



Weathering Change

Seniors and students rally in pandemic

If the only thing a person can count on is change, then the students of Dr. Franklin Perkins School are ready for it.

As speakers noted during the 2020 Recognition Day event held virtually on June 19th, students have shown remarkable fortitude as their learning and living routines underwent rapid change in March when schools across Massachusetts went virtual because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

And although never easy, senior Aya Creaghan, the 2020 Class Speaker, suggested change is an essential means for growth that should be embraced. "If something unexpected happens, know you've just experienced a change and if you accept it you will grow more than ever," Aya said.

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Aya recounted how she learned to embrace change during her dynamic high school career at Perkins. As a

younger student, she recalled feeling stuck on things she perceived as having gone wrong in her life, but ultimately embraced Perkins resources, such as school-based therapy, and accepted her challenges.

The latter part of this school year was certainly unexpected. Students in all grades were asked to make huge adjustments in their learning, lifestyles, and expectations when the COVID-19 pandemic hit this spring.

Day students and some residential students completed their school year from home, with continued instruction and support from their teachers and specialists, including occupational and speech therapy and reading support, all via video conference. Residential students adjusted to major changes in school routines and residential life, attending school only with those they lived with, remaining in certain portions of school buildings to prevent cross contamination, and wearing masks almost all of the time. Family visits were not allowed until the first week in June, an incredibly difficult reality for all.

The upheaval was challenging at best, yet staff have remarked on how well students took it in stride, complying with

social distancing and coming up with new ways to stay busy and engaged.

As Chief Academic Officer Cindy Wing said on Recognition Day, Perkins seniors are no strangers to challenge, yet they consistently demonstrate courage, perseverance, and resilience. "You've shown each of those, and if you can possess those attributes in your thinking throughout the rest of your life, you will do wonderful things," she said.

To Perkins seniors moving on to new endeavors such as college and the workforce, and younger students adapting to the evolving school environment, know that the staff of Dr. Franklin Perkins School recognize your grit and is truly impressed with how you've worked through the pandemic.

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Friends,

So much has transpired since we last published Perkins Pulse, both in the world and at Perkins. I'm writing to you at a time when we face continued challenges but also great joy and hope for the future.



In June, we celebrated the accomplishments of Perkins seniors who completed the 12th grade. Always a momentous occasion, it was profound to see our seniors complete their school year after the disruption of the COVID-19 Pandemic. As detailed in our cover story, they and all of our students have adapted to learning under very trying and uncharted circumstances, and it is to their credit and that of our dedicated staff that they've been able to continue meeting their ongoing educational and therapeutic goals.

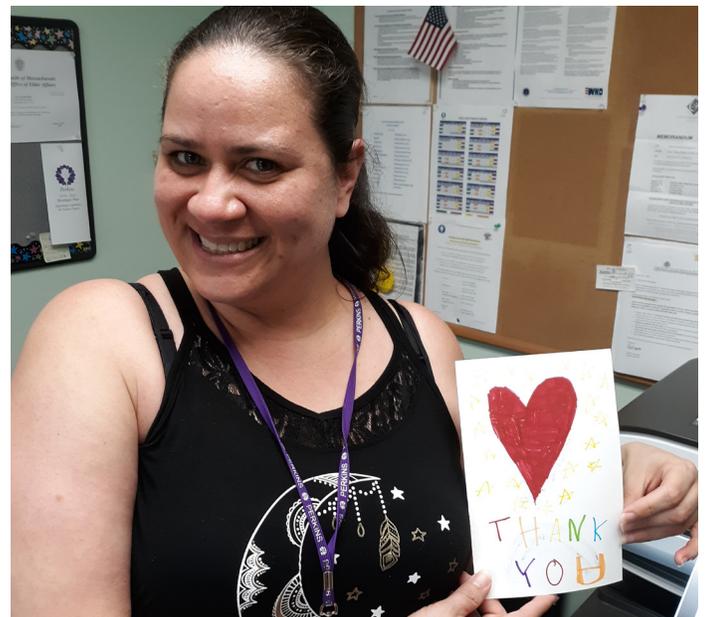
Throughout this issue, we share how the Perkins staff and people we serve across all programs have responded to life in quarantine, digging deep and showing resourcefulness in meeting many challenges. Residents weathered extended time away from family, students and adults changed how they learn and receive services, and everyone adapted to wearing masks and operating with extra caution. What's more, students and staff alike have showed their strength and compassion in discussions about systemic racism and how it affects them and this organization.

There have been times when the picture seemed bleak, but as the stories in this issue show, the spirit of the agency is one of resilience. Change and uncertainty have been difficult for all of us at Perkins, but there is no denying the value of the lessons we've learned. As we begin to cautiously reopen in-person day programs in the weeks ahead, may we build on this experience and use it to make our organization even more compassionate, creative and excellent!

Michael W. Ames, Ph.D.
President & CEO

Team Perkins:

We know it hasn't been easy, but we are so thankful for your strength, resilience, and hard work over these last few months.



To Our Covid Emergency Fund Supporters

We offer our heartfelt thanks to the people, organizations and companies that rallied around Perkins in a springtime of uncertainty. Our program operations were significantly impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. Necessary temporary program closures were compounded by the need for supplies, like masks, gloves and disinfectant. We faced significant costs and unexpected revenue losses as an organization, but we head into the summer and a new fiscal year with a positive outlook, thanks in large part to the financial and moral support from the community. We received nearly \$100,000 from 140 donors, a touching response that signals how much the community values the work we do and the people we serve.

Through our COVID-19 Emergency Fund, supporters – including parents and families of students, residents and other program participants, small and large businesses, and charitable foundations- we have been able to meet our needs through the unforeseen challenge of the pandemic. Staff were prepared to deal with COVID-19 exposure with the appropriate Personal Protective Equipment and received incentive pay and benefits for their deep commitment in the face of a global pandemic, our buildings were as clean as possible to prevent potential spread of disease – and notably, while we have not been completely immune to COVID-19, to date we've had only 3 COVID cases amongst staff and 1 in a Perkins resident, all contained because of our protocols.

Just as important as the financial and in-kind contributions were the kind words that often accompanied them. We were edified by the messages from donors such as a parent who commented, "Perkins is such a great institution where I strongly believe my daughter receives the best education. Literally, I don't know where my daughter ... would be without you guys."

We don't know where we'd be without all of you, either.

Thank you.



A New Normal

Patty Sinclair writes about a day in the life of our early childcare center

Taking temperatures, curbside drop-off and pick-up, wearing masks and lots and lots of handwashing: These are just some of the procedures we've implemented as an emergency child care center and anticipate will be part of our re-opening guidelines (Perkins CDC is set to re-open in July).

As I'm writing this, we've just welcomed eight children into the program for the day, ages 17 months to 10 years. I greet each child outside, in full PPE, and ask a series of screening questions each day before they are allowed into the building.

Once inside, the children wash their hands, settle in, and are given individual baskets for the day. In these baskets are personalized materials for only that

child to use (crayons, markers, pencils, etc.). Children can choose to do an individual activity at a table or they can go to one of the open centers with materials for play. They can work in a center together but are reminded to stay six feet apart. For younger children this can be more challenging so we often keep one in a center at a time. Once all the children have arrived for the day, we spend the rest of the day outside, with breaks to come in to eat and rest. Being outside gives us a lot more flexibility and children are allowed to take off their masks if they are in active play.

Throughout the day, we are cleaning materials and surfaces as they are touched. Our infant and toddler teachers are asked to wear long hair up in a ponytail and wear a protective layer including goggles, gloves, mask and lab coat when they are participating in care giving routines such as feeding and diaper changes. At the time I'm writing

this, we have had no COVID-19 cases among the children we care for, which is a testament to the protocols we have in place.

The days are different from what we are used to. But each challenge is managed by our kind, compassionate early childhood educators who are finding hope and resiliency in the midst of it all. We are grateful to be providing emergency care right now, as it has allowed us to connect with families in our community when the community needed them and they needed us.

“The days are different from what we are used to. But each challenge is managed by our kind, compassionate, early childhood educators...”

We look forward to our reopening date in early July. As we move forward with the new state guidelines for childcare centers reopening, we will draw from our experience these last few months and look forward to continuing to provide safe care in a nurturing environment to many children we have dearly missed during the shutdown!

This article was written by Patty Sinclair, Director of Perkins Child Development Center (CDC)



Still at Home

Creativity is key for adults in quarantine

While other areas of the state and country re-open amidst the pandemic, we're not thinking in those terms for Perkins' adult residents just yet. COVID-19 is more dangerous for those

with underlying conditions, who are immunocompromised, or who are elderly, like many of our adults. And our dedicated staff remain committed to keeping residents safe and cared for around-the-clock, while simultaneously holding boredom at bay.

Indoor ladder ball competitions, cornhole tournaments, Wii marathons, cooking groups, cultural nights, health, and wellness classes, Ted Talks, board games and pizza parties, and more - all examples of activities adult residents have been enjoying during COVID-19.

On Mother's Day, residents in Clinton assembled hand-made crafts and, by appointment, arranged for "mom pick-ups." From the Barlow apartment windows, residents waved "hello" with gusto to their moms below. For seniors at Davis Manor, activities are geared towards keeping residents' active and

engaged. Pastimes include music and dancing, sing-a-longs, balloon tosses, blowing bubbles, puzzles, baking and movie afternoons.

As much as everyone would like the pandemic to end, especially those who have been isolating for months on end, many of our adult residents remain at high risk. Challenges to keep them safe are ongoing. The needs for personal protective equipment, deep cleaning and sanitizing homes, and technology to allow residents to see and talk with family and medical providers, are expected to continue. And for some, family visits are already happening with careful protocols in place. But overall, we understand that the men and women in our adult programming will need to remain at home longer than others. And we're prepared.



Thriving Through a Shutdown

RIAD's animals and students help each other

When residential students couldn't hug their families, students and animals found allies in each other.

Karen Jordan, Assistant Program Manager at RIAD, has seen remarkable growth among the students who work and take lessons at the barn since COVID-19 began to affect programming in March. Residential students

have increased their participation in therapeutic horsemanship and animal assisted therapy classes each week, leaning on the animals for support as they've missed friends and loved ones.

"I have definitely seen an increase in the students' desire to want to be closer to the animals," Jordan said. During the early weeks of COVID-19, the barn facilities became a place for students to express their feelings about the upheaval of the pandemic and often sought to hug the horses.

The boost is enough to take the edge off having to maintain social distancing protocols, and students have taken wearing masks in the warmer weather in stride. And as horses, goats, chickens and cats have lifted Perkins students, many have been happy to reciprocate. Jordan noted that those participating in job skills lessons and the "Barn Bucks" program for younger students have been instrumental in meeting the animals' daily needs. With fewer staff on hand during the shutdown, students

have stepped in to help feed and water the animals, as well as to clean paddocks.

One student, Riley, shared that her favorite task is to clean the horses' paddocks.

"It's great just to see them run around and play with each other and lay down on the ground -- you don't see that in the barn." Riley shared. "It's also nice just to feel like you got a good day of work in."



PERKINS PROFILE Nursing Team



Perkins nurses on a day out of the office pre-COVID

While Perkins day programs moved to remote learning in March and the number of staff working on campus decreased, 82 adult and residential students remained in their programs, living under new and unsettling guidelines for social distancing to keep them safe. But as many people pivoted

to work and learn from home, the Perkins nursing staff remained a steadfast campus presence.

Meg MacDonald, a registered nurse who serves as Director of Health Care Services, said the agency's RNs felt a pressing need to be more present than ever to the students of Dr. Franklin Perkins School, and the adults living in Perkins residences in Lancaster and Clinton: "We feel we've got to be there because these people need reassuring." In addition to MacDonald, the team of dedicated nursing and healthcare professionals includes: Ellen Serafin and Tiffany Abrams, RNs who work in the Educational Buildings during the school day; Lisa Neal, Teri Cataldo, Carole Demchak, and James Hatton, RNs who manage the care of residential students; and Peggy Greenwood and Cathy Natale, RNs working with adult residents in Clinton and Lancaster. Completing the team are Health Assistants Kelly Joyce and Tracy Hisman.

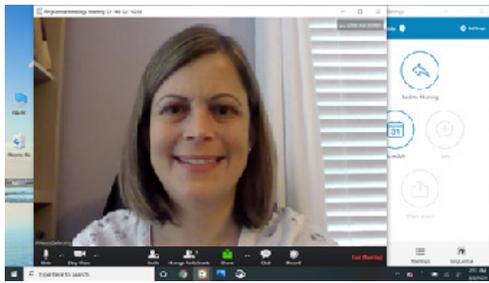
The nursing department has remained fully staffed throughout COVID-19, with nurses focusing on keeping residents and staff safe by helping to inform and enforce infection prevention measures, as well as supporting residents dealing

with the fear brought on by the pandemic.

In the adult residential program, that's meant managing the care of people with chronic health conditions, all under strict protocols to protect the most vulnerable residents. Many congregate care facilities have struggled to prevent and contain COVID-19 infections among their staff and residents. Yet only 1 Perkins resident has had COVID-19 to date – a testament to the commitment of the nurses, and the agency at large, to keeping people safe.

Meanwhile, many students have been on edge, seeking reassurance from nurses frequently that they weren't experiencing symptoms. Nurses have readily provided temperature and vital checks just to reassure students.

Looking ahead, MacDonald feels that the nursing team has the framework to provide care to students when more students return to campus. It's been very intense getting through the last few months, but it feels good to have a plan in place looking forward, she said. "It's a group effort for sure."



Allison Galbraith, LICSW, in a telehealth session

Virtual Visits

Clinicians connect with kids, adults and frontline workers in virtual visits

For Perkins Behavioral Health Clinicians and clients, the COVID-19 Pandemic ushered in a springtime that was far from business as usual.

Since mid-March, the team has overhauled the way it delivers services to clients with mental health needs. Under guidance from the state and led by Clinical Director Dianne Walsh, clinicians now provide telehealth therapy sessions to clients using Perkins' existing communications app, Ring Central.

In order to make sure people receive the mental health care they need, Gov. Charlie Baker relaxed some regulations on telehealth, giving providers more flexibility to use software they already own to provide services. This has been crucial to continuing the work that Perkins clinicians do with existing and new clients. These include frontline

healthcare workers facing burnout and parents struggling with the demands of working and parenting during a pandemic.

Doctors and nurses suffering from severe burnout brought on by working in COVID units are among some of Perkins newest clients. Walsh said these providers have presented with acute anxiety, as well as post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms after caring for the sickest patients. Other essential workers who aren't working with patients but still must report to work have sought services as well, facing a number of health and financial worries.

While telehealth has its limitations, Perkins clinicians are prepared to use it for the long haul; clients are not expected to return fully to the clinic until the public health emergency is over. Walsh noted that therapy via screen is challenging for providers but "The quality of work is still really high, even though it's hard to read body language, as is important in trauma therapy."

In a recent survey, one client shared how telehealth has buoyed the whole family through the pandemic: "It's truly helped all of us stay grounded as we navigate such a crazy world..."

BLACK LIVES MATTER

Our Commitment

To promote inclusivity and fight racism

George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery are just the most recent men and women of color killed because of racism and police brutality. Their deaths are unjust and unfathomable. Their lives matter.

At Perkins, where our tagline is, "a chance to blossom" and our mission is to promote meaningful and sustained well-being, we know that no child or adult can thrive in a world where they don't feel safe. Racism is harmful and insidious. It affects every person of color in our community.

Our CEO and Executive Leadership team are committed to doing what

we can - as advocates, service providers and as a community - and to open a dialogue within the Perkins community. We have so much to learn. We are listening, learning, and we will make progress.

To read our full statement, please visit perkinsprograms.org under "Latest News."

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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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