G2DSP Program Enriching Lives of Area Students

Saint Joseph’s Center is participating as a partner with the Pennsylvania Advocacy and Resources for Autism and Intellectual Disability (PAR) for the development of the Graduate to Direct Support Professional Program (G2DSP). Participating students are formally mentored through real-life vocational experience in the field. G2DSP is useful for career discernment as a student considers life after high school which may be to enter the workforce or post-secondary education especially pursuing careers in direct service, nursing, social work, and other healthcare. The Direct Support Professional (DSP) role at Saint Joseph’s is central to the quality care for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Continuation of such quality requires preparing the next generation of staff.

Heidi Williams, one of the first G2DSP participants, also earned the Girl Scout Gold Award, the highest award in Girl Scouting. Her wonderful achievement benefited Saint Joe’s staff. For her project, she created resources called “Self-Care for Health Care.” Acknowledging the burnout some health care professionals experience, Heidi assembled 600 self-care kits for distribution to Saint Joseph’s staff. Each kit included self-care tips, reminders and gifts. While in the G2DSP program she worked at Adult Day Services in Luzerne County, PA. Her experiences at Saint Joseph’s Center will benefit Heidi throughout her life.

“What a great opportunity for students!” says Angel Heffley, with so much excitement. Angel is a Direct Support Professional at the Community Living Arrangements Home in Scranton, PA. “Everyone should know about this opportunity,” Angel says referring to the G2DSP Program. She encouraged her daughter, Alexis, to apply. This mother/daughter team share the same love for Saint Joe’s residents. They have created long-lasting bonds with coworkers and residents. In fact, Angel has worked in community homes and at Adult Day Services for 14 years and her daughter was introduced to Saint Joe’s when she was just 2 years old. Alexis returned years later for “Bring Your Child to Work Day” and had a new understanding of Saint Joe’s. When Angel speaks about Alexis and her commitment to be part of G2DSP, you can hear how proud she is and rightly so. Being part of Saint Joe’s for so many years, Angel knows firsthand how important it is to find coworkers who embody Care, Concern, Compassion and Commitment.

Alexis echoes a similar respect for the residents she cares for. “I applied for the G2DSP Program when I was 16 while looking at majoring in social work for college and I’ve loved it ever since! The clients are special and unique, their personalities are amazing and it makes me so happy.” One resident who gestures “thumbs up/thumbs down” to communicate actually responded to her verbally, a rare experience only a few have had. She was so excited to hear that “YES” which made her day. “I’m actually feeling sad as I know I will be leaving this wonderful group of guys after graduation,” says Alexis, “but I have invited them to my graduation party so we can celebrate together”. Alexis will attend the University of Southern Maine majoring in cyber security and looking to add Human Services to her studies because of her experiences at Saint Joe’s. “The best thing is the connection with clients and I never would have met such amazing people anywhere else,” says Alexis.

To learn more about how you or someone you know can be a part of the G2DSP Program, visit our website stjosephscenter.org for more information.

Congratulations to 2023 high school graduates Alexis, Colby and Kelsie! From left are: Alexis Heffley, G2DSP participant, along with her mother, Angel Heffley, DSP Saint Joe’s Community Living Arrangements (CLA); and CLA residents Colby Stravinsky and Kelsie Acosta (seated).
Residents and Employees celebrate “A Little Earth Day” in Therapy Garden

More than 40 residents and staff gathered to celebrate “A Little Earth Day,” May 10, coordinated by Sr. Sandy Grieco, and Sr. Rosemarie Gregorio, of the Pastoral Care Department. The event began with a prayer focusing on respect for all of creation and the responsibility to care for the Earth. The flowers, which residents started as seeds weeks ago, were planted around the Therapy Garden, and bird feeders made by the residents were hung on the fences and trees. A great variety of interesting and stimulating experiences are planned for the residents through the Dynamic Abilities Program this summer. A few examples are the following: lunch in the park; attending community celebrations, visiting farms, petting zoos; nature walks and splash parks. “Working on an individual’s goals with them and seeing excitement on their face when they accomplish a task is rewarding in itself and makes me feel like great things are happening,” shared Leah Aten, Coordinator of Dynamic Abilities.
Growing a Healthy Sense of Pride

Clients and staff in the Community Support Services (CSS) Program have something exciting to look forward to this summer—growing their own vegetables! Recently added to the grounds of Adult Day Services on Blakely Street in Dunmore are two vegetable garden beds waiting to be tended to. “It gives the clients a chance to get their hands dirty, be outside, be active, and enjoy the warmer weather,” says Michele Uhler, Program Specialist, CSS. Designed to meet the needs of individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities who reside with their families or who choose to live independently, Saint Joseph’s Center CSS offers a variety of programs providing individualized support. The idea bloomed from a lunch group that meets weekly at Marywood University’s Student Center. Andy, a CSS Client, says “I can’t wait for them to be big enough to pick! I’m excited to watch them grow.” The clients take such pride in taking care of the plants, watching their vegetables grow, and harvesting them to make a healthy snack.

Finding Birth Mom Brings Great Joy

Love, happiness and gratitude are words that Maria Wentz Maloney uses to describe her life. Maria, who was adopted from Saint Joseph’s Center in 1969, now adds fulfillment to that descriptive list. Maria is so appreciative of her adoptive parents, Rosalie and Edwin Wentz, who provided her with the best childhood. “They loved me so much and explained at an early age that I had been adopted as a baby. They embraced me as their own for 50 years and I accepted them as the loving and caring parents that they were,” shared Maria. Because of the close relationship that Rosalie and Edwin had with Mother Maria Dolora, Administrator of Saint Joseph’s Center at the time of her adoption, she was named Maria.

After Maria’s parents passed and aware of her adoption, she began looking for more information about her birth mother. Self-directed and using online resources, she found her birth mother, Patricia, in 2020. Once reunited, Maria and Patricia visited Saint Joseph’s Center in November, 2021. During that visit, Maria presented a beautiful chalice, that was given to her dad Edwin for his many years of service as a Grand Knight in Nanticoke. Maria was asked by the Knights to donate the chalice to a chapel that was meaningful to her family, and she noted, “Saint Joseph’s Chapel is 100% where it needs to be.” Plans to bless the chalice for use and celebrate mass were delayed because of the pandemic. Finally, on, May 11, 2023, the formal presentation and Liturgical celebration occurred. The date was chosen for its proximity to Mother’s Day to honor all mothers, especially those who have been impacted by the gift of adoption. Maria, her husband, Joe, and Patricia attended as well as Saint Joseph’s Center staff. During the luncheon which followed, Maria praised her husband for his constant support and both of her mothers for their courage and strength. She also expressed appreciation for Saint Joseph’s Center for helping so many women, children and families since 1888.

“I am so blessed beyond my expectation for my life—I am fascinated as my life has truly done a 360 degree turn. Being able to come back to Saint Joe’s with my birth mother to share all of this is just so amazing. God’s plan was incredible. It is truly a happy life for me which continues with more memories and adventures,” Maria shared with deep gratitude.

Maria and Patricia present the chalice to Father Mosley during mass

Sharing the joy of this occasion are, front row, from left, Joseph Maloney; Rev. Joseph Mosley, Celebrant and Center Board Member; Maria Wentz Maloney and Patricia, back - Sr. Maryalice Jacquinot, President/CEO; Tamara Hall, Director, Maternity Services; Sr. Mary Ann Lang, Administrative Assistant for Publications.

Saint Joseph’s Center Summer Festival, Go Joe 26, and WNEP-TV Telethon

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To donate to the Summer Festival please visit our website StJosephsCenter.org

Telethon will be televised Friday & Saturday at 7pm - 9pm on WNEP.
Dear Friends of Saint Joseph’s Center,

With the arrival of summer, there is a sense of energy and excitement among all of us at Saint Joseph’s Center. Naturally, this is due in part to longer days with more sunlight, warmer temperatures and the beauty of flowers and colorful shrubs in full bloom. Opportunities to enjoy outdoor activities, visit local parks, attend baseball games or hang out on the many porches, patios and pavilions located at residences and program sites are plentiful.

The enthusiasm for summer is even greater this year with the end of the COVID-19 public health emergency. As I reflect on the past few years, I am extremely grateful for so many blessings. Residents and clients continue to show us flexibility in the face of constant change and what it means to be trusting and resilient. Staff members, always dedicated, were determined to ensure the safety and well-being of residents and clients while also adding joy and meaning to each day. Many others through faithful prayer and generous support expressed concern and encouragement to carry on.

With lessons learned from this experience and hopeful determination, we look forward with optimism and creativity at what might be possible. Programs and services are renewed in their efforts to provide person-centered resources that help each individual and family to reach for their God-given potential. With confidence, the blessings of awareness and gratitude will continue to be a source of inspiration as they have been throughout the history of Saint Joseph’s. This year, we celebrate 135 years of loving care since the foundation in 1888. Thank you for being a part of the Saint Joseph’s community.

Plans are in place for the Annual Summer Festival, WNEP Telethon and Go Joe Bike Ride. The outpouring of support, donations, volunteerism and presence as we prepare and throughout the weekend reminds us of the countless ways this mission has impacted lives and formed lifelong connections. Hope to see you this summer!

With gratitude and prayers,

Sister Maryalice Jacquinot, IHM
Sister Maryalice Jacquinot, IHM
President/CEO