

Illuminations

A Bi-Annual Newsletter From Morgan Autism Center

Summer 2018

10 Year Dedication Training First Responders About Autism

By Brad Boardman,
Executive Director

“Mission” is a pretty big word: laden with conviction and ambition. Let’s face it: A mission is heavy stuff. Morgan Autism Center takes its mission very seriously. In addition to the programming we provide our students and clients, Morgan Autism Center engages in extensive outreach to the community to meet our mission objectives. There is one outreach activity of which we are particularly proud.

For more than ten years now, Morgan Autism Center has been leading autism training programs for first responders. These trainings now reach approximately 800 individuals per year. Individuals trained include officers, dispatch, corrections, rangers, and paramedics.

The training Morgan Autism Center provides to these officers is crucial in helping them make better assessments and judgments in real time. Our trainings include both lecture and a visit to our campus. These visits are invaluable, and translate the lecture into real, concrete understanding. Here on campus, these civil servants have the unique experience of being able



SPECIAL MEET AND GREET WITH FIRST RESPONDERS:

Recently, students and clients had a meet and greet with San Jose police officers and firemen. Vehicles were on site for an educational experience trying out lights, sirens, and socializing with the police and firemen.

to interact and socialize with our students and adult clients in a non-emergency situation. They have a chance to see how we support student learning, communication, and emotional regulation.

It can be a little intense to have 120 officers and other personnel step onto our campus to take a tour. But this is one of the great things about the Morgan Autism Center staff. Everyone understands that it is our mission to create a positive environment, and therefore, community for people with autism. Our program directors get involved in leading the tours, our teachers and instructional staff welcome the visitors into their classrooms, to give them first hand observational experience.

Occasionally, our visitors will see a student who is having a difficult time. While it is not our desire to have any of our students or clients experience distress, these moments are extremely instructive for our visitors, providing them with a chance to observe the students and how our staff support them. For many of our first responders the experience of a visit makes the theoretical real. First responders feel more prepared in the field to make sound decisions to serve our community and individuals on the spectrum.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brad Boardman'.

Brad Boardman
Executive Director,
Morgan Autism Center

CONTACT US

T: 408-241-8161
F: 408-241-8231



ADDRESS

950 St. Elizabeth Drive
San Jose, CA 95126

Our New Playground Is A Success!



We appreciate all the time and positive energy shared by our amazing group of volunteers.

Photo Credit: Brandon Magnus



Check-in on the morning of the playground build was full of excitement as volunteers signed in and enjoyed breakfast with each other.



Several volunteers got their chance to be creative and paint a mural of children playing on the playground.

On June 14, Morgan Autism Center students and clients became the proud new owners of a new playground, courtesy of KaBoom!, The Sharks Foundation and Groupware Technology. The project was massive, requiring weeks of planning and design work, demolition of an old structure, and pre-build days that enabled the bulk of the playground to be built in just one day...thanks to 200+ community volunteers. We are so grateful to The Sharks Foundation and Groupware Technology for funding the project, to KaBoom! for putting all the pieces together

and to the many volunteers comprised of Sharks employees, Groupware employees, Morgan Autism Center family members, friends and community members who just wanted to come out to help a good cause. Morgan Autism Center students are so thrilled to have appropriate equipment for play and to support self regulation!

-B.B.



Many hands make light work.



Adult client, Mishal, adds the finishing touches to the kids she designed for our mural.



The new playground is finally finished thanks to all the hard working volunteers from the Sharks Foundation, Groupware Technology and Morgan Autism Center's families and friends. We couldn't have done this without you.



Moving 200 cubic yards of mulch for the playground was no small feat.



Volunteers quickly install the much needed swing set.



SJ Sharkie, Joonas Donskoi from the San Jose Sharks, and Councilmember Dev Davis dedicated the playground with a ceremonial ribbon cutting.

Shining Bright: Student and Adult Spotlight

Social Butterflies in the Adult Program

Katie and Molly are sisters who have been a part of the Morgan Autism Center Adult Program since the early 2000's. They have very different interests and therefore very different program schedules.

Katie happily joins her groups each day. She looks forward to swinging and going on walks at the park, or at the mall if it is raining. While on campus, she enjoys working on her favorite puzzles, listening to her favorite Dr. Seuss stories, singing and happily clapping to her favorite songs in music group.

Molly is a very sociable person who takes great joy in acting as the hostess of the program when visitors come through. She likes to make people feel welcomed and takes pride showing them around and helping in any way she can. Out in the community, Molly enjoys her visits to a local nursing home where she likes to pass out

prizes to the winners of the bingo game. She is also involved in our Community Integration Program where she joins a peer group at the Community School of Music and Art in Mountain View. Molly takes a dance/movement class as well as a music class where she happily follows the teacher's instructions to play songs on the xylophone.

Though their interests are different, they do share a wicked sense of humor and get a sense of joy in playfully teasing the staff. Before they leave Program, they let the staff know they are going home to have a "Diet Coke."

-Sue Taylor and Flo Fuller,
Adult Program and CIP Directors



TWO OF A KIND: Sisters, Molly and Katie might have different interests, but agree on one thing... occasionally enjoying a Diet Coke at the end of the day as a special treat.

Art Benefits For Student in Room 2

Asa started at Morgan Autism Center in the Fall of 2016. He was full of energy from the start and did not like to sit for more than a minute. Our first impressions told us that Asa is a sensory-seeking student intent on searching out physical and tactile input from his surroundings.

At first we were challenged to find an activity that Asa fully enjoyed and would participate in for a 15-minute work session. During his first art therapy class, art therapist, Nicole Ferguson, introduced a mixed media art project to students.

Students were given a template, oil pastels and watercolors with which to work. Asa was reluctant to sit down as the staff modeled for him how to use each of the art materials. Teachers assisted Asa on how to hold the brush, dip it in the cup of



ARTIST IN THE MAKING: Working on his own, Asa takes his time creating a colorful tissue collage carefully choosing each piece.

water, then into the watercolors and finally onto the paper. As soon as Asa held the brush and painted a brush stroke, a calm came over him. He immediately took to painting.

Art materials, like paint, can feel soothing to our students. This soothing effect has helped make a huge impact in Asa's level of calmness. He shows focus and concentration that we were not able to tap into with other activities. Now we use painting and finger-paints to help him focus and get ready for his work sessions. We are so grateful to have discovered how art sessions are benefiting Asa in his growth, learning, and for his enjoyment.

-Claudine Pitpitan,
Room 2 Teacher

Family Perspective

Starry Starry Night Sibling Speaker- Todd Damrosch

My name is Todd Damrosch...I am 15 years old and a freshman at Half Moon Bay High School where I play football and baseball. I guess you would say I am a pretty typical teenager. I am really into film making, and this year had the honor of filming and editing the video for this year's Starry Starry Night.

I am also incredibly honored for the opportunity to tell you a little bit about Alex and our relationship. I am an only child...so I don't know what it feels like to have a brother, but I can't imagine that I would be more connected to a brother than I am to my cousin Alex Bettencourt.

He was 4 when I was born. He has something called Charge Syndrome...it means he was born with multiple birth defects, and he basically doesn't talk (unless you really know his language) and he is deaf and blind. I hate saying that, because I feel like it automatically

When I knew I was going to speak at Starry Starry Night, I tried to reflect on growing up with Alex, and to be honest, there wasn't anything dramatic or big I could remember from when I was younger. Alex was just...well Alex. He was my big cousin. Someone I looked up to...someone I had fun with. We were "the boys." He was Batman, I was Robin. I feel like I have always known that he was tougher than anyone else I knew but I really had no idea just how tough he was. I thought of him when I got stitches in my lip my first day of pre-school, because I knew crying over 6 stitches was something Alex just wouldn't do.

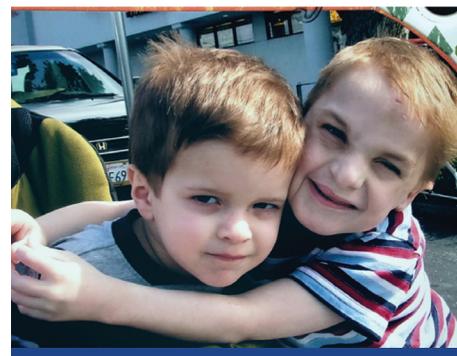
I know now that he had more than 30 surgeries by the time I was born...but I never knew the details. I didn't realize that he had a feeding tube when I was little, I just thought it was cool that he had 2 belly buttons and wondered why I didn't.



BOOM!: Starry Starry Night Sibling Speaker, Todd (on the right), teaches his older cousin, Alex, how to fist bump.

creates a picture of Alex, that is so much different from what I see. But I also want to be honest that Alex has a lot going on and faces significant challenges every single day. I know this has had a huge impact on my family, on my Aunt and Uncle, my parents, my grandparents, and yes, on me too.

When he had major spine surgery, I visited him in the hospital on the way home from a baseball game. I was old enough by then to start to understand that maybe life wasn't fair, if I was playing baseball, and he was getting screws put in his spine.



FAMILY BONDS: Even at young age, the two boys were inseparable.

Whatever Alex has had to adapt to, I tried to adapt to also. When Alex lost his sight, it was right before my 10th Christmas. My mom sat me down and we had a very serious talk that there might not be Christmas that year. I remember thinking that it wasn't that big of a deal, that all I wanted was for Alex to see. Christmas wasn't Christmas without him.

At some point things started to shift. I got bigger physically, and I developed "typically" and Alex didn't. I started to be more like the older cousin and found myself being very protective...and not just of Alex, but of others with special needs.

It made me angry when people would stare, it hurt that they didn't see what I saw... the happy, smart, funny dude that I taught to fist bump and that gives the most epic hugs where he squeezes so hard that it feels like he is going to pick me up, no matter how big I get. I realize that people stare because they don't know what I know. I think that being raised in a family with someone disabled has made me see the world a little differently.

In middle school, I kind of got a reputation for being really good with the special needs kids.

To me it wasn't a big deal, and to be honest, I think it's kind of sad that a middle school kid being kind to special needs kids was something to be celebrated instead of expected, but it was. In 8th grade I decided to be a teacher's aide in the special needs class. It was a great decision and experience, and I've been told

of the office. Maybe it is cheesy to say that there is "love in the air" ... but there kind of is.

The amount of love, patience and understanding that I noticed the staff have with all of their students was kind of unbelievable to me. From staff running and laughing with a student, or hugging and

" ...I really appreciate the Morgan Autism Center staff, especially because they have chosen this for their work... "

I made a difference for those kids. That makes me happy and I know that is because of Alex.

And Morgan Autism Center is a huge part of that. I have no memory of Alex going to any school other than Morgan Center. I just knew Alex went to a "special school"...I didn't know how true that was, but now I do. I got to spend some time



GREAT HUGS: Todd says Alex gives the best hugs!

at Morgan Autism Center at the new campus during my spring break this year to film the video for Starry Starry Night...and I noticed some things.

It is kind of hard to explain, but I honestly could feel the energy as soon as I walked through the doors

comforting, or just sitting quietly and watching carefully and keeping someone safe while they worked through a moment.

I had never thought of teachers at a school having such a deep connection and love for their students. I know that it must also be challenging at times. I know from being with Alex, that he can get over excited or frustrated and that can lead to a hair pull, or what my family calls a "targeted hug." But even though I know in my heart that Alex doesn't mean to hurt me, I know it can be difficult not to take personally sometimes and I really appreciate the Morgan Autism Center staff, especially because they have chosen this for their work and were not born into it like me.

And it wasn't just the staff love for the students, but I could also see the love the students had for their teachers. I could feel the trust, and it makes me so happy to know that Alex can feel that too. It is hard for him to navigate now that he is blind. He doesn't get around like he used to, so when I saw him in his super high tech walker with the staff, smiling and motoring independently it meant so much to me, and I know to him too.

I know that I wouldn't be me, if Alex wasn't Alex and I know that Alex wouldn't be Alex without the Morgan Autism Center. So I would



BEST OF FRIENDS: Todd and Alex play on a tire swing.

like to take this opportunity to thank all of the wonderful staff members for what they have done for Alex and all of the other students and clients at MAC. I'd also like to thank my aunt, Moriah Bettencourt for trusting me with this responsibility and Brad Boardman for the opportunity to be the sibling speaker as a 15 year old cousin.

And last but not least, I would like to thank all of you for being supporters of this amazing program that means so much to families like mine.

*-Todd Damrosch,
Starry Starry Night Sibling Speaker*

A Great Pair Bringing Smiles to Students and Clients

What do a clown, a dog, and a pediatric dentist have in common? The ability to help children! (Dr. Art) Rabitz and his therapy dog, Missy, do just that each week at Morgan Autism Center). For 42 years, Dr. Art Rabitz was a pediatric dentist in San Jose and once he retired, he needed a new endeavor to keep him occupied.

Dr. Rabitz has always worked well with kids, so the decision to become a therapy clown was easy. Over the last 10 years, he has been performing magic tricks and clowning around while visiting children and other patients at Good Samaritan Hospital in San Jose and the Ronald McDonald house in Palo Alto. When Art walks into their rooms with his bright red nose and big smile, patients forget for a moment what they are going through and can't help but smile and chuckle at Art. Those smiles keep Art going and are why he loves what he does.

SMILES ALL AROUND:
Students and clients can pet Missy and wear a clown nose.



A few years ago, his dog passed away and Art was looking to get a new dog. He got a therapy dog from the Dog Guide Center in San Rafael. Therapy Dogs are in high demand and the waiting list is long. But when the Center learned Art was a therapy clown working with children, it only took two days to receive a sweet black Labrador named Missy. She passed the rigorous training required to navigate hospitals, nursing homes, and other facilities providing affection and comfort to individuals that need it most.

“Missy makes people forget what they are going through.” Art explained. “She makes them feel good, relaxes them, and allows them to reboot their mind.”

When Art visits Morgan Autism Center, students and clients enjoy visiting the gentle clown with the bright red hat and nose, but once they sit with Missy, he sort of fades away into the background and he lets Missy do her job, which is to bring calmness and smiles to those who engage with her.

Adult client, Jill, is a big fan of Missy, and dogs in general. On a recent visit, Jill said, “Missy is a beautiful dog and she helps me relax.” We all feel the same way, Jill.

Dr. Rabitz still gets excited to go out with her into the community. Both are empathetic and kind which makes them a great pair for the benefit of others.

-Nicole Ferguson,
Communication and Development Associate

Morgan Autism Center Awarded Large Grant From Mission City Community Fund

Last month, Morgan Autism Center was awarded a \$4,000 grant from the Mission City Community Fund to help purchase a van for our Adult Program's Community Integration Program. This program provides clients with vocational training, volunteer opportunities, and life skills training. They participate in a variety of daily activities ranging from recycling, volunteering at Hidden Villa (a local farm) and Guadalupe River Park, creating teaching materials for educators at Resource Area for Teaching (RAFT), taking classes at San Jose State University and participating in weekly art and dance classes at the Community School of Music and Art (CSMA). These activities are crucial for our clients as they not only teach valuable vocational and life skills, but also help with

integration into the community.

Our Community Integration Program provides opportunities for our clients to get out into the community and work alongside neuro-typical peers. These interactions not only benefit our clients, but their peers as well. Individuals are given a chance to understand autism and learn to work and interact with others who are neurodiverse. This partnership builds a stronger and more accepting community.

We recently retired one of the vans used to take our clients out into the community. Thanks to the Mission City Community Fund, we are now able to purchase a replacement van which will enable clients to participate in these activities again. Thank you so much to Jeanne Katsuro



COOKING UP A STORM:
Adult client, Jason, tries his hand at cooking veggies at Hidden Villa Farm.

and everyone at Mission City Community Fund for your support!

Mission City Community Fund's mission is to enrich the quality of life to [their] community residents. [They] focus on five areas of giving: social services, education, health care, theater and arts, and the environment.

-Lisa Lemke,
Development and Communications Director

FUNDRAISING

Morgan Autism Center's 11th Annual Starry Starry Night Fundraiser Breaks Records

On May 19, Morgan Autism Center celebrated its 11th Annual Starry Starry Night Fundraising Gala at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Palo Alto with over 380 parents, family members, and community supporters.

Starry Starry Night is our largest fundraiser of the year and it allows us the opportunity to highlight the artistic talents of those we serve. One-of-a-kind art pieces created by our students and clients through our Art Therapy Program are auctioned off to excited bidders.

Guests at the event also enjoyed fine wines, a raffle, silent auction, a wine pull game, steel drum music by Coconut Hut Entertainment, and a fun heads-or-tails game. After a delicious dinner, guests heard a heartfelt speech by Todd Damrosch, whose cousin, Alex, attends Morgan Autism Center, and enjoyed an exciting Live Auction featuring artwork created by 3 of our Adult Program clients (who even got to participate in the auctioning of their paintings)! The evening concluded with a very successful Fund-a-Need. \$101,000 was raised to get air conditioning for our new campus!

This year, we presented the Galaxy Award to our community partners, the 49ers Community Foundation, Corrections Academy 12, Eagle Scouts, First Tech Credit Union, the Loma Prieta Region Porsche Club of America, Rebuilding



SILENT AUCTION: Artwork by Morgan Autism Center students and clients brought in a record breaking number of over \$4,900. We are so proud of our talented artists.

Together Silicon Valley, and Stantec for transforming our new campus and helping create a beautiful and safe space for our students and clients.

Thank you to everyone who came out to support Starry Starry Night. This year's gala raised over \$310,000 to support our School and Adult Programs, making it our most successful one yet!

We would also like to thank the following sponsors for their incredible support this year: Lane Partners, ASVB, James and Ruth Su, Tomas and Monica Evensen, Kevin and Donna Gott, Wentz Vineyards, Onesta Winery, Chris and Linda Ludeman, Dennis and Marie Campoy, Nena Montgomery and Michael Edson, Vilma Kennedy Palette, John and Mindy Gray, William and Estella Moriarty, Fremont Bank, John M. Sobrato, John Winther, Tech CU, Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati Foundation, Ahmed,

WAYS TO SUPPORT

Annual Gift /Stock & Planned Giving

Morgan Autism Center graciously accepts monetary and in-kind donations. You can donate online at www.morgancenter.org/donate or send a check to 950 St. Elizabeth Drive, San Jose, CA.

Amazon Smile

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Many companies participate in matching gift programs. Ask your employer today to join you in supporting Morgan Autism Center.

Ghazala and Mishal Sadiq, Eaton Hall Architecture, Gilfix & La Poll Associates, Heritage Bank, Jack and Patty Balch, Jon and Nicole Moe, Sereno Group, 777 Welch Road Partners, Shire House Inc., Steve and Suzi Gilbert, Rialto Capital Management, Anthony and Tracy Falcocchia, Mark and Helga Devon, Stantec, Terrence and Terry O'Day, Charlene Tuchman, Jay Berkett, Kevin and Theresa Oller, Richard Lopez, Robyn Ayers, Scott and Sharon Hartley, Steven and Christina Wilder, John and Ellen Rothmann, Mike and Kathy Glass, and Dru Berkett.

Additionally, thank you to our many in-kind donors and other supporters. For a complete list, visit us at www.morgancenter.org/donate. Finally, a huge thank you to Franca Cozzitorto, our spectacular Event Chair, our hardworking and dedicated Event Committee, and our incredible staff and community volunteers!

-Lisa Lemke,

Development and Communications Director

Morgan Autism Center Golf Classic Sponsored by LWG

September 10, 2018
at San Jose Golf and
Country Club

For more information contact
Lisa Lemke at (408) 241-8161
or lisa@morgancenter.org
Visit us at www.morgancenter.org

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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED



Dreamscape by Christopher Perry

A recent graduate of the School Program, Christopher has been creating art and drawing for as long as we can all remember. He draws bridges, buildings, and trees with great precision. Christopher's art has been a favorite at our annual Gala Celebration and Fundraiser, Starry Starry Night, for many years.

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Mission Statement

Our mission is to help children and adults with autism or other developmental disabilities maximize their potential in a dignified, positive and loving environment.

Connect with us at:
www.morgancenter.org

