



Perkins PULSE

A newsletter from the Perkins community

Winter
2020



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Perkins Goes to College

ATP students taste college life at MWCC

When Kathleen, a 21 year old student in Perkins Adult Transition Program (ATP), first learned she had the option of taking college courses during her time at Perkins, she was “super, super excited.”

Kathleen, who came to Perkins as a high school student, has set her sights on becoming an occupational therapy assistant for children on the autism spectrum. She was inspired to pursue this by her best friend at Perkins, who has an autism diagnosis. Instead of entering the workforce after Perkins as she had originally planned, she knew she'd need to attend college.

But first, Kathleen had to get her parents and teachers on board. Her parents were concerned that the stress of college courses could set Kathleen back in her mental health treatment. “I had to prove to my parents I could do it, that I could handle the work load and the stress of all that,” Kathleen said.

To ease into college, Perkins teachers and Kathleen's parents encouraged her to take an online course offered

by Mount Wachusett Community College (MWCC), the Gardner college that ATP students may attend as part of their Perkins programming. After she successfully completed two online courses, she was able to enroll in an on-campus course in the fall. “I loved the independence I got because of it,” Kathleen said.

“I loved the independence I got because of it.”

College courses became an option in September 2017 after another Perkins ATP student, Owen, asked to enroll. Based on his interest, ATP teacher Joe Mahoney connected with administrators at MWCC to make a plan for sending Perkins students there. Today, Perkins offers four slots per semester for students interested in attending.

Perkins staff members drive students to and from MWCC for classes and remain on campus for support as needed. Mahoney noted that MWCC offers necessary accommodations for students with disabilities and other

academic resources, such as tutoring. Students are also encouraged to attend campus events.

“The students have done a really nice job integrating into the college community,” Mahoney said.

For Owen, now 20, attending MWCC has been an ideal introduction to higher education. He aspires to work in filmmaking one day and plans to attend community college closer to home after Perkins. He said the experience has helped him overcome his anxiety about taking classes, which stems from his autism spectrum diagnosis.

“I love community college because I love the diversity of the students there. I have friends younger than me, and others in their 30s,” Owen said.

The MWCC program has been a wonderful addition to the Adult Transition Program and the students that have attended have found great success in their ability to thrive in a college environment.

A Message From Our President & CEO

Friends,

As we entered a new decade this year, we have been busy across our programs providing high-quality care and services, while simultaneously planning for how to continue to evaluate, strengthen, and improve our current programs and facilities for the years and needs ahead.



But as I write this and prepare to share the stories and updates we wrote pre-Covid-19 in this edition of Perkins Pulse, we are in the midst of responding to the Coronavirus pandemic, a situation rapidly unfolding with each new day. It's impossible to write with any certainty about what the ultimate impact will be to our community. I have shared, in other communications, updates on the status of our programs and our preparations for what may come, yet I also want to share some thoughts about the resiliency I see everyday across Perkins. I also want to extend my heartfelt thanks to our staff, families, and the people we serve, who have responded with fortitude as we've adjusted programming and shifted operations in order to protect our community and help flatten the curve, all while continuing to provide necessary services and support.

I was touched to make the rounds on campus in the days after Governor Baker declared a state of emergency and see residential students enjoying a scavenger hunt, teachers communicating with students at home and making preparations to support distance learning, and dedicated staff working feverishly to ensure business and other support operations continue without interruption.

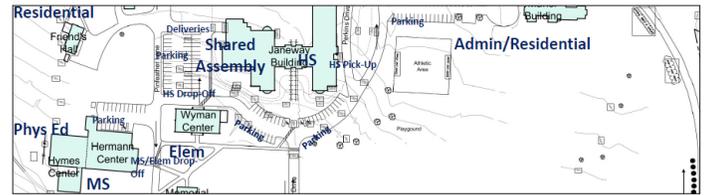
And every day since, as we practice extreme physical distancing and take precautions across our programs to keep everyone safe, staff have continued to make adjustments to their schedules and stepped up for duties they don't typically perform; teachers, clinicians, and program staff have put in extra hours and a lot of passion to provide a range of supports to our students and adults; Behavioral Health staff got up and running on a brand new telehealth platform; families and program participants have adjusted to accommodate new daily routines and responsibilities in physical isolation while using video and other means to maintain connections; and many of our administrative staff have adjusted to working from home.

We continue to brace for the untold results of COVID-19. We deeply miss seeing our program participants in the day programs and welcoming visitors to our programs and campus. Yet, I believe that in addition to the many challenges this event poses, it will also be an opportunity to reflect on the strength of the Perkins community in the face of adversity.

Thank you for being part of our community and for your ongoing support. It is truly imperative at a time like this.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael W. Ames". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Michael W. Ames, Ph.D.



Campus Development

Exciting campus plan in the works

Coming soon, Perkins will unveil plans for a bold and exciting campus plan that will enhance each of our services in different ways. After months of discussions with key stakeholders, the plan includes: building a new middle school, upgrading our elementary school by renovating the existing middle school building, building new residences and upgrading existing residences for both school-age students and Perkins adults, upgrading behavioral health clinic space through renovations to the existing elementary school building, upgrading and expanding the Rein in a Dream facilities, and moving off-campus administrative staff to the Lancaster campus.

We are hopeful that the three-year construction project will start this year post-Covid-19. We are planning carefully to cause the least disruption possible to program operations. The project will be funded through charitable support and loans. Stay tuned to Perkins' Facebook and emails for more information.



Counting Books Before Kindergarten

CDC goal encourages early literacy

Children who attend the Perkins Child Development Center (CDC) are well on their way to reading 1,000 books before they even get to kindergarten, thanks to an initiative led by parents and supported by CDC Director Patty Sinclair.

In the fall, the CDC implemented the "1,000 Books Before Kindergarten" program, a challenge from The 1,000 Books Foundation to U.S. parents and caregivers to read at least 1,000 books to babies, toddlers and preschoolers before they reach school age.

To track their progress, CDC students and parents fill out a reading chart listing the number of books read each month. Students receive a colored sticker for every 10 books read, and these are added to a large rainbow display inside the CDC -- a visual celebration and measure of their achievements.



a licensed mental health therapist, said clinicians actually help parents or caregivers with their own mental health and treatment knowledge as a means for improving the outcomes of children in therapy. The program is optional and is open to anyone close to a child who wants to assist in the treatment process.

Involving parents in treatment is a component of the Attachment, Regulation and Competency (ARC) Framework, an intervention model developed at the Trauma Center at Justice Resource Institute in 2003, and used in many ways through Perkins Behavioral Health’s services. According to the ARC website, the model offers a “flexible framework” for clinicians, identifying core conceptions of intervention that can be implemented across care settings rather than a strict protocol.

Many of the children Perkins treats – 30 percent in FY2019 – have trauma-

and stressor-related disorders and present with high-risk behaviors that many adults aren’t equipped to handle. Often, Heather said, “parents feel isolated and unaware that caring for children with trauma requires a team.”

At Perkins, caregivers learn how to regulate their own emotions, learn about effective responses to difficult behavior, and are educated in sensory tools and psychoeducation that informs how they interact with their children.

“Parents are taught how to care for themselves in order to support their children effectively,” says Heather.

Treating Trauma

Perkins clinicians help parents help kids

Recognizing the vital role parents and other caregivers play in a child’s journey toward mental health, clinicians at Perkins Behavioral Health are now offering services to the adults who are closest with the children we serve.

Last summer, a support program for parents and other caregivers was launched at the outpatient practice on our Lancaster campus. Perkins Clinician Heather Bernier (pictured above),

PERKINS PROFILE

Tammy Sege-Adede, MPA



service role in one of our many residences.

The oldest of eight children, caring for others and managing multiple responsibilities comes naturally to Tammy. Even so, she credits her early supervisors at Perkins with guiding her as she developed into a seasoned manager and her more recent supervisors for enhancing her skills as a senior administrator and for giving her countless opportunities to grow, learn, and take on new challenges.

While at Perkins, Tammy earned both her associate and bachelor’s degrees, as well as a Master of Public Administration degree. Needless to say, she’s committed to improving herself, as well as the organization. In her current role, she directs the organization’s quality improvement division, which oversees Perkins’ electronic medical records system, collects and analyzes key data points to help us improve our services, and is

currently overseeing the organization’s work towards accreditation with the Council on Accreditation.

“Perkins has continuously given me opportunities that have allowed me to learn, grow, and make a difference.”

“The accreditation process and, really, all the work of our department,” says Tammy, “allows us to look at our work across divisions, make small changes, and reach that next level of quality. My goal is that our work helps the people we serve reach their goals sooner and maintain that progress longer.”

Over her 30-year career at Perkins, Tammy has had six different roles and knows the ins and outs of Perkins’ programs and services. Today she is the Director of Quality and Performance Improvement, though she joined Perkins in 1990 in a direct



In Memoriam

This past fall, Perkins lost two longtime residents, Alex Ingram and Diana Greenough. Alex and Diana were members of our tightknit community of adults. They both grew up at Perkins, attending Doctor Franklin Perkins School and then staying on as permanent residents. Their longtime friends in the programs, the employees who worked with them, and the entire Perkins community mourns their loss and celebrates their lives.



Alex Ingram 1970-2019

Alex came to Perkins at age 11 and made both the Lancaster and Clinton campuses his home for the next 38 years, winning the admiration and affection of those who had the pleasure of living and working with him. Alex encountered significant health challenges throughout his life, but thanks to the great advocacy of his mother, Perkins Trustee Trix Oakley, and the quality care he received from the Perkins staff and his doctors at Tufts Medical Center, he lived a full and meaningful life.

Those who knew Alex best miss his negotiation tactics, sense of humor, and sly grin. He was passionate about music, watching Mr. Rogers, taking rides to the nearby farms in trucks, buses or vans, and sneaking chocolate against doctor's orders.

While we can no longer talk to "the Prince of Barlow," we are joyful to have known, lived, and worked with Alex. He is greatly missed.



Diana Greenough 1952-2019

Diana spent 54 of her 67 years at Perkins, having lived in many of the residences across campus before settling in Davis Manor on the Lancaster campus for the last 20 years. Staff recount how she was generous and kind, sending flowers for special occasions and ensuring that she said good morning to each and every person daily. Diana was adored by her fellow residents and many of the Perkins staff, but shared a special bond with Sharon Brennan, Director of Programs for Adult Services.

Among Diana's favorite things were working on complex knitting projects like creating a weighted blanket, dancing at Perkins proms, gardening, meeting babies, shopping, going to church, and socializing with her friends and people she'd meet at jobs through the years.

Diana, "the matriarch of Davis Manor," lives on in our hearts forever. We are honored to have known her.

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Perkins
971 Main Street, Lancaster, MA 01523
perkinsprograms.org | (978) 365-7376

Our mission is to promote meaningful and sustained well-being for children, youth, and adults facing educational, developmental, or mental health challenges.

Do you have a Perkins story you'd like to share? We'd love to hear from you. Email us at nleblanc@perkinschool.org.



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