

# PACE Setter

PACIFIC AUTISM CENTER for EDUCATION  
Connect • Support • Educate



## MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, KURT OHLFS

PACE's resiliency throughout an unprecedented global crisis come from the unwavering support of our staff of teachers, therapists, instructional aides, residential caregivers, our administrative team, and our donors and community partners. This collective support enables us to carry on our mission, launch new initiatives, and grow our existing programs. It allows us to strengthen our impact in the community and serve more families in the Bay Area. As we enter 2022, we continue to assess the needs within the community we serve and work hard to identify solutions. We continue to focus on opportunities that mobilize and expand our expertise and knowledge to support individuals with autism and their families beyond our walls.

This April, we invite you to celebrate Autism Awareness

Month with us by participating in our **Kindness Matters** campaign, dedicated to promoting inclusion, acceptance, and kindness for individuals of all abilities and backgrounds. You can find out more about our campaign by visiting our website, [www.pacificautism.org](http://www.pacificautism.org).

Thank you for being a part of our effort and supporting our mission.

**WISHING YOU ALL A SAFE AND HEALTHY START TO THE SPRING SEASON,**



KURT OHLFS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**This Autism Awareness Month, we are proud to introduce our new month-long campaign!**

# KINDNESS MATTERS

Join us this April for a month of celebrating diversity and promoting acceptance of individuals of all abilities, featuring all-new interviews, special themes each week, and our annual "Voices for Autism" virtual benefit concert led by the PACE Youth Leadership Committee.

**\$20,000 goal**

Help us reach our goal! Donations will go toward PACE's Annual Fund, which supports the agency's services and programs.

LEARN MORE AT [WWW.PACIFICAUTISM.ORG/EVENTS](http://WWW.PACIFICAUTISM.ORG/EVENTS)

CONNECT SUPPORT EDUCATE CONNECT SUPPORT EDUCATE CONNECT SUPPORT EDUCATE CONNECT SUPPORT EDUCATE CONNECT

## ASK A THERAPIST: FORMS OF COMMUNICATION



**Faces**  
BEHAVIORAL SERVICES FOR CHILDREN

Alania Sabankaya, BA, RBT

As caregivers and therapists for children with ASD we often observe frustration in our students when they encounter challenges communicating their needs and desires. Our goal is to provide interventions that allow children to learn **functional forms of communication** that are specific to each child's skill set. Here are some forms of communication most often observed:

### Non-Verbal Communication

Non-verbal communication can be observed as:

- Using signs or adaptive sign language
- Using gestures
- Physical aggression or self-injurious behavior
- Drawing pictures or writing symbols or words
- Crying or emotive sounds
- Physically directing someone's hand to a desired object or environment

### Echolalia

Echolalia might look like a child repeating a word or phrase heard or read in a different context and using it as a way of communication. Caregivers and therapists are encouraged to research the context of the phrase or word being repeated in order to understand the function of this communication.

### Speaking with No Eye Contact

Individuals who can verbally communicate but lack the skill to maintain eye contact may be experiencing sensorimotor-related challenges. It is a sensory experience to make eye contact with another individual, just as speaking is a sensory experience. Doing both behaviors simultaneously could lead to sensory overload, causing the person to break or not make eye contact initially.

### How Can I Support Functional Communication?

Functional Communication Training (FCT) is a methodology that provides a child with a reliable way to convey information using language, signs, and/or images to achieve a desired end. It was originally developed as a way to reduce undesirable behaviors that resulted from an inability to communicate effectively. In order for FCT to be effective it is important to keep in mind the Four Functions of Behavior: Escape, Attention, (access to) Tangible items, and Sensory needs. This helps us understand why behaviors occur. It is also important to identify a child's likes and dislikes. These can be in the form of items, actions and environments.

Individualized planning within a team of stakeholders for functional goals is required for success. As a caregiver, this may be collaborating with your child's BCBA on strategies that support your child's needs. Functional communication can be improved using Augmentative Alternative

Communication devices (AAC), which include but are not limited to: Picture Exchange Communication Systems, Communication boards, and Sign Language.

**Alania is studying to get her MA and her BCBA. We are so proud of her. Go Alania!**

We love this graphic about visuals from "Long Story Shortz." The graphic highlights some of the key benefits that visuals bring to the classrooms at PACE and beyond.

4 methods for increasing communication within applied behavior analysis. Regis College Online. (2021, April 23). <https://tinyurl.com/Communication-and-ABA>

Helping Children with Autism Learn to Communicate (Caroline Miller), Child Mind Institute. <https://childmind.org/article/helping-children-with-autism-learn-to-communicate/>

9 Important Reasons to Use Visuals from the very talented Long Story Shortz & @kweins62 on IG and Twitter



MEET OUR NEW BOARD MEMBERS: JOANNA RASHID, MARINA DJORDJEVIC, AND SRUBA SESHADRI

We are excited to introduce a new column that highlights the amazing work of our Board members. This month we introduce Joanna Rashid and Marina Djordjevic, who joined the Board in November 2021, and Sruba Seshadri, who joined in February 2022.



**Introducing Joanna Rashid. Tell us a little bit about yourself!**

I am a Bay Area native. My husband and I are raising our two daughters on the mid-peninsula. Our first daughter, Etta, is 14 years old and has autism. Our younger daughter, Nola, is about to turn 13 and is neurotypical. We love to hike! We love to cook at home and enjoy the fantastically diverse bay area food scene.

**What does it mean to you being a parent who is involved with PACE on a daily basis?**

If you have a child with severe autism, you know that finding appropriate education and activities are a challenge. After years of searching, I'm so grateful to be able to send my daughter to a school she loves.

**What makes our organization's mission powerful for you?**

PACE combines highly customized curriculum, program flexibility, and well-trained staff to create an impactful program. PACE's strengths-based approach focuses on promoting independence rather than just compliance. When we first began at PACE in 2019, the school director, Sadie Randle, told me that "first we have to make the kids feel safe and happy to be here, without that they can't learn." I will never forget that moment. I think this mindset is the key to PACE's success.

**What is something you look forward to most being a part of the Board of Directors?**

I am active in the Bay Area autism community. In talking with families, far too often I hear families struggling with the transition from secondary to post-secondary education, and then on to adult programs. In the bay area, there is a lack of appropriate high-support, day programs. PACE's focus on independence and preparation for adulthood aims to reduce the support they will need in adulthood. My hope is that as a board member, I can do my part to help bring pragmatic and effective programming to more teens and adults with autism.

--



**Introducing Marina Djordjevic. Tell us a little bit about yourself!**

I'm a proud mother of two; Sophia and David. My son, David, is a student at PACE and lives in one of the residential homes. I've lived in the Bay Area for most of my life and work at a startup company. I love hiking, museums, yoga and pilates. Looking forward to traveling again!

**What makes our organization's mission powerful for you?**

PACE's mission "To enhance the lives of those impacted by autism..." is powerful to so many families that are affected by autism. By offering education and residential programs, families have an amazing resource that is often very challenging to find. For any family with a child or loved one with autism, special needs or any disability, managing daily activities can be overwhelming. I am very thankful for PACE.

**What is something you look forward to most being a part of the Board of Directors?**

I'm looking forward to getting to know more about PACE as an organization as well as the other Board members. I hope to bring a parent's perspective to the Board so PACE can continue to provide the programs needed to its community.



**Introducing Sruba Seshadri. Tell us a little bit about yourself!**

I recently joined the PACE Board in February 2022. Both of my sons have been involved with PACE. My older son was part of the YLC (Youth Leadership Committee) and Arjun volunteered in the Finance Department at PACE. My background is in technical account management application. In addition to my 25 years of engineering background, my journey has lead me to be the co-developer of Therapeutic

Sensory bags.

**What is something you look forward to most being a part of the Board of Directors?**

I believe in the work done by PACE based on my association through my son volunteering at PACE and would like to leverage my skills and connections in the tech industry for a good cause.

INTRODUCING LEAD TEACHER, JESSICA SOLCHENBERGER

**Karen Kennan,**  
Assistant Executive Director  
**Christina Polyanko,**  
Marketing Associate



Sunny Days  
PRESCHOOL

Sunny Days Preschool has had the privilege and honor of 11 years shared with Jessica Solchenberger, Lead Teacher, who will make time to encourage her staff with kindness, remembers each birthday, and strives to be a leader who takes care of her staff and students through individualized care.

Jessica is most passionate about helping the children at Sunny Days communicate their needs. Seeing a smile on each of their faces every day gives her the fuel that ignites her passion to work at Sunny Days.

While her tenure at PACE has been filled with learning, she feels that she has learned the most over the last two years. During the pandemic, Jessica strived to engage her students through a variety of creative ways. She learned to be more exciting and engaging through Zoom and Google Classrooms. During distance learning, Jessica implemented engaging tools such as fun costumes, hands-on crafts, creating an environment where each student felt cared for. Also, during the pandemic, she experienced

an increase in appreciation for her hard work from her students' parents. There have been more monumental moments in the last two years than ever.

Coming back on campus, Jessica says she looks forward to seeing and being present with both students and staff every morning when coming to Sunny Days. As a lead teacher, she makes it a priority to support her team in ways that encourage them to be their best. "There will be challenges and days where you question yourself. The good days and everything you learn will make it worthwhile," said Jessica when asked about the best piece of advice you can give someone who is just starting to work in the field of special needs. Jessica suggests

**"There will be challenges and days where you question yourself. The good days and everything you learn will make it worthwhile."**

that those seeking to work with special needs students should look at getting volunteer experience working in a classroom setting.

Jessica has her Master's Degree in Education with a concentration in Special Education and Early Childhood Development from San Jose State University. Before her role at Sunny Days, she substituted as an aide in special education classes. This experience led her to continue her education at SJSU. On her days off, you can see Jessica taking a road trip down Highway 1 to Monterey Bay for the day.

--

## Modules for Parents

# PORCHLIGHT

BROWSE 50 MODULES

**The Porchlight Autism Education Series is a free eLearning program with over 50 modules designed to offer behavioral solutions to common daily challenges parents or caregivers may confront in the world of developmental disabilities.**



**Daily Routine & Life Skills**

- Family Vacation
- Going out to Eat
- Car Trips

FREE



**Social & Safety Skills**

- Greeting People
- Conversations
- Social Stories

FREE

**Children with autism very often have deficits in language, social, and behavioral development. These modules can help you teach your child to develop life skills.**

[WWW.PORCHLIGHTEDUCATION.ORG](http://WWW.PORCHLIGHTEDUCATION.ORG)



**Porchlight**  
AUTISM EDUCATION SERIES



**RESIDENTIAL NEWS: REBUILDING TOGETHER DAY**

**Melissa Watkins,**  
*Marketing and Development Manager*

We are incredibly grateful for the many volunteers and local community organizations who continue to support PACE's residential program.

In November of 2021, over 20 volunteers came together at PACE's Meadows Group Home for Rebuilding Together Day, a bi-annual day of service hosted by Rebuilding Together Silicon Valley. For this day of service, we partnered with Rebuilding Together



to provide essential home repairs to nonprofit agencies, veterans, and low-income households. Volunteers from Silicon Valley Mechanical transformed the backyard at PACE Meadows with new mulch and shrubs. In addition, they provided new picnic benches for

the clients, built by hand onsite, and new outdoor games for the clients to enjoy. Volunteers also gave much-needed attention to the inside of the facility by repairing walls before giving them a fresh coat of paint. It was a significant improvement that brightened up the outdoor spaces and

**UPCOMING PROJECTS:**

PACE's Residential Program recognizes the importance of sustainable energy and is committed to using renewable resources to contribute to a greener world. Over the last year, PACE has worked on an initiative to convert all six residential homes to solar power, allowing the agency to leverage natural resources to reduce energy costs and consumption. Matranga Group Home for adults will be the first home to receive the solar power conversion, made possible thanks to generous grants from the Crkvenjakov Foundation and the SPARK Foundation, and Fund-A-Need donations from our 2021 Golf Classic.

**ABOUT PACE RESIDENTIAL:**

PACE's residential program offers a comfortable and safe setting for children and adults with autism, enabling them to develop daily living skills and to lead more independent and productive lives built on the foundation of personal choice and independent decision-making. PACE currently operates two children's homes and four adult homes throughout the South Bay area.  
*Photo: Rebuilding Together Silicon Valley*

**PACE SCHOOL NEWS: HOLIDAY DONATION DRIVE BY ROY**

**Melissa Watkins,**  
*Marketing and Development Manager*

Thank you to everyone who made our student-led Holiday Food Drive a huge success. We had an outpouring of donations of canned food items and essential household items to support local organizations that serve the houseless population in our community. In these unusual and uncertain times, the donations will positively impact the lives of families and individuals in need this holiday season.

This special event was organized by Roy, one of our students. Roy is passionate about helping others. His wish for the holidays was to help individuals in need of food and other essential items during the colder winter months. With support from school staff, Roy's wish came true. Roy led all aspects of the holiday drive, from creating flyers and distributing them around campus to

sorting the donations daily. He also made a PowerPoint presentation to highlight the needs of people in the Santa Clara and Santa Cruz Counties. As you can see in the photo, Roy is beaming with happiness over the donations that came in. We are beyond proud of his efforts

**"With support from school staff, Roy's wish came true. Roy led all aspects of the holiday drive, from creating flyers and distributing them around campus to sorting the donations daily."**

and inspired by his kind heart and compassion. Thank you again to those who supported Roy's Holiday Drive and for spreading kindness and cheer into 2022.



**SAVE THE DATE!**

**14TH ANNUAL PACE  
GOLF  
CLASSIC**

**FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 16TH, 2022  
CINNABAR HILLS GOLF CLUB**

Come out and join us for a wonderful day at the 14th Annual PACE Golf Classic on Friday, September 16th, 2022 at Cinnabar Hills Golf Club. Your participation makes a significant impact at PACE. All proceeds from the event support PACE programs and services. We hope you are just as excited as we are to get outside and play a round of golf for PACE!

**ALL PLAYERS WILL ENJOY:**

- Beautiful Mountain & Lake Course fairways with golf carts
- Shotgun start
- Full lunch and refreshments
- Exciting on-course contests
- Complimentary swag bag
- Cocktail Hour and Dinner
- Silent and Live Auction

**SPONSORSHIPS AVAILABLE!**

Please contact Melissa Watkins for more information, at [melissawatkins@pacificautism.org](mailto:melissawatkins@pacificautism.org)



# PACE Setter

PACIFIC AUTISM CENTER for EDUCATION

Connect • Support • Educate



PACE Setter  
1880 Pruneridge Avenue  
Santa Clara, CA 95050  
408.245.3400

**Editors:** Melissa Watkins and Christina Polyanko

**Executive Director:** Kurt Ohlfs

**Contributors:** Marina Djordjevic, Karen Kennan, Kurt Ohlfs, Christian Paglia, Christina Polyako, Joanna Rashid, Alaina Sabankaya, Jessica Solchenberger, Sruba Seshadri, Melissa Watkins

**Mission:** To enhance the lives of people impacted by autism, through innovation, exceptional education, and compassionate care.

**Vision:** A world in which people of all abilities live fulfilled lives.



**BE A PART OF OUR COMMUNITY**

**Donate:** by mail at 1880 Pruneridge Avenue, Santa Clara, CA 95050, online at [www.pacificautism.org/donate/](http://www.pacificautism.org/donate/), or by phone 408.245.3400  
**Double your gift!** Make a matching gift contribution at your workplace.  
**Choose us** on Amazon Smile at [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com).  
Please contact [development@pacificautism.org](mailto:development@pacificautism.org) for giving options.

**2021-2022 PACE BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**Tom McGovern, President**  
**Dave Setti, Vice President**  
**Debbie McCarroll, Treasurer**  
**Kurt Ohlfs, Secretary**  
Marina Djordjevic  
Jeff Fallick  
Mark Gilfix

Lisa Grisalin  
Paul Lacy  
Sarah Schwartz Mudgett  
Mark Pepper  
Joanna Rashid  
Veronica Rodriguez  
Sruba Seshadri



PACE is a 501(c)3 non profit organization, tax id: 77-0259858. Contributions made to PACE are tax deductible as specified by the current tax law.

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
SUNNYVALE, CA  
PERMIT NO. 981



CONNECT SUPPORT EDUCATE CONNECT SUPPORT EDUCATE CONNECT SUPPORT EDUCATE CONNECT SUPPORT EDUCATE CONNECT

## GREAT GIVERS: MUSICAL NOTES WITH CHRISTIAN PAGLIA

**Karen Kennan,**  
Assistant Executive Director

In this edition of Great Givers, we are pleased to highlight Chris Paglia, our music therapist at PACE, whose work makes a valuable impact on our students and clients. Walk into any PACE school or preschool classroom on a music morning and you may hear the cheerful strumming of a guitar as Music Therapist, Christian Paglia leads the students through a “Hello” tune and encourages them to greet each other in song. Or you may see children happily drumming on individual drums and other percussion instruments as they practice paying attention and listening to different rhythms. This is Music Therapy, the “skillful use of music and musical elements by an accredited music therapist to promote, maintain, and restore mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health.” (MTAO)

At PACE, Music Therapy is one of the tools in our therapeutic tool bag along with Speech Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Applied Behavior Analysis, and a variety of other therapeutic modalities. Music therapy is distinct from simply using random music as a form of



therapy because it uses evidenced based interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a specific therapeutic relationship. Chris uses musical techniques with our students to enhance a wide variety of skills including: speech, cognition, emotional expression, attention and focus and social and communication skills. For children on the autism spectrum struggling with communication challenges, music becomes a bridge for supporting and shaping their communication efforts. Studies show that music actually helps build and strengthen neurological connections.

Formerly a professional carpenter, several years ago, Chris went back to school to complete his degree. A chance meeting with a Music Therapy student inspired him to complete his BA and then the additional 2-year certification required to become a Board-Certified Music Therapist (MT-BC). While studying, in addition to giving guitar lessons and working as a Music Together teacher, he worked as a music specialist at the Arbor Bay School in San Carlos, providing adapted music classes for students with varying learning differences, including Autism

San Carlos, providing adapted music classes for students with varying learning differences, including Autism

Spectrum Disorder (ASD). He knew from that experience, that he was going to love being a Music Therapist.

Chris has been playing guitar and singing since he was 10 years old, performing semi-professionally in bands, and as a solo act. He has spent many years working on his technique and repertoire, but more importantly, has come to place higher value on what the music “does to the audience.” This has culminated into a career where the “product” of the music during a session is less important than the therapeutic effect of the musical relationship with the client. Says Chris: “I don’t ever play to impress in this setting, only to relate, and the client’s musical output is only interpreted with therapeutic benefit in mind, rather than an idealized standard of music or musicianship. However, some really great jams do happen!”

**At PACE Chris is able to collaborate with each classroom teacher to understand the goals for each student and to facilitate those objectives musically. Overall goals for the students at PACE are:**

- To create a community experience with acknowledgment of, and reciprocal communication with others;
- To develop enjoyment of music from a listening and performing perspective;
- Cognitive (executive function and memory) work through rhythm playing, following prompts (musical when at all possible, gestural and verbal otherwise), and singing;
- Impulse control through turn-taking, call-and-response, and other musical means.

**Since his arrival at PACE Chris has experienced some “break-through” moments with students:**

- One student was willing and able to learn a dance step with him, moving back and forth to the rhythm of the song. This was after initial reluctance to join in movement activities.

- Several students have done some nice singing, particularly in fill-in-the-blanks applications, but recently there have been a few who have sung extended phrases, which is very rewarding.

- Sometimes students who have been reluctant to interact with Chris, suddenly tear down the barrier and come near, wanting to be more a part of the music.

Although break-throughs are hard to quantify, recently, during group drumming sessions, Chris has observed improved cooperation and attention to classmates, greater eye contact and increased patience during turn-taking. These seemingly small achievements add up to larger successes as our students develop their ability to regulate, communicate and relate to the world around them.

Chris is nourished by the interactions with clients and caregivers, and says he feels grateful every day in this career. Even sessions that might be described as “difficult” usually lead to better future outcomes, where he can work through a difficulty and find solutions, or learn something new about a client that will allow greater communication. “And” he says “of course, there are moments of great joy; huge smiles and laughter, goals being met, increased communication and cooperation; and these are naturally full of good feeling, and have their own lessons to teach.”

For more information about the profession of Music Therapy go to [www.musictherapy.org](http://www.musictherapy.org).