

Insight

Fall 2019

Developments at The New England Center for Children®

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Photograph by Haley Pelletier, NECC Teacher



The New England Center
for Children®
Autism Education and Research

Insight

Fall 2019

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Our Mission: To transform the lives of children with autism worldwide through education, research, and technology.

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A LETTER FROM OUR CHIEF DEVELOPMENT OFFICER



Dear friend,

As the cooler New England months close in, we see the familiar signs of fall — school buses winding through our neighborhoods, children with brightly colored backpacks, leaves slowly turning shades of yellow, red, and brown. School is underway across the nation. Yet NECC students have been hard at work all summer long. We operate on a year-round schedule, and that means our staff have been working hard all summer, too.

NECC has some of the most dedicated, mission-driven people under its roof. Ask teachers why they work here, and you will hear over and over: The kids!

These are people who teach with compassion and care while respecting the individuality and dignity of each student. They find the place where students thrive — their strengths — while minimizing behaviors that limit their success. They help students feel good about themselves and create their best possible future.

This year, our Children of Promise Gala will honor our teachers and the life-changing work they do.

This high-end event brings in significant resources to enhance NECC's programs and services and will take place on Friday, November 15 at the InterContinental in Boston.

We hope that our mission, and the staff who make that mission a reality, continue to inspire you to support The New England Center for Children. Register at www.necc.org/gala.

Sincerely,

Jared Bouzan, MEd
Chief Development Officer

NECC EXPANDS ITS GLOBAL OUTREACH



NECC recently announced a partnership with One Two Three Autism School in Beirut, Lebanon, to serve children with autism and their families. One Two Three is the first and only school in Lebanon for children with autism. The school was inspired by Bachir Sarkis and Saritta Trad, who were unable to find an appropriate education for their child in Lebanon. They wanted to build a school that could help provide quality services for their child as well as children in the community and for other Middle Eastern citizens. Bachir's uncle, Sarkis Sarkis, helped to fund the school through a generous donation. NECC was contracted to manage school operations, teaching, applied behavior analysis (ABA) consulting, and professional development.

In addition to Lebanon, NECC operates or consults in Kuwait City, Kuwait; Dubai and Abu Dhabi in the UAE; Doha, Qatar; Gurgaon, India; Riyadh and Dammam in Saudi Arabia; and in Brazil, Australia, Italy, England, Canada and other countries. The ACE® software is currently used in 13 countries. NECC employs close to 300 people internationally, a quarter of whom are U.S. citizens and the remaining are nationals. NECC employs more than 50 percent of the BCBA's in the entire Gulf Region.

On the cover: Jack, age 15, works at Chestnut Hill Farm in Southborough as part of his vocational training. Gifts to the Annual Fund support transportation to our employer partner sites, giving students the opportunity to work alongside their fellow community members.

» Your gift. Your impact.

Your gift gives students opportunities to be part of their community, practice skills outside the classroom, and have a great time, too! **Thank you.**



Meet our Music Specialist:

Nadia Castagna, BS, MMEd, autism concentration

Nadia is one of the first teachers in the world to have a music degree with a focus on teaching individuals with autism. She won the music education award from the Boston Conservatory at Berklee for excellence in teaching music. She has two lesson plans published in the book "Teaching Music to Students with Special Needs - A Practical Resource" by Alice M. Hammel.

How did your interest in music develop?

My parents helped foster my love for music. My mother is an artist and my father was a fashion designer so there was always some kind of artistic activity going on in our house. They always had music playing in the background as we were creating art together. My parents always told me that I could sing before I could talk. I was always singing, dancing or making visual art with them. My father had a love for classical music and opera and would share that love with me frequently. This inspired me to pursue the violin at school when I was nine. When I was fifteen, we moved to Massachusetts from Rochester, NY and I had to switch instruments from the violin to the marimba (a giant xylophone) because there was no orchestra at my high school, only marching band. From then on I knew that I wanted to do something with music in college.

What inspired you to work with children with autism?

My late aunt Penny is who actually inspired me. She used to work with adults that had special needs and would bring me to cookouts and outings with her clients. She gave me opportunities to perform music classes with her clients once a week, and encouraged me to pursue my love for music in college. I've always wanted to work with students with special needs. My original intent was to be a music therapist, but I honestly enjoyed teaching more and I ended up finding the unique, one of a kind, program (master of music education with a focus in autism) at the Boston Conservatory, now at Berklee College of Music. The arts have always been a



NECC in the News

We are grateful to our media partners for helping us spread our message.

Comcast Xfinity

Comcast, provider of Xfinity, created a video PSA about the need for qualified special education teachers, especially in the autism field. The PSA aired more than 3,000 times on Comcast channels. You may have seen it on our social media channels, too.

Comcast's community outreach also includes one of the largest efforts to provide digital equity for low-income families. Learn more at: www.internetessentials.com.

105.7 WROR

105.7 WROR emceed the annual NECC 5K Walk/Run for Autism and spun tunes and played games to keep the crowd energized.

Beasley Media Group

Our media partner, Beasley Media Group, has run several public service announcements for us this year, including the need for funding to support research on daily living skills, and the Children of Promise Gala, which benefits autism education and research.

xfinity



great vehicle for socialization, communication, creativity, problem solving, FUN, and working with peers in a group.

What about teaching music at NECC is special to you?

It's great to have such a supportive staff, a great space, and creative students. This is honestly my dream job. I love teaching music, it's my life. Every day is something new, everyday there is a student that makes some kind of musical progress and I enjoy experiencing that not only with the students, but also with their supportive teachers. I see the students learning, having meaningful musical experiences, and most of all having fun and enjoying themselves while they are being creative. The students are making some great extended eye contact, exploring how to use their bodies and voices to make music, learning to be independent in the music atmosphere (such as requesting songs and instruments, and answering generalized questions like "who would like to come up to the board to find the answer?"), singing for the first time, playing an instrument for the first time, attending to the lead teacher for an extended amount of time, working together as a group, and expressing themselves creatively through movement, instrument exploration, and singing.

What do you do outside of your work at NECC?

I teach at the Berklee Institute for Arts Education and Special Needs (BIAESN) on Saturdays. My work includes private lessons, early childhood classes, iPad ensemble, and rock band, and I have anywhere from 30-50 kids per semester. I am also the timpani player in the Me2/Orchestra in Dorchester, MA. Lastly I also make music with friends and record cover songs (such as Africa by Toto), and I enjoy attending music concerts of all genres.

What are your plans for the music program at NECC?

I have a lot of plans for my students! Some of the plans include starting a percussion ensemble, and starting a Music Exploration class, where students can begin writing and reading music. I will also continue to share my knowledge at the



*ABLE assembly and other conferences, to advocate for music education for students with severe special needs. In the future, I would like to publish a book one day with Jess Mordarski (NECC art teacher) that would be a recognized resource for arts educators everywhere, for music/arts education and severe special needs. Everyone has a place in the music classroom, and the music classroom has a place for everyone.

**The ABL Assembly is an annual conference hosted by the Berklee Institute for Arts Education and Special Needs (BIAESN) at Berklee that provides professional development and learning in the field of arts education and special needs for educators, artists, researchers, policymakers, school administrators, program administrators, and students.*

The Washington Post

This national newspaper published CEO and Founder Vincent Strully's commentary on autism.

MetroWest Daily News

The regional paper covered Will Pacheco, who ran the NECC 5K Walk/Run for Autism in support of his brother, and NECC student, Sam.

MetroWest Daily News

Guest columnist, CEO and Founder Vincent Strully, wrote about the need for more autism research and support.

New England Psychologist

This psychologist trade publication wrote about the Infant Sibling Project at NECC.

Boston Herald

The Boston Herald wrote a feature story on NECC student Sam, and his brother's fundraising efforts.

ABA Inside Track

This popular podcast, hosted by three former NECC employees, interviewed Kim Walter, an ACE Specialist, about NECC's programs and services.

EducationIQ Australia

Australia's leading education publication covered a panel on autism education services featuring NECC CEO and Founder Vincent Strully.

Family Physician

This publication of the American Medical Assoc. Alliance posted about NECC's Infant Sibling Project.

Al-Ittihad, United Arab Emirates

The leading Arabic daily newspaper in the UAE wrote a feature story on The New England Center for Children- Abu Dhabi [recently renamed the Mohammed bin Rashid Center for Special Education or MRC-NECC].



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Trending NECC hashtags

#NECCforAutism #AutismResearch
#NECC5K #AutismTechnology
#AutismEducation #Team NECC

Acts of Generosity

» Betsy Dangel

Betsy Dangel recalls the first time she let her elementary school-aged son, Alex, walk to the end of their street to their mailbox. He had practiced how to cross the street, unlock the mailbox, retrieve the mail and put it in a pouch, lock the mailbox, and walk back to the house. Now he was trying on his own for the first time; she nervously waited at her window, instilling these first steps of independence in her child with autism.

Betsy, a widow by the time Alex was fourteen months old, saw Alex reaching his milestones, albeit a bit late. At age two, he could count to 30 and recite the alphabet in French. But his caregiver noticed that he wasn't talking as much as other children and that his vocabulary began diminishing. Betsy took Alex to the pediatrician and ran into roadblocks. The waiting list for an evaluation was six months out. When she met with a neurologist, the first one told her "Maybe you'll be a lucky one and he'll be an Aspie" (Asperger's) and handed her an ARC brochure (resources for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities). Alex received early intervention services for just six weeks because the process had taken so long. Children in Massachusetts age-out of early intervention services at three years old.

"Every time I need to teach Alex a new skill, I reflect back on what I've learned from NECC. How can you not support an organization that has given so much to your child and yourself?" -Betsy Dangel

A mutual friend introduced Betsy to Vinnie Strully, NECC's CEO and Founder. Alex was diagnosed with autism and he entered the NECC preschool program just before his fourth birthday. He spent two years in the preschool program before transitioning to kindergarten in his public school, supported by NECC staff.



"Alex's progress at NECC's preschool was amazing," says Betsy. "NECC taught me to break down each task into little pieces and build on those pieces."

Today, Alex is a 21 year-old college junior. He has impressive skills, including doing laundry and minor cooking. Although he requires some support, his life is quite independent. He goes out to restaurants and travels by himself. He was even able to navigate the issues surrounding a missed cross-country flight, rebook himself a new flight online and spend 4 hours in LAX on his own. Betsy admits that was a nerve-wracking situation, but she couldn't have been prouder of the way Alex handled himself.

Betsy is a long-time supporter of NECC. "Every time I need to teach Alex a new skill, I reflect back on what I've learned from NECC. How can you not support an organization that has given so much to your child and yourself? Not only did NECC teach Alex invaluable skills, they also taught me how to impart many skills to Alex."

Betsy provides a gift to the Annual Fund each year, gives through the Children of Promise Gala, and was a major benefactor in the construction of the Dillon Arledge Student Center. The music room bears her son's name — the "Alex Dangel Music Room" — in support of her son and in memory of her late husband, Alex's father, who had a passion for music.

"I'm fortunate because my son can communicate and can participate in a variety of life's activities. But I'm acutely aware that many parents don't get to hear the words 'I love you' from their children and that's heartbreaking to me," says Betsy.

"I hope I can make another family's life just a little bit easier through my giving. NECC is a state-of-the-art facility with an amazing research center and staff that is making resources available not just within their walls, but for anyone who needs assistance."

Spring Event Recap 2019

- » **BOSTON MARATHON**
\$51,474 raised
- » **NECC 5K WALK/RUN FOR AUTISM**
\$246,437 raised
- » **ART SHOW**
\$5,985 raised
- » **CARLOS PLACIDO DUNKIN' GOLF CLASSIC**
\$194,820 raised

* figures may vary slightly from previously announced, as additional donations were received after event date.





The New England Center
for Children®
Autism Education and Research

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Boston • Abu Dhabi

SAVE THE DATE

Children of Promise Gala

Friday, November 15, 2019

www.necc.org/gala

Team NECC runs

the Boston Marathon

Monday, April 20, 2020

NECC 5K Walk/Run for Autism

Saturday, May 9, 2020

Carlos Placido

Dunkin' Golf Classic

June 1, 2020

New Balance Falmouth Road Race

Sunday, August 16, 2020

CHILDREN OF PROMISE

GALA

Friday, November 15, 2019 | InterContinental Boston

Join us for an evening of live music, auctions, dinner, and dancing to support autism education and research.



VISIT OUR EVENT WEBSITE AT WWW.NECC.ORG/GALA