

# Insight



The New England Center  
for Children®  
Autism Education and Research

Fall 2020

Developments at The New England Center for Children®



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# Insight

Fall 2020

Vol. 4, No. 2

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

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Please send comments or suggestions to [development@necc.org](mailto:development@necc.org).

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The New England Center for Children®  
Autism Education and Research

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## A LETTER FROM OUR CHIEF DEVELOPMENT OFFICER



Dear friend,

The last several months have been far from easy, but we continue to persevere. Whether working from home, coping with the stress of living through a global pandemic, or helping our children with remote learning, we have all been through so much. Yet, in these strange times, we have also witnessed so many instances of compassion, selflessness, and community. Nowhere has that been more true than at NECC.

Although we have encountered obstacles, we have faced them with determination, and we have overcome them. Why? Because it is our mission and our duty to provide the best possible services for our students. The dedication and compassion of our staff, as well as the support of our entire community, the full breadth of #TeamNECC, has enabled us to do this.

In the following pages, you will read about our response to the COVID-19 pandemic and our emphasis on providing a diverse, inclusive workplace. You'll meet a teacher who returned home to make a difference and a parent whose passion for fishing has turned into years of giving to NECC. You'll also learn about the unique, pandemic-altered events that showcased the strength of the NECC community and raised needed funds.

Through this entire issue of Insight I hope you are inspired. Inspired by the way our staff has adapted to the new "normal". Inspired by the resilience of our students. Inspired by the generosity and compassion exemplified by everyone in the NECC community, including you. It is because of you, that we have persevered, and for that, I thank you.

Sincerely,

**Jared Bouzan, MEd**  
Chief Development Officer

## START YOUR CAREER AT NECC

### Join #TeamNECC

NECC believes in investing in the future of our staff. From unparalleled professional development, to providing the opportunity to pursue graduate degrees at little to no cost, NECC is the perfect place to begin, or continue, a career.

Want to join #TeamNECC?  
Visit our website, [www.necc.org](http://www.necc.org).

### Apply Today!

- Teachers
- Residential Counselors
- Maintenance
- Food Services
- And more...

#NECCforAutism  
#WorkatNECC  
#TeamNECC

*On the cover: Brendan and his teacher, Patty, enjoying the swings at one of the residential houses.*

## » Your gift. Your impact.

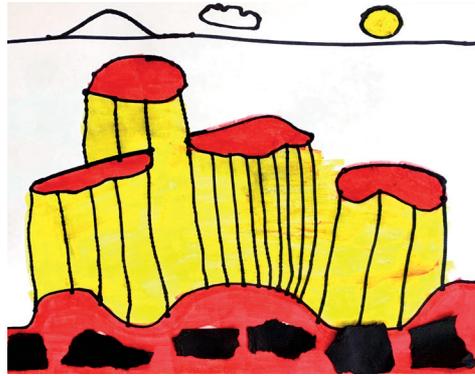
Your generosity has never been more important than over the last several months. Because of your support, our students were able to stay safe, continue to achieve their goals, and create fun, lasting memories. **Thank you.**



Shaw and his teacher having fun at his residence's at-home, tropical themed Prom.



Alex in her cap gown prior to graduating from NECC.



Student artwork from a remote art class about Grand Canyon National Park



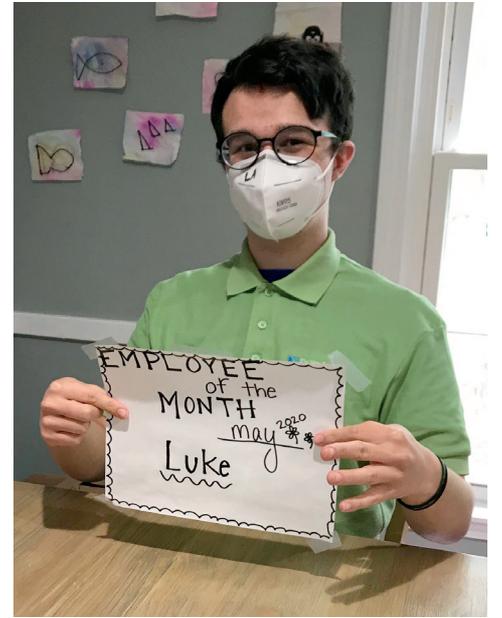
Michael and his teacher relaxing at his residence.



Anders (right), and his teacher, Richie (left), showing off their matching shirts!



Landry, a student, with one of the yard signs made to honor NECC's direct-care workers.



Luke showing off his "Employee of the Month" award at his residence's school store.



Mia holding up her finished artwork from a remote art class.



Isaiah enjoying the library after returning to the school in July.



Marvin showing off his homemade mask from his residence's "Super Hero Weekend."

# Program Updates

## Emergency Management Team

NECC's Leadership, including Vinnie Strully, Cathy Welch, Heather Morrison, Jean Waitneight, and Jess Sassi formed the Emergency Management Team (EMT) to formulate and execute NECC's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. With guidance from state officials, including Gov. Charlie Baker, Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito, and SHHS Marylou Sudders, NECC executed a number of measures to protect staff and students from contracting or spreading the virus. It was because of a thoughtful, concerted effort from nursing, maintenance, food services, teachers, and executives that NECC was able to limit the impact of COVID 19 on our students and keep our residential program open throughout the spring and summer.

## Diversity and Inclusion

In response to the nationwide focus on racial equality, NECC renewed its commitment to build towards a community free of intolerance and discrimination. These measures included hosting forums in conjunction with Diversity@Workplace where NECC staff members of different backgrounds could openly share their experiences with prejudice, the formation of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion



Chair of DEITF, Fatou Njie-Jallow

Task Force (DEITF) chaired by Fatou Njie-Jallow, and contracting a Diversity and Inclusion consultant to work with NECC on different issues. Regarding the climate in the United States surrounding racial inequality, and NECC's role in becoming more diverse and inclusive, the Board of Directors released a statement reading, "NECC stands with everyone who has been affected by racism...For those of you that have taken the time to offer your thoughts to us already, thank you. We hear you, and we want to work together to make NECC stronger."

## Remote Learning

The day-school closed in mid-March due to state regulations. While it reopened on the first day possible, in the meantime NECC programming moved to virtual means. Below is a summary of different departments remote learning efforts.

**Music:** Nadia Castagna MMEd, held live Zoom classes and created a "virtual classroom" that housed a wide variety of music education related content.

**Art:** Jessica Mordarski MEd, BCBA, LABA provided a diverse range of at-home art lessons.

**Adapted Phys. Ed., Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy:** Department members created a YouTube channel with different

workouts and other active guided activities. They also held live Zoom classes.

**Research:** There are a number of studies in early stages related to helping children with autism tolerate PPE and improving health and safety habits.

**ACE®:** Offered PPE and health lessons for educators to reinforce important, health and safety skills.

# Governor Baker Visits NECC

Monday, July 13 was a special day for the NECC community as Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker visited the Center and held his daily COVID-19 press briefing in the gymnasium. In addition to Governor Baker, Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito and Secretary of Health and Human Services for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Marylou Sudders were also in attendance and met with NECC senior executives including Founder and CEO, Vinnie Strully, and Executive Director — Southborough, Cathy Welch. While touring the facility, NECC Director of Facilities Mark Fitzpatrick discussed NECC's safety measures with the Governor, including improving ventilation and creating a secure isolation unit for the few students who tested positive for the virus in the early days of the pandemic.

Governor Baker was complimentary of NECC's handling of the pandemic, telling reporters, "The ability [the NECC community] has shown to adapt to maintain a safe environment for students in their care and for their 24/7 staff has been a godsend. The schools incurred unanticipated costs related to the purchase of personal protective equipment, infection control measures, increased staffing costs and enhanced cleaning protocols over that period. We know this is difficult work, and we know that so many people, time and time again, found a way to simply get it done."



Gov. Baker, Lt. Gov. Polito, and CEO/Founder Strully meet NECC student, Allie.



Gov. Baker holding his daily briefing from NECC's gymnasium.



(left to right): Fitzpatrick, Gov. Baker, Lt. Gov. Polito, Strully, Chairman of the Board of Directors John Kim, Cathy Welch, and SHHS Sudders discuss NECC's COVID-19 safety measures.

# Returning Home to Make a Difference

Kevin Dorsey

The New England Center for Children truly is a global organization. Despite starting small, its growth throughout its 45 year history has brought the impact of NECC to thousands of children and families around the world. Between the 19 countries where NECC has provided educational programs, the 22 countries where NECC has presented research, and the use of the ACE® ABA software system on 5 continents, NECC's network spans the entire globe. With this wide reach has also come an increasingly global staff with interns and teachers coming to Massachusetts from Europe, South America, and Asia to both work directly with NECC's students and also study to become Board Certified Behavioral Analysts (BCBAs) who can then go on to and serve children with autism elsewhere. In some ways, it is the norm to come to NECC from far away, grow as an autism educator, become a BCBA, and then leave. Kevin Dorsey breaks this norm, as his story is one of homecoming rather than venturing off.

Dorsey, a second-year Level II teacher on one of NECC's residential teams, grew up in Southborough and attended Algonquin Regional High School. He remembers driving by NECC on Route 9, yet, although he shared a hometown with the Center, he knew little of its work and global impact.

"Just from being in town, I always knew [NECC] was there and that they worked with kids with autism, but that was really the extent of it. It wasn't until later that I learned about BCBAs, ABA, and how they really worked with their students."

Later, in this case, was college. After graduating from Algonquin in 2015, Dorsey set his sights south, attending Virginia's James Madison University. He originally planned to study business, but his desire to "not work behind a desk for the rest of [his] life" made him reconsider this thought. Psychology, as it turns out, fascinated him and provided a more hands-on career path. Still though, while he enjoyed his psychology coursework through his first two years of college, he still, like so many others, was unsure the direction he wanted to go with his career. It was at this pivotal moment in his junior year, that he discovered the full breadth of ABA, and how it benefits so many.

"My professor who taught that ABA class was very influential in my life. Once I saw how ABA works to improve the lives of children with autism, it became a focus for me. With that focus upon graduation, I knew that I wanted to work in behavior analysis and I realized that NECC was a perfect fit."

After graduating in the spring of 2019, Dorsey began his career with NECC. He was recently accepted into the Western New England graduate partnership program.



"The opportunity to get my graduate degree in ABA and become a BCBA while working, and at a fraction of the cost of other programs, was a big selling point for beginning my career at NECC. That, combined with being so close to home, made the decision easy."

Since joining his residential team, Dorsey has become a valued member of Team NECC. Stephanie Bonfonte MS, BCBA, LABA, the Program Specialist for his team notes, "What stands out most is Kevin's compassion for his students. It is so evident in everything that he does. He truly cares about his students' well-being and he constantly tries to improve as a behavior analyst to better help them."

With these qualities in hand, Dorsey will continue on his path at NECC for at least the next three years, splitting time between his role as a teacher and a student. While at times he admits that this progress will be challenging, there are always moments that put his work in perspective.

"When you're working on something behaviorally or academically with a student and they make progress, it's amazing. I love seeing them accomplish a task and gain another level of independence."

What lies ahead for Dorsey beyond the completion of his Master's degree is up in the air, but for now, he is happy to be making an impact on the lives of children with autism at NECC. The fact that he is doing so close to home, in the community where he grew up, makes it even better.

"Working at NECC has been so impactful. I love working with my students and knowing that in a way, I'm also giving back to my hometown."

# Acts of Generosity

## » Eli Delany, “Fishin’ With a Mission!”

Fishing is more than just a hobby for NECC parent Eli Delany. It’s an avenue for him to compete, traveling around the Northeast for bass fishing tournaments, and a way to spend quality time with his son, Luke. “I’ve had countless cherished moments with my son through fishing,” says Eli. “It’s very rewarding. We both love it.”

Luke, 20, has been a student at NECC since 2004 and his time at the Center has truly transformed both his and Eli’s lives.

“Before he started at NECC, there was no progress whatsoever. When he started at NECC though, it was immediate, night and day, and my wife and I are very thankful for that.”

The appreciation goes both ways. While Eli and his family are grateful for Luke’s progress, the NECC community has also benefitted from having Eli as an ardent supporter. In addition to spreading autism awareness in the competitive angling community through his success at tournaments and relationships with angling stars Mike Iaconelli and Kevin VanDam, as well as selling autism awareness decals for others’ boats, Eli’s “Fishin’ With a Mission!” event has raised over \$14,000 for the Center and provides a unique experience for NECC students.

*“Fishing does not discriminate and I think it’s a great bonding activity for parents and children with autism...I hope to bring that to other families and the NECC community as a whole.” -Eli Delany*

The annual event, traditionally held in late July at the Mystic Wellington Yacht Club in Medford, MA, brings together those from inside and outside the NECC community for a day of outdoor fun, fishing, and philanthropy. For NECC students, the day is full of new experiences, including fishing with generously donated equipment, taking boat rides, and playing games. For the rest of the event’s attendees, there is a fresh water bass tournament and



(left to right): Luke, Eli, and his wife Deborah.

striped bass tournament. Entry fees for these components of the event, as well as donations from local companies, benefit the Center.

While this year the event could not be held in person due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a virtual fishing tournament that, thanks to the competitors, as well as Mercury Marine, their Senior Manager of Competitive Angling Michelle Kilburn, and the Teamster Local 25 Autism Fund Boston, raised over \$2,500 for the Center.

Next year, Eli hopes to hold the event in person and once again provide an incredible experience for NECC students through fishing. While raising money is always the goal, he also hopes to continue to share his experiences with other families. Fishing he believes, transcends autism.

“Fishing does not discriminate and I think it’s a great bonding activity for parents and children with autism. It is such a special part of my relationship with Luke and I hope to bring that to other families and the NECC community as a whole.”

Altogether, through the “Fishin’ With a Mission!” event, his advocacy in the competitive angling community,



Luke and Eli competing at a recent tournament as a team.

and selling decals and wristbands that spread autism awareness, Eli is a true friend of the Center. The ability to combine his two passions, fishing and helping improve the lives of children with autism, is inspiring and has made an impact on NECC as an organization.

“We are lucky to have friends like Eli,” says NECC Director of Institutional Advancement Beth McGonagle. “His support over nearly a decade, specifically through ‘Fishin’ With a Mission!’ has brought so much joy to NECC students and families and has funded numerous adapted physical education initiatives at the Center. He’s just amazing.”

**Learn more about “Fishin’ With a Mission!” at [MyLittleBuddysBoat.com](http://MyLittleBuddysBoat.com)**

# Spring Event Recap 2020

Despite having to conduct events virtually, the NECC community came together in the spring and summer months to raise needed funds for the Center. Through it all, the theme was getting active. From the Virtual 5K in May, to the virtual Boston Marathon in September, NECC community members walked and ran in a number of different events



## Virtual 5K Walk/Run for Autism Raises over \$140,000

On May 9, over 500 people on 70 teams from around the NECC community came together to participate in the Virtual 5K Walk/Run for Autism presented by Avidia Bank. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, this year's race day consisted of participants doing their own activities remotely. While many ran or walked the distance, others were more creative in their participation. Nontraditional forms of participation included completing an obstacle course, cycling, and horseback riding. Roche Bros. Supermarket of Westborough, Wegmans of Natick, and Erland Construction of Burlington donated pizza and ice cream to the residential houses. In total, the event raised **\$143,761**.



## Team NECC tackles Falmouth Road Race At-Home Edition

16 people, including staff, NECC family members, friends, and a student, competed in the Falmouth Road Race At-Home edition on behalf of NECC. Like the 5K Walk/Run for Autism, this year's event was held remotely with runners completing their 7 miles at a location of their choosing over a two week period from August 15-29. Altogether, the team raised **\$14,859**.



## McKenna Family Creates The Mike Walk

While "The Mike Golf Invitational" could not be held this year due to gathering limitations, Mike and Lori McKenna still wanted to raise money for NECC and honor their oldest son, Michael, a student at NECC. So, from August 27-30 Mike and his son, Matt, walked 100 miles on the Cape Cod Rail Trail in what was dubbed, "The Mike Walk." Thanks to sponsors and generous friends and family, "The Mike Walk" raised **\$39,775**.



## Team NECC Runs The Boston Marathon

NECC staff members, Kyla McHaffie, Katie Olszowy, and Ashley Arsenault, as well as local community member, John Gobron, ran for #TeamNECC in the virtual iteration of this year's Boston Marathon. While the team was disappointed over the cancellation of the in-person event in April, they persevered and continued training until the race in September. From September 7-13, the team members completed their own 26.2 mile courses, with two of them, Kyla McHaffie and Ashley Arsenault (pictured left), finishing their runs at NECC. In total, the Marathon runners raised **\$44,409**.

Thank you to those who made our Spring and Summer events such a success!

### Virtual 5K Walk/Run for Autism Sponsors

Avidia Bank — Presenting Sponsor  
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FITTS Insurance  
Greenwood Industries Inc.  
Ken's Foods  
New England Dental Group  
Priority Fire and Security Inc.  
Southborough Wellness  
The Apparel Project  
The Wilz Family  
This End Up Furniture Company

### Falmouth Road Race Team

Regina Kruger  
Robin Drew  
Ben Gabriel  
Fatou Njie-Jallow  
Kristen Sidman  
Lori McKenna  
Ellen Graham  
Ashley Dodd  
Gianna Davino  
Colin Dykeman  
Beth McGonagle  
Stephanie Carlin  
Rachel Stout  
Taylor Saks  
Jordan Saks

### The Mike Walk Sponsors

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts  
Allways Health Partners  
Lee Kennedy  
Rockland Trust  
Comprehensive Benefit Administrators  
Driscoll Insurance & Bonds  
Fallon Health

### Boston Marathon Team

Katie Olszowy  
John Gobron  
Ashley Arsenault  
Kyla McHaffie



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## SAVE THE DATE

### Children of Promise Gala — VIRTUAL

Friday, November 20, 2020

[www.necc.org/gala](http://www.necc.org/gala)

CHILDREN  
OF PROMISE

*Gala*

Friday, November 20 | 7:00 p.m.

A NIGHT IN, SUPPORTING AUTISM

JOIN US FROM THE COMFORT OF YOUR HOME AS WE HOST A VIRTUAL  
FUNDRAISER FOR THE NEW ENGLAND CENTER FOR CHILDREN

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