the agency. PACE Board members are responsible for all fiduciary decisions, strategic direction, policy, and leadership, and are encouraged to participate in agency events, such as the PACE Annual Golf Classic, Autism Awareness Month, and PACE School graduation ceremony.

**Serving on non-profit Board offers many benefits!** According to Boardsource.org, "Each year, millions of individuals dedicate their time and expertise to shape the future of nonprofit organizations when they serve on a board. Board members provide critical

intellectual capital and strategic resources to power nonprofit success and strengthen communities. For many people, serving on a board allows them to make a difference in their community and support a cause that they care about." If you're ready to grow your professional background and support an important cause, apply to join the PACE Board of Directors today!

### How to Apply:

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

### PACE Board Requirements:

Active members commit to attend quarterly meetings via Zoom. Additional meetings may be required as needed. No prior Board experience is required. Board Members are acknowledged on our website, and in print and digital marketing materials.

## RESIDENTIAL NEWS

**Melissa Watkins**

*Marketing and Development Manager*

PACE owns and operates five group homes licensed to serve residents from 6 to 59 years of age. PACE offers services and activities that give these individuals opportunities to live productive lives within the community. The homes are operated by an Administrator and a House Manager who is assisted by a team of trained staff members, 24/7, 365 days a year.

This year, several PACE group homes received substantial upgrades, including a new kitchen remodel, new flooring, new fences, and new HVAC systems. Home maintenance is a critical part of ensuring the homes provide a safe and comfortable environment that also accommodate the unique and individual needs of the residents. In September 2023, attendees at the 15th Annual PACE Golf Classic helped raised \$43,500 to support PACE Residential home projects. PACE is deeply grateful for the support from the PACE Golf Classic community.

Maintenance at the PACE group homes is an ongoing need. As we enter the season of giving, now is an opportunity to make a tangible difference in the lives of our clients. A donation this holiday season can support our ongoing efforts to

maintain the homes, from upgrading appliances, to painting and landscaping, to transportation for vocational and recreational outings. There are many ways your contribution can make an impact! To make a secure online donation, visit us at [www.pacificaautism.org/donate](http://www.pacificaautism.org/donate).



## EMPOWERING OUR FUTURE

We are proud to introduce our 2023-2024 PACE Youth Leadership Committee! This season, we have twenty-one high school students from around the South Bay ready to make a difference in the world.

The new cohort will be led by YLC President, Wesley, who has demonstrated his passion for leadership and volunteerism and dedication to the YLC and PACE. He also volunteers at Animal Assisted Happiness where he has served over 600 hours, and is currently the Vice President of his school's chapter of Best Buddies.

Joining the YLC Leadership team are Sarah and Avi, who will be co-vice Presidents. Both members look forward to contributing their skills to the YLC. "I can contribute

most meaningfully by giving strategic input to the YLC's event planning and fundraising meetings, and encouraging everyone to give feedback on each others' ideas to consistently broaden our impact," says Sarah. All three members of the leadership team volunteered at the PACE School's student dance in Sprint 2023. After helping out at the school dance, Avi said that being part of the YLC means the world to him and "because of those interactions I had and that special connection between the kids that I encountered, [the PACE School dance] is a memory I will never forget."

**We are grateful for the time and talents from our YLC members. Thank you for supporting PACE!**

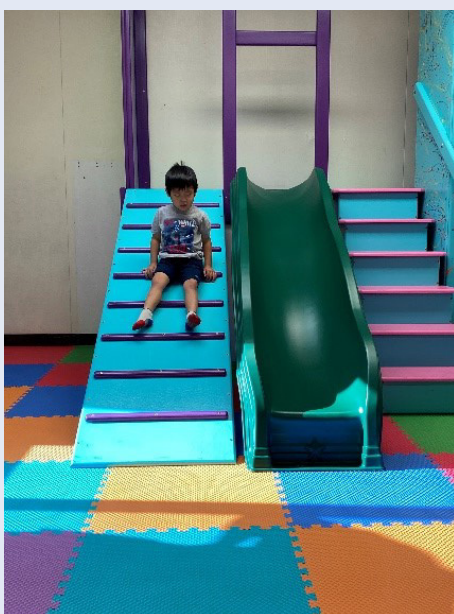


*The PACE YLC (Youth Leadership Committee) is a group of high school students in the Bay Area committed to increasing awareness of PACE and autism in the community and raising money for PACE programs and services. In collaboration with PACE staff, the YLC participates in a variety of strategic and fundraising initiatives in order to sustain and deepen the mission and impact of PACE in the community.*

## CHILDREN'S PROGRAM UPDATES

**Karen Kennan,**  
*Assistant Executive Director*

In September we transitioned our oldest PACE school students to our new PACE San Aleso campus in Sunnyvale, and we moved our elementary students from the Sunny Days (SD) campus to the Pruneridge Avenue building. This opened up additional resource rooms at the Sunny Days site, including an exciting sensory gym, complete with swings, crash pads, rock-climbing walls and a zip line, as well as a dedicated room for the Faces ABA clinic. The SD and Faces teams are actively setting up and rearranging the space on campus to make it even more functional and inviting. Additional enhancements include a new BCBA office/work space and expanded staff lounge area.



If you would like to see the new gym please contact Alicia in the Sunny Days office, [aliciabeauchemin@facesforkids.org](mailto:aliciabeauchemin@facesforkids.org), to arrange a drop in tour.

**Do you know someone who is looking for an inclusive, special needs preschool?** Our Sunny Days morning program currently has openings. To receive additional information and to get on our preschool wait list go to [www.tinyurl.com/sunnydayslist](http://www.tinyurl.com/sunnydayslist)

Faces Behavioral Services currently has openings during our early afternoon shift (12:30-2:30). Contact our Intake Coordinator at; [www.tinyurl.com/facesintake](http://www.tinyurl.com/facesintake)



## ASK A THERAPIST: AAC TIPS FOR SUCCESS!

**Shahina Abdul-Rahim,**  
*PACE Speech Therapist Support Staff*



**AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) tips are strategies that can help parents best support their children in learning how to communicate more effectively.**

### The Expectant Pause

During interactions with AAC users, provide sufficient time for them to consider and formulate their response. Lean in with an expectant smile, conveying your enthusiasm for their input. Avoid filling it with additional words despite the potential feeling of extended silence. Giving ample time to AAC users signals the significance of their thoughts and reinforces that their communication is valued.

### Keep it Simple

Avoid making the process of assisting an AAC user overly complex. Begin by choosing a single word and actively demonstrating its use several times throughout the day. Repeat this modeling consistently. Gradually introduce another word when suitable.

### It Takes Time

Remember the importance of patience, as the time required for progress varies significantly among individuals.



It can be frustrating if an AAC user doesn't grasp the concept as swiftly as anticipated. However, consider that substantial input might be needed before observable results occur. Be persistent in modeling and expect they will eventually use their device confidently.

### Modeling is Important!

AAC users need to see their AAC system in use. We don't expect any child to learn to talk without seeing or hearing the adults around them talking. Nor should we expect someone who needs AAC to figure out how to use their AAC system without seeing others using it to communicate. It is so important to model the language to be able to start conversations, make comments, describe things, and actions, ask questions, and give opinions. We recommend that parents/caregivers model words above the AAC user's current skill level.

### Involve Family Members/Siblings

Educate the family about AAC and how to assist. Teach them about giving time and treating the device respectfully. This involvement helps to create a good environment and give motivation.

## PACE EVENTS

Throughout the year, PACE benefits from the incredible generosity and support from two annual events: the Annual PACE Golf Classic and the Bay Area Real Estate Roundtable (BARER). Both events raise critical funds for PACE programs, and champion awareness of autism and neurodiversity in the greater community.

The 15th Annual PACE Golf Classic was held on Friday, September 22, 2023, at Cinnabar Hills Golf Club in San Jose, CA. It was a beautiful day on the course with 122 golfers in attendance. This year marked one of the most successful PACE Golf Classics in its 15-year history, **raising over \$103,000 for PACE**. Of the funds raised, \$43,500 will support a variety of facility enhancement projects for the PACE Residential program. A very special thank you to our sponsors, golfers, volunteers, vendors, staff, donors, and Cinnabar Hills Golf Club for making the event a huge success.

The Annual PACE Golf Classic begun in 2008, spearheaded by former PACE Board President Joe Dermer, and the Dermer family. Joe and the Dermer family continue to be make the PACE Golf Classic a successful PACE tradition, and we are grateful for their longstanding support of PACE. To learn more and participate in the 2024 Annual Golf Classic, visit [pacificaautism.org](http://pacificaautism.org).



In May of 2023, the Bay Area Real Estate Roundtable held its annual two-day fundraiser at the Half Moon Bay Ritz Carlton in Half Moon Bay, CA. This year's event hosted over 150 attendees. For over 20 years, the BARER event has raised significant funds for PACE programs (historically accounting for over 50% of PACE's Development budget). The event brings attendees from the Bay Area and across the US to support PACE and to bring awareness of autism to the real estate world. This year, the event **raised over \$700,000 for PACE**.



## TIPS FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON

**Jessica Mattox,**  
*RBT, Faces Behavioral Services*

The holiday season can be a sensory and social whirlwind for everyone! From family and friends to cooking and traveling, there is no shortage of stimuli and experiences to navigate. To assist in making celebrations more comfortable and enjoyable for your children, consider incorporating tasks or activities that play to their strengths without being too overwhelming:

1) Count potatoes, line up forks or plates, mix foods, or fill up glasses! This not only involves them in the preparations but also allows them to focus on tasks that are straightforward and satisfying.

2) Consider establishing a "personal bubble," a dedicated quiet space in crowded settings. Having control of personal space can help reduce feelings of being overcrowded, and a quiet space provides a retreat if things get too hectic.

3) Social interactions can be complex and confusing sometimes. It's important to honor when assent is withdrawn; if your child is not in the mood for hugs, conversations, or certain activities, that's perfectly okay. If they are, that's great too!

4) Make time for activities or games centered around their special interests, as familiar and favorite activities can offer a great source of comfort and joy. Finally, advise family members to try and avoid asking open-ended or vague questions, like "What do you like to do?" Specific and direct questions like, "What do you like to do at school?", are usually much easier to navigate and process.

5) There is always so much delicious and new food around this season! When it comes to tasting new foods, follow your child's choices and encourage them when appropriate. This can make this experience less stressful. Always provide safe or preferred foods as an alternative.

6) If travel is on the agenda, an accessibility bag packed with headphones (normal and noise canceling), lots of fidget toys, the best snacks, and any other necessities can go a long way in easing the journey.

In summary, the holiday season is a time of joy, but also of sensory overload and social challenges. By incorporating structured tasks, creating a safe space, honoring boundaries, and focusing on special interests, we can support a more accessible and enjoyable festivity for everyone.

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**Editor:** Melissa Watkins  
**Executive Director:** Kurt Ohlfs  
**Contributors:** Shahina Abdul-Rahim, Christina Baviacqua, Karen Kennan, Jessica Mattox, Kurt Ohlfs, Lori Strickland, Melissa Watkins

**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.



## 2023-2024 PACE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

|                             |                    |
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## 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.

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Autism Awareness Night Fundraiser

## SHARKS HOCKEY SENSORY ROOM

SUNDAY, APRIL 7TH AT 3:00 PM  
SAN JOSE SHARKS VS ARIZONA COYOTES

Tickets include **VIP access to the sensory room, a sensory kit, and a designated section for the PACE community.**

**PURCHASE TICKETS**

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## GREAT GIVERS

In this edition of Great Givers, we dedicate the column to two individuals who made a great impact at PACE. Our community was sad to learn of the passing of Mary Flanagan-Hanson, who passed away on June 14, 2023. Flanagan-Hanson dedicated many years of her life to volunteerism and supporting families of individuals with autism. She was a founding board member of the SPARK Foundation, a non-profit residential group home for children and adults with autism, which led to the establishment of the PACE Residential program. She was also a founding member of Parents Helping Parents on the Peninsula.



(Mary Flanagan-Hanson (left) with Sheila Dermer (right). Mary and Sheila are both co-founders of the SPARK Foundation)

From her obituary, “Additionally, Mary was an avid painter, gardener and lover of books & literature all her life. Throughout her years, Mary enjoyed activities with her friends and family such as sharing & testing recipes, traveling and time spent in nature including annual trips to Tahoe.” Mary’s influence and contributions to PACE will be remembered dearly. The PACE Residential program, which currently serves over 20 residents, was created with her compassion and unwavering commitment to helping others.

**Remembering Robert Brabson**  
Robert Brabson passed away peacefully on July 10, 2023. Robert and his wife Janet were friends of PACE, and dedicated many weekends and holidays with a client at the PACE Matranga Residential Group Home. Robert is described as someone who was always around for his family. He loved his family, people, his jobs, food, vintage cars, football, Marine Corps League of San Leandro, Country Music, and dancing. He had a great sense of humor and was very kind and generous. PACE will remember Robert fondly for his commitment and passion for supporting the PACE Residential program.



## PACE WELCOMES NEW THERAPY STAFF

PACE welcomed two Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA) to support students in the children’s program and at the PACE School, and a new Speech-Language Pathologist. We are thrilled to welcome **Nathan Virto, BCBA**, to Faces Behavioral Services, **Marisa Smith, BCBA**, to the PACE School, and **Dylaina Swan, M.S. Medical Speech Language Pathologist CF** to our SLP team.



Nathan became a BCBA in 2021 and has more than 15 years of experience working with neurotypical children and adolescents, and 7 years working with individuals with intellectual and behavioral challenges. He has experience providing parent support and collaboration, and working with students in California public schools and in clinic and home settings. Nathan is passionate about providing excellent training and support for therapists and looks forward to his role as a mentor and collaborator on client cases.

This October, Marisa joined the therapy team at the PACE School. Marisa was born and raised in the Bay Area, and has been working with children and families for more than ten years in behavioral health.



Her hobbies include enjoying time in nature, especially the beach. She is excited to work at PACE, because it’s a supportive, collaborative environment where she can make a difference in the lives of children and families. In her role at PACE, Marisa will support our elementary-age students at the Pruneridge campus in Santa Clara.



Dylaina is our newest member of the SLP team. She has a Masters in Audiology Speech Language Pathology from Rocky Mountain University. Dylaina is familiar with assisting students on the spectrum and has worked closely with facilitating Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) camps. She has also participated in Language Acquisition through Motor Planning (LAMP) training. Dylaina is committed to ensuring that your child receives the best care and assistance in their communication journey. She understands the importance of tailored approaches to address the unique needs of the child.