

Insight

Spring 2021

3 CHANGE AND RESILIENCE
at the Dukakis Aquatic Center

5 TEACHER FEATURE
Diego Coyle Diez

6 COMMUNITY PROFILE
Tere Ramos



The New England Center
for Children®
Autism Education and Research

WELCOME



Dear Friend,

Springtime always seems to bring a sense of hope and renewal. Now more than ever, we need positive change. The past year has challenged us all, but through every difficult circumstance, our students and staff showed great flexibility and compassion. This issue of Insight explores the themes of hope, change, and resilience.

These stories would not be possible without your support. On behalf of everyone at NECC, thank you. I encourage you to read, enjoy, and share these stories. They have inspired us over the past year and we hope they do the same for you.

Sincerely,

Jared Bouzan

OUR MISSION is to create a global network of educators, researchers, and programs so that those living with autism may live fuller lives.



WHERE TO FIND US ONLINE

NECC.org
ACENECC.org
NECCABUDHABI.org



NECCforAutism



The New England
Center for Children

Jared Bouzan
Chief Development Officer
jbouzan@necc.org

Beth McGonagle
Director, Institutional Advancement
bmcgonagle@necc.org

Jeff Arnold
Writer, editor, designer
jarnold@necc.org

Children of Promise Gala Success Despite Nontraditional Format

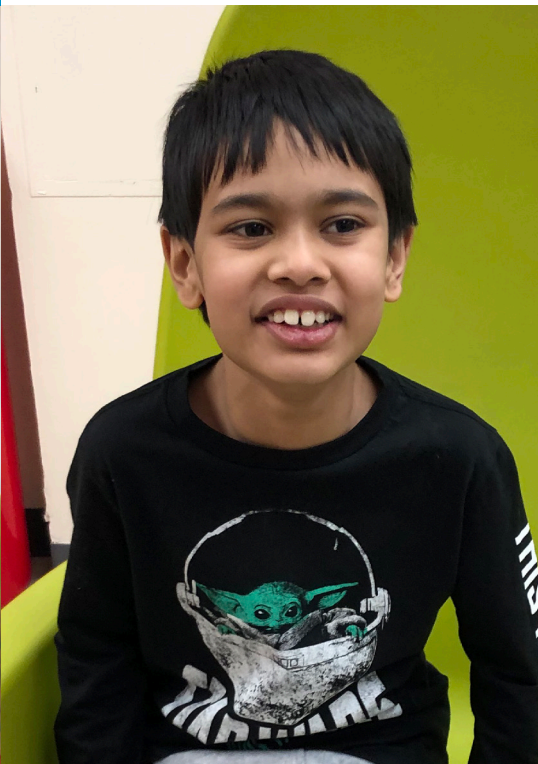
LAST NOVEMBER, THE ANNUAL CHILDREN OF PROMISE GALA went virtual for the first time. While the event was nontraditional, the generosity and enthusiasm of NECC's network of supporters was unstoppable. The event raised over \$670,000 for NECC's programs and services.

The virtual gala was hosted by NECC parent, Matthew Wosk and featured a celebration of the Center's 45th anniversary as well as a look inside NECC's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"In a year like this, we are especially grateful to our broad base of donors and corporate sponsors," said Vinnie Strully, NECC's founder and CEO. "Their support will allow our team of teachers, researchers, and clinicians to continue their life-changing work for children with autism."



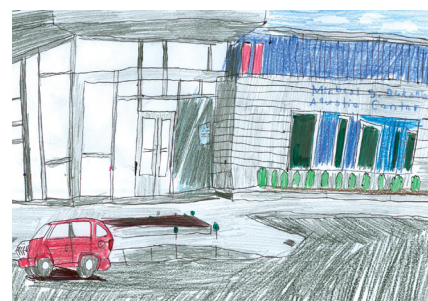
Matthew Wosk
filming for the Gala



Change and Resilience

AT THE MICHAEL S. DUKAKIS AQUATIC CENTER

Opened in June 2008, the Michael S. Dukakis Aquatic Center features a specially-designed pool, locker rooms and adjacent conference rooms. The space was funded by a \$5.5 million capital campaign in honor of former Massachusetts Governor and longtime NECC supporter, Michael Dukakis. The Aquatic Center is a favorite spot for students and teachers, with swimming a central part of the adapted physical education (APE) curriculum. This year, it brought a sense of normalcy to an otherwise interrupted school year.



THE POOL AREA AT THE MICHAEL S. DUKAKIS AQUATIC CENTER IS LOUD.

The sound of students and teachers playing in the water, laughing, splashing, and talking, bounces off the high ceiling, pool deck, and walls, creating a symphony of sorts that envelopes anyone who walks in. It is hectic, but it is joyous.

These sounds are indicative of what the pool provides students at NECC. On one hand it is an integral part of the full educational experience. Students learn to swim with teachers who are trained to work with children with autism in a safe environment. On the other hand, the pool also provides an opportunity to relax and play in the calm water. While the rest of their day might be spent in a classroom or at their residence learning new skills, the pool is something different. As Phil Leonard, MS, Assistant Director of APE, points out, many students love any opportunity to get in the water.

“There are plenty of kids for whom going to the pool is what they look

forward to during the week,” he explains. “It’s a unique activity they get to do, and you can see that it makes them happy.”

While COVID necessitated many changes at NECC, one constant has been the role that the pool plays in students’ lives. When students were not able to go to the pool last spring and early summer because of the pandemic, there was a void that was difficult to fill. This void existed not just for the students, but for staff as well.

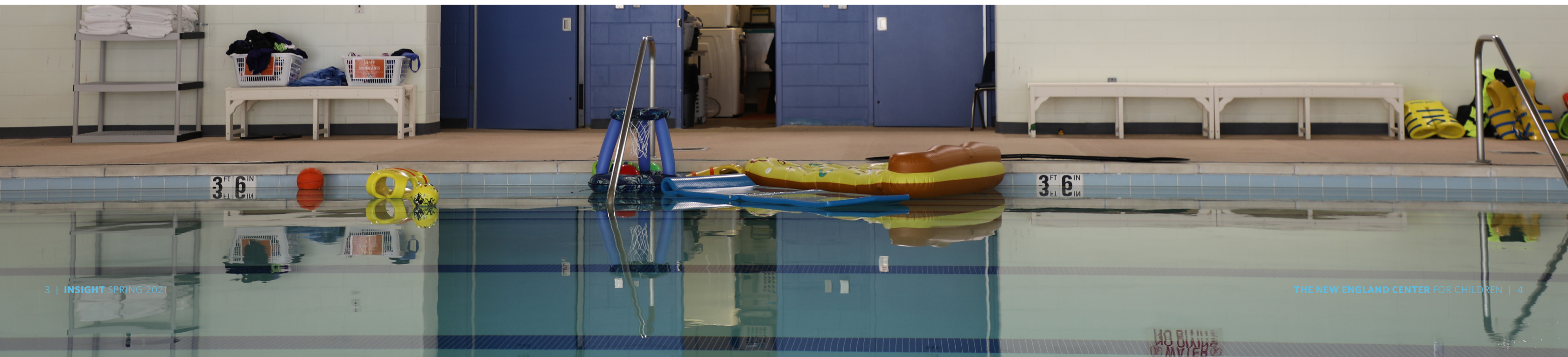
“I think for those of us who weren’t working with the students in their residences every day, we felt pretty disconnected. That was difficult, and every step we took to work back towards being open was encouraging,” says Leonard.

Since reopening last summer, the pool has been a favorite part of so many students’ days. Thanks to financial support from NECC’s community to provide water safety equipment and PPE, the staff has

been able to provide a fun learning experience despite new and difficult conditions brought upon by the pandemic. As with everything that NECC does, students remain the primary focus.

“Seeing students back at school was hugely rewarding, because we all know what it took to get them back here,” Leonard shares. “It wasn’t easy, and I think all of the teachers deserve a lot of credit. Especially in the pool, swimming with a mask is not the most comfortable, and then you overlay that with the COVID situation and people’s hesitancy and uneasiness, and it’s so much to overcome. They have gone the extra mile in adapting to this new reality.”

NECC is still far from feeling like it did prior to the pandemic. Teachers and students will continue to wear masks and signs reminding people to wash their hands and keep their distance, but every day the students will continue to come to the school and adhere to the changes. They will spend time learning and growing alongside their classmates, and some days, they will go to the pool.



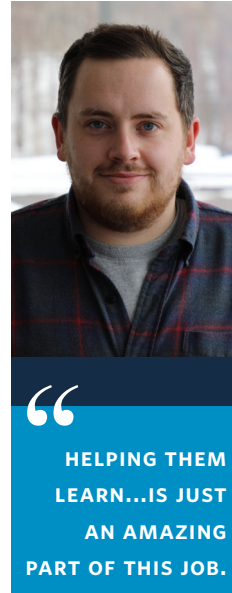
Teacher Feature

DIEGO COYLE DIEZ

Diego Coyle Diez is a level 2 teacher on a residential team who came to NECC last spring from Ireland. After earning an undergraduate degree in psychology from the National University of Ireland, Maynooth in 2017, and a master's degree in applied behavior analysis (ABA) from the University of Dublin in 2019, Diego came to the US to continue his path in autism education and research. The year since Diego joined NECC has been challenging, but his commitment to teaching his students is unmatched. We recently caught up with Diego and asked him about his inspiration to come to NECC, his time here, and why he finds his job so rewarding.



Diego with his student, Ryan



“
HELPING THEM
LEARN...IS JUST
AN AMAZING
PART OF THIS JOB.”

THE MOST REWARDING PART of my career at NECC is the experience with our students. Seeing their progress through hard work and the support we provide is remarkable. Seeing their happiness is just amazing. For example, one of my students had a difficult time with food selectivity and really wouldn't eat much. Over time, through our work, he started enjoying more foods. Seeing him laughing, happy at mealtimes now, especially compared to how he was earlier, is incredible and it inspires me as a teacher to try to do so much more.

TEACHING THROUGHOUT THE PANDEMIC has been, honestly, difficult; however, the guidance and support from the Emergency Management Team has helped us continue to work with our students. The way NECC as a company and a school has come together to find ways to keep our students in their schedules as much as possible has been a pretty inspiring sight.

WHAT SPARKED MY INTEREST IN AUTISM EDUCATION was knowing the effect that ABA can have on children with autism. Helping them learn skills that they can use every day, that sometimes can be difficult, is just an amazing aspect of this job. I couldn't say no to that opportunity.

REPRESENTATIVES FROM NECC CAME TO IRELAND to host a showing of what NECC does for students at my alma mater, Trinity College. They showed us all the different things that they do, all the research. Knowing that a place exists that can provide so much support to children

with autism, I knew I needed to experience it. I said to myself, “I want to be part of helping these kids and learning from the people at NECC.”

DURING MY MASTER'S PROGRAM IN IRELAND, I wrote a lesson for a student, and the main article I based this lesson on was written by [NECC Director of Research] Bill Ahearn. One day after I started here, walking through the school, I saw his office. Realizing that I am in the same place as this person who has influenced so many people's lives, it was just astonishing.



Kati and her teacher at a Special Olympics soccer event in 2019

Community Profile

TERE RAMOS



Tere, center, with her husband and Kati, last summer

FOR NECC PARENT, TERE RAMOS, supporting her daughter and NECC is a full family affair. Tere's daughter, Kati, has been a student at NECC since 2006, and in those 15 years, Tere's family has found numerous ways to contribute.

In 2016, Tere's husband ran the Boston Marathon for Team NECC, and just last year, Kati's sister, Eleanor, raised over \$10,000 through NECC's 5K – the highest individual fundraiser for that race. For Tere, though, she has made it her mission to show her appreciation for the teachers and staff members committed to helping students.

In the fall of 2019, Tere arranged for a food truck to cater lunch for

every staff member at NECC. This gesture, she explains, was to show her gratitude for the entire NECC staff, from teachers to administrators to building and grounds workers.

“The idea was how can we show to everybody that we are grateful for their work,” she says. “We wanted to provide them something palpable to say, ‘We appreciate everything you do for our kids.’”

While the scale of this gesture was unprecedented, as the food truck served more than 800 people, this was not the first time that Tere had found a creative way to express how much the staff means to her, her family, and everyone in the

NECC community. In years prior, as a special holiday treat, she provided catered lunches for teams throughout the school.

Tere's involvement with NECC is another in a long list of examples of community members finding ways to support NECC's mission. So many individuals and companies provide resources that in turn help students learn and grow.

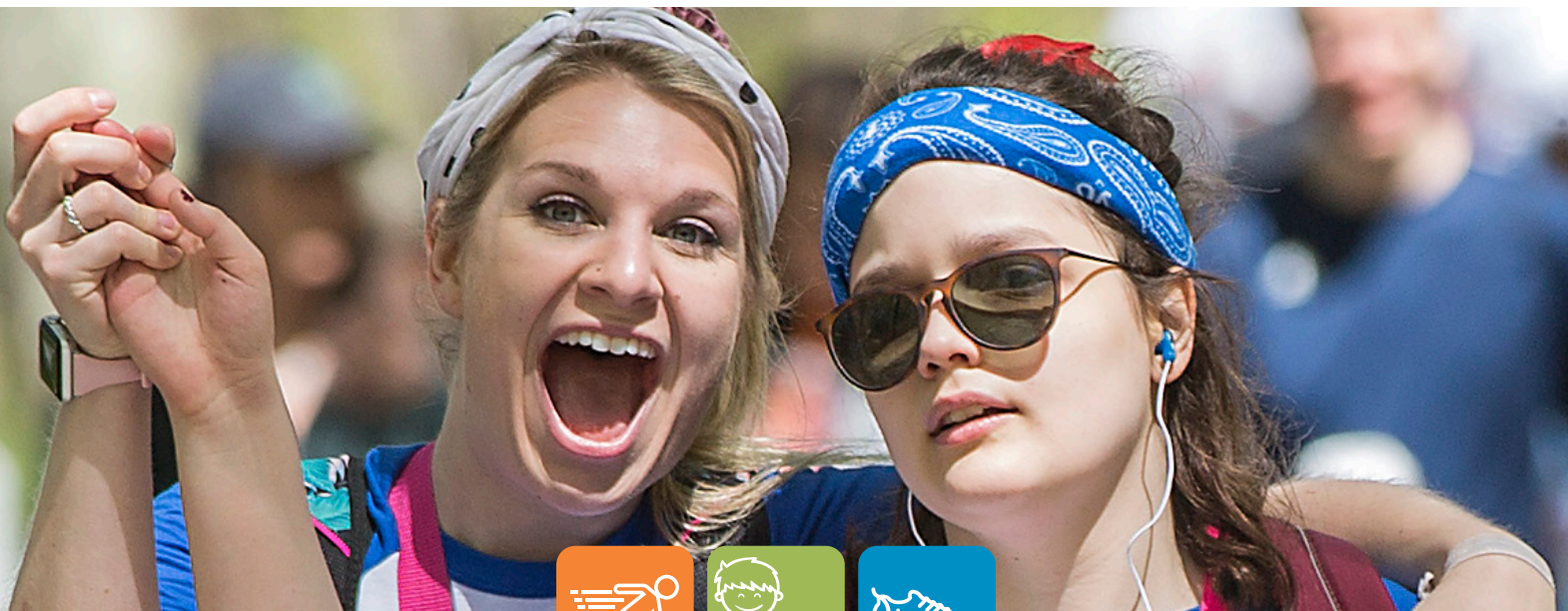
“Our parents are important members of our community,” says Jared Bouzan, Chief Development Officer. “We always feel their support and are driven to do everything we can to help their children continue to learn and grow.”



The New England Center
for Children®
Autism Education and Research

33 Turnpike Road
Southborough, MA, 01772-2108

BOSTON | ABU DHABI



5K WALK | RUN FOR **AUTISM**

LIVE VIRTUAL AUDIO EVENT | SATURDAY, **MAY 1** | 10:00 A.M.



**CHARGE
RUNNING**

NEW THIS YEAR, the NECC 5K is powered by the Charge Running app.
Visit WWW.NECC.ORG/5K to register, fundraise and join the virtual event!