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Horizons
Winter 2020

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To support Crotched Mountain through a gift, visit crotchedmountain.org/give or call 603-547-1485.
Dear friends:

Snow, sleet, wintry mix, rain, freezing rain, sub-zero to +50 degrees, that has been the normal February week, every week, that we have experienced this year. By the time you read this, days will be longer, there will be more sun, and of course we will be on the cusp of Spring. Which, of course, represents hope and growth. Here on the mountain there’s nothing like the resurgence of flowers as we bid farewell to the snowy landscape and welcome a new and green New Hampshire in all its glory.

We see growth and learning every day in our students. We see the excitement of overcoming small and large challenges. You have seen this yourselves and have read about these successes. But I would like to share two new things with you that are emblematic—literally—of the growth we’re seeing with Crotched Mountain. They are a pair of logos, brand new graphics that are connected to programs that are key to our organization in the coming years.

First, we have the brand new logo for Ready Set Connect, our community-based autism services program. Ready Set Connect provides Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy to young children with autism in a fun, supportive group setting. We are currently in our 10th year and as the demand for autism services has skyrocketed (matching the national autism rates that continue to climb year after year) we have scaled our program to impact even more families. From a single multipurpose room in Concord in 2011 to today, where we have three centers in Manchester, Concord, and Tilton—and more on the way!—Ready Set Connect is growing. As such, we have overhauled the look and feel of the Ready Set Connect brand, giving it a unique design that still remains tethered to Crotched Mountain. (And be sure to check out our brand new website at www.readysetconnect.org.) Be on the lookout for more exciting news as Ready Set Connect continues to grow across New Hampshire.

And, second, I’d like to introduce you to Year of Impact. The need for Crotched Mountain School’s unique services is on the rise and we are always looking to bring on top-notch and committed staff to serve our students. As a way to establish a community of change-makers on our campus, the Year of Impact program gives qualified individuals the chance to live and work on campus for a 12-month employment experience, supporting our students in the residential setting. Food and housing are all free and we pay a full wage and benefits—as well as a $2,500 bonus at the end of the year. If you or someone you know would be interested in this incredible program please point them to www.yearofimpact.org.

Thank you for being such an important part of the growth of Crotched Mountain. We can’t do any of this without you.

Hurry up Spring,...we are all waiting!

Respectfully,

Ned Olney
President and CEO
Crotched Mountain Foundation
These kids are learning—and earning—together.

For Jeff Howard, a teacher at Crotched Mountain School, it’s all about inverting The Cycle. Jeff teaches a class of day students comprised entirely of middle school-aged boys, a demographic that in “typical” academic circumstances would prove to be a handful. The students in Jeff’s class come with all the unpredictabilities and volatilities built into the middle school boy experience plus a selection of diagnoses—ASD, ADHD, EBD, ODD—and the baggage of previous school tenures that went sideways.

Jeff chalks that up to The Cycle: 1) the students struggle academically, 2) they act out, 3) they disrupt the class, 4) the disruption makes their classmates anxious, 5) they are ostracized socially because of this disruption, 6) and, finally, they don’t want to come to school anymore.

And that’s when a kid may end up as a day student at Crotched Mountain School, and the moment they set foot into Jeff’s class, his antidote kicks in to disrupt The Cycle, and help his students begin the journey towards academic success, self-confidence, and, most importantly, friend-making.

It is, simply, an inversion of the path these boys followed that led them to Crotched Mountain School, the ultimate destination, a return to their home school district.

**STEP 1: DEFUSE SOCIAL ANXIETY**

“The first thing I do with a brand new kid is to give him a checklist so he can get familiar with the schedule,” Jeff says. “All of my students are coming with some sort of stress so I want to create a positive environment and build trust and establish expectations.”

Part of that environment is creating a space for friendships to grow organically. Savvy as they are, the boys would see right through a corny friend-making strategy. So Jeff and his staff kickstart these friendships in a more subtle way; essentially they become match-makers on the sly.

“In the pre-admit process I meet the kids and talk to them,” Jeff says. “I want to find out their interests. What’s their favorite food or movie or game?”
With this intel in hand he and his staff can set up situations where the boys will begin to gravitate towards one another, maybe start chatting about Star Wars or everyone playing a game of UNO, and before you know it the seeds of friendship have been sewn.

What’s this look like? It could be as simple as a higher-decibel-than-usual conversation about how Trevor, the new kid, likes Angry Birds. (Jeff and his staff know that Julian likes Angry Birds). The two boys strike up a chat about their favorite installment in the franchise and by the end of the day they two of them are hanging out in a corner of the classroom watching each other play Angry Birds.

“And then they’re just being regular kids,” Jeff says.

**STEP 2: ESTABLISH CLASSROOM ACCOUNTABILITY**

The beauty of these sprouting friendships is that they yield an invaluable crowd control resource for the classroom. So not only are the boys making friends—possibly their very first!—they are in turn weaving a network of peer-to-peer accountability.

Directives from the teacher or the grown-up may go in one ear and out the other, but when your friend is telling you to pay attention or accomplish this task, well, that means something. The students hold themselves to expectations and much of that comes from a simple truth that powers Jeff’s approach to teaching: these boys see themselves in each other.

They see their struggles and their perceived failures; while their specific stories are different, their broader paths are largely the same—they have, all of them, been caught in The Cycle.

“They are so used to getting into trouble, they end up thinking they are bad kids,” Jeff says. “A student once told me that he thinks that there is a class about making friends and handling emotions that he missed and everyone else got.”

**STEP 3: CREATE ACADEMIC FLEXIBILITY**

The smaller class size and increased staff ratio (though the goal is to reduce high staff dependability) allows Jeff maneuverability within the boys’ learning schedules. Expectations are in place and enforced—there is a daily schedule that includes reading and writing and math and therapies and specials—but the flow is malleable.

“When a student begins, we identify their academic strengths and weaknesses,” Jeff says. “Whereas the social and emotional gaps are addressed through group experience, the academic needs are tackled with strategies that are customized to the student.”

Within the construct of the day, Jeff and his staff build in fluidity so the students approach their schedule in a way that allows them to exert some control while also abiding by the daily expectations. Depending on circumstances, it might not be ideal at the scheduled time to get into the math lesson, but as long as the math gets done that day, the actual time it gets done is negotiable.

“We’ve seen that so many of the kids’ behaviors come from the need to control their environment,” Jeff says. “Allowing the schedule to be moved around gives them some of that control.”
If control is one ingredient to academic success, confidence is the other. Fostering that confidence comes hand-in-hand with the social interaction with the students; that is, as the teachers and staff get to know each student they are able to identify the respective academic strengths and conjure up learning that blends both strengths and interests with the students' areas of need.

“If I have a strong reader who’s weaker in math, I try to provide them with word or narrative-based math problems,” Jeff says. “If the reverse is true, I’ll give my mathematicians more technical reading materials that involves graphs or figures. We’re trying to have them bring in their skills that they’re confident in.”

And to cap it all off, Jeff’s class has implemented a points system. Leveraging concepts of ABA and overseen by a Crotched Mountain School Board Certified Behavior Analyst, this system allows students to earn points through academic achievement and goal-hitting (e.g., Student A typically takes a long time to complete a scheduled activity; if he nails his goal of completing the next activity within three minutes, he earns points).

These points can be used for daily rewards or can be saved up to be cashed in for bigger prizes like snacks, comic books, or some time on the classroom mini pinball machine.

The end goal to inverting The Cycle? Creating a new cycle, one of success, that is based in a fun, safe, welcoming learning environment where students hold each other accountable, understand what is expected of them, are given the room to achieve academically, and most importantly, make friends.

“We want them to relax, make friends, and build confidence,” Jeff says. “And we want them to understand that they fit in. They’re not the odd man out anymore.”
Emanating from within Leanne Mathis’s classroom are the sounds of wild animals. A quick investigation reveals that the source of the hullabaloo is the 1995 movie *Jumanji*, which is getting the big-screen treatment on the classroom smart board.

Leanne’s students are taking in the cinematic action at their tables, benefitting from a peer’s recent educational achievement: after reading the book *Jumanji*, he—and his class—were rewarded with a movie screening.

Not a bad way to spend a school morning.

Leanne is a special education teacher at Crotched Mountain School, working with younger children up to the age of 11. Her class is a mix of residential and day students, bringing with them an assortment of behavioral needs, diagnoses, and academic challenges.

“Our goal in this class is to integrate the students with each other as much as possible,” Leanne says. “And of course getting them to a place where they can return to public school.”

Leanne and her staff balance academics with sensory breaks and Choice Time, earned incentives like watching YouTube, playing basketball, breaking out a board game, building a custom Pokemon deck—you name it.

“This gives the kids something to look forward to,” Leanne says. “We’re not picking the activities for them. They’re choosing what to work for.”

On the behavior side of things, the focus is on strengthening social and emotional skills, equipping the students with the tools to defuse oncoming negative behaviors and build meaningful friendships.

“They’re all seeking attention in certain ways but we’re trying to find socially acceptable ways to receive that attention,” Leanne says. “That means developing a sense of personal space or if you’re done with something not throwing it across the room or barging into places without asking.”
Communication was a primary goal. Deon began working with a Crotched Mountain speech therapist to help him develop the verbal articulation everyone knew he could make happen.

One day last summer, Deon picked up a ball and started throwing it back and forth. Leanne brought him to the gym, where he grabbed a basketball and started shooting at the rim.

Bingo.

They had identified Deon’s Choice Time: shooting hoops at the gym, particularly with the Campus Support Staff dudes.

“He typically might see those guys if he was having a behavior, of he was having a behavior,” Leanne says. “Now he gets rewarded by playing with them in a good space. He doesn’t have to have a behavior to see them. He likes hanging out with the cool guys.”

And wouldn’t you know it, his communication began to open up. What would Deon—AKA D-Money (his hoops nickname)—say?

“Shoot the ball!”
“Get the rebound!”
“Hike!”

Just be warned: if you see Deon and you’re holding a ball, he will make a beeline to you and help you on your shooting form.

“That’s his favorite thing, to get everyone involved,” Leanne says. “At his core, he’s a sweet-natured kid. And a future coach.”

“When Deon first came here last year he was not speaking and was engaging in a lot of escape behaviors,” Leanne said. “He would lie on the floor and throw his work around.”
Caleb, Leanne’s newest student, brought with him serious behavioral issues. But it didn’t take long before he proved that he was more than his behavior. There were major leadership qualities lurking within this eight-year-old and in a matter of weeks he was showing them off to his class.

“Caleb strives to be the kid he knows he can be,” Leanne says. “His behavior challenges are what prevent him from successfully doing that 100% of the time.”

Just as his pal Deon found basketball to be the catalyst to learning and behavior modification, for Caleb it’s all about Pokemon. Like for most other boys his age, the Japanese collectible card game is all the rage, and Caleb is obsessed with crafting his own custom deck of cards to do battle with any who dare oppose him (which tends to be Niko, one of the lead staff in Leanne’s room, who inevitably gets shellacked by Caleb).

“These deck-building skills can actually translate to academics,” Leanne says. “He is able to strategize, constantly making decisions about what he needs and what he has at his disposal.”

Caleb brought these skills to “Pokemon Club,” a social group arranged by Crotched Mountain’s psychology department, where kids from different classes come together to square off with one another.

Something is clicking because activities and incentives like these, in conjunction with the therapeutic support of speech, OT, and PT, are bringing those dormant leadership skills to the surface: lately, Caleb has been leading the classroom’s morning meeting by himself, preparing his new friends for the day that lies ahead.
At Crotched Mountain’s Ready Set Connect, children with autism are fashioning the tools to build their most desirable creations: real friendships.

The sun pours into the windows of the Ready Set Connect Autism Center in Tilton, NH. It’s midday Friday during February school vacation week and the activity is starting to ramp up. Ready Set Connect provides Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy to both pre-K and school-age children. Ready Set Connect’s unique Social Skills program provides support for that most elusive of aptitudes for a child with autism: the opportunity to learn how to make friends.

“Social skills aren’t black and white,” Christi says. “There are a lot of areas that overlap and intersect and there are no distinct social rules. In fact, they change throughout the years. What’s acceptable at age 5 is not acceptable at age 10. For a child with autism, they’re always playing catch-up.”

When you add these barriers to the always-shifting social landscape that is baked into the school experience—i.e., the “ground rules” for how you interact with your classmates always seems to vary grade to grade to grade—a child with autism is constantly working to gain ground on their neurotypical peers. And authentic, organic friendships become that much more difficult to attain.

“Children with autism, especially high-functioning children, are good at walking the walk and talking the talk,” Christi say. “But they miss it by a little bit, so they have a hard time building those friendships. They look like they should be able to have those conversations and interactions, but it’s just a little off, and their peers notice. Especially in middle school, where kids aren’t as nice.”

FRIEND FILES

Social skills begin at an early age. Ready Set Connect’s Early Intervention program, which provides ABA Therapy to pre-K children with autism, lays the foundation for the more advanced skills that are coming in the school-age program.

Ready Set Connect’s ABA Therapists work with children on verbal behavior approaches, encouraging eye contact, and basic communication of wants and needs. Socially, the children engage in “parallel play,” which fosters the beginning of peer relationships. All the while Ready Set Connect staff document achievements like spontaneous eye contact and peer motor behavior imitation.
“From that point we can work on things like sharing and taking turns,” says Laura Kazmierczak, a Case Manager at Ready Set Connect in Concord. “They all build upon each other to create a foundation of social skills.”

For the older age group, Social Skills brings children together who are of the appropriate age and skill level. Everything is done in a group, from an ice breaker activity to conversation time to playing board games together. These interactions allow the kids to build what Christi calls “friend files,” mental inventories of their peers’ likes and dislikes, which they can pull from later to conduct conversations.

“Many of these are abstract goals,” Christi says. “But we track and measure their accomplishments. And then one day, one of the kids will spontaneously start talking with someone or engaging in conversation. That’s success.”

“Others take turns, pay attention to the other players’ dispositions, and learn to lose.”

The Game of Life is a particular favorite in the Social Skills program. Not only are the kids learning those soft skills of sportsmanship and empathy, but they’re gaining some practical know-how, like using a debit card or being able to accept not having the highest paying job or even losing that job.

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One tactic the therapists use in Tilton are “social stories,” created in web-based animation software. The social stories turn into cartoons that take an abstract concept (e.g., lying or stealing) and make it concrete.

Together, the kids craft their own narrative, write a script, and plug it into the software. The result? A unique comic strip telling a story about lying—and the social consequences that can result from engaging in this type of behavior.

“A social story is a set of rules come to life,” Christi says. “This way we are able to show this story through technology, which all kids love.”

GAME THEORY

Then there are the games. Board games, card games, whatever grabs the kids’ attention, gets them around the table, and playing. There are few experiences as social as gathering together with some freshly popped popcorn (that the kids learned how to make themselves of course) and embarking on some fierce head-to-head competition.

“It creates a natural environment to teach social skills,” Christi says. “The kids take turns, pay attention to the other players’ dispositions, and learn to lose.”

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“Many of these are abstract goals,” Christi says. “But we track and measure their accomplishments. And then one day, one of the kids will spontaneously start talking with someone or engaging in conversation. That’s success.”
Because of some very kind-hearted people, our students are getting a state-of-the-art sensory room, a safe place to go when they are feeling anxious and overwhelmed. This space, equipped with all kinds of cool tools, is just what is needed to regroup and successfully return to therapies and learning.

And no one is more grateful than Linda Murphy, Occupational and Physical Therapy Manager at Crotched Mountain School. She sees firsthand how children with autism often have sensory processing challenges related to touch as well as visual, auditory, and movement input.

As a result of the generosity of a handful of donors, Linda now has the equipment to help every student, no matter their sensory challenges. There’s the Bubble Column with lights and shapes that gently float. A special chair provides soothing pressures. Students can listen to music and play with the relaxing lights. There are weighted blankets to provide pressure and warmth. And then there’s the Fiber Optics Cascade hanging from the ceiling.

“The Fiber Optics Cascade is elaborate and wonderful!” Linda says. “We couldn’t afford one before these amazing people stepped up to help.”

Not only does the Sensory Room help students return to their classroom, it also provides much needed data that teachers and clinicians use to support the students’ needs.

“None of this life-changing help would be available if it weren’t for donors just like you. If you are interested in helping to fund a special need such as the Sensory Room, please reach out to me, Kathy Waters, at 603-547-1485 or at Kathy.Waters@crotchedmountain.org and we’ll explore what possibilities there are for you to make a huge impact on the lives of our students.”

FOCUS ON PHILANTHROPY

By Kathy Waters, Director of Fundraising

Thanks to Our Donors, New Sensory Room Provides a Place of Peace and Learning

Corked Mountain School clinicians check out the new sensory room equipment.

“Thanks to our donors, our students are getting a state-of-the-art sensory room, a safe place to go when they are feeling anxious and overwhelmed. This space, equipped with all kinds of cool tools, is just what is needed to regroup and successfully return to therapies and learning.

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Upcoming Events

Corks for a Cause
May 7, 2020

Join us for a third Corks for a Cause event in support of all Crotched Mountain’s programs at Devine Millimet in Manchester, NH. Taste wines from Sweet Baby Vineyard, Zorvino Vineyards, while relaxing to the music of twice Grammy nominated Spanish Guitarist Jose Lezcano.

Third Annual Winnipesaukee Volleyball Classic
June 6, 2020

A sun-filled—and fun-filled!—day to benefit Ready Set Connect Autism Centers. Held at the beautiful Akwa Marina in Laconia and hosted by the Mailloux family, this event attracts all levels of volleyball players. And if you don’t play, enjoy the lake with a Tiki Boats ride, refreshments, and fun for the whole family.

The 18th Annual Crotched Mountain Golf Classic
June 19, 2020

As the saying goes—“A bad day at the golf course still beats a good day at the office”—and we haven’t had a bad day yet at this event. Start the weekend with us at the 18th Annual Golf Classic to benefit all of Crotched Mountain’s programs. Held at the Crotched Mountain Golf Club in Francistown, NH, the golf classic is a tradition that will not disappoint!

For information on how you can get involved with these events, contact Jeannette Nieder at 603-547-1486 or at Jeannette.Nieder@crotchedmountain.org.
Make a Big Impact with a Future Gift

We appreciate the loyal support that Crotched Mountain receives from so many friends like you. Please consider extending this support into the future by including a gift to Crotched Mountain Foundation in your estate plans. It’s not as complicated as you might think and we have all kinds of free, updated resources available to you. Your generosity provides children and adults with disabilities the ability to achieve maximum independence and become productive, valued members of their communities. Thank you for ensuring that Crotched Mountain can impact those we serve into the future.

Check out our newly updated and easily accessed website at www.crotchedmountain.org/planned-giving. There you will find all kinds of ways to give gifts of any size from bequests to life insurance to gifts that provide you, or loved ones, with regular income. Be sure to ask for your free Estate Planning Kit and uncover the giving option that works best for you.

To discuss how your legacy can support people with disabilities for generations to come, please contact Kevin Harte at 603-547-1489 or at Kevin.Harte@crotchedmountain.org. And don’t forget to check out all the amazing, free resources at crotchedmountain.org/planned-giving.

“Since becoming a donor and volunteer in 1998, I have come to know and respect the Crotched Mountain employees and the selfless work they do each and every day in serving and caring for children and adults with disabilities. It has been my great privilege to establish a Charitable Gift Annuity that both honors them and ultimately establishes a fund in my late wife’s and my name for their professional development and training.”
—John H. Adams, Crotched Mountain donor and volunteer

“I made a decision that was simple, free to arrange, and it will reduce a tax burden for my family. In addition to my annual gift, I named Crotched Mountain as one of the beneficiaries of my retirement plan. This combined giving allows me to help Crotched Mountain today as well as ensure its exceptional programs and services continue.”
—Nancy VanVranken, M.D., Immediate Past Chair, Board of Directors

“It was such an easy decision; I knew right away that I would become a member of the Don Kent Legacy Society. Having Crotched Mountain in my estate planning means I am still an important member of that lovely community. I’m reassured that, right through my retirement years, I’m continuing to serve those extraordinary children and adults with disabilities at Crotched Mountain.”
—Pat Whitney, retired Crotched Mountain employee

To receive the survey online, please email Erik.Labieniec@crotchedmountain.org.

Survey Says!

We value all of you who generously support children and adults living with unique challenges. What a difference you make in their lives! We couldn’t do what we do without you. So, we want to hear from you.

Please keep an eye out for the Donor Survey being mailed and emailed out this spring. You’ll be able to complete it online or on paper. The donor survey will help us get to know you better so we do a better job of engaging your interests. Thank you in advance!

To receive the survey online, please email Erik.Labieniec@crotchedmountain.org.
SNAPSHOTS

A CUT ABOVE

Alex, a Crotched Mountain School student, was due for a shave and a haircut. More importantly, he was due for a shave and a haircut in the community. For his very first trip ever to the barber, Alex, his staff, and his clinicians journeyed to nearby Goffstown to test out the communication and social skills he’s been working so hard at in his class at Crotched Mountain School. And it went great. And that’s a big deal. Looking suave, Alex!
In January, Crotched Mountain School welcomed educators from the New Hampshire Energy Education Project who guest-hosted science class along with Crotched Mountain science teacher Elliott Milford and showed students the ins and outs of electricity.

The Tenth Annual Bruins Alumni Classic was the largest ever! On February 29, hundreds of fans poured into Sullivan Arena at Saint Anselm College to watch Rick Middleton and other Bruins icons face off against the Crotched Mountain Wild, with all proceeds going to support Crotched Mountain Accessible Recreation and Sports (CMARS).

Learn more about CMARS at cmars.org

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Change lives and have the adventure of a lifetime.

Journey to Crotched Mountain School in beautiful New Hampshire to participate in a 12 to 24 month employment experience serving students in our residential program with disabilities and helping them lead awesome lives.

Perfect for recent graduates, people looking for a career change, or anyone eager for a unique life experience.

Change lives and make memories that will last forever!

- Free meals and year-round housing
- Competitive pay and full benefits
- $2,500 bonus at the end of your year
- Skills to build your resume
- Observe multiple clinical disciplines
- Enjoy all tax-free NH has to offer

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