

Get Your (Child (with Autism) Out and Do a Lot of Things!

"Getting Out" Not Only Expands a Child's Knowledge and Physical Well-Being, It Also Can Result in Jobs

Joanne Lara, MA, CTC Ed Specialist

Temple Grandin realized that her thinking was different from others when, many years ago, she asked someone to think about a church steeple, at which time she discovered that other people visualize a "vague, generalized, pointy thing."

"I see only specific steeples I have seen in the past; there is no generalized, pointy thing," Temple explained in her book *Temple Talks ... about Autism and Sensory Issues*. "My concept of a steeple is based on lots of specific examples I put in a file folder in my mind labeled 'steeple.'"

As a result of this basic difference, Temple and many others who now are beginning to understand the autistic brain, advise parents to do whatever it takes to get their child "out and do a lot of things. It is important to fill the mind with many images they can look at. Imagine an autistic child's brain starting as a vast, empty Internet,

equipped with a good Google search engine. You need to fill it up ..."

In other words, push the parameters. Don't let your child stay home playing computer games or watching TV because they're intimidated by other environments, people, or strange animals. Scientific studies are, more and more, validating what Temple learned years ago. Get outside and EXPERIENCE, and you will not only find things you like and may help your social skills and knowledge about how vegetables or flowers grow, you might also find a vocation you'd love and be superlative at doing as work.

While vocational programs in public schools used to teach these various experiences in home economics, shop, and various other programs before No Child Left Behind was created, most of those programs don't exist in public schools anymore, so it's imperative to get your child on the spectrum to venture out to fill their senses, expand

their experiences, and, perhaps, even find a vocation in which they'd excel.

Each of the programs in this article has two distinctive attributes. 1) They invite kids and adults on the spectrum to visit and experience the outcome of what they produce or do; but 2) they also offer jobs to those on the autism spectrum as part of their programs to help stop the skyrocketing unemployment of those on the autism spectrum. All of them but one are located in California (although the New York Smiles company has just recently opened another greenhouse operation in CA). Multiply the possibilities of any of these programs by 49 additional states, and you might begin to make a small dent in the unemployment problem of those on the autism spectrum.

You might also like to share what great adventures you have in your own neighborhood with the *Autism Asperger's Digest*. Let us know at jonathan@fhautism.com.

A list of these programs includes:



- | | | |
|----------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Shemesh | 3. Spero Vineyards | 5. Special Spirit |
| 2. Smile Farms | 4. Danny's Petting Farm | 6. Atypical Place |



SHEMESH ENTERPRISES

(www.shalominstitute.com)

*A Source with Soul and Season
with Purpose!*

Shemesh Enterprises is a social enterprise that empowers and develops independence for young adults with “different abilities” through employment, internships, and social connections. The jobs program is the centerpiece of the overall enterprise, which is housed on 220 acres in the mountains of Malibu, five miles from the Pacific. The Shalom Institute is based on expansive facilities, with programs that serve more than 25,000 people annually in camp, special activities, and jobs.

“Shemesh” translates from Hebrew into “Sun,” which, quite literally, is the essence of the Shemesh Organic Farm, Shalom Institute’s summer overnight camp for children, which includes those with developmental disabilities, their community events, bakery, and the enormous undertaking they’ve created since Shemesh Enterprises’ inception in 2012.

The vision for the Shemesh Farm Fellows’ program came from Bill Kaplan, who visited Israel on a Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles mission to see how Israel provided for adults with developmental disabilities, with farming and its products offering jobs.

Not only is Shalom Institute a retreat center and camp that includes those on the autism spectrum and other youth with disabilities, it employs 34 adults with developmental disabilities on its farm. The program is not, however, a residential program for the “Farm Fellows” (the workers).

The Farm Fellows come to work in Shalom Institute’s Shemesh Organic Farm and Garden, bake in the Shemesh Bakery, work in the

organization’s social media and marketing department, and participate in health and wellness activities at Shalom Institute, which include hiking, meditation, basketball, social skills building, yoga, and visiting the farm animals, among others.

The products of their work—primarily produce, herbs, and baked goods—are sold by the Farm Fellows in Los Angeles’ area farmers markets, at community organizations, as well as at Shalom Institute’s community events. Shemesh Farm stands are also staffed by the Farm Fellows. Farm stand profits support Shemesh Enterprises and its continued growth.

“We believe that being out in nature is therapeutic for people of



“We have established a tone at Shemesh that is warm and welcoming, but also professional, forward thinking, innovative, and, overall, a very cool vibe.”

all abilities,” says Michele Cait, director of Shemesh Enterprises. “We created Shemesh Enterprises in part so that adults with developmental disabilities would have the opportunity to work in a camp/farm environment with trees, plants, and animals that would not only give them a paycheck but also enhance their well-being. We have witnessed the positive impact of this environment on our Farm Fellows. We have established a tone at Shemesh that is warm and welcoming, but also professional, forward thinking, innovative, and, overall, a very cool vibe.”

“Everyone who either visits our Farm and Garden or is a patron at our markets wants to be part of our magical, vibrant, working community,” adds Cait.

Founded in 2012, all the original Fellows still work for Shemesh,

although some work at other jobs in addition to Shemesh. When they turn 26, they are still able to be employees of Shemesh because, like other companies, employees continue to grow with the company, as has been the case with the Shemesh Fellows.

Major funding and support come from a \$200,000 Cutting Edge Grant in 2015 from the Jewish Community Foundation of Los Angeles. The program was piloted in 2014 with a generous grant from the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles, private donations, and revenue from the farmers market sales, with additional funding from the Jewish Federation Valley Alliance. The Jewish Federation continues to fund Shemesh Enterprises annually.

Shemesh plans to launch its Shemesh Farm products online soon

so patrons can purchase from all over the country. That will also open up new employment opportunities for the Fellows in shipping, packaging, media, and technology.

"Presently we are honing in on our Culinary Table Salt and Pink Pepper line and are expanding our fresh dried herbs and spices that are also sourced from our garden and handcrafted by our Fellows," explains Cait.

The slogan for those products is "Source with Soul and Season with Purpose."

The farm also makes garden stones, organic lip balms, and various other products for sale from their "green," eco-friendly environment.

The farm director is Davis Watson, who oversees gardens and animals, but subscribes to a policy of allowing the Fellows to take frequent breaks to visit the animals and undertake other activities regularly. Fellow Jacob Artson explains:

I have learned from Shemesh that I can succeed at anything I set my mind to and that if I keep working hard I can become better even at the things that are most difficult for me. Thank you to everyone at Shemesh for helping me to learn these important lessons!

In addition to Shemesh Enterprises, Shalom Institute also has about 40 autism spectrum disorders (ASD) children who come to Camp JCA Shalom (www.campjcashalom.com), an overnight camp (for children ages 7 to 17) for summer and winter camp and seasonal weekend retreats.

Shemesh 'Farm Fellow' Neal Katz Feels Connected to God

Fellow Neal Katz says he's a 'simple guy' and challenges others to contemplate his world.

"I work at camp JCA shalom in Malibu. I water trees, plants, and herbs in their organic garden. I pick ripe lemons, oranges, and olives. I use hay to insulate the trees in the winter. It makes me happy to work.

"I feel connected to God when I am working in nature. I see God's work in the earth and want to feel it in my hands. When I am in the garden and working, I feel God's call, and I answer him by doing the work he started. When God was creating the earth, He created plants on the third day. I am continuing God's work when working at JCA.

"Everyone says I am a simple guy and, really, I am. I wish everyone was as simple as I am. The world would be a much less complicated place if we all tried to do God's work and not the work we convince ourselves we ought to do.

"When watering trees, I think about giving back to the earth what she gives to me and to the earth.

"Earth is like a giant circle.

"It's a give and take; however, not enough people give.

"This year I challenge everyone to give more to Earth's giant circle and take less. Be more aligned with God's vision and see how much *you* grow as a result."



Neal Katz is employed at Shemesh Enterprises in Camp JCA Shalom.



SMILE FARMS

(www.smilefarms.org)

They Built a Greenhouse That Changed Everything

Fifteen years ago, Jim McCann, founder, chief executive officer, and chairman of 1-800-flowers.com, and Chris McCann, president of 1-800-flowers.com, built a greenhouse, which may seem like an ordinary task for someone in the flower business, but it was far from it.

It was a special greenhouse for developmentally disabled adults to give them an opportunity to become an intricate part of their community through jobs provided in a safe, nurturing location for socialization and productivity.



It all started with a phone call from the group home in Moriches, NY, where Jim and Chris' brother Kevin live. The home was having difficulty finding local jobs for all of its residents and was hoping the McCanns could leverage their business relationships to help with such placement.

Knowing firsthand the importance of integrating developmentally disabled adults into a community structure and a little something about flowers, Jim and Chris sprang into action and personally funded a year-round greenhouse operation to create those jobs.

From its peaceful nook on the east end of Long Island, the

Flower Barn was born. It quickly became an enrichment epicenter for developmentally disabled adults who age out of traditional educational programs at 21 years old.

Since 2001, year after year, Kevin and his housemates have grown flowers and plants that are sold to local florists and communities, providing them with a steady salary, lasting social ties, and an unmistakable sense of pride. The families of these newfound gardeners quickly saw positive changes in their demeanor.

It became clear to everyone that the Flower Barn was filling a huge gap

"The McCann family believes that, as citizens, neighbors, co-workers, and friends, they should make a difference in the communities in which they work and live. More importantly, they are passionate about delivering smiles."

in social services for these important members of our communities.

As word spread of the Barn's success, Jim and Chris started getting calls from families across the country about expanding and assisting the group homes in their respective areas. The seed was planted; brainstorming began and the concept of partnering their business with this humanitarian cause took shape.

The McCann family believes that, as citizens, neighbors, co-workers, and friends, they should make a difference in the communities in which they work

and live. More importantly, they are passionate about delivering *smiles*.

So, at the beginning of 2014, the McCann family created "Smile Farms," a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting developmentally disabled adults by building fully operational, self-sustaining greenhouses that provide meaningful work, social interaction, and *immersion* in the communities in which they work across the country.

On September 18, 2015, the Flower Barn transitioned into a Smile Farms, which has the goal of partnering with citizens, corporations, and government entities to fund and create an additional five farms over the next five years, spreading smiles one job at a time.

Smile Farms employs 35 farmers, 30 of whom are developmentally disabled adults in the Independent Group Home Living facility. As of its official opening in September 2015, the farm had 17 greenhouses, a mum field that doubles as a pumpkin patch in the fall, and a micro-green growing house. The Smile Farm wears the proud label of "All-American Grown."

Volunteers are welcome and fund-raising events are planned when visitors can enjoy the greenhouses filled with mums, hanging baskets, annual and perennial flowering plants, palms, papaya, ferns, dracaenas, microgreens, and more! Visitors also have the opportunity to speak to the farmers and see how passionate they are about their jobs. Some of their responsibilities include mixing soil, potting plants, cleaning the area, helping customers, art projects, maintenance of the greenhouses, and watering plants. It is the perfect way for visitors to see how much the farmers enjoy working while earning their own paycheck.

Smile Farms recently expanded into Turlock, CA with a three-acre community farm, which hires adults with developmental disabilities and

invites everyone "to work side-by-side to grow vegetables," which are raised "pesticide free." Smile Farms' "Community Bridge Builders" supports their adults with developmental disabilities to become contributing members of their community through their farm, which harvests vegetables to go to members who have paid in advance for a share of the harvest (similar to a coop). Produce is delivered to members in Modesto and Turlock who have ordered a season of vegetables.



SPERO VINEYARDS

(www.sperovineyards.org)

Spero's Viticulture Vocational Training is Located in "the Napa of Southern California"

Spero Vineyards offers student tours of its vineyards by reservation, so it offers an opportunity for schools and students to get out and learn about vineyards, but the company's primary program is its Viticulture Vocational Training program, which



seeks to tackle the growing challenges of unemployment among adults with disabilities by offering a solution to one of the most significant barriers in agricultural production—matching highly trained and dedicated workers with employers who need their service. Mark Woodsmall, co-founder of Spero Vineyards, explains the

"Students in the program receive instruction in the history and culture of the wine country, viticulture science, hospitality, business marketing, and various ... agricultural aspects of the winemaking business."

goal, which is "to grow our resources to support the education and advancement of 200 Global Citizens by 2019, in which young adults with developmental disabilities are welcomed into this program."

The program currently serves 12 to 14 students in a class that runs for an annual growing season. The students are not paid while they train, but they also do not pay for the training, which many working institutions require.

Young trainees earn a vocational certificate in viticulture (the science, production, and study of grapes) and food handling and customer service certificates at the completion of their program with the Temecula-based winery.

Students in the program receive instruction in the history and culture

of the wine country, viticulture science, hospitality, business marketing, and various theoretical and hands-on agricultural aspects of the winemaking business.

The classroom sessions and the vineyard experiences are interactive and hands-on to stimulate and engage students. Versatile job skills that apply to a variety of environments are taught with a high return on relevance. The goal is to train a highly specialized workforce capable of delivering a quality end product.

Of the 36 students the company has worked with thus far, more than 50% has secured full/part-time employment or internship opportunities.

In the first two cohorts of 10 students each, 12 gained employment after completion of the program in

areas such as retail (Jolly Jumps, Vons, and TJ Maxx), personal business (Super Clean Home Services), City of Temecula internships (Human Services, Mary Phillips Senior Center, and Information Technology), County of Riverside-Department of Education, Spero Vineyards, and the Department of Rehabilitation.

Currently, the project has 1380 vines of cabernet, zinfandel, and tempranillo under cultivation, with plans to expand the vineyard by an additional 2,000 vines.

Spero Vineyards' Viticulture Vocational Program is a unique public-private partnership among project organizers and vineyard owners, Mark and Eva Woodsmall, the City of Temecula, and the Temecula Valley Winegrowers Association. Spero

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Vineyards Viti-culture Vocational Program is located within the City of Temecula's larger program called Global Citizens Viticulture & Hospitality Vocational Program. The Spero project entails vines under cultivation. Located in Temecula, a region of southern California where grapes flourish, the area is often referred to as "the Napa of Southern California."

Leonest, Ponte, and Wilson Creek wineries have been very supportive, lending their technical expertise and facilities support. The program currently does not have any financial support from any companies.

Spero also has the benefit of working with several noted professionals in the field: Gwennyth Palafox, PhD, who specializes in behavioral interventions, psychological supports, and, most importantly, innovating individualized work training programs for adults in transition; Dr. Edward Palafox, DPT, who is a physical therapist who provides consultation on body positioning, establishing a stable footing for work in the vineyard. Both Ed and Gwyneth contribute to the program curriculum and Michele Alaniz, the director of pediatric services at Casa Colina Hospital, provides consultation on occupational therapy.

The students gain self-confidence from the experience, according to Trainee Diane, standing in front of her family, teachers, and peers at Spero, talking about the job skills she learned through the program:

Spero prepared me to get a job and get ready for life. I learned so many job skills and forms of communication. I got a lot more social, and Spero really brought me out there. I learned about how to prune and harvest, and I felt so proud of myself. And, funny thing, I learned about the "body of a vine," and I didn't know vines had a body.

She makes a joke and smiles, brimming with confidence and job possibilities. She speaks excitedly about a job interview she will have and feels proud to have learned such important skills. Parent Susie Brown spoke with considerable enthusiasm that her child had received valuable skill sets in the program and could now blossom:

My daughter, Melanie, was the first Spero employee. She was Vineyard Manager, and she felt exactly like she was, a confident, proud person who was paid for her hard work. Our special population has a sense of humbleness, sweetness, and compassion that the rest of us don't have, and we should honor and support these strengths and special skills.

Schools, Programs, or Research That Explains the Value of "Getting out" into Gardening:

<http://occupational-therapy.advanceweb.com/Student-and-New-Grad-Center/Student-Top-Story/Gardening-For-Autism.aspx>

<http://www.proflowers.com/blog/horticulture-therapy-flowers-and-plants-help-autistic-children>

<http://patch.com/california/temecula/spero-vineyards-in-temecula-celebrates-autism-awareness-month-in-the-inland-empire-through-special-needs-vocational-training-programs>

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/blog/2015/10/05/%E2%80%98fruits-employment%E2%80%99-vineyard-employs-adults-autism>

Coco Winery, one of Spero's first models:
<http://www.cocowine.com/contents/english>

see also: <http://www.downhomeranch.org>; www.extraordinaryventures.org



DANNY'S FARM

(www.dannysfarm.org)

Offers a Petting Farm That Welcomes Children and Adults with ASD

Danny's Farm offers a nurturing petting farm with goats, sheep, mini-horses, and mini-cows to focus on and develop a social environment for children and adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and other developmental disabilities.

Their inclusive farm is based at Cal Poly Pomona in the Veterinary Science and Agriculture Departments. Students at Cal Poly work alongside the employees with and without disabilities and volunteers with ASD, creating an inclusive setting. "Safety concerns are first and foremost and



is staffed accordingly," states Cathy Gott, owner. The farm employs four adults with developmental disabilities, including Danny Gott, her son with ASD who has welcomed countless visitors most months of the year since 2007 when the farm first opened.

Because the farm is seasonal and needs more staffing during the spring and fall, Danny's Farm hires vocational programs, such as Villa Esperanza and Almansor Center, to send crews of three employees and one job coach during these three-month peaks. Jobs include ticket taking, as well as grooming, setting up, and cleaning up of the animals and grounds.

"On a number of occasions, non-verbal participants visit, and the beauty of interacting with animals is that words are not necessary."

While Danny's Farm is open to the public, it provides specific outreach to the special needs community, thanks to the generosity of its donors. In addition, it has a "mobile petting farm" that serves the neediest of children, those too disabled to travel to the farm.

Jim and Cathy Gott created the facility because "Danny always had a tremendous affinity for animals, and we were thinking of healthy ways that Danny could work and thrive as an adult," says Cathy. Their facility may well be the precursor of a movement that has taken hold in the last five years, which involves parents and siblings creating businesses specifically to hire those with ASD because they are aware of how difficult employment is for them, even though many young adults with autism are talented and eager to work.

"It is a joy to watch the magic unfold at Danny's Farm," says Cathy. "Witnessing our expert staff guide a visitor through the farm is a beautiful

thing. On a number of occasions, non-verbal participants visit, and the beauty of interacting with animals is that words are not necessary. Many times, visitors are fearful of the animals, but gentle guidance and starting with smaller animals, such as bunnies, causes the fear to dissipate and the comfort to increase."

"It has been a heartwarming adventure on many levels. Seeing a community wrap its arms around a cause that benefits so many is at the top of the list. Touching the lives of its participants is at the top as well."

Over the past 10 years, Danny's Farm has attracted thousands of visitors. Regular field trips are scheduled to several school districts and special day classes, and Danny's Farm can be seen at numerous Autism Awareness events throughout the Los Angeles area.

Founding Farmer Danny Gott says that "working at Danny's Farm is a great experience for me. I have an information booth and welcome all the kids to the farm as well as answer questions about the animals. I hope everyone will come by and have fun and learn about animals."

Visit Danny's Farm at Cal Poly Pomona on most Saturdays. Admission is \$4.00. To schedule a Mobile Farm

experience, contact the Farm Manager at (909) 896-7741. For donor relations, volunteers, or to schedule a visit, call (626) 632-0826 or visit <http://dannysfarm.org>.

Animals & Health

Studies have shown that animals provide numerous health benefits to people and, in particular, reduce anxiety and provide social support. <http://center4research.org/healthy-living-prevention/pets-and-health-the-impact-of-companion-animals/>

One study shows that the introduction of pets can improve prosocial behavior in children with ASD. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3411605/pdf/pone.0041739.pdf>

Farm animals are being used as part of a therapeutic strategy to improve social-emotional outcomes for people with ASD. <http://modernfarmer.com/2014/02/animal-therapy-autism>.



SPECIAL SPIRIT RANCH

(www.specialspirit.org)

***An All-Inclusive, Equine
Therapeutic Center Where
Children and Adults Become
Empowered***



Danny Gott and Alec Baldwin, fundraiser

In addition to being an outdoor and physical activity, horseback riding helps with building gross and fine motor skills and also strengthens core and leg muscles. The movements of the horse under the riders make them increasingly aware of the location of their body in relation to the horse. The riders also must remain engaged at all times to stay balanced.

Riding is fun and exciting, and it encourages riders to talk to instructors, volunteers, and, above all, the horses. Several of the non-verbal kids start



talking by asking the horse to move forward. Most of our kids are receiving a variety of therapeutic services. What sets riding apart is that it does not

approximately 1,000+ riding lessons per year. Older riders are offered the opportunity to volunteer.

All lessons are 45 to 50 minutes, which includes grooming and tending to the horse as well as riding. Most parents like the young kids to ride in groups because they can socialize, and it also gives parents a chance to talk and exchange information about the program and their children.

Funds for the program come from parents, who pay \$55 for a single lesson or \$45 a lesson if they sign up for a session of eight rides. The program also offers scholarships, pending funds availability. The

"By working with the horse and interacting with volunteers and other riders, the riders' self-confidence and sense of competence soars ..."

feel like "therapy"; instead, it is an enjoyable, outdoor activity and engages all the senses of the rider concurrently.

"Most of our first-timers may have tantrums, scream, and cry when they come," says founder Eva Lund. "However, once on their horse, these behaviors generally stop. The movement of the horse is very soothing and calming."

"Some kids have to come to the barn several times before their senses adapt to new smells, noise, etc., because many of our kids are very sensitive to change, so we work slowly and methodically to get them used to this new environment."

"By working with the horse and interacting with volunteers and other riders, the riders' self-confidence and sense of competence soars," adds Lund.

At Special Spirit, the owners believe that all kids are special, regardless of their "diffabilities." They have between 35 and 42 weekly riders, with

program is underwritten with grants from the Lakers Youth Foundation, Neighborhood Council, Weingart, Capital Group, Aidan's Red Envelop, All Glory, and individual donors.

Animals & Therapy

Articles on the bond between human and animals that may contribute to OT release and oxytocin mediated effects:

Beetz, A., Uvnäs-Moberg, K., Julius, H., & Kotrschal, K. (2012). Psychosocial and Psychophysiological Effects of Human-Animal Interactions: The Possible Role of Oxytocin. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 3, 234. <http://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2012.00234>

The study provides preliminary evidence that improved volition may be an important and under-recognized benefit of hippotherapy for children with autism:

Taylor, R. R., Kielhofner, G., Smith, C., Butler, S., Cahill, S. M., Ciukaj, M.

D., & Gehman, M. (2009). Volitional change in children with autism: A single-case design study of the impact of hippotherapy on motivation. *Occupational Therapy in Mental Health*, 25(2), 192-200.



ATYPICAL PLACE

(www.atypicalplace.org)

School Children and Special Needs Education

Atypical Place hosts educational programs for local schools and organizations interested in farm-based learning at Trabia Farms near Templeton on California's central coast. It provides farm tours to support school programs that educate approximately 300 children about where their food comes from and how to develop healthier eating habits.

A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, Atypical Place is dedicated to providing farm-based learning for adults and children with cognitive and other developmental disabilities using a "holistic approach so everyone learns from one another," says Dr. Elizabeth Burton, corporate secretary and spokesperson for Atypical Place. The staff's goal is to provide educational and vocational training that will lead to job opportunities, build self-confidence, and increase independence. While gaining skills, the program participants create products that allow them to give back to their communities.

Atypical Place features unique outdoor places at Trabia Farms for sensory exploration. In the Exploratorium, program participants can hide in the playhouse, create music on the outdoor harmony park musical instruments, discover buried treasure at the Fossil Whale dig site, sit quietly

"The participants give back to their communities by donating the products they create—vegetables to local food banks, along with herb sachets and flower bouquets to local hospitals, convalescent homes, and fundraisers for other nonprofits."

watching over the butterfly garden, listen to birds singing, play on the swings, navigate the plant maze and wobbly bridge, or just enjoy the views while strolling along the ADA nature trails.

Using organic, sustainable practices, Trabia Farms grows olive

fundraisers for other nonprofits. They also give back to each other as program graduates become volunteers for the next generation.

The volunteers—both “typical” and special needs kids and adults—help out with the programs, doing

and Atypical Place is expecting approximately 10 more to obtain paid jobs this year.

Atypical Place works with volunteers from local school districts in San Luis Obispo County, public agencies, local colleges, and community organizations to create mutually beneficial partnerships to serve program participants. It also provides seeds to special education classes so they can raise their own pumpkin plants, transplant them in spring to the farm, and harvest their pumpkins in the fall. ■



trees to produce award-winning extra virgin olive oils. Fruits and vegetables, flowers, and herbs grow in and around the Rainbow Garden to support the “A Place to Grow” and “A Place to Bloom” programs. Trabia Farms also is home to barnyard animals—horses, miniature donkeys, chickens, and farm cats—which participate in the “Barn Buddies” animal therapy programs.

Participants in Atypical Place programs learn how to care for the animals, plants, and land. They gain basic agricultural skills, social skills, and self-confidence with sensory and motor development and relationship building. The participants give back to their communities by donating the products they create—vegetables to local food banks, along with herb sachets and flower bouquets to local hospitals, convalescent homes, and

setup or cleanup or helping the participants. Approximately 40 special needs participants were promoted to be volunteers in Atypical Place’s third program year. A few were able to advance into paid work in 2016,

Joanne is the founder of Autism Movement Therapy and was the recipient of two Autism Speaks grants. She is also core adjunct faculty at National University in Los Angeles. Joanne is the Executive Director of Autism Works Now! (www.autismworksnow.org). For AMT Certification, licensing, and online courses, visit www.autismmovementtherapy.org.

