This is our inaugural issue of a newsletter for NYCLI

We are planning on publishing it periodically throughout the year to update parents and friends of the school. We welcome contributions and ideas about what to include in future issues!

OCTOBER 2015
A Note From the Director

By SUE VENER

Although I would like to believe that I perform with precision, my job takes me in so many directions. Much of what I plan to accomplish in a given day often does not get done. Priorities shift based on need. If I am needed with a student, my focus becomes myopic. If a staff member needs assistance or consultation, my attention is hers. My priorities shift as my day unfolds. By 5 pm, I am ready to go home. After a one-hour commute, I am greeted by a beautiful, 2 1/2 year-old bundle of active joy. My day ends when he goes to sleep — sometimes at 11 pm. Often, I pass out before he does! At times, I am jolted by the little voice saying, “Wake up, Mommy!”

I applaud women who have full time jobs and raise a family. It is hard. It is exhausting. It is relentless. It is wonderful. Although I don’t have a child with autism, the intensity of my son’s needs are such that I have very little time for myself, and even less for my husband. But, I love my life and I love my job!

I respect the families that we serve. I respect the fact that they are blessed with loving, wonderful children who present with challenge. Their job is endless. Their concerns are forever present.

Some general suggestions that a parent of a child with autism might consider:

(a) Know your limits! If you have one good hour to spend with your daughter, do so! It is OK to have your daughter watch television for a while for you get revitalized;

(b) If you find yourself getting frustrated with a situation, walk away. An emotional response to a challenging situation is probably not going to end well; and

(c) Find time for you (I have to work on that myself!). The more energy you have, the more balanced your life, and the more “fun” you have, the more patience you will find.

The great challenges that a parent of a child with autism faces is close to impossible for those of us who do not have a child with special needs to understand. We do not pretend to know how it is to walk in your shoes. NYCLI only wants to identify challenges and help. We applaud your continual efforts for your children who deserve so much!
Upcoming Events

November 8
NYCLI Fall Gala at Gargiulo’s
We are looking forward to our annual fundraiser and celebration at Gargiulo’s, where NYCLI families and friends gather, have fun, and show their support for the wonderful children and hardworking instructors and staff. NYCLI families are selling raffle tickets, with chances to win an Apple Watch, a FitBit, and other great prizes. At the gala there will be a silent auction and a raffle with a chance to win a MacBook Air computer. For a seat or benefactor’s table at the gala, or to donate, go to: https://aabr.givezooks.com.

Late October
Halloween Festivities
Children, instructors and parents dress in costume, decorate pumpkins and trick-or-treat. Ghosts and goblins parade the streets and bring smiles to all.
NYCLI Kids Are Around the City . . .

NYCLI students spend a great deal of time integrating into community activities. Students are given opportunities to explore and participate in activities that are both fun and educational. Skills acquired at NYCLI are practiced and displayed in more naturalistic environments.

. . . And On the Job

As NYCLI’s young students develop into competent young adults, there is a tremendous shift in their program. One of the tasks of the clinical team at NYCLI is to enable our school’s young adults to develop the job readiness skills needed to secure meaningful employment. The skills that will be needed at a worksite are first acquired at the Institute. Students who will be packaging groceries at a market are first taught to package groceries in the school store. Students who will be removing expired items from a pharmacy shelf are first taught the task at the Institute’s “pharmacy.” Students learn to say Please and Thank you, to manage their free time during a break, and to hold the door for others.

As the students develop skills, they venture into work sites. Job coaches from NYCLI are at the site to ensure the success of the students and to identify potential challenges that may arise to be addressed back at the Institute. As time goes on, the focus on employment skills increases.
On August 20th, at their 18th Annual Charity Golf Outing and Dinner, the Knights raised money to benefit children's charities. Supporters of the Knights and of their charities shared in a day of raffles, contests, golf, and dinner. Over the past ten years, the New York Child Learning Institute has been a fortunate recipient of their generosity. NYCLI was just awarded a check in the amount of $5,000 in September and is tremendously thankful for their continued commitment to the success of our students and the growth of our program.

Michael Gordon Foundation’s Continued Support

In January, 2015, NYCLI was the proud recipient of a grant from the Michael Gordon Foundation. The grant enabled the institute to purchase needed classroom furniture, a Smart Board, curriculum, and toys and play materials for a new classroom of students. The purchased items were needed to ensure that the institute had the equipment necessary to educate the new students enrolled. Over the past six years, the Michael Gordon Foundation has been at the forefront in enabling NYCLI to secure needed materials as the program grew. NYCLI is tremendously grateful—thank you!

New York Collaborates for Autism

NYCLI is pleased to announce the creation of a pilot program that will enable young adults with autism to participate in job readiness activities at both the Institute and in the community. This program has been made possible through a grant from New York Collaborates for Autism (NYCA), from the proceeds of Comedy Central’s 2015 Night of Too Many Stars.

Prior funding from NYCA from the proceeds of Comedy Central’s 2012 Night of Too Many Stars allowed our students to participate in a self-advocacy training program and focus on job readiness activities.
NYCLI’s 2015 Graduates

Diamante Badalla, a NYCLI Consultant, presents two NYCLI graduates with diplomas. The accomplishments of these students throughout their educational careers empower them to succeed in their adult lives. NYCLI wishes these young men tremendous success and happiness as they discover new opportunities.

ENDNOTE

From a Mom New to NYCLI

The day my son Heath was born was the happiest day of my life.

Practically, that may be a testament to how uncomfortable it is to be 9 months pregnant. But on an idealistic level, I was overjoyed to meet him and begin a new chapter in my life.

We had many challenges during Heath’s early months—getting him fed, getting him to sleep, getting ourselves some sleep and trying to achieve some work-life balance. They were common issues for new parents.

Things changed when Heath was diagnosed with autism before he turned two. It’s hard to describe the roller coaster that brought to our lives. There was a part of me that immediately responded “We will love him even more.” But there was a deep sadness, too, as we learned how hard life was likely to be for our son, and for us. The world is not set up for people with autism to thrive without a lot of help, and our world was going to need to change fast to get Heath that help.

No parent ever stops worrying. If they did they wouldn’t be doing their job. But if you have a child with autism, you know the worrying is different and more intense.

One of the core traits of autism is trouble communicating. As a parent, that means you cannot trust that your child will tell you if they are being mistreated when you are not around. I can get information out of my son, but I can’t count on it. It makes separating from him hard. It means worrying, as a parent, at a different level.

Parents also worry about how their child with autism will learn about the world and grow independent. It takes special skills to instruct a child like mine with methods that work for him.

We worry about our child’s happiness and personal growth. Heath has a sense of humor, he is affectionate, he wants to please. I want him to work with people who get to know him and see his strengths and his personality shining through.

Our son started at NYCLI this year. He is five. One of the most reassuring things I have heard from another mother in his class was that she used to worry so much, but that after a year, she “no longer worries” about her son at school. That’s no small thing.

We chose NYCLI because its team strives for across-the-board high achievement, with an undercurrent of kindness and care for the kids. We feel relieved that it is not a for-profit enterprise. We are reassured that the people there see a real calling in their work and take joy in helping the kids get as far as they can go.

For NYCLI families, a crippling degree of worry is replaced with hope and confidence that their child is in good hands.

The day Heath was born will probably always rank as the happiest day of my life. But I expect a lot of happy days in the future as we watch him grow and mature, and we are so happy to have NYCLI to help us in that journey.

KATHLEEN O’BRIEN
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