Coffee Shop Prepares Students For Life Beyond PRSA

A

nn afternoon coffee break is a daily routine for many. For the
staff working at Pressley Ridge’s Pittsburgh Campus – which
includes the Day School Pittsburgh and the School for Autism –
their coffee break is much more meaningful.

Three days each week, students from the Pressley Ridge School for
Autism (PRSA) operate a coffee shop on campus. On the surface,
the PRSA Coffee Shop offers a welcome service to the staff in the
form of beverages and snacks, but it’s the students who run the
shop who benefit much more than the customers.

The coffee shop is a therapeutic environment where the students
learn valuable social and vocational skills, including appropriate
work place etiquette. The are four jobs: greeter, snack stand, barista
and cashier. Each job has specific expectations that vary based upon the individual student’s needs and abilities, which increases the
students’ chance for success.

The use of meaningful Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) in the coffee shop is encouraged. AAC includes
various methods of supplementing or replacing speech to convey wants and needs. When a student uses any form of AAC, a unique vocabulary is developed for
communication in the work environment, which promotes communication in
settings outside of the classroom. Group conversations are led by PRSA’s Speech-
Language Pathologist, and social language and the art of “small talk” become a
byproduct of the work environment.

Though staff are closely monitoring, students working in the coffee shop are given
the least intrusive level of prompting to promote independence. The staff are also
able to identify each student’s strengths and weaknesses, which can be used to
develop a work-biography to be passed on to future placements.

For our students, the PRSA Coffee Shop is an important stepping stone between a
highly structured therapeutic environment and the real world, and it is just one of
the many ways we prepare our students for life after Pressley Ridge.

Congratulations, Class of 2017

28 students graduated this spring from
Pressley Ridge’s six schools, plus dozens
more from other programs.

Summer 2017 Newsletter

Champions for the Community

The children of Pressley Ridge are big fans of the Stanley Cup
Champion Pittsburgh Penguins – both on and off the ice. Over the
past five years, the Pittsburgh Penguins Foundation has supported
our kids with nearly $75,000 in financial contributions that
have provided art therapy and educational tools for children and
young adults with autism. During the most recent NHL season,
groups of Pressley Ridge kids from Pittsburgh and Johnstown, PA,
Morgantown, WV and Western Maryland were treated to the unique
experience of watching a game from the Sidney Crosby and Evgeni
Malkin Charity Suites. One youth said, “Thank you for giving me
one of the best Christmas ever. Seeing the Penguins was a once-in-
a-lifetime experience for me.” One lucky group of kids not only got
to experience a Peng-win, they also sat next to Christina Aguilera,
who graciously took time to take photos with our kids!

We are so grateful to the Pittsburgh Penguins Foundation for their
continued support of our kids and families.

Two Decades of Devotion

Henrietta Thomas has cared for more
than 100 foster children in her
20 years as a foster parent.

IN THIS ISSUE

2016 Year in Review

• 6,812 individuals were served in 58 programs across 6 states
• 1,403 youth were placed in foster homes. 71% returned to their biological
  family, were adopted or were sent to another family-like living environment.
• 4,774 children, adults and families received community-based mental and
  behavioral health services. 79% showed positive growth and change.
• 222 youth received educational services. 90% of eligible students graduated
  with a high school diploma.
• 413 youth participated in residential treatment programs. 65% returned home
  or were sent to a family-like living environment.
• Upon completion of services, 88% of individuals experienced stronger family
  connections.

Since 1832, Pressley Ridge has done
whatever it takes to create success
for children and families.

From therapy and treatment to foster
care services and education for children
with special needs, including autism
and deafness, Pressley Ridge empowers
kids and families with the ability and
confidence to succeed.

Pressley Ridge serves communities in
Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia,
Maryland, Virginia and Delaware.

To get involved or find out more
information, visit PressleyRidge.org.
Letter from the President

It’s hard to believe that what would one day become Pressley Ridge began as a passion project for the First Presbyterian Church sewing circle. In the summer of 1832, they opened the Pittsburgh and Allegheny Orphan Asylum as a refuge for children who had been orphaned by the recent cholera epidemic. The home’s purpose was described as “protection, relieving, supporting and instructing orphan children.”

Now, here we are 185 years later delivering that very same mission to a larger, more diverse population than those women could have ever imagined. Pressley Ridge still offers protection, relief, support and instruction through mental and behavioral health services, foster care and education for children and families experiencing difficult situations. As you can see throughout this newsletter, success is defined differently for each of the nearly 7,000 individuals we serve. But there is one common thread between each of these stories — strength. Whether we are providing a child with a temporary family to give their own family time to heal, supporting parents by giving their child the special education needed to succeed, or empowering families with the skills and understanding to grow together - the ultimate goal is always a stronger family.

Though it is our staff directly affecting these families, it is the support of the community that has allowed us to do whatever it takes for 185 years. The people in the communities we serve have embraced our mission and supported our families, and for that, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

Suzanne L. Cole
President and CEO

A Youth Voice for Mental Health

In collaboration with the Beaver County System of Care, Pressley Ridge is honored to be a part of the Beaver County Youth Ambassador Program, which aims to spread awareness and reduce stigma related to mental health issues among high school students. The program began in 2016 with representatives from five school districts, and by next school year, the list will have grown to 15 with as many as 10 students participating from each.

During two events held in early 2017, the students attended workshops and heard personal stories of mental illness, advocacy and recovery. The ambassadors also discussed ways to alert their peers how and where to find help. Student-designed posters featuring inspiring messages and helpful information will soon be hung throughout the halls of the partner schools. In addition, ambassadors volunteered to speak about their own mental health experiences for a compilation video that was shared on Children’s Mental Health Awareness Day on May 4.

Congratulations to the Class of 2017

This spring, 28 students graduated from the six Pressley Ridge Schools, along with dozens more from our foster care, community-based and residential programs. These students have experienced varying degrees of adversity in their young lives, yet through hard work and determination, they have succeeded.

Kira, who recently transitioned to independent living from Pressley Ridge foster care, is just one of this year’s commendable stories. Throughout high school, Kira maintained straight As while working part time and taking free online college courses. She graduated with honors from Hamilton Local School and will attend Miami University Hamilton in the fall, where she was awarded nearly $100,000 in scholarships and plans to study forensic investigation.

Steve came to Pressley Ridge Day School Johnstown at the age of 12 with a diagnosis of Selective Mutism. He struggled with academics, refused to participate in group activities, ignored instruction and became physically aggressive. In his eight years at the school, he made great strides and eventually began responding verbally in class, making friends and even participating in a school-to-work program at REL where he now hopes to secure full-time employment. Steve’s mother proudly boasts, “Pressley Ridge has been a life saver. I now get to see my son, whom I never expected to graduate, not only graduate, but with the highest grades...and the opportunity to go on and further his education. There are many more shining examples of success in the Pressley Ridge Class of 2017, and we are proud of how far they have come. No matter where they are headed, we wish them the best of luck.

In Memoriam - Robert G. Runnette

Pressley Ridge mourns the loss of Bob Runnette, dedicated member of our board of directors for nearly 40 years, most recently serving as the chair of the Pressley Ridge Foundation Board. He greatly supported the mission of Pressley Ridge, and his leadership has contributed to our ability to serve children and families in need for decades. His commitment to Pressley Ridge was unwavering, and we are grateful to have had his guidance and wisdom over the years. His legacy will continue in our mission to do whatever it takes for kids and families, not only today but well into the future.

Events That Make a Difference

Events not only generate funding that is vital to our programs and services, these events allow us to spread our mission in the communities we serve.

Events

Cocks for Camp - May 11th at The Art of Entertaining, Cincinnati

Sporting Clays Shoot - May 15th at Seven Springs Mountain Resort

Presented by TeleTracking Technologies

Save the Date

Ice Cream Fundae - Central PA

Presented by Highmark

July 29 - Indian Echo Caverns

Ice Cream Fundae - Pittsburgh

Presented by Graeter’s Ice Cream

August 13 - Pittsburgh Zoo & PPG Aquarium


You Have the Power to Be the Difference

There are many ways to impact the lives of the children and families of Pressley Ridge.

Community Service

Many of our program centers are in need of improvements such as swimming, landscaping and gardening. Corporate volunteers, service groups or individuals can give just a few hours of their time to make a visible difference.

Backpack Giveback

Many of our families are unable to provide the most basic necessities for their children. You can host a collection drive for non-perishable foods, toiletries, school supplies, coats or other essential items.

Donate

Your gift of any amount will give more than 6,800 children a chance to succeed. Please use the enclosed envelope, call (412) 872-9435 or visit PressleyRidge.org/donate.