



# Living Healthy *with* PWS

## LathamCenters Quarterly Newsletter



*Latham Centers creates opportunities for independence, self-worth, and happiness for children and adults with complex special needs.*

## Latham Students Welcomed 2021 with Gratitude

*By Cara Losapio, Residential Supervisor*

Throughout 2020, our students were faced with so many challenges in a world that could be both confusing and scary at times. As the world drastically changed around them, our students worked harder than ever to not only face their everyday challenges, but to adapt to the “new normal” and to make the best out of every situation.

In that spirit, Latham said farewell to 2020 by all coming together for a virtual New Year’s Eve celebration. While this year’s festivities may have looked different than those of the past, no fun was lost! Before the real party kicked off with dancing, the traditional countdown and televised fireworks, the students were asked to participate in a mindfulness activity.

The year 2020 brought a lot of disappointments and hard times. From adjusting to socially distanced living, canceled family visits, virtual learning, and limited ability to explore the community, it would be warranted if our students chose to lament on the struggles they faced. However, in true spirit of Latham, our students instead shared messages of positivity and hope.

When asked what the best part of her year was, Angel excitedly shared that she was still able to see Mommy virtually and that she was looking forward to more parties this year!

Olivia, our resident Fashion Diva, shared that her favorite memory was her 21st birthday party at Latham and that this year she is looking forward to learning how to model!

One of our shyer students, who has chosen to remain anonymous, wrote that the best part of 2020 and what she was most grateful for was being with her friends and staff.



Bridget shared that the best part of 2020 was moving suites “feeling like herself again” and that she was grateful for Latham after advocating for more support, exemplifying dedication and perseverance to personal growth in the face of adversity.

Annika did not let the “new normal” stop her from being a normal social teenager this year. She giggly shared with delight that the best part of her year was getting a boyfriend!

Even those who tried to maintain their too-cool-for-school attitude couldn’t hold back! When asked what the best part of 2020 was, Annabel stated, “Nothing but one thing.” That one thing was repairing a relationship with a peer and learning how to not only share a space, but to become friends. What was she most grateful for? “Having a family of girls I call friends and supportive staff helping me.”

*“While they could have justifiably  
had an attitude, our students  
instead chose to show their gratitude!”  
– Cara Losapio*

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Now that 2020 is over, what are their wishes for 2021? One thing every student agreed upon was for COVID to be over!

Daniel is looking forward to being able to travel for home visits again, as he is most grateful for his brother, sister, Mommy, and Abba.

Matthew is looking forward to going back to regular school – no more social distancing!

Homer can't wait to be able to see all his friends in person again!

Latham may be strong, but our students are even stronger! Let their positivity inspire you throughout this New Year!

## Staff Highlight: Ashley Pouliot reflects on Latham Community

Admissions Assistant Ashley Pouliot epitomizes the caring and hardworking team members dedicated to Latham's mission. She joined our team over a year ago, and she has already made quite an impact. She wears many hats, from Virtual Social Hour scheduling to new-parent contact to videographer.



Latham Centers recently published a Staff Spotlight about Ashley, and the social media engagement was phenomenal, with dozens of website blog views, more than 500 Facebook views, and 245 Instagram accounts reached. Comments included, "Amazing team tirelessly supporting beautiful individuals," "...You are all miracle workers...no doubt about that,"... and "Another amazing team member. We are always grateful for how willing Latham is to educate, inform and help!"

Director of National Outreach Katrina Fryklund interviewed Ashley for the Spotlight:

### ***What is your favorite thing about working at Latham Centers?***

Ashley: There are many favorites. One is seeing the kids on Storytime and Social Hour. You can tell this has been something that children look forward to. They have been able to build relationships and friendships with peers from around the country and are always so involved, whether it's their night to read, socializing, or dancing and participating in the mindfulness.



*Pictured: Admissions Team (together on campus pre-Covid), and Ashley in one of many Zoom meetings this past year.*

***You are the first Admissions Team member to be awarded Staff of the Month at the monthly Student Community Meeting. Congratulations! How did that feel?***

Ashley: I was very excited and honored. I work amongst a group of exceptional co-workers. They have all taught me so much working at Latham, and the staff here really amaze me every day. The direct care staff make every day so memorable for the students. I am so impressed by the dedication and commitment that our staff have in support of our incredible student community.

***How would you describe the Latham Community to someone new to Latham Centers?***

Ashley: I would describe it as a very tight community. You can always see that staff come together to ensure the safety and education of all students. You can see students playing card games, exercising, preparing for Special Olympics, Student Council, and if a peer is having a tough day, the students and staff make sure they belong. I think everyone on campus wants everyone, staff and students, to find success. I am truly honored to be a part of the Latham family.

***"My favorite day thus far at Latham is the first student intake I was a part of; seeing the student so happy to be at Latham, their parents' joy, and being so excited to join his peers and meet new friends."***

***– Ashley Pouliot***



# Winter Wellness at Latham Centers

By Katrina Fryklund

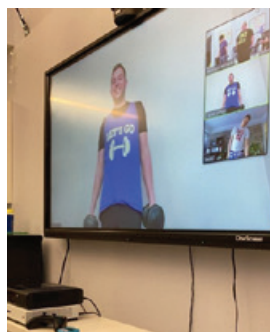
Health and wellness are top priorities in our world of nutrition, daily weight checks, calorie counting, and fitness. Our winter initiatives are fun and creative, boosting energy and inspiring everyone around campus.

**Fitness:** In January, Latham announced an exciting venture with *Let's Go Fitness*, geared towards individuals with Prader-Willi syndrome and other complex special needs.

This online platform enables all of our students – from their different suites on campus and even at home – to participate in a variety of virtual fitness classes led by and intended for those within the PWS community. The students have really enjoyed *Let's Go Fitness*, and they especially love the new addition to their weekend and afternoon routines. As you can see from these photos, everyone is beaming ear to ear and working hard. *Let's Go Fitness* creator Keegan (Dante's father) writes on their website, [www.lets.go.fit](http://www.lets.go.fit):

*"Dante has a rare genetic disorder called Prader-Willi Syndrome (PWS). Among other challenges, PWS causes low muscle tone, low energy and a constant hunger. Although Dante loves sports, getting Dante to be active and managing his weight have always been a challenge. His transformation started in the middle of the COVID pandemic. Little did we know how far it would go."*

Monique Williams, Latham's Director of Health and Wellness, has managed the campus launch and oversees the program. "So far, the *Let's Go Fitness* program has gone amazingly well," Monique said. "We've been happy to partner up with the *Let's Go Fitness* team! The kids



have been able to participate in activities such as Yoga and Fitness, and it's nice to see so many kids participate each week; especially those who would typically be hesitant to try a group exercise activity!"

**Dining:** Also introduced in January, our new Winter Menu is a thoughtful collaboration by our expert kitchen staff. With a focus on seasonal and healthy foods, the menu sees a four-week rotation of meals that will continue until the unveiling of our Spring Menu. Students, staff, and parents made suggestions, and some meals were "piloted" over the past few months during special menu days.

The menu took into consideration the successes of our previous menu, and changed certain areas allowing for seasonal variation and adjusting calorie counts. "We have looked for ways to make the calories count for where we think they should count," Monique said. "For example, some of the items offered for certain meals, we have changed in some way shape or form and then have used those omitted calories somewhere throughout the rest of the day to give them more nutritional value throughout the day."

The new menu allows students to make small choices with their meals, such as adding fresh fruit to their cereal or providing items on the side for students to create their own meal. Kitchen staff continue to follow all student meal plans and dietary needs, upholding Latham standards for mealtime.

The new menu items are a hit! Meals include Chicken Marsala, Veggie Burgers, Beef Stroganoff, Shrimp Scampi, Turkey Dinner, Pasta with Marinara Sauce, and much more!



"I love all of  
the new meals!"  
— Justin



## Virtual Drawing Class Guest Teacher Shines

By Katrina Fryklund

Latham Centers' Outreach Team is so grateful to Hannah H., a recent Guest Teacher in their Virtual Animals of the World Drawing Class!

Every Tuesday, Latham's Admissions and Outreach team members instruct students with Prader-Willi syndrome around the country through an online lesson about animals of the world. These animals are cute, majestic, silly, or extraordinary! In January, Hannah H., a longtime attendee of Latham's virtual community, led her peers through a lesson about unicorns, her favorite animal.

The drawing class led by Hannah was excellent! Hannah knew in advance of this surprise lesson for her peers and took her job very seriously. She researched unicorn facts and wrote down the most interesting information that her friends needed to know. Then, she and her mother typed them on the computer for practice. With glee, Hannah instructed students and helped teach everyone how to draw a unicorn, step by step.

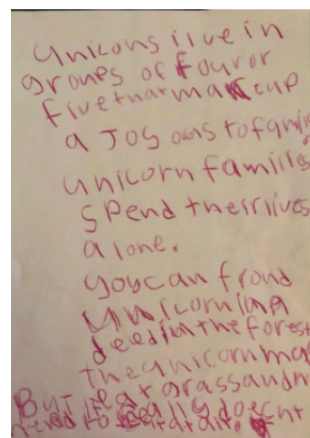
The team is so proud of Hannah for her hard work over these last few months. She has made new friends and

thrived in our virtual programming, including taking on a leadership role.

Meanwhile, she has been working on being her best self, focusing on health and wellness and losing almost 60 pounds, and sharing her happiness and unique abilities with all of us.

Latham's growing virtual community has changed the lives of many children and their families. Director of Program Marketing and Admissions Brittini Kliment is delighted with the progress of our virtual community.

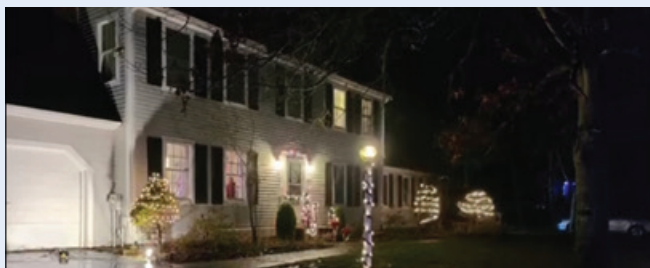
"It has become an incredible opportunity for individuals with PWS across the country to be able to connect, build friendships, and feel a part of the larger community. Seeing kids catch up with one another every week has been fulfilling for our entire team. Additionally, we have heard from parents who are proud of their child's growth in this virtual world."



## "Holiday Light Fight" Brought Cheer to Adult Program

Santa's Cheer Squad invited the Adult Services Program staff and individuals to join in a HOLIDAY LIGHT FIGHT contest! Residential Manager JoEllen Whatley reminded staff, "I'm sure by now you have heard about our contest, but if not I have included the flyer with all the information. Many of our residents have been focusing on the positive and having a fun time decorating. There's a bit of time left to complete the outside of your homes exploding with holiday cheer!" Photos of all 11 houses were shared throughout the program so each resident could vote on the two categories of Creative/DIY and Best Holiday Theme. The effort brought joy to the entire Latham community – including our residential neighbors!

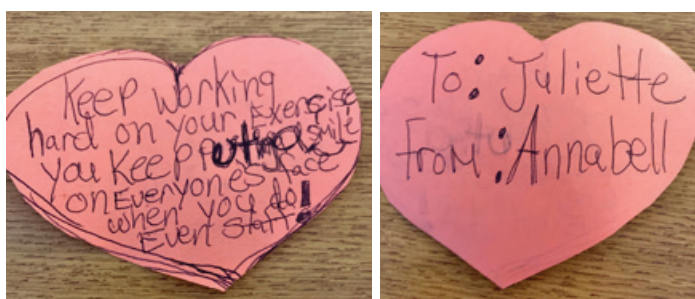
The video showing the house decorations is available here: [https://youtu.be/XVc\\_-EqNQWg](https://youtu.be/XVc_-EqNQWg)





## A Heartwarming Valentine's Day

"Love and friendship was in the air as we celebrated Valentine's Day," in the words of Children's Program Receptionist Abby G. "This year's festivities were extra special – since Valentine's Day was on a Sunday, we got to feel festive all weekend! The suites made Valentine's Day cards and decorations, and Sunday's bingo theme was full of love – with bingo cards full of Valentine's words and phrases. Students dined on a delicious dinner that featured "Chicken-Pom-Adore-You" (chicken parmesan), pasta, green beans, Love Potion punch, and cherry pie for dessert. Tables were decorated with tablecloths and centerpieces to make it a special evening. Students and staff felt the love!" Latham's Education Team shared images of handmade heart-shaped cards. Special Education Aide Joey Mallon wrote, "Keeping with the positivity of vaccine week, with Annabell's permission, here are just a couple of the notes she wrote to her peers for Valentine's Day. They filled me with joy and I hope they do the same for you."



## Latham Dedicates New Adult Homes

In an especially moving Home Dedication Ceremony for two new accessible homes for individuals in our Adult Program, the Latham community came together over Zoom to honor Roland "Chip" Gagnier and James Polito. The celebration on February 24th acknowledged the exceptional work of Chip and James, both of whom were instrumental in helping Latham Centers bring the vision of the residences to reality. The 2-minute video slideshow highlighting the journey and thanking the honorees is available online: <https://spark.adobe.com/video/QfGK4FqYovVWq>



## Rare Disease Day

On Rare Disease Day (February 28th), we celebrated the extraordinary people in our lives diagnosed with PWS. In addition to sharing "I Am Special Because..." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2V2y-zfb-ds&feature=youtu.be> – a wonderful video created by Latham's Children's Program team – Patrice Carroll, Director of PWS Services, noted: "We know that there are challenges, but we also know the joy and beauty they bring to our lives. Take this day to enjoy the children and adults who keep us smiling every day."

