

Bright Future opens third center in Porterville



This month, Special Services' Bright Future program opened the Bright Future Burton Center in Porterville. The center serves children, ages 3-5, with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and provides behavioral services using various strategies from the field of applied behavior analysis (ABA).

The Burton Center, located on the campus of Burton School District, is the Bright Future's third new center in a year.

"We already have centers in Visalia on the Liberty campus and in Farmersville on the Snowden Elementary campus. This site gave us the ability to serve families in the south county," said Bright Future program manager Ron Pekarek. At total capacity, the center will serve 16 children in three-hour morning or afternoon sessions.

"With multiple kids in the center, we can practice school-based activities like circle time, playtime, snack time, centers, and transitioning from preferred to non-preferred activities in addition to providing individualized ABA instruction," Pekarek said. "Our goal is to better prepare the children to be successful when they enter first grade at their district of residence."



Pekarek added, "We have data on in-home services, but not yet for our centers. Even though we can teach lots of skills and reduce problem behaviors, ASD spans their lifetime. We feel like we've gone back to the roots of why ABA became the treatment of choice for children with autism. That is so that students need less intensive support from district staff once they are in first grade."

Pekarek said one of the first challenges children have to overcome is being asked to do something when they want to do something else. "If you're engaged in something and an adult asks you to do something else, sometimes that is a struggle," he said.



With behavioral issues, the center staff works patiently with the children to transition them through their emotions and get them back on task. "Typical behaviors schools would send them home for, we try to work through," said Mindy Gomez, the center's supervising behavior consultant.

For example, on Friday, Logan, 3, wanted to play instead of doing his one-on-one time with his tutor, Damian Thomas. Thomas allowed Logan a few moments of play, then guided him back to his table and made a game of it.

"Let's race," Thomas said. "Ready, set..."

"Go!" Logan responded.

According to Pekarek, it was a good sign of progress because when the center opened a few weeks ago, Logan would not have responded.

Gomez said the two areas parents usually want help with are tantrums and communication.



When it comes to communication, one of the ways children learn what to do and how to say what they want is with the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS). The goal of PECS is to teach children with autism functional communication through the use of icons or pictures of preferred items. Children with limited communication skills can use these pictures to ask for what they want and communicate their needs to others.

The day is laid out for the children with a pictured schedule at the center's entrance. Each image represents the activity to be worked on and the order in which it is to be completed. When it's time to do an activity, the child takes the activity's image over to the activity's location and places it on the Velcro strip that matches the image.

Routines are essential to the children's progress, along with parent involvement. Gomez said parents will come in next month to see what is being done in the center, so they can then incorporate what they have learned when working with their children at home.

For more information on the Bright Future program, contact Ron Pekarek at ronp@tcoe.org.

Photo above:

~ Julian, 3, center, works with tutors during one-on-one time at the Bright Future Burton Center.

~ Damian Thomas, left, helps Logan, 3, during snack time.

~ Children at the Bright Future Burton Center learn how to share items and take turns during playtime.

~ The Bright Future Burton Center has a camping theme, and under each child's tent is their pictured schedule for their session.

ABC30 special features two Tulare County teachers

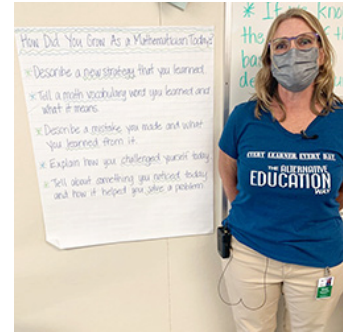
ABC30 will air the latest special in its *Children First* series on Sunday, October 3, at 6:30 p.m. Entitled *Children First: Amazing Educators*, the special will feature stories about teachers who have gone above and beyond to help Central Valley students during these difficult times. Among them are two Tulare County educators – Sophia Mejia-Taylor of Woodlake Unified and Lana Russo-Jimenez of Lindsay Unified.



Sophia Mejia-Taylor is the librarian at Castle Rock Elementary in Woodlake. Miss Sophia, as she is affectionately known, understands that Tulare County students struggle to achieve state literacy standards. To address this at her school, she has helped to remodel the school library into an engaging space and created a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics) Center with the help of students known as the Library Squad. During the pandemic when students were learning at home, Miss Sophia delivered books to them on her electric bike, nicknamed Nimbus 2000 after Harry Potter's first broom.

Lana Russo-Jimenez is a math learning facilitator at Lindsay Unified's alternative education sites. She once failed math and freely shares with students the report card to show them that one bad grade doesn't have to define them. She makes math come alive for her learners who typically struggle with the subject. Russo-Jimenez incorporates social-emotional learning into her lessons to help learners cope with any anxiety they feel about the subject. Russo-Jimenez also aides students in securing internships at local businesses.

The special will be hosted by Graciela Moreno and Warren Armstrong and is also available on the station's streaming apps. For more information, visit abc30.com/ChildrenFirst.



Red Ribbon Celebration set for October 25-29

The annual Tulare County Office of Education Red Ribbon Week will be held **October 25-29** with the theme of *Drug Free Looks Like Me*. The Red Ribbon Week committee will host fundraising activities throughout the week with an emphasis on making positive life choices without the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. This year, the committee has chosen to donate the proceeds collected during Red Ribbon Week to the American Red Cross Wildfire Relief Fund. The Red Cross provides funds to families affected by the wildfires who need to replace clothes or food, offset transportation or lodging costs, and any other immediate needs.

Orders for the Red Ribbon t-shirts – now on sale – are **due by Friday, October 1 at noon**. For a copy of the order form and to see updates about Red Ribbon Week, visit tcoe.org/RedRibbon.



Learning Resources

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