



THE BIRDS' MAGICAL SEASON pg. 24

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**Devereux PA Children's Services:**  
Reaching New Heights of  
Education and Support for  
Individuals with Autism

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"The Devereux PA Children's Services Employment Training Program focuses on discovering and developing students' job skills, social skills, and self-care skills to prepare them for greater independence and empower them to become productive and happy members of society as they transition into adulthood. We have many business partners in the local community who provide meaningful job-training opportunities including a sign company, florist, laundromats, coffee shops, pizza shops, Wawa, and the Coatesville VA," said Ladislao P. Buljevich, M.A., employment training and transition coordinator.

# Empowered to Thrive

by JENNIFER UPDIKE  
photos by JODY ROBINSON

**Devereux Pennsylvania Children's Services** provides autistic individuals with the academic, social-emotional, and life skills needed to flourish in their homes, school, and communities.

**A**pproximately 1 in every 36 children in the United States receives a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. While having autism can present challenges, individuals with autism can thrive when they are empowered and nurtured in an environment of empathy, understanding, and individualized support.

Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health offers a compassionate and therapeutic environment where individuals with autism can achieve their full and unique potential. Founded in 1912, Devereux is one of the nation's largest nonprofit organizations providing services, insight, and leadership in the evolving field of behavioral healthcare. Devereux specializes in helping individuals with autism—throughout southeast Pennsylvania and across the country—lead happy, meaningful, and socially connected lives.

"When it comes to autism, one size does not fit all," said Devereux Executive Director of Autism Services Todd Harris, Ph.D. "Like all of us, each autistic person has a unique set of strengths and experiences that shape who they are—and we want to celebrate those differences and help them reach their full potential."

At multiple locations throughout the region, Devereux Pennsylvania Children's Services supports children, adolescents, and young adults—from birth to age 21—with autism spectrum disorders, intellectual and developmental disabilities, and emotional and behavioral challenges. Devereux's comprehensive continuum of services includes an acute-care hospital, Approved Private Schools, community-based employment training and social-skills training. Devereux Pennsylvania Children's Services also provides community-based mental health services, outpatient services, and residential treatment programs.

Richard F. Dunlap Jr., Ed.D., Devereux Pennsylvania Children's Services assistant executive director, joined the organization following a successful career as a teacher, principal, and superintendent in the region. His personal commitment to providing exceptional education and care for children and adolescents is aligned with Devereux's mission.

"Our comprehensive continuum of services supports children and adolescents with the development of communication, social, and independence skills needed to realize fulfilling, productive, and socially connected lives," he said. "Our programs and services utilize evidence-

based strategies, including Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports and Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)."

Devereux Pennsylvania Children's Services' state-licensed Approved Private Schools serve day and residential students with autism spectrum disorders, intellectual and developmental disabilities, and emotional and behavioral challenges. The center's co-educational schools offering full-time placement in for individuals with autism include:

- **Devereux Pennsylvania's Center for Autism Research and Education Services (CARES)** in Downingtown, and;
- **The School for Integrated Learning** in West Chester.

Devereux Pennsylvania CARES serves students, ages 5 to 21, with autism and other developmental disabilities. The program helps students achieve greater independence by focusing on communication and social skills, community inclusion, recreation and leisure activities, adaptive behavior, and employment.

"Days at CARES are filled with meaningful activities, functional tasks, laughter, music, and dance, with outstanding therapeutic support from our dedicated staff," said Devereux Pennsylvania CARES Education Director Jennifer M. Hassler, M.Ed. "Our mission-driven team members have a passion for guiding students toward positive outcomes. We problem-solve, collaborate, and create meaningful and unique learning experiences."

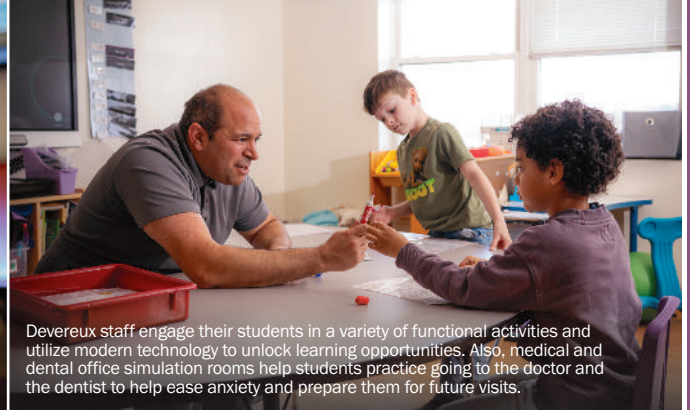
At CARES, families and caregivers play an integral role in achieving successful treatment and outcomes. This collaboration is supported through regular communication with teachers and classroom staff, as well as meetings to discuss Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and behavior support planning. In addition, Devereux provides person-centered future planning to develop a post-graduation vision for each student, as well as home consultations for families who request additional support.

Devereux Pennsylvania Children's Services' School for Integrated Learning provides full-time placement for youth, ages 6 to 21, with a curriculum designed to help each individual develop social, communication, and independent living skills. Notable program components include an employment training center, a small zoo, and community-based instruction such as field trips, work-study programs, and fundraising events.

In addition, the center's Devereux Day Academies in Norristown (grades 4 through 8) and Landenberg (grades K through 8) offer full-time placement for students who benefit from small classroom sizes, specialized staff, and other vital resources to help them flourish. Full-time placement also is available at the Brandywine School in West Chester (grades 1 through 12) and the Mapleton School in Malvern (grades K through 12).

Devereux's educational and clinical services employ the principles of ABA to develop effective teaching plans and behavior support strategies. Instruction is informed by research





Devereux staff engage their students in a variety of functional activities and utilize modern technology to unlock learning opportunities. Also, medical and dental office simulation rooms help students practice going to the doctor and the dentist to help ease anxiety and prepare them for future visits.



and evidence-based practices for students with autism and includes individual and small-group instruction, skills taught in the context of naturally occurring routines, instruction embedded within preferred activities, individualized prompting procedures, visual mediation, and data-based decision making.

One of the biggest challenges some people with autism face involves clear and effective communication. For these individuals, speech-generating devices, also known as augmentative and alternative communication devices, can help individuals express their thoughts, wants, and needs using electronic voice generation and other assistive technologies.

"There is no consistent approach in the behavioral healthcare field for instructing children on how to use speech-generating devices," Harris explained. "For autistic individuals, these devices can be life-changing, offering a way to

communicate and engage with the world."

Devereux is working to create a more structured approach for teaching autistic individuals how to use these devices, with the goal of establishing a systematic method to teach the necessary skills for more effective communication.

At Devereux Pennsylvania Children's Services, individuals and families with autism have access to programs and services well after one's formal education has been completed, helping young adults transition to various work, community, and home environments. In addition, families have access to Devereux's additional centers in the Commonwealth:

- **Devereux Pennsylvania Adult Services** supports adults living in homes/apartments throughout Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery counties. The center empowers adults with intellectual and developmental

disabilities, autism, emotional differences, self-management challenges, and brain injuries.

- **Devereux Pocono** supports children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, autism, and emotional and/or behavioral differences through community group homes; personal-care homes; life sharing; adult training facilities; and community services, including behavioral support services for adults and intensive behavioral-health services for children.

Devereux's personalized approach to care empowers youth and adults with autism to thrive. Each year, thousands of individuals across southeast Pennsylvania receive compassionate and highly specialized treatment in an environment best suited to their needs.

The goal: to provide each individual with the academic, social-emotional, and life skills needed to flourish in their homes, schools, and communities.

"At Devereux, we focus on the needs of each individual, and it is inspiring to see how, with the right supports, they can overcome challenges and grow in skills and confidence," said Harris. "Whether it is a child excelling in school or an adult securing meaningful employment in the community, the transformation we witness every day is truly remarkable. We are committed to supporting them on their journey to achieving their goals and flourishing in all aspects of life." ■



Devereux Pennsylvania Children's Services IDD and Autism Services PBIS Leadership team has successfully directed PBIS initiatives across both educational and residential programs. The team includes: Mary Kate McGee, M.S., assistant education director, School for Integrated Learning; Jennifer Whittaker, M.Ed., education director, School for Integrated Learning; Grace Fischer, BSW, D-PBIS coordinator; John Malinkowski, M.S.Ed., BCBA, clinical coordinator; Edward Vincent, MBA, program administrator; Devereux Executive Director of Autism Services Todd Harris, Ph.D.; Zaniel Young, MBA, MAPL, program director; and Senior Clinical Director of IDD and Autism Services Jenny Nielsen, Ph.D., BCBA-D.



For more information about  
**DEVEREUX PENNSYLVANIA CHILDREN'S  
SERVICES** or Devereux Advanced  
Behavioral Health, visit  
**[www.devereuxpa.org](http://www.devereuxpa.org)**  
or call (610) 873-4930.