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**A LOOK AT
ACTIVITIES AT
THE CENTER FOR
DISCOVERY**

SECTION C • MAY 10, 2024 • CALLICOON, NY

THE CENTER FOR DISCOVERY®

From top to bottom: A clinical session underway at The Center for Discovery. A student picks peaches at one of The Center for Discovery's organic and biodynamic orchards. A student interacts with baby sheep as part of The Center's Animal Assisted Intervention and Education (AAIE) program.



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School Scene

A look at the activities at The Center for Discovery

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Enhancing Wellness at The Center for Discovery through the Integrated Arts and Animal-Assisted Programming

BY CONIO LORETTO, MT-BC, LCAT, SENIOR DIRECTOR OF MUSIC THERAPY; SARAH MERRICK, OTR/L, CPDT-KA, CLINICAL DIRECTOR OF AAIE; AND SHANNON ROONEY, PATH INTL., CERTIFIED THERAPEUTIC RIDING INSTRUCTOR, DIRECTOR OF AAIE PROGRAMING

At The Center for Discovery, we are dedicated to fostering holistic wellness through innovative and unique programming that allows each individual to thrive. Two key pillars of our therapeutic and educational offerings here at The Center are the Integrated Arts and Animal Assisted Intervention and Education (AAIE).

Our Integrated Arts Department is a cornerstone of our approach, where therapists, educators, and specialists in various creative disciplines collaborate to enrich the lives of our students.

Through music, drama, dance, horticulture, visual arts, and outdoor recreation, students explore avenues for self-expression and skill development. Creative expression becomes a powerful tool for communication, emotional regulation, and building self-



A Physical Therapist and a student at The Center engage during a Music Therapy session.

confidence.

Through individualized music therapy sessions, students find their unique voice as they play and sing their own music. In art sessions, they build physical strength and stamina as they hold a paintbrush to create their own masterpiece.

Drama students – many of whom are nonverbal – perform on stage in front of loved ones bursting with pride, as well as beaming staff members. The overwhelming emotion can be seen in the tears of joy in the audience.

Our Healing Gardens at The Thanksgiving Farm & Community School are a hub of activity. Under the guidance of a master gardener and landscape architect, students at The Center participate in all aspects of the gardens – from the design, to seeding, upkeep, harvesting, and processing herbs and other produce, to delivering them to the broader Center for Discovery community.

Nearby in Grahamsville, Sweet Hill is a homesteading farm that provides viable work for the students and residents in our care. It is there that they manage all aspects of the livestock and production needs under the direction of our farm team.

Through the various Integrated Arts programming at The Center for



A student and Center for Discovery staff members clap along during a Music Therapy session.



Students and residents at The Center for Discovery perform in the Discovery Dramatic Arts production of Peter Pan.

Discovery, we are honored to witness the students go from completing one step of a process to all steps, and actually teaching others how to perform a task. It is truly an amazing experience – and an incredible accomplishment.

The AAIE program complements the Integrated Arts program, leveraging the unique bond between humans and animals to enhance therapeutic outcomes. Our highly trained animals and their handlers participate in a variety of clinical

and recreational activities tailored to address individual goals, from grooming and animal care, to therapeutic horsemanship.

Through these interactions, participants experience not only physical benefits, but also emotional connections that foster personal growth. Engagement with animals is a powerful tool for emotional regulation.

The students here at The Center experience the joy of interacting with loving animals, while also learning how to settle when excited, communicating in both verbal and non-verbal ways to support the animals, and grading their movement for gentle interactions.

Through Integrating Arts and Animal Assisted Intervention and Education, we create a dynamic environment where individuals can explore their potential and most importantly, succeed.

Whether it's through developing responsibility and vocational interests through caring for animals, or engaging in creative activities, participants experience the joy of connection and the satisfaction of personal achievement in their daily lives.



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Providing Excellence in Education at The Center for Discovery



Scenes from The Center for Discovery including students, residents, and staff members.

BY FRED STABBERT III

The **Sullivan County Democrat** recently met with members of the leadership team who oversee the Education program at The Center for Discovery (TCFD) in an effort to learn more about the school program and their goals for the future.

The Center for Discovery in Sullivan County supports individuals affected by Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other complex conditions. With a highly-dedicated and trained team, along with innovative programming, TCFD is focused on bridging crucial gaps in care. Students aged 5-22 are referred to the program by their school district. Referral packets are received by the admissions team where information is reviewed and decisions are made about potential placement.

The Center for Discovery currently serves 182 Adult Residents, 164 Pediatric residential students, and 176 community (day) students on a daily basis. They are poised to open The Children's Specialty Hospital later this year, which is a state-of-the-art facility that will allow for a short-term hospital stay for children with an Intellectual Developmental Disability (I/DD) and chronic co-occurring medical condition(s).

"This initiative aims to address the significant gap in healthcare services for this population and provide much-needed care - closer to home," said Dr. Johanna Lantz, Chief of Psychology at The Center.

Kerri Muzuruk, the Chief of Education Programs, Curriculum, and Design, describes their approach as holistic, focusing on the whole child and creating individualized

treatment plans tailored to each student's needs. The HealthE6@ Curriculum is the foundation for all of the educational routines. This year, The Center worked with many local school districts to open 6 additional classrooms to support younger children (K-2), many of whom may have missed out on diagnosis or early intervention during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The goal of this program is to give students intensive support now, so they can go to a less restrictive environment in the future. Many students were on home instruction before placement at TCFD because traditional school settings did not work for them.

The ultimate goal is to get those students back to their home districts with the skills needed to succeed!

An important distinction in the programs offered at TCFD compared to others is the integrated model of care. Dr. Nicole Kinney, Chief of Clinical Services explained the value of "push-in" therapy sessions, where the clinicians can work alongside the teacher inside the classroom to provide Occupational Therapy, Speech Therapy, and Physical Therapy within the natural routines of the students' day.

The advantage of embedding therapeutic activities into daily schedules to address behavior and educational goals is that students can practice these skills throughout their school day in a variety of settings, which supports the carryover of skills to all environments. The multidisciplinary team works together to manage the complex health, behavioral, and learning

needs of the individuals.

Lantz, provided a glimpse into a groundbreaking partnership with Emory University. TCFD is pioneering research to help predict high risk behavioral and medical events such as seizures in individuals with ASD. By leveraging advanced algorithms and daily health and behavioral data collected on students, they've achieved an impressive 85% accuracy in predicting these occurrences and continue to refine the algorithms to achieve their goals!

"Health and nutrition are priorities at The Center," said Kinney. We have implemented the Food Exploration and Discovery (FED) program for students with restrictive eating habits." The students interact with food in various ways.

They participate in growing their own food, fostering positive relationships with nutrition and food variety. This focus on healthy eating has shown promising results, with better behavioral and overall health outcomes for students.

TCFD doesn't just support individuals—it is also a resource for families. There are designated supports for families as they navigate their own emotions regarding the decision for residential placement. Families are provided guidance on daily routines, feedback on interventions, and suggestions for recreational activities for families to participate in on campus.

To learn more about The Center for Discovery's Day School program, please visit: <https://thecenterfordiscovery.org/our-services/pediatric-programs/day-school-program/>.



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Integrating Assistive Technology in School Settings for Improved Outcomes

BY LINDSEY VEETY, PT, DPT, ATP/SMS,
DIRECTOR OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

When you think of mathematics in school, you're often transported back to sitting in a desk, with a calculator and pencil, learning numbers and facts, and computing equations. Here at The Center for Discovery, math classes look a bit different. For example, math may look like a hands-on activity done in the barn - counting, weighing, and sorting eggs with the adapted egg scale that the students use on a daily basis.

This unique scale is color coded for easy use, so students can learn color and how to match numbers. The scale also has a read back feature for students who need the auditory feedback.

This - along with many other pieces of adapted technology are provided by The Center's Assistive Technology (AT) team, made up of a group of AT professionals and innovation specialists. This team works alongside The Center's clinicians, teachers, and support staff to promote students' skill sets and improve independence within

their environments.

This is done on a daily basis by adding adaptations to the skill or activity, modifying tasks, and providing trainings and supporting the overall team. The AT team has strengths in problem solving, creating items using tools such as 3d printers and laser cutters, a wood shop, and of course - teaching and training.

Some of the items used in classrooms daily that have been made with this equipment include 3d printed marker holders for coloring, an adapted universal tool holder to assist with fine motor skills, and adapted 3 dimensional communication boards to improve communication skills. The team focuses on using low cost and recycled materials that they have on hand, to solve problems when they can, and as they arise.

In addition to adapted devices such as the egg scale, students also work together in the spring to weigh, fill, and seal vinegar and maple syrup bottles, thanks to the help of technology thoughtfully designed and developed by the AT department. The idea for this arose when clinicians and teachers reported to the AT team that they wanted to be able to assist in this vocational task with some of the



A student and staff member collaborate during the Assistive Technology team's Tech It Out initiative on tech-driven learning initiatives for students and residents.

older students here at The Center, to work on fine motor skills, number matching, and weighing.

The issue was the precision required in working with the liquids and the glass bottles. And just like that, the AT team worked with the classroom team to make a switch adapted bottle filler that students were able to accurately and safely use. While some of these adaptations are small, the impacts are massive.

Our AT team also teaches lessons inside The Center's classrooms, working alongside the students and teachers to create adapted devices that can be donated to others. Recently, the team worked with a group of students to teach how basic on/off switches work, and educated the students on how to adapt toys for their peers who require switches to access these toys, in order to play with them.

The students were able to adjust these toys by working alongside the AT team, and then delivered the adapted devices to another classroom. The end result? All of the students played alongside one another, showing them how the adapted devices worked - a great lesson for all of the students.

The Assistive Technology team at

The Center for Discovery has worked tremendously hard and has made incredible strides in improving the lives of the individuals within our school program. The focus for the future is integrating within the local community even more. The team is currently working on making a library of items and trainings that they are hoping to share with families and the broader community.

For more information on The Center for Discovery's Assistive Technology department, please visit: <https://thecenterfordiscovery.org/our-services/medical-clinical-services/assistive-technology-innovation/>.



A student utilizing the Assistive Technology team's adapted egg scale to weigh and sort eggs.



A resident at The Center demonstrates the use of an adapted universal tool holder to assist with an art-based session.

A Second-to-None Approach at The Center for Discovery: Assessment, Training, and Learning Advancement Services

BY KEITH RICO, LBA, BCBA, LMHC,
CHIEF OF TRAINING & PROGRAM
DEVELOPMENT

A vital aspect of The Center for Discovery's work is Assessment, Training, and Learning Advancement (ATLAS) services, which involve collaboration among all clinical and support departments.

Drawing from ongoing research and decades of experience, The Center translates its findings into best practices for supporting students and educators in partner school districts. This comprehensive approach has earned praise, often being called second-to-none.

A recent case exemplifies this dedication. A district administrator reached out for help with a student struggling through transitions across programs. The student had moved from the public school system to an alternate program intended to better suit his needs – but he faced significant behavioral challenges within two months.

His mother described the experience with the new program and district as lacking communication and consistency. This created immense stress for the family,



The Discovery Health Center at The Center for Discovery – a certified Rural Health Clinic, providing services to students and residents, staff members, and the local community.

leading them to opt for a home-based education program. Feeling defeated, they sought guidance for their son's future.

Working closely with the student's district team, The Center developed a thorough, short-term, and efficient evaluation program. Over two days, the student engaged with a diverse team of experts, including psychologists, behavior analysts, therapists, teachers, and more - not just for standardized assessments, but to also understand and support the caregivers and educators that were working with him.

These sessions were not just clinical; they provided emotional support, laughter, and empathy for

the family, along with the dedicated professionals working with them.

What sets The Center apart is its commitment beyond the evaluation itself. The ATLAS team followed up with interviews and observations with teachers, clinical staff, and family members to create a comprehensive report.

This report, reflected the student's whole-person experience, integrated inputs from various clinical staff and included in-home and in-school training models to support him wherever he was receiving services.

Following the evaluation, The Center continued its support with extensive post-evaluation meetings involving the family, school, and caregivers. The result was remarkable: a month later, the student transitioned back to school confidently and successfully.

His family felt hopeful, reassured by The Center's ongoing support and transparent communication. Most importantly, the student rediscovered his excitement for school and community engagement, smiling as he boarded the bus.

"What Happens Here Matters Everywhere" is more than a slogan at The Center; it's a guiding principle. The Center's highly-trained clinical staff is committed to sharing best practices broadly, with schools, healthcare settings, residential facilities, community organizations, government agencies, advocacy groups, and others dedicated to

supporting individuals with complex needs. Through these efforts, The Center can multiply its impact and make a lasting difference in the lives of so many.

If you or someone you know is interested in engaging with The Center's ATLAS team, please reach out by phone (845-707-8442) or by email at ATLAS@tcfcd.org.



A resident at The Center working alongside an education staff member during a classroom activity.



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A Vital Resource for New York State: The Children's Specialty Hospital

The Center for Discovery's Children's Specialty Hospital (CSH), located in Rock Hill, New York, will be a place where families across New York State can turn for the treatment of complex disabilities and related medical conditions at first diagnosis and beyond.

The Specialty Hospital is designed for children ages 5-21 who have developmental disabilities and a diagnosis of intellectual disability, autism, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, or neurological impairment, along with a medical condition that requires treatment.

The CSH will provide inpatient treatment and conduct comprehensive medical, behavioral, and clinical assessments over a maximum of six months. Through a collaborative approach, this program is designed to help children and adolescents thrive at home, in school, and integrated in the community over the long-term.

"The hospital has the potential to bring about positive transformation for families on a global level," Dr. Terry Hamlin, the President and CEO of The Center for Discovery says. "The world needs new solutions and treatments to help this ever-growing population, and we have the exceptional expertise to help."

The Specialty Hospital is scheduled to open in 2024.

For more information on Children's Specialty Hospital, please contact StrategicOutreach@tcfcd.org.



Dr. Theresa Hamlin right, leading a tour of the Children's Specialty Hospital.



A family visiting the Children's Specialty Hospital.



The exterior of the soon-to-open Children's Specialty Hospital, located in Rock Hill.



A student during a clinical therapy session at the Children's Specialty Hospital.



A student visiting the Children's Specialty Hospital.

The Center's HealthE6® Model: Transforming Education for Individuals with Autism and Disabilities

BY NANCY HENDRICKSON,
CURRICULUM DIRECTOR, EDUCATION

The Center for Discovery has spent decades developing its HealthE6 model, which offers a transformative approach to education and care for individuals with complex forms of autism and other developmental disabilities. With a focus on comprehensive care, this model is reshaping the educational opportunities for 340 school-age children, including 176 community (day) students. The HealthE6 considers the whole person when developing individualized programs for students.

The HealthE6 addresses six pillars for all students: Evaluation, Environment, Emotional Regulation, Energy Regulation, Eating, and Education and Evidence-Based Practice. When looking at students through this lens, a daily rhythm emerges that allows for the integration of therapeutic and educational services to focus on health, wellness, and learning!

At the core of The Center's philosophy is a developmental approach that acknowledges the qualitative differences in how children learn and develop. Recognizing that all children initially engage with the world through sensory experiences, the curriculum progresses from concrete interactions to more abstract thinking, tailored to each child's unique pace and abilities. Our learners are supported where their skills are. Adaptations are made to the academic curriculum to help them progress to deeper levels of understanding and interaction with the world around them.

The HealthE6 curriculum supports a personal progression of skills and allows students to experience meaningful and creative learning that enhances their individualized education program. The curriculum consists of activities presented in three options of increasing complexity:

Explore: Students who explore, become better observers of the world around them and learn to interact with this world through their five senses. Students are building functional and foundational skills for increasingly complex tasks that they will be asked to perform later in life. They are learning the expectations and routines of the world around them.

Navigate: Students who navigate, are able to use their skills of observation and expand upon this knowledge. They are familiar with the routines and expectations and are working on transitioning through their daily schedule with increased accuracy and independence.

Apply: Students who apply, activate prior knowledge and engage in the practical application of these skills. They are independent or near independent in most routine tasks and learning to appropriately respond to changes in this routine.

Academics form a critical component of the curriculum, with a focus on English Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies. Through hands-on, outdoor-based learning experiences, students are empowered to excel academically despite significant learning challenges, fostering a love for learning and exploration.

The program also incorporates a functional curriculum, focusing on life skills, prepares students for independence in daily living. From personal care routines to money management and public transportation, students learn practical skills tailored to their abilities, maximizing independence and promoting lifelong learning.

The Center fosters an environment that promotes supportive friendships and integrates academic experiences within the natural landscape. Harnessing the calming effects of nature, students explore



thematic questions about the world while engaging with animals, organic gardens, and various types of outdoor recreation.

In addition, creative arts, including music, dance, and drama, are woven into the curriculum to reinforce communication, social interaction skills, emotional regulation, and self-efficacy. Through collaborative productions and individual lessons, students showcase their talents, fostering a sense of self-confidence and community spirit, while connecting with their peers around them.

As students approach adulthood, vocational programs provide opportunities for skill development and career exploration, aligning with individual desires and abilities. This work starts as early as 12 years old when students begin to be exposed to a wide range of vocational opportunities to see where their interests lie. The formal transitional programs, initiated at age 18, focus

on supporting the transition to adult placements, ensuring continuity of care and support beyond graduation.

Integral to the HealthE6 Model is ongoing evaluation and data-driven approaches to monitor progress and tailor support. With a commitment to evidence-based practices, The Center ensures that each individual receives personalized care and opportunities for growth.

"The HealthE6 Model considers how the brain develops and what needs to be done in order to set up an environment that allows and individual to thrive. The model is not only applicable to children with disabilities, but to everybody."

For more information on The Center's HealthE6 Model, please visit: <https://thecenterfordiscovery.org/our-approach/our-healthe6-model/>.



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