



Insight

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The New England Center
for Children®
Autism Education and Research

FALL 2022
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As The New England Center for Children begins both a new academic and fiscal year, I would like to share my deepest gratitude to our staff, families, and supporters for your patience and generosity over the last year. Despite an ongoing staffing crisis, NECC staff pulled together for our students. Though it might not have seemed like it at moments, NECC had a strong year. We are so proud of the hard work and dedication of our staff; without you, our students would not have continued to make strides amid these tumultuous times.

Over the last few months, our students, as well as their families, have enjoyed the return of a bit of normalcy, with the reopening of the Michael S. Dukakis Aquatic Center for APE/OT time and family swim, and the return of in-person events like the Annual 5K Walk/Run for Autism and the Art Show — both of which raised crucial funds for the Center.

Let's keep the momentum going as we look forward to another great year.

Sincerely,



Jared Bouzan, M.Ed.
Chief Development Officer

**OUR MISSION IS TO CREATE
A GLOBAL NETWORK OF
EDUCATORS, RESEARCHERS,
AND PROGRAMS SO THAT
THOSE LIVING WITH AUTISM
MAY LIVE FULLER LIVES.**

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@NECCforAutism



The New England
Center for Children



NECC students made this autism acceptance banner during their rec and leisure sessions in April in honor of Autism Awareness Month. The banner hung in the Arledge Student Center prior to being displayed at the Solomon Pond Mall in Marlborough, MA as part of their local artist showcase this fall.

Teacher Feature

ALEX HEGGIE



Though Alex Heggie has only worked at NECC for two years, his connections with the organization date back more than a decade - and another continent. In 2012, Heggie was working for a small, independent day school in the heart of London that catered to students with a range of physical and intellectual disabilities when he met a student with ties to NECC.

"This student had an incredible supervisory team who travelled from NECC at least three times per academic year to check in on his progress," said Heggie, adding that the student's two-teacher team in London included one from NECC. But NECC's commitment to its student wasn't the only thing that impressed Heggie.

"One of the teachers out of Southborough arrived at the school in Chelsea, London to train for the position in June of 2016 - we immediately hit it off," he shared. "One thing led to another, and, in August 2020, we were married."

In the fall of 2020, Heggie's school closed after taking a financial hit from the COVID-19 pandemic, so he and his new wife, Amanda Durocher-Heggie, who currently works as a training and implementation specialist in the ACE®

department, returned to the U.S. to work for NECC in Southborough. He started as a level 2 teacher for IIP Cohort B but jumped at the opportunity to work in the Adapted Physical Education (APE) department.

"My passion has always been helping children with various diagnoses achieve and maintain a fit and healthy lifestyle," he shared. "My favorite part of my job is being able to open up different environments for our students to enjoy. Seeing the joy in students faces as they accomplish new goals in the gym or simply get back to enjoying the pool reminds me daily that my job is endlessly rewarding."

Heggie shared that he ended up in this line of work by chance. He was planning to study law, though quickly realized that it was not for him. Simultaneously, his job working with an organization educating young adults made him realize he had a passion for education, so he became a traveling paraprofessional.

"At each and every one of my assignments I was placed with a student who required additional support either within mainstream education or in a special needs setting. Seeing first-hand the difference that that level of support

could make helped to cement that passion for education," Heggie said.

At NECC, Heggie is taking advantage of furthering his own education through the Center's partnership with Simmons University. "I have not only gained a deeper understanding of ABA and its place in education but have also developed my sense of empathy for the population we serve which, for me, is priceless," he explained.

As part of his master's degree program, Heggie is engaged in research, something he believes is important to the future of autism education. "Education and its systems are forever changing and evolving. Research allows us to stay at the forefront of this necessary evolution and keep our systems updated and relevant," shared Heggie. "Keeping up with education as it evolves allows us to best serve our population."

He hopes to complete his doctorate one day (to keep up with Amanda who recently defended hers), possibly in the science of movement, kinesiology. "I am passionate about what I do so long as NECC has a need for passionate teachers, I hope to stick around," Heggie said.

MEET NECC'S SUMMER INTERN CLASS

For nearly three decades, NECC has been working on a pipeline for direct-care staff through its internship program. Because of the generosity of attendees from last year's Children of Promise Gala, who pledged funds to support the expansion of NECC's internship program, NECC was able to welcome its largest class of interns in the program's history. Forty-seven students from colleges and universities across the country, as well as Ireland, Spain, and the United Kingdom, spent 10 weeks learning about ABA and the great work NECC does on its Southborough campus.

"These internships provide hands-on experience and exposure to our field of work, to which many are drawn after completing their internships and beyond graduation," said Ellen Graham, MA, CAGS, program director of graduate studies and internships. "Many of our interns return to NECC for employment after their internships. While we won't be able to solve the national staffing shortage, being able to offer these opportunities to future special educators is invaluable to both NECC and our industry."

Meet a few of this summer's interns and the impact their NECC internships have had on their career goals.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO DO YOUR SUMMER INTERNSHIP AT NECC?

Chloe Chiota '24 (Hamilton College): I was looking for a volunteering opportunity for the summer and NECC seemed like the perfect place to make a difference while learning a lot and gaining valuable experience. I was inspired by NECC's incredible mission and innovative teaching practices, and I'm so glad I got to be a part of it.

Olivia Chiota '24 (Hamilton College): I was really interested in interning for NECC after taking a tour of the school and learning about what a wonderful organization it is. I was so impressed by the facilities, teachers, and methods of the school, and I knew I wanted to be a part of the organization for the summer.

Gianna Godek '24 (UMass Amherst): NECC is nationally known to provide immaculate care to their students with autism. When I was offered a position as an intern, I couldn't pass up this extraordinary opportunity! I knew from the beginning that this experience would be life changing for me, helping to guide me on the path to success.

Julia Hayes '23 (University of Idaho): I chose to do an internship at NECC because of the invaluable experience it offered students to get hands-on experience working in the classroom with students. As a student studying special

education, this seemed like an incredible opportunity to gain more experience that will better prepare me for my future career.

Noor Kaur '23 (Bucknell University): I was looking for any kind of hands-on experience relevant to my major. I also wanted something with a research component to it. I was really surprised to find an actual internship (and paid) in psychology. I had worked as a peer mentor with kids with autism before so that drew me in as well. I'm still in the process of figuring out what I want to do with my degree, so I jumped in from an exploratory perspective.

Sam Monks '23 (Haverford College): I wanted a hands-on learning experience where I could learn and use psychological tools to make a difference. NECC seemed like the perfect community for me to achieve my goals.

WHAT WAS YOUR FAVORITE PART OF THE INTERNSHIP?

Julia: My favorite part was getting to use the strategies and other things I have learned about in school in an actual classroom setting. It is one thing to learn about teaching, but a completely unreal experience to actually do it and see things come together. I also loved getting to work alongside brilliant and creative teachers and getting to know the most precious kids.



Noor: This might be a cheesy, cliché answer, but truly the people were the best part. Of course, the students were amazing, and I developed a relationship with all of them. But the other teachers were super helpful, and I made friends with a lot of them. It was awesome being around these people who care so much about what they do and are so good at it, too.

WHAT ARE YOUR FUTURE PLANS/GOALS?

Julia: After I finish my undergraduate this coming year, I plan to pursue a master's degree either in special education or educational leadership/administration. I would definitely love to continue working with children with autism and eventually pursue a career in educational administration working in a district, state, or federal setting to advocate for and shape a better education system.

Sam: My long-term career goal is to become a licensed clinical psychologist. But as a result of my positive experience at NECC, I do hope to work with children with autism in some capacity in the future.

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE?

Gianna: This has been my first internship experience and it has genuinely exceeded my expectations. The staff of ITT is extremely devoted and supportive to both their students and

each other. I could not ask for a better work environment as I am always encouraged to strive to do my best, and I am given the opportunity to make decisions on my own, as a level 2 teacher would. My experience at NECC thus far has taught me so much and given me great insight about the field. I can truly say NECC has been an extraordinary resource to help me find my path in life, as I fell in love with the career during my internship.



Acts of Generosity

THE CARLIN-HANDIN FAMILY



Elliot Handin is a fighter. Diagnosed with leukemia at just three months old, Elliot beat the odds, defied his doctors' grim diagnoses, and is now a thriving 17-year-old student in NECC's residential program.

After a near three-year battle with an aggressive form of infant leukemia, Elliot's parents watched as his language skills disappeared and his behavior deteriorated. A neuropsychologist diagnosed Elliot with autism at the tender age of three.

"We had been desperately searching for the best school we could find after we learned that Elliot was on the more severe end of the autism spectrum," shared his mother, Stephanie Carlin. "I remember sleepless nights awaiting word about his acceptance to the NECC preschool program and the enormous relief I felt when I got the call with the good news."

Elliot joined NECC 14 years ago, first in the preschool program, followed by instruction in an NECC Partner Classroom for some of his elementary school years, before moving into the residential

program in 2016 at age 11—an incredibly difficult decision for Stephanie and her husband, David Handin.

"Here we were again with Elliot, facing a different kind of critical decision," said Stephanie. "He had been making minimal progress on his IEP, his behavior at home was deteriorating and we were running out of therapists and specialists to meet his needs. To say that making the decision to transition Elliot to the residential program was excruciating is an understatement. In retrospect, I think David and I dug back into that same resolve we had when Elliot was a tiny baby heroically facing aggressive leukemia. How can we give this kid a chance at his best life? The answer to that was not complicated though it was emotionally painful."

According to Stephanie, Elliot's progress over the last six years in the residential program has been dramatic. While he remains mostly non-verbal, he has gained access to significantly more language through the use of his AAC device and vocal approximations. His behavioral challenges have steadily declined and his independence in daily life skills has improved beyond expectation.

"The most remarkable improvement we have seen is Elliot's ability to understand and relate to the world around him," she shared, adding that he now acknowledges and smiles at his two younger siblings (Bryce, 14, and Vera, 11) and parents, and can even have short conversations about their plans during home visits. "We credit the remarkable work done at NECC and cannot wait to see what's next for Elliot."

Supporting NECC has been a top priority for the Carlin-Handin family as a sign of

appreciation for all NECC has done for their family. Over the last several years, they have raised more than \$21,000 for the Center. For the last five summers, Stephanie has run the Falmouth Road Race as a member of Team NECC, raising more than \$2,000 each year. They also attend the annual Children of Promise Gala, participate in the Annual 5k Walk/Run for Autism each spring, and volunteer at staff appreciation events whenever possible.

"In February 2021, when Elliot's leukemia returned completely unexpectedly, NECC stepped up to help us in ways for which we will be forever grateful," said Stephanie. "The care the entire team extended to Elliot and our family during one of the darkest moments of our lives was incredible."

When his colleagues generously reached out to help during this medical crisis, David suggested they donate to NECC.

"I think it is easy to understand why David and I feel so committed to supporting NECC. The entire team works tirelessly to create stability and safety while exposing each child to the best educational opportunities possible," said Stephanie. "We are proud of what we have been able to give back to a school that has changed the course of our lives."



YOUR GIFT, YOUR IMPACT

Your gift gives students opportunities to be part of their community and have some fun. This summer, students enjoyed community events and outings, such as visits to Uhlman's Ice Cream and the Southborough Fire Station, pizza parties, fishing at the annual Fishin' with a Mission event, the reopening of the pool, the return of movie days, and so much more!



NECC News

NECC CELEBRATES FIELD DAY

On June 29, NECC celebrated Field Day. Often called the best day of the year, students and staff enjoyed a day filled with arts and crafts, bounce houses, games, carnival rides, and ice cream. This year's video game theme even drew special visitors Mario and Luigi! It truly was a great day to celebrate the hard work of both students and staff.



16TH ANNUAL 5K RAISES NEARLY \$200,000 FOR NECC STUDENTS



More than 600 participants, including students, teachers, friends, and families of NECC gathered on May 21 for the 16th Annual 5K Walk/Run for Autism. Runners and walkers enjoyed a beautiful day on the course followed by a BBQ lunch. The event, which is one of NECC's signature fundraising events, raised over \$190,000 for the Center.

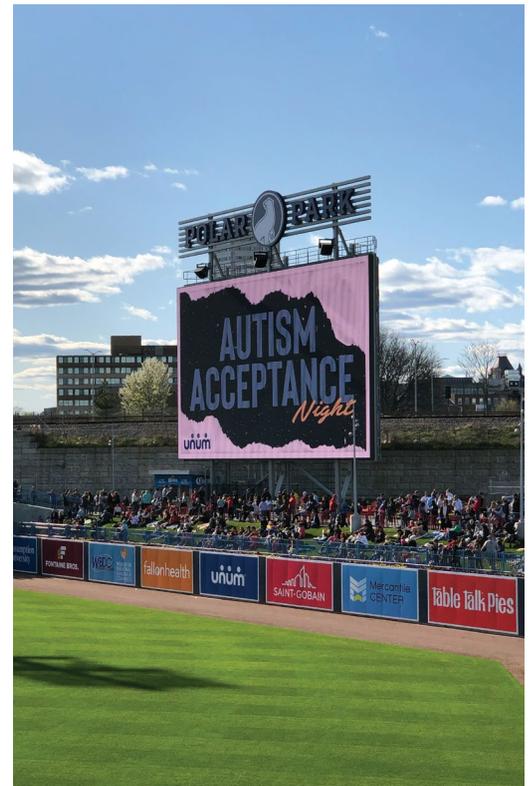


NECC HOSTS 4TH ANNUAL ART SHOW

On May 5, David and Elizabeth Klein, a member of NECC's Board of Directors, hosted the fourth annual NECC Art Show, which returned to an in-person event after a two-year hiatus due to the pandemic. Nearly 100 individuals - including students, families, and friends of NECC - gathered at the Southborough Community House for the event, which showcased more than 60 pieces of artwork created by NECC students and staff as well as great works from local professional artists. Through the silent auction, as well as fixed priced items such as iPads, art kits, and pizza, bowling, and ice cream parties, NECC raised more than \$12,250.



WOOSOX HONOR NECC AS A "HEART OF WORCESTER"



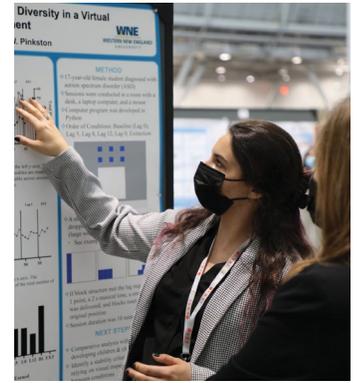
Prior to their game on April 30, the Worcester Red Sox honored NECC as a "Heart of Worcester" as part of its Autism Acceptance Day event. The pregame ceremony enabled two NECC students and four teachers from the New Castle Road residential team to be recognized on the field. NECC student Xander even threw out the first pitch. "Our Heart of Worcester program is a way to acknowledge local nonprofits who make a difference in the lives of individuals in our community," said Joe Bradlee, vice president of baseball operations and community relations for the Worcester Red Sox. "The WooSox are committed to serving all of our fans, especially those with autism, and we are grateful for our partnership with The New England Center for Children."

NECC STAFF PRESENT AT ABA CONFERENCE

Each year, the Association for Applied Behavior Analysis International (ABAI) holds a conference that brings together the world's top ABA researchers. This May, the 48th annual conference was held at the Boston Convention Center in the Seaport, where more than two dozen NECC researchers and staff shared findings from ongoing research projects.

"The ABAI convention is an important event for our staff to not only share our work but to also have a chance to learn from others in the field," said Bill Ahearn, PhD, BCBA-D, director of research. "Many of our collaborators also present at the conference and this is an important opportunity for us to meet and further our relationships as well as to embark upon new projects."

ABAI is also an opportunity for NECC recruiters to talk with potential staff and a place where staff alumni can reconnect with NECC and their former colleagues. Many of these staff alumni are currently leading agencies, teaching at universities, or have opened clinics of their own, none of which would have been possible without the foundation of knowledge and experience they collected while working at NECC. A popular stop in the exhibit hall is NECC's ACE® ABA Software System booth where current users and prospective clients share success stories.



NECC CELEBRATES DIVERSITY



Throughout the year, NECC's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts acknowledge occasions that honor differences among our community members. In June, members of the DEI Task Force planned events celebrating, appreciating, and creating understanding for the Juneteenth holiday and LGBTQ Pride Month, filled with special foods, drinks, and activities.

As part of the Juneteenth celebration, NECC staff had the opportunity to sign up for discussions on two books, *Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People* (Mahzarin R.R. Banaji) and *How To Be An Antiracist* (Ibram X. Kendi), which were held on September 21 and 28.



"This year's goal was to build awareness around core diversity, equity, and inclusion competencies," said Fatou Njie-Jallow, DEI director. "The bias book is foundational for that, and the antiracist is also foundational because it brings the idea of racism so people can be more comfortable talking about it. It created a space where staff could share their perspectives and how each book will shape their behaviors and views moving forward. This initial effort will hopefully be one of many opportunities to build our capacity to talk and connect in new ways."

NECC OPENS CLINIC IN ABU DHABI

This fall, NECC continued its expansion in the Middle East with the opening of its second clinic. The NECC Clinic - Abu Dhabi is located in Masdar City, a Freezone in Abu Dhabi that prides itself on its sustainability and is a hub for research and development. The city is home to a rapidly growing clean-tech cluster, and has a residential neighborhood with businesses, restaurants, shops, and public green spaces.

"The NECC Clinic in Abu Dhabi will strive to contribute to this vibrant community by providing world-class services to both children and adults of determination," said Kristin Buchanan, MSEd, BCBA, executive director of Gulf consulting. "This new clinic will allow us the opportunity to provide clinic-based ABA and speech services, while still being able to provide support both in-home and at school. We are eager to provide more families access to our cutting-edge services, helping further NECC's mission of supporting those living with autism and other developmental disabilities across the globe."

The NECC Clinic - Abu Dhabi is the second clinic in the Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC), established through NECC's GCC Consulting arm. The first clinic was opened in Dubai in December 2019.



#TEAMNECC RAISES \$18,000 FOR NECC



On August 21, Team NECC Falmouth Road Race runners conquered the seven-mile course while raising more than \$18,000 in crucial funds for NECC. Pictured top, L-R: Taylor Collins (NECC staff), Carrie Johnson (NECC staff), Stephanie Carlin (NECC parent), Kim Ruscitti (NECC staff), Lori McKenna (NECC parent), Jenna Shields (NECC friend), Fatou Nijie-Jallow (NECC staff), and Bakary Jallow (NECC friend). Bottom, L-R: Laureen Palmateer (NECC staff), Emily McKenna (NECC sibling), and Hanah Conlan (NECC staff). Not pictured: Amy Grant (NECC staff), Becky Zorovic (NECC parent), Matt McKenna (NECC sibling), and Jonathan Gillim (NECC friend).



The New England Center
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GALA

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INTERCONTINENTAL BOSTON

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