

## Training Student Interns: A Win-Win Proposition



After working hard on the computer during occupational therapy with OT intern Shira Vasilevsky, Marc Riegler ends his session with fun on the bike.

“This experience has been a life-altering one for me, really terrific!” said Shira Vasilevsky, occupational therapy intern. Ms. Vasilevsky was finishing up a three-month placement and preparing her final presentation to HMS staff. As a result of her daily HMS immersion and experience treating students, she discovered that working in pediatrics is right for her.

A graduate student at Thomas Jefferson University, she said, “Everyone has taken every oppor-

tunity to welcome and include me as part of the staff and to teach me something...I find the practice here very meaningful and rewarding.”

Under the supervision of OT Trish Hamilton, Ms. Vasilevsky moved from orientation and observation to greater independence and treating a full caseload. “I learned a lot of OT skills that I need,” she said. “I also gained confidence for my career in terms of my creativity and initiating ideas, and learning how to relate to people with

disabilities who have limited ways to communicate.”

Ms. Vasilevsky is one of numerous interns who acquire training and experience at HMS over a typical school year. HMS teachers and therapists supervise interns in placements of varying length and intensity, depending on the particular discipline and its requirements and how far the student has advanced with her degree. Each intern leaves an impact on HMS.

“Good things come out of the experience,” said Ms. Hamilton, who has supervised many interns prior to Ms. Vasilevsky. “It gives our students a new face—some kids really respond to that, getting a whole new perspective during treatment.” And it’s a professional challenge. “You have to talk through everything and explain.”

Dance/movement therapist Rachel Federman-Morales agreed “I love supervising interns. They bring fresh energy and enthusiasm...I have someone to brainstorm with, someone to dialog with about goals for the group or an individual. And they bring ideas from their coursework—it’s a refresher for me.”

“When you’re new you also want to establish yourself and leave your mark on HMS,” Ms. Vasilevsky said, “so interns do special projects that are helpful and contribute immediately to the school.”

Wendy Lewis, speech/language therapist who graduated from Penn State with a focus on Augmentative and Alternate Communication (AAC), interned at HMS in 2006. When a position opened in 2007, HMS offered her the job.

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## Read a Book, Plant a Bulb!



Kendyll Weimer drops her flower bulb into a tube held by recreation therapist Karen Turek. The tube, at wheelchair height, allows Kendyll to plant the bulb as part of the school’s “Read a Book, Plant a Bulb” literacy project. Devon Slivka looks on.

Next spring, HMS will be in bloom! Students recently planted 162 flower bulbs in the school’s central courtyard. Each bulb represents a book that HMS youngsters read during a two-week literacy challenge in April. The project encouraged numerous ways to access stories—reading with parents or on the computer, listening to a book on tape and other options.

Students gathered outdoors on a gorgeous afternoon to help with the planting. Most dropped the bulbs through a tube held over the soil at wheelchair height. A few were able to throw their bulbs into the prepared holes with hand-over-hand assistance. Youngsters

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## Executive Director's Message

By Diane L. Gallagher, PhD

This issue of the newsletter highlights HMS's intern training program, an integral part of the school's strategic plan. One of our goals is to expand our outreach so that students not enrolled at HMS can also benefit from our expertise. By training interns across many disciplines, we potentially impact children throughout the Delaware Valley and beyond.

We are also extending our influence in other ways. Recently I attended a meeting of special education administrators, a division of the CEC—Council for Exceptional Children—that focused on out-of-district educational placements. My colleagues suggested that New Jersey's specialized private schools and public schools enjoy a more collaborative relationship than is true for their counterparts in Pennsylvania. Because we're all about providing the most appropriate education for each child, HMS, along with other Pennsylvania Approved Private Schools is working to strengthen that relationship within our state.

In proactively reaching out to area school districts, we are planning a one-day professional conference in 2010, hosted by HMS. Our working title, "Collaboration: Building Bridges to the Community," reflects our goal to address many of the issues parents and school districts grapple with in striving for the most appropriate education placement.

Presenters from HMS and area school districts will discuss the dilemma that arises when school districts and parents are not in agreement about a special placement. How can a child who doesn't fit the traditional special-education population still be accommodated in a school setting? How can a school with HMS's staff expertise help a school district to integrate assistive communication successfully in the classroom? These are a few of the topics we plan to address.

HMS's new website will include an extensive resource section for families and educators of children with disabilities. We can help site visitors to understand the range of needs and to access available resources, directing them to position papers on important issues or to experts both at HMS and in area medical and educational organizations.

In these and other ways we hope to broaden our sphere of influence and to positively impact relationships between those who determine services for special-needs children.

## HMS Remembers Dr. Manuel Album

Dr. Manuel Album, long-time dental consultant to HMS and a pioneer in dentistry for children with special needs, died November 30, 2008 at age 89. Dr. Album started HMS's dental clinic in 1956 and treated students for almost 50 years until his retirement. He cared deeply about their welfare and became a much-loved figure at the school.

Dr. Album enjoyed a distinguished clinical and academic career. He served as Chief of Dental Services of Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and later started a

clinic for children with disabilities at the University of Pennsylvania School of Dentistry.

His skill and compassion were noted not only regionally, but also by the international dental community. He received numerous honors and awards for his contributions to children's oral health and work on behalf of children with disabilities. He served as a mentor to many clinicians, including Dr. Robert Lloyd, who now continues the dedicated service to HMS that Dr. Album began.

## Open Houses Showcase Harris Hall

Families, educators, physicians, legislators and advocates for children with special needs visited HMS this spring during open-house events that showcased the school's residential program. Guests toured Harris Hall, the new state-of-the-art residence, and other areas of HMS to see essential program components in action. They observed assisted communication, power mobility and arts activities and the school's ability to manage children with complex needs. Tours were further

tailored to answer visitors' specific questions. Steven Bachrach, HMS Medical Director, was on hand to talk with visitors, along with other administrators and staff.

Because the new residence enables HMS to accommodate an increased number of students, open-house invitations went to professionals in states beyond Pennsylvania. Additional open houses will take place this fall to continue promoting HMS's program excellence and unique range of services.

## HMS Chapel Will Sparkle

With Harris Hall completed and occupied, the final phase of HMS renovations to the old residence and classrooms will take place over the summer. However, a facelift of the chapel, one of the original buildings of Home of the Merciful Saviour, is already underway. The space will come back to life as a welcoming common room for recreation activities, primarily for residential students.

Funds given in memory of Lorine Vogt, longtime HMS board member and chairman of the Capital Campaign, are making this

wonderful refurbishment possible. Paint has miraculously transformed the ceiling and walls of this historic jewel, its fine architectural details becoming even more visible. New carpet is being installed.

We are most grateful to St. Christopher's Church, Gladwyne, for their generous gift which enabled us to rehabilitate our lovely organ. Not only are we able to play this fine instrument, but the pipes and casing are now shining brightly. This gift also provided for rewiring and enhanced lighting.



## March Madness Rules!

Basketball fan Christian Matcovich ran a March Madness contest with help from Julia Birmingham, speech therapy intern. Using his communication device over the loudspeaker, Christian invited HMS students and staff to fill out brackets before the playoffs. He and Ms. Birmingham displayed the outcome of each game series on his "Mac Attack" bulletin board. Brackets closest to and farthest off the final results won prizes.

## WHYY TV to Spotlight HMS



Students in the after-school dance class performed this spring at the Painted Bride Art Center in collaboration with dancers from the fusion2 training company. Their original work was filmed for WHYY TV's "Arts and Culture: Experience" spot that will highlight HMS's dance/movement therapy program. From left, students Elisheva Apple, John Bailey, Ethan Jorgenson and Mark Riegler dance with volunteer Nicole Bouldin, dance therapy intern Courtney Kramer and fusion2 dancers Karissa Wenk and Arianne Wenk.

WHYY TV will feature HMS's dance/movement therapy program on its Arts and Culture *Experience* spot. *Experience* introduces WHYY viewers to regional arts and culture stories with the goal of building awareness and engagement. The two-and-a-half-minute videos are interwoven throughout WHYY's programming and air 20 times.

WHYY has already filmed dance/movement therapist Rachel Federman-Morales working with students at HMS as well as the recent performance by HMS's after-school dance class at the Painted Bride Art Center. The spot is not yet completed, but we will notify readers as soon as it is scheduled to air. Stay tuned!

## Art Show Opening Features Fabulous Student Work



(Left) Emily Whiteman, accompanied by dormitory aide Shirley Randall, shows her appreciation of a sculpture titled "Mountain" at the April opening of HMS's annual student art show. (Right) Guest judges for this year's art show represented three local organizations that benefit the arts and make the arts more accessible to diverse audiences. From left, Barbara Allen, executive director of Fresh Artists; Michael Norris, executive director of Art-Reach; and Tu Huynh, program director for Art in City Hall.



## Parents Corner

By Ann and Wink Herron

Our daughter, Emily came to HMS in September of 2000 and will graduate in June. When we looked to HMS for what we assumed would be her last educational placement, one of our primary concerns was the distance from our home (we only live 20 miles outside of Philadelphia). Little did we know that nine years later Emily would be a 5-day resident!

With the completion of Harris Hall and the additional space for 5-day and 7-day residents Emily was offered the opportunity to reside at HMS during the school week. The school's state-of-the-art renovation and addition of Harris Hall have provided Emily the ability to begin the transition process.

Over the last few years as we, with Emily began to think about transition opportunities and options, we focused on what Emily loves the most: lots of socializing with her peers, using her communication device and ability to use her power chair. Living at HMS has helped Emily to develop independence, make decisions for herself and begin to rely on other caregivers without direction and input from her family.

The spacious addition has allowed Emily to navigate her power chair with more confidence and control. We are told she frequently arises early to drive around the halls before daily activities begin. She is also honing skills with her communication device to interact more efficiently with both her peers and staff, as she needs to communicate with a variety of caregivers. Emily participates with her peers in extra-curricular activities such as horseback riding, and attends musical/theater presentations and afternoon dance classes to name just a few. Living at HMS during the school week has allowed Emily to grow both socially and emotionally as a young adult.

Now that the *future* has become the *present* our hope is that Emily will become a full-time resident at Margaret Moul in York, PA. HMS has given Emily both "roots and wings."

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Like Ms. Lewis, a number of current staff first interned at HMS. Christina Coia, director of education said, "It's a great way to conduct a pre-employment interview. And if an intern is good, it's like having another professional in the building."

Ms. Lewis, now a first-time supervisor, works with intern Julia Birmingham, another Penn State AAC student. Reflecting back on her own internship, Ms. Lewis felt it was an amazing opportunity, having an entire caseload of children with multiple disabilities and with a diverse range of abilities—both physical and cognitive. She found HMS positive and supportive. "Even as an intern I was encouraged to think outside the box and try something new," she said. Ms. Birmingham agrees. "It's a great placement."

For Ms. Lewis and others, supervision demands a major time commitment—meeting weekly to review treatment and to set goals; helping the intern to develop an independent professional identity;

overseeing the intern's reports and assessments; and preparing evaluations, reports and certification paperwork for the intern's study program.

Supervisors also insure each intern a full HMS grounding and understanding of the intricacies in working with HMS students. They may arrange the opportunity to treat a colleague's student whose challenges the intern finds particularly interesting. They make interns part of the team interaction, co-treating with other disciplines—they want interns' experiences to mirror HMS's philosophy and approach.

"My problem-solving skills have strengthened," said Ms. Birmingham, "just applying what I know and trying to mesh it with what everyone else knows...I've learned about working with other departments and skill sets. They've all helped me in treating students."

Ms. Birmingham also works well with her supervisor, Ms. Lewis. "It's interesting coming from the same school and program—to see this is what we learned in classes, and

this is how it translates to actually working in the school."

HMS has been committed over the years to training the next generation of professionals. The staff's dedicated guidance offers a big pay off to interns, but also to HMS. Interns become the school's ambassadors. They bring information back to their university classmates and instructors. As their careers take off, many maintain their relationship with HMS as professional colleagues. Today there are practicing teachers, therapists, special education supervisors and other professional decision-makers who first interned at HMS and now refer students to the school and in other ways collaborate with HMS staff.



### HMS School News Spring 2009

A publication of HMS School for Children with Cerebral Palsy, dedicated to reporting about student life, school programs and important events.

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HMS School is nonsectarian, admitting children from any locality without regard to race, religion, gender or country of origin.

The Mission of HMS School for Children with Cerebral Palsy is to educate, nurture, and care for children and youth with motor impairments who may also have other disabilities resulting from brain injury with the goal of assisting each individual in achieving his or her maximum potential. HMS School aims to facilitate independence and improve the quality of life for its students in a safe and secure environment so they can lead fulfilling, stimulating lives in their present and future environments.

## Read a Book, Plant a Bulb

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saw photos of the flowers that will emerge next year—crocuses, tulips, daffodils and other spring and early summer blooms.

Recreation therapist Karen Turek regularly leads gardening activities like this one. A grant from the Philadelphia Committee of the Garden Clubs of America funded several raised planting beds whose height accommodates youngsters in their wheelchairs, positioning students' arms close to the soil and plants.

Ms. Turek says that students benefit from gardening at many levels. It brings them outdoors. They enjoy the seasonal changes and the sensory experience of putting their hands in dirt and water, touching the plants and

smelling their scent. They get feelings of accomplishment and the satisfaction of watching plants flourish. The activities build skills in sequencing and following directions and can reinforce other educational goals like the literacy effort. And gardening exposes students to a leisure activity they can pursue outside of school, whether at home or in a post-HMS placement.

## Correction

In the Winter 2009 issue, an article titled "HMS Recreation Partners," misspelled the name of Barbara Wertheimer, Director of Pegasus Riding Academy. Our sincere apologies.

