

Reflections

A magazine for family, friends, and supporters of The Camphill School

SPRING + SUMMER 2024



The Camphill School
1963 - 2023

Reflections

Cover & Below:

Our students are looking forward to fun this spring and summer!

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Editor's Letter



“

The whole world is a series of miracles, but we're so used to them we call them ordinary things.”

—Hans Christian Andersen

In celebration of the school's 60th anniversary, our last issue of *Reflections* looked to the past, sharing stories of students and staff members who experienced the school during the past six decades.

For this issue, we will remain firmly in the present. The stories within these pages explore the journeys of current students and their families. Like those in the fall issue, each of the families was searching for a place their child could be themselves, where they could be recognized as someone who deserves to lead a life with meaning and relationships where they can be known and appreciated for who they are.

Our students and their families often discover the school during a difficult time when they start to believe there is no true place for them. Like many who visit Beaver Run or Beaver Farm there is a sense of disbelief that a school and community like Camphill is here. We are grateful to be here for all of our students—past, present, and future—and are equally grateful to all those supporters who have helped our school remain resilient over the past six decades.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Courtney".

Courtney Coffman
Editor

We Know

By Anna and Scott Thomas, Ella's Parents



Imagine there are a thousand unique ways to arrive on the Beaver Run campus of The Camphill School and know within an instant that it is the right place for your child. Perhaps it would be the stunning views, or the interesting buildings, or the sights and sounds of a vibrant community where all are welcomed, understood, and valued. For us, it was *The Joy of Cooking*. The day that we came to tour this unknown school for our rising kindergartener with a set of special needs related to an unknown genetic disorder whose impact was still unknown, *we knew*. We saw copies of *The Joy of Cooking*, a book given to me by my mother and to her by her mother, the book I now have two copies of as the bindings of my first have dissolved. That book was sitting on the shelf in the kitchen of almost every house we visited, every classroom we observed. *We knew*.

What we did not know, was the impact that Ella coming to The Camphill School would have on her, on our family, the way we raised our children, our health, friendships, and understanding of who Ella is. We did not know that in kindergarten, we would meet Annika, who taught us that Ella was perfectly capable of joining others at a table for a meal, and that bread dough wrapped around a stick and cooked over an open fire then slathered with butter would become a new family favorite. We did not know that Mary would soothe her at rest time and rejoice with us when she learned to accept that restoration. We did not know that Emma would take Ella for long walks, that Ella would start to sing the songs she heard, and that she would independently walk onto the school bus for the first time.

When we met Ginny, with her warm smile and kind heart, we knew Ella's transition to the lower school would be easy. We did not know that we would have seven years of a class that felt more like a family, of birthdays celebrated, field trips taken, plays, and sneaking pictures of the kids during concerts before phones were prominent.

We did not know we would have so many fond memories of class picnics held at our house, of big spreads of food and the laughter of students and coworkers sliding down a water slide in our back yard. We did not know that Sonja and Tobias would become steadfast supporters of Ella's experience at Beaver Run, always providing a safe place to land through various transitions in house parents and teachers.

We certainly did not know what to expect as Ella transitioned to high school. We did not know that life would get harder for a while; we did not know if Ella would get to enjoy all of the things a high school student should enjoy: the dances and proms and special outings. We did not know that epilepsy would dictate Ella's life for a few years. We did not know that daytime nurses would need to be added to Ella's cadre of support so that she could remain safely in the school program. We did not know that Sarah, Peggy, and Shirley would become Ella's biggest advocates—yes, bring her even though she is having a bad day—yes, we will get to know and love Ella's nurses—yes, we will support a very strict diet and multiple medication changes—yes, she belongs and will be safe.

We know now that Ella did go to dances and her prom and that at her high school graduation, Sonja would read her a special letter describing Ella's heart and soul and assure us that the world was ready for her. We did not know that Justine would become a special part of Ella's life,



and the only name Ella has ever spoken out loud. We did not know what to expect when Ella transitioned to Beaver Farm, except that *we knew*. We knew she would be just as loved and cared for and supported in meeting new challenges. We did not know that Ella would find expertise and confidence in herb processing and egg washing, but we knew she would love to see her friends and get in a little bit of trouble for being rowdy. We are so grateful to Sam, Toni, and everyone at the farm for seeing her for who she is and letting her be twenty.

So, as we are facing the last full year of Ella's time with Camphill, what do we know? We know the name of her genetic

disorder. We know how to better manage the challenges associated with it. We know that Ella can sing almost any song she hears, has a great sense of humor, is able to work when it is time to work, rest when it is time to rest, and have fun in the process. We know that in writing this piece, we missed acknowledging dozens of other people that impacted her life over the last fifteen years. We hope you all know that we have seen, we have noticed, we have appreciated. We know the future is uncertain, but we also know what the possibilities are, who Ella is and what she is capable of. We know this because of her time at Camphill. *We know*.

What do I want to learn today?

The classroom at the Transition Program

By Ginny Thimme

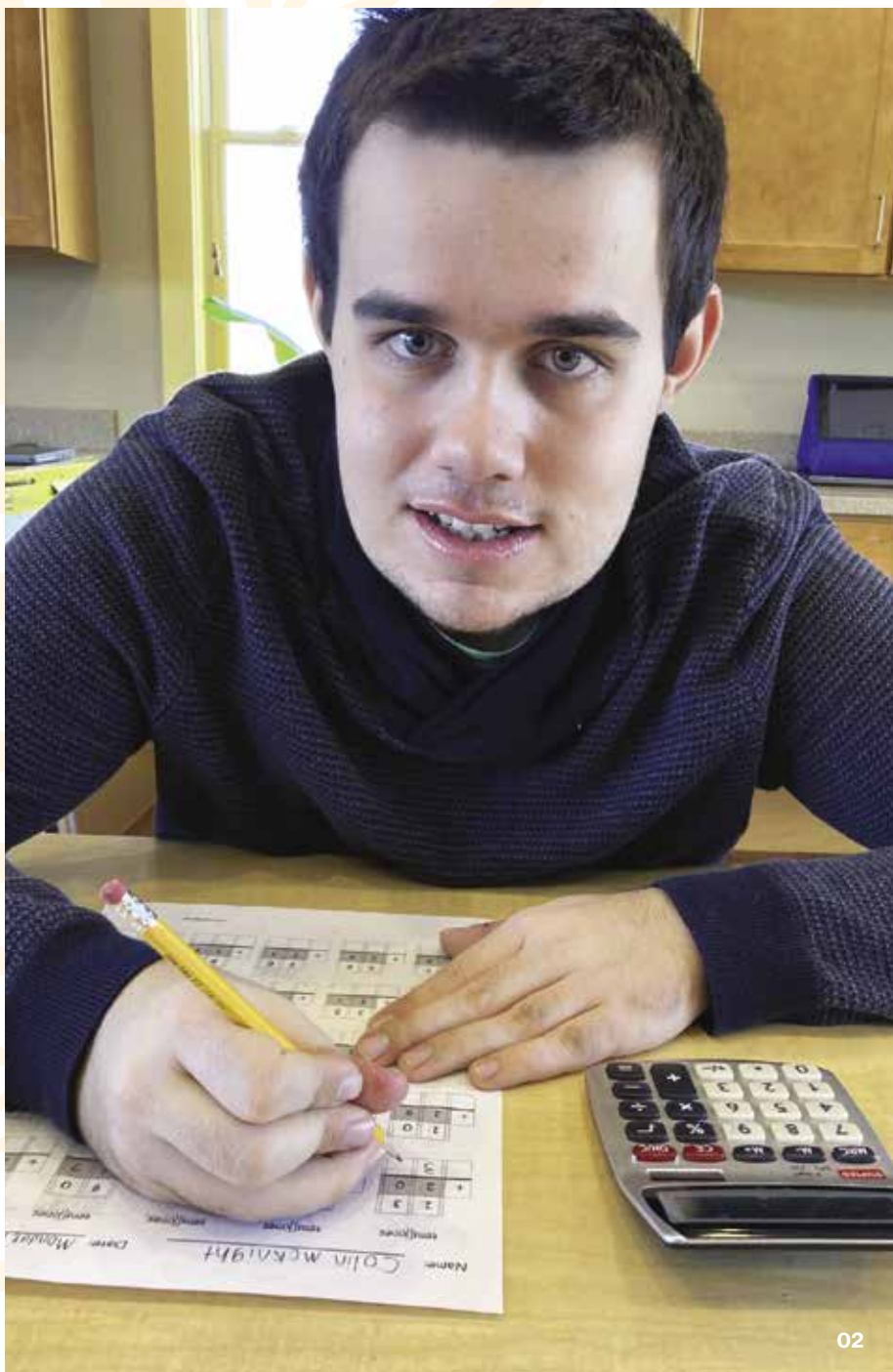
There is so much work going on at the Transition Program! Everyone is active, engaged, and busy: tending the live-stock; growing crops, herbs, vegetables, and flowers; or working in the kitchen turning the produce from the farm and the garden into delicious nutritional meals for all to eat; or working in the workshops transforming the raw materials produced on the land (the plants, flowers, wood, and wool) into pieces of art and beauty. There's also a Childcare group, which is new this year.

A group of students might be working in the greenhouse watering the plants or cutting some salad for lunch, another group might be feeding the pigs or collecting the eggs, whilst others are chopping vegetables in the kitchen, or setting the tables in the dining room, or weaving a tablecloth in the weavery, or cutting back brambles and stacking logs with the estate crew. As well as each individual student learning important vocational and social skills, everyone is contributing to the work, well-being, and life of the community as a whole.



01

02 / Colin makes calculations



02

Amongst all of this industry, there are also moments of stillness: a hush before blessing the meal, a few moments of silence after eating, a quiet walk in nature, or a moment to be peaceful at snack time or at rest time after lunch.

The classroom in the Ed. Center is also a place of stillness. Muddy boots and jackets, hats and gloves are shed, hands are washed, fresh water is drunk, and the world of work and labor and responsibility is forgotten for a moment. We sit up

and we breathe out. Books are opened, pencils are sharpened, the limbs come to stillness, the head takes over, and now each student is only responsible for themselves: What do I want to learn today?

We look at the clock and we check the time; we look at our calendar and we check the date; we look outside and we check the weather; and then we look inside and we check ourselves: How do I feel today?

Many of the students enrolled at the Transition Program spend some time each week working in the classroom. Some work on writing their name, address, age, and birth date; others are working on computer skills, or calculating skills, or learning to tell the time. Some students might be filling out demographic forms, or writing lists of job interests and job experiences. Whilst others might be working on their interview skills.

There are also students who want to journal, or paint, write poetry or songs, or emails to their parents, or they want to read inspiring stories and biographies. Others might be given writing prompts or exercises that help them to answer the questions: Who am I? What am I here to do on this earth? Many students need guidance and help to make their life goals realistic and attainable.

For others, it is still OK to dream for a while . . .

Ginny Thimme was a class teacher at The Camphill School for many years and is now one of the Special Ed. teachers at the Transition Program.

John's Journey to Acceptance

By Maryann Merion, John's Mom

Acceptance and inclusion are vital components of the emotional health and wellness of any individual. They are even more crucial for our special children. At Camphill, acceptance and inclusion are not merely included on a checklist of objectives; they are integrally woven into the fabric of the entire Camphill community.

John's journey to TCS began in eighth grade, while a student in the autistic support program at the local public middle school. Fraught with lingering undiagnosed medical issues and subsequent behavioral concerns, John's IEP goals transformed from substantial, measurable growth to sheer regression. As such, primary objectives shifted from mastering his existing skill set to managing his current behaviors. Speech therapy was suspended. He was excluded from field trips. I was informed by his autistic support teacher that John would never progress beyond his current levels. Everything pivoted on behavior. Everything was reactive.

What I didn't realize at the time was the impact that alienation and exclusion had on John. His inability to effectively communicate his physical and emotional pain became overwhelming for him. This deficit compounded things even further. When behaviors heightened after entering ninth grade, the need for change became evident. Desperate and alone, alternative special education options were sought.

After touring several schools, I felt somewhat hopeful for John's future but never quite completely. Daunted, I reached out to a friend whose son attends Camphill. This is when the journey changed from harrowing to hopeful. John's potential ninth-grade teacher came to observe him at school. There, Sally saw something in John that even I had failed to recognize: the dire need for an inclusive and understanding environment. This, she conveyed, was not only an essential educational component but a vital condition of personal growth and fulfillment. As fate would have it, John's first day at Camphill was on Sally's birthday, a coincidence she has fondly referred to as her "birthday gift."

John became residential at the Farm this past September, and the strides he has made in such a short span of time are testament to the successful and flourishing philosophies which TCS espouses. I am more than just grateful for what the Camphill community has afforded John. I am humbled and awed by the level of genuine and unwavering commitment which abounds. Not a single speech therapy session missed. Not one field trip denied. Here, unconditional acceptance is the norm, not the exception.





Turn your Pennsylvania personal or business tax dollars into tuition assistance!



Left / Phoenixville Federal Bank & Trusts President/CEO Doug Darlington (center left) and Assistant Vice President/ Marketing Director Matt Johnson (center right) present an EITC contribution to The Camphill School's Courtney Coffman (left) and Claus Sproll (right).

Thank you to these businesses and individuals who have participated over the last year:

Anonymous

- Craig and April Adams**
- Scott and Jen Althouse**



The Pennsylvania Education Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) program enables you to redirect your Pennsylvania tax dollars – almost dollar for dollar – to The Camphill School, for tuition assistance for our students from Pennsylvania.

- Title Insurance & Trust Company Shares Tax Insurance Premium Tax (excluding surplus lines, unauthorized, domestic/foreign marine)
- Mutual Thrift Tax
- Malt Beverage Tax
- Retaliatory Fees under section 212 of the Insurance Company Law of 1921

To qualify for the program, businesses must pay one of the taxes listed below. Individuals qualify if their Pennsylvania state taxes exceed \$3,500 annually. Effectively, you or your business can donate to The Camphill School instead of paying taxes to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Eligible businesses and individuals can receive a tax credit equal to 75% of their contribution to The Camphill School. This credit increases to 90% if you or your business commits to give the same amount for two consecutive years.

For businesses, application deadlines apply.

If you want to support the school and make a gift directly to the school, you will get a tax deduction, yes, but the majority of that donation is still a cost to you. If you make a gift to the school through this EITC program, it can offset almost your entire PA tax bill – in other words, the donation comes at almost no additional cost to you. You are basically redirecting who gets the money when you pay your state tax bill, which you have to pay anyway.

Any business authorized to do business in Pennsylvania subject to one or more of the following taxes may be eligible:

- Personal Income Tax
- Capital Stock/Foreign Franchise Tax
- Corporate Net Income Tax
- Bank Shares Tax

To learn more, contact Courtney Coffman (ccoffman@camphillschool.org) or visit camphillschool.org/ways-to-give.



Fran Kinniry



Liz and George F. Ohsiek, Jr.
Bill and Faith Parshall



Fun in the Sun!

Will you make a donation so that our students and their house communities can take trips during our Extended School Year (ESY) program?

These weeklong stays at the beach and mountains or day trips to area cultural and educational attractions expand our students' horizons. These excursions provide memorable and educational experiences that serve as an extension of classroom, home, social, and therapeutic learning. Traveling together also secures and reaffirms the bonds and relationships between peers, teachers, and housemates.

Make your donation online at camphillschool.org/summeradventures.



The Camphill School
1963-2023



SCAN ME
TO DONATE
NOW!

Our Daughter Shines

By Frank Angelini, Natalie's Dad

What does it look like when a child flourishes? What kind of setting helps a child flourish? We know how it looks when our daughter, Natalie, shines: She's happy, confident, expressive, and loving. We also know the sort of teacher-student relationship that fosters growth in our daughter. She was fortunate to have a home program with an extraordinarily talented teacher for three years. Our search for a school setting that could match that was a challenge.

Throughout much of Natalie's home program, we focused on getting her ready to apply to a school other than Camphill, one with a good reputation but which, in retrospect, has a fairly rigid structure. Would that school have helped Natalie "fit in" to society? Perhaps. Would it provide her the opportunity to flourish and "be herself"? We were undecided on that point as we continued to consider seeking enrollment there.

In the course of seeking placement for Natalie, we decided to explore Camphill. As soon as we arrived, it "clicked": Natalie would blossom here! Immediately, we were struck by the nurturing vibe exuded by the buildings and the grounds. The entire school felt like a place that would

strike the perfect balance of comfort and challenge, providing a safe base that would bring out the best in Natalie. We could see her beaming as we explored the campus. Camphill went to the top of our list.

The entire process of joining the Camphill community was positive, including the admissions process and the trial classroom session. After the latter experience, it was clear to us that Natalie wanted to be at Camphill in the coming fall.

Prior to Natalie starting, a fellow Camphill parent told us that, over weekends and holidays, their child looks forward to returning to school. That has indeed been the case for Natalie. We can always count on her to smile during the ride to school, and she often jumps out of the car and runs to her building when we arrive. After her first full week at Camphill, Natalie told us, "They *get* me!"

We appreciate the thoughtful communication from Natalie's teacher. It's customary for teachers in "mainstream" schools to inform parents when their child is struggling. Natalie's teacher shares the ways in which our daughter shines and uses them as foundations for growth in other areas.

After a year and a half at Camphill, we have seen so much growth in Natalie. She is more affectionate, communicative, and expressive than ever. We are grateful that our family has had the opportunity to become part of the Camphill community.





In

Search

of the

Miraculous

Join us to celebrate The Camphill School's 60th anniversary with an elegant evening in support of our students and community. Guests will enjoy dining, dancing, bidding, a performance by our students, and will be the first to hear a very exciting announcement!

Thursday, May 30
6:00 to 10:00 p.m.
Meredith Manor,
2270 Pottstown Pike,
Pottstown, Pa.

Music by:
Almost
Minnesota

Our auctions
will allow you to
bid on items for
yourself *and* for
our students.

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is proud to induct
**PANORAMA
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as *Corporate Partner.*

In commemoration of
our **60th anniversary**,
we will also honor our
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Elegant evening attire

To sponsor, purchase admissions, advertise in
the program, or to bid on auction items visit

bidpal.net/camphill2024

For more information contact Sarah at
sdowns@camphillschool.org
or 610.469.9236 x133.



The Camphill School
1963-2023

Parent Support Group

The Camphill Parent Support Group is open to all parents of students at the school. It provides a forum in which to share personal experiences, feelings, and coping strategies. Benefits of participating include:

- **Feeling less lonely, isolated, or judged**
- **Reducing distress, depression, anxiety, and fatigue**
- **Talking openly and honestly about feelings**
- **Improving skills to cope with challenges**
- **Gaining a sense of empowerment, control, and hope**
- **Improving understanding of your child's challenges and your own experience with it**
- **Getting practical feedback about various options for you and your child**
- **Learning about a variety of resources**

The support group meets one Sunday per month at 10:00 a.m. over Zoom and is announced via email. While each meeting usually focuses on a specific theme, the structure is sufficiently flexible so as to allow a variety of conversations related to being a Camphill parent. We hope to see you!





PLEASE JOIN US

May 30

60th Anniversary Gala (see page 14) bidpal.net/camphill2024

2024

VISIT CAMPHILLSCHOOL.ORG FOR MORE DETAILS ABOUT ALL EVENTS.

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The Camphill School's mission is to create wholeness for children and youth with developmental disabilities through education, extended family living, and therapy so that they may be better understood, they may more fully unfold their potential, and they may meaningfully participate in life.

The Camphill School does not discriminate on the basis of race, age, color, creed, gender, sexual orientation, national or ethnic origin, religion, or disability.

