The Parent, Educator, Physician & Philanthropist Resource for Children and Adults with Special Needs

A.S.K. HONORED BY NEW JERSEY COUNCIL OF ADMINISTRATORS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION!

ECLC OF NJ—
"EDUCATION, CAREERS & LIFELONG COMMUNITY!"

THE CALAIS SCHOOL'S INNOVATIVE ANIMAL ADAPTIVE THERAPY™ PROGRAM

INSIDE:
IN-HOME CARE PLANNING FOR MEDICALLY FRAGILE KIDS

Helping to Create a Healthy, Safe & Bright Future for ALL Kids.
Introducing ECLC of NJ—"Education, Careers and Lifelong Community" for Children and Adults with Special Needs

Guides Children on a Successful Life Journey

By: Joanne Bastante-Howard

ECLC’s Chatham Campus located at 21 Lum Avenue, Chatham, NJ 07928

Serving children ages 5 to 21:

Principal Diane Gagliardi
Assistant Principal Susan Tillis
Psychologist Allison Weideman
LDTC Cindy Collins and Susan Sylvester
Social Workers James Luongo & Paula Wey
Nurse Anne Fields

ECLC’s Ho-Ho-Kus Campus located at 302 N. Franklin Turnpike, Ho-Ho-Kus, NJ 07423

Principal Vicki Lindorff
Assistant Principal Steve Collins
Psychologist James Wagner
BCBA Matthew Kuzdral
LDTC Peggy Walsh
Nurse Elizabeth Horgan

A humble beginning now serves 700 children and adults

In 1970 ECLC, originally known as the “Early Childhood Learning Center,” debuted at a one-room location in Morristown, New Jersey through the dedication of a team of concerned parents. The mission of the center was to provide early intervention services to preschool children with special needs.

ECLC continued to grow in size and scope. Today it boasts campuses in Chatham and Ho-Ho-Kus, New Jersey, and is an accredited, not-for-profit institution that offers special education for students five to 21 years of age.

ECLC specializes in supporting children with a wide array of special needs including severe learning and/or language difficulties, autism spectrum disorder, Down syndrome, apraxia, cerebral palsy, deaf and hearing impairments and those who are medically fragile and have multiple disabilities.

Both schools are staffed with classroom teachers, instructional para-professionals, speech-language specialists, occupational and physical therapists, music/art and physical education instructors, social workers, nurses, psychologists and learning consultants. The Chatham campus is comprised of 122 staff members, and the Ho-Ho-Kus facility has 70 staff members including a board-certified behavior analyst (BCBA).

Eleven counties and dozens of cities rely on ECLC

When districts do not have the necessary resources to meet a child’s individual needs, they refer their resident to ECLC. To date school districts in 11 New Jersey counties, representing dozens of communities, seek ECLC’s special education
expertise in addition to its programs that focus on improving a child's socialization, life skills and employment opportunities.

Both campuses provide a noteworthy academic program that is aligned with the New Jersey Department of Education's Core Curriculum Content Standards. Students are enrolled into classes according to their abilities not by their "grade" level. The maximum age range within a classroom is four years, and the student-teacher ratio is maintained at 4:1 with a maximum number of 12 students per class.

A "multisensory" curriculum that fosters creativity and learning

"Today, many children are diagnosed with disabilities such as motor, medical and behavioral challenges that require intensive and specialized support," stated Bruce Litinger, executive director at ECLC. "To meet the individual needs of students, our teachers use a variety of creative and unique multisensory instructional materials and techniques. Students work at their own pace, individually and in small groups. There is an equal emphasis placed on enhancing their academic skills and developing the social-emotional well being of students. Our team of speech, occupational and physical therapists work in conjunction with our classroom teachers and physical education, art and music to optimize the learning environment," Mr. Litinger explained.

A unique curriculum to help with social and behavioral challenges

Teachers in both campuses utilize the Social Communication, Emotional, Regulation and Transactional Support (SCERTS) Model, a multi-sensory, child-centered and activity-based framework in all classes. It provides a systematic method that ensures specific skills, appropriate support and educational objectives are selected and applied in a consistent manner across the child's day.

The SCERTS Model collaborators include Barry Prizant, Amy Wetherby, Emily Rubin and Amy Laurent, who have expertise in Speech-Language Pathology, Special Education, Behavioral and Developmental Psychology, Occupational Therapy and Family-Centered Practice. They have experience in university, hospital, clinical and educational settings and are actively involved in clinical work, research and educational consultation. A comprehensive two-volume manual is available that provides detailed guidance for assessment and intervention efforts (Prizant, Wetherby, Rubin, Laurent, & Rydell, 2006).*

The SCERTS process allows families and educational teams to build upon the child's knowledge. Additionally, it draws upon a wide range of effective practices currently available, including contemporary Applied Behavior Analysis (i.e. Pivotal Response Treatment, LEAP), TEACCH®, Floortime, Relationship Development Intervention®, Hanen® Program and Social Stories™.

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)—According to the Christian Sarkine Autism Treatment Center, human behavior is made up of conscious and unconscious actions that can be described, observed and measured. Scientists who study behavior can learn how to predict behavior by categorizing it. The next step in the process is to apply behavioral principles, methods and treatments to successfully target a child's specific behavioral excesses or deficits. ABA can be simply defined as a treatment system that utilizes careful behavioral observation and positive reinforcement cues in order to teach the child a new behavior. The goal is for the parent or educator to determine what triggers a behavior and what transpires after that behavior to reinforce it.

SCERTS is Most Concerned with Helping Authentic Progress in a Variety of Settings and with a Variety of Partners.

TEACCH®—Program focuses on the characteristic patterns of thinking and behavior seen in individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). It is based on understanding the learning characteristics of individuals with autism and the use of visual supports to promote meaning and independence.

Floortime—According to Autism Speaks, Floortime Therapy derived from the Developmental Individual-difference Relationship-based model (DIR) created by Child Psychiatrists Stanley Greenspan, M.D. and Serena Wieder, PhD. The premise of this model is that adults can help children expand their circles of communication by meeting them at their developmental level and building on their strengths.

Relationship Development Intervention® (RDI)—Family-based behavioral treatment designed to address autism’s core symptoms. It was developed by psychologist Steven Gutstein, PhD, and builds on the theory that “dynamic intelligence” is key to improving quality of life for individuals with autism.

Hanen Program®—It Takes Two to Talk Program, is designed for parents of young children who have been identified as having a language delay. In a small, personalized group setting, parents learn practical strategies to help their children learn language naturally throughout their day together.

Social Stories™—Developed by Carol Gray in 1990, Social Stories explores the philosophical roots of telling social stories and sharing events that lead to discovery and continuing development. It does not dismiss the importance of conversation. Instead, it fills in important vacant spaces in social story history.

SCERTS differs from the focus of traditional ABA, an approach that targets children’s responses in adult-directed discrete trials that promote child-initiated communication in everyday activities and draw extensively from research on human development. SCERTS is most concerned with helping individuals achieve “authentic progress,” defined as the ability to learn and spontaneously apply functional and relevant skills “in a variety of settings” and “with a variety of partners.”

This model factors in a child’s individual style of learning, interests and motivations. The child is engaged in meaningful activities that are transferrable to other environments outside of the classroom.

The acronym “SCERTS” refers to the emphasis on the development of:

- **Social Communication**—spontaneous, functional communication, emotional expression, and secure and trusting relationships with children and adults;

- **Emotional Regulation**—the ability to maintain a well-regulated emotional state to cope with everyday stress and to be most available for learning and interacting;

- **Transactional Support**—help partners respond to the child’s needs and interests, modify and adapt the environment, and provide tools to enhance learning (e.g., picture communication, written schedules and sensory supports). Specific plans are also developed to provide educational and emotional support to families and to foster teamwork among professionals.
Social Activities for Children of All Ages and Programs for Children and Their Families Too!

The Ho-Ho-Kus campus was the first school in New Jersey to formally train every staff member and integrate SCERTS into the daily curriculum.

At both campuses, the local community becomes an extension for testing independence and other daily living skills. On a regular basis all ECLC students explore the library, post office, bank, drug store and restaurants.

Extracurricular and social activities

When it comes to extracurricular activities, ECLC students aren’t left watching on the sidelines. They participate on sports teams (both intramural and in competitive school leagues), drama/music clubs, dance, cheerleading, scouts, student government, school newspaper and yearbook, to name a few. Students celebrate the usual school milestones of prom night, field day, talent shows, award assemblies, Thanksgiving feasts and holiday events!

ECLC keeps students engaged even on the weekends with the respite (sleepover) program. Activities are planned to practice social skills, teamwork and the “art” of relaxing. All of these programs are offered with no cost to the district.

In the upper-school classes, students participate in a work-readiness program called Seeking Knowledge for Independent Living (SKIL) in which students at both ECLC campuses learn how to manage mailings, collate newsletters, create custom invitations, T-shirts, mugs and menus and even run the school lunch program. These projects support outside clients and school needs. Once students have mastered the basic skills necessary, they move out into the community to “sample” jobs, from child care and retail to food service, maintenance and office support. The goal is to prepare students for independent living and for the transition from school to work.

Additional programs and therapies

- **Respite Weekends**—A fun sleepover with peers is offered to students at both facilities.

- **Alumni Enrichment Program**—Chatham school sponsors the Diane Gagliardi Adult Evening Enrichment Program in the fall and winter for a nominal fee.

- **Alumni Dances**—Both schools offer dances for graduates.

- **Free Workshops**—Available on a wide range of topics important to parents and caretakers of children with special needs.

- **Parent Support Groups**—This Ho-Ho-Kus group is run by parents for parents. Anyone with a child that has special needs can attend (whether or not enrolled in ECLC).

- **After-School Activities**—Both schools offer many recreational activities such as bowling, yoga and basketball.

- **After-Care Program**—This is currently only available at the Chatham school.

- **Sibling Support Groups**—This is currently only for ECLC siblings at the Chatham school location. It gives children opportunity to interact with each other and obtain support.

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Animal therapies—service dog and equine-assisted therapy program

**Service dog program**

Since 2011, ECLC students in Chatham have benefitted from a service dog therapy program every day! The facility dog Gino was trained by Canine Companions for Independence (CCI)** and joins students throughout the day, offering guidance and motivation. Gino is able to make connections and breakthroughs with some students who did not respond to other therapies. He is a wonderful addition to the staff, helping students succeed in gym class and other activities throughout the day. Even during lunchtime, Gino supports students, arousing low-tone students and calming others. He offers unconditional love to everyone he encounters.

Ho-Ho-Kus school partners with “Paws for Autism” who bring a group of specially trained dogs into the classroom for weekly sessions. These dogs are wonderful motivators and rewards for students, helping them to engage in a variety of school activities.

**Equine-assisted therapy program**

Children enrolled in the Ho-Ho-Kus campus are offered a weekly session of equine-assisted therapy (often called HIPPO or therapeutic horseback riding) at Starlight Farm (www.starlightfarms.org) in Ringwood, NJ. Equine-assisted therapy is widely recognized as a valuable method of improving mental, physical and emotional health of people with special needs.

Students at the Chatham school participate in equine-assisted therapy at the Willow Pond Farm (www.willowpondfarmnj.com) in Gillette, NJ.

Physicians, therapists and teachers are among the many professionals who refer their patients and students to therapeutic riding programs because it offers the rider a unique opportunity to participate in an active, rewarding and motivating recreational sport. For individuals with impaired mobility, horseback riding gently and rhythmically moves their bodies in a manner similar to a human walking gait.

**An award-winning team**

Executive Director Bruce Litinger was given the Association of Schools and Agencies for Handicapped (ASHA) President’s Award for a lifetime of advocacy for people with special needs. He began his successful career as a special education teacher and is now an extraordinary leader.

Ho-Ho-Kus Occupational Therapist Brandy Springer provides individualized therapy sessions for students every day as well as managing special sensory diets for dozens of students. She was named New Jersey’s “Related Services Provider of the Year” by ASAH.

The winning streak continues in the Chatham facility. Judy McGrath, school teacher, was named the nation’s “Teacher of the Year” by the National Association of Special Education Centers (NAPSEC). This recognition follows her award at the end of 2013 as New Jersey’s “Educator of the Year,” by ASAH. She teaches a class of graduating students and focuses on ensuring they will be ready for adult living by utilizing technology.

**Canine Companions for Independence (CCI) is a national non-profit that breeds, raises, trains and places service dogs with people who have disabilities or facilities that work in education or healthcare.**
Life-long services beyond education

Bergen P.R.I.D.E. Center
403 Sette Avenue
Paramus, NJ 07652

Morris P.R.I.D.E. Center
100 Passaic Avenue
Chatham, NJ 07928

Community Personnel Services
54 Fairmont Avenue
Chatham, NJ 07928

"Many young people fall through the cracks once they turn 21 years old. Today ECLC serves more adult clients than students! In 1995 we began providing individuals with post-graduate transition services, job placement and coaching through a separate entity called Community Personnel Services (CPS). We also realized some students required additional supports," explained Litinger.

As a N.J. Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVR) and N.J. Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) service provider, ECLC is able to assist students with a variety of abilities and within every socio-economic level.

"For those who are unable to begin a work program we provide them with vocational training and independent life skills through our P.R.I.D.E. Program. Students typically enroll at ECLC school, graduate and then move into one of its adult programs, either supported employment (through Community Personnel Services, CPS employment division) or the P.R.I.D.E. day program. P.R.I.D.E. is great for young people who are not ready to work yet and need to have an intellectually stimulating, community-based environment to flourish," Litinger stated.

“The program offers a great deal of social interaction. While we consult them, they can select what they want to be doing. Our goal is to help encourage our young people to keep physically and mentally healthy and as active as possible,” he concluded.

To learn more about ECLC

Parents, school districts and media personnel interested in receiving a personal tour of ECLC in Chatham, contact Principal Diane Gagliardi at 973-635-1700 or via email at dgagliardi@eclcnj.org. For a tour of ECLC in Ho-Ho-Kus, contact Principal Vicki Lindorff at 201-670-7880 or via email at vlindorff@eclcnj.org. All media inquiries should be directed to Amalia Duarte, public affairs director at 973-902-8390 or via email at aduarte@eclcnj.org.

For updates at ECLC of New Jersey, visit the school website at www.eclcnj.org or its Facebook page at www.facebook.com/ECLCofNewJersey.

ECLC is a member of ASAH, National Association of Private Education Center (NAPSEC) and the Alliance of Special Education Schools of North Jersey.

CPS is a member of Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) and Alliance for the Betterment of People with Disabilities (ABCD).

P.R.I.D.E. is a member of North Jersey Coalition of Day Programs and Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE).
A Close-Up View of One of New Jersey’s Gifted Young Artists—Michael Nowicki

By: Joanne Bastante-Howard

Whenever we meet children with neurological conditions, we soon realize that while medicine has made advances, the brain is still quite the mystery. Thankfully, neurologists are making inroads and are instrumental in helping families identify conditions that affect the brain, spinal cord and nerves.

One extraordinary mother shared her struggles over the years in trying to find answers to help her son. When she began reminiscing about taking Michael home from the hospital as a newborn in December of 1995, it conjured up an array of emotions for Joan Nowicki, mother of a 20-year-old boy with hydrocephalus, Asperger’s syndrome and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

“Hydrocephalus was finally detected when a nurse measured Michael’s head circumference during his customary office visit. It was much larger than it should have been. A battery of additional testing followed which ultimately confirmed this diagnosis. As a result of this condition, he was not verbal and unable to attain his communication milestones,” she explained.

What Is Hydrocephalus?

According to the American Association of Neurological Surgeons (www.aans.org), the term hydrocephalus is derived from two words: “hydro,” meaning water, and “cephalus,” referring to the head. Hydrocephalus is a condition in which excess cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) builds up within the ventricles (fluid-containing cavities) of the brain and may increase pressure within the head. Although hydrocephalus often is described as “water on the brain,” the “water” actually is CSF—a clear fluid surrounding the brain and spinal cord that acts as a shock absorber for the brain and spinal cord as well as a vehicle for delivering nutrients to the brain and removing waste. It also regulates changes in pressure within the brain.

“It is likely Michael had hydrocephalus in utero, but it wasn’t visible on the ultrasound. He wasn’t diagnosed until he was three months old,” explained Mrs. Nowicki. “At three months old he was sent from the neurosurgeon’s office to a hospital for immediate surgery due to the pressure on his brain. Michael remained in the hospital for 10 days,” she stated.
“Today Michael is medication free after 20 years!”

“Within a couple of weeks, we returned to Overlook Hospital in Summit, N.J. Michael required another surgery because the shunt that was inserted was draining fluid too rapidly. To complicate matters more, Michael developed a brain bleed. He had to be admitted to regulate the bleeding. It was extremely frightening,” she said.

**Shunt**—Treatment for hydrocephalus generally involves surgical interventions. Shunt placement and management is the most common treatment. A shunt is a flexible plastic tube, about 1/8 inch in diameter, with a valve that controls the flow of cerebral spinal fluid draining from the ventricles of the brain.

**Attending school became a defining moment**

“Around three years of age, we began to notice Michael had other challenges. Over the next few years, he would not make eye contact with us and that was a red flag. But it wasn’t until he began attending school that his behaviors became more apparent,” Mrs. Nowicki stated.

“Since our sons were only two years apart, it was difficult to pick up subtleties. We were trying to balance home life and caring for two young children. It’s possible that we may have realized he had ASD sooner if we had only one child,” she said.

**Preparing for preschool**

“We had an intake with our school district when Michael was three. He was immediately enrolled into their early intervention preschool and remained in that program for two years until being moved into kindergarten. The primary objective of the program was to improve his socialization skills and ADHD.

**A real inspiration**

“Michael ultimately had four shunt surgeries because new issues emerged. The doctors had to conduct a series of tests to eliminate certain conditions. At six years old he developed debilitating headaches. I remember seeing him hold a cold compress on his head. He was so young and a real trooper. There was a great deal of trial and error with medications. He was on anticonvulsants because the headaches escalated and he experienced side effects. This escalation was a sign that we had to return to the hospital or the doctor as soon as possible. He was prescribed anticonvulsants and on them until last summer. Today he is medication free after 20 years!”

“I remember another time when Michael was 11 years old and he was sitting with me at the kitchen table and I literally saw his face droop when paralysis began to set in. Something was happening right before my eyes that left him unable to walk on his own.”

“The medical team was thinking he had an infectious disease or Lyme disease, but testing ruled them out. He was physically declining rapidly. It was determined that he required another shunt surgery including a new valve. After the surgery, he was no longer weak and he was able to walk again. Unfortunately one eye was crossed and did not correct itself. A year later the pediatric ophthalmologist performed corrective surgery. The surgery was a success. He didn’t even require glasses,” she said.

**Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)**—ASD affects one out of every 68 children in the U.S. It occurs more often among boys than girls. ASD affects these different areas of a child’s life: social interaction, communication (both verbal and nonverbal) and behavior and interests. While there is some commonality with children who have ASD, each child is unique.

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Is Asperger’s Syndrome different from Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

Doctors used to think of Asperger’s Syndrome as a separate condition, but in 2013, the standard reference that mental health professionals use, called The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), changed how it’s classified.

Today, Asperger’s syndrome is part of a broader category called autism spectrum disorder (ASD). This group of related mental health issues shares some symptoms. Even so, lots of people still use the term Asperger’s when referring to a “high-functioning” form of ASD. This means the symptoms are less severe than other ASD.

The DSM-5 also includes a new diagnosis, called social pragmatic communication disorder, which has some symptoms that overlap with Asperger’s. Doctors use it to describe people who have trouble talking and writing, but have normal intelligence.

“Our kids aren’t typical and require creative solutions,” Joan Nowicki

“Michael attended public school up to third grade. When we realized the public school was not meeting his academic, emotional or behavioral needs, we transferred him to Rock Brook School, a private school in Skillman, NJ. He attended this school from nine to 14 years of age. We had to seek an alternate placement because Rock Brook didn’t have a high school at the time.”

“We wanted a good adaptive academic program to further Michael’s learning as much as possible. We also wanted a school placement where he would experience music, art, clubs, dances and other social opportunities. These are activities typically enjoyed by other children in a high school program. ECLC met all of our criteria. Its program mirrors a typical high school. There are dances, clubs, award ceremonies, and even a student government association.”

“We enrolled Michael at ECLC in Chatham. I also learned about a reading program called the SONDAY® System. It worked wonderfully for Michael. This program focused on developing specific sounds and strengthening his speech. In time, he began speaking more fluently. He has been in the program for five years at ECLC and also had an introduction to it in his previous school. SONDAY is not the typical way to teach reading, but our kids aren’t typical and require creative solutions,” she stated.

SONDAY® System (www.winsorlearning.com/products)—According to Winsor Learning, intervention solutions and education consulting, the SONDAY System has helped more than 1,800 school districts (Pre-K to Grade 12) improve reading scores by providing Orton-Gillingham based tools and training to educators working with struggling students.

“Throughout his lifetime, Michael has had multiple brain and other surgeries to help manage his condition. Learning that he had ASD was almost a relief to us since it explained many of his behaviors. It also gave us the ability to provide him with the proper therapy to help him. He received speech, occupational, physical and behavioral therapies, reading support and continued testing and support from a neuro-psychologist,” explained his mom.

“Today Michael’s academic knowledge is at various levels: He is reading at third grade level and his speech is relatively good. However, Michael is not his best spokesperson. We are working on
teaching him to become his own advocate. It's not an easy task,” Mrs. Nowicki stated.

We marvel at the resilience and talent of one child!

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “marvel” as one that causes wonder or astonishment. It is astounding how this word so adequately describes Michael. “He started playing with trains at three years of age. My husband would take both boys to events. At 10 years of age, a family member, who is an electrician, taught Michael how to maintain and fix his trains. He does this independently now,” Mrs. Nowicki explained.

“What’s more, Marvel® comics and movies are a passion of his. He has his own YouTube channel where he develops videos and provides animations and commentaries on movies.”

His talents don’t stop there. Michael’s father taught him to play guitar and drums. Today Michael is a talented artist, musician and singer. He is an active member of the guitar club at school. “His ECLC Music Teacher Diana Reed nominated him for a 2016 VSA Award. He entered into the vocal section of the competition. The competition was a closed audition in February of this year. He not only sang, but played the guitar. He won an award in the vocal contest and performed “Imagine” by John Lennon during the award ceremony on May 7, 2016 in North Brunswick, New Jersey.

“My son has taught me infinite patience, unwavering care, analytic problem solving, boundless love, trust and compassion,” Mrs. Nowicki stated.

Advice for parents and caretakers

“I encourage parents to always go with their instincts. No one knows your child better or loves him or her more. Try to network with other parents of children with special needs as much as possible. The best way to sift through information is to find out what has worked for others.”

“As for therapists, educators and medical professionals, I urge you to look for the unique talent in each child. This is the entryway to the person and the essence of the individual. Once you take the time to identify the child’s gift and tap into it, his or her interactions with other children will be more expeditious and fruitful,” Mrs. Nowicki concluded.

Founded in 1978, VSA New Jersey is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting the creative power of people with disabilities. The organization is part of the international VSA network, an affiliate of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.