

Building Blocks

Impact and Innovation from the MaineHealth Glickman Lauder Center of Excellence



Little Students, Life Changing Lessons



It is truly an honor to do this work. I love my job, everyone here does. And you can see it every day — in ways big and small.

— Colleen Foley-Ingersoll

Declan “Decky” Hourihan is always happy when he’s in his world. Whether it’s climbing, swinging, or feeling the wind in his hair during a family boat ride, the busy three-year-old boy loves to move. “Everything is an adventure or an obstacle course,” says mom Kayla.

When Decky started walking at age one, his parents Kayla and Jared Hourihan started to notice some

changes. As his motor skills improved, Decky slowly stopped using his words, responding to his name, and making eye contact. “Initially, these things seemed like normal toddler regressions. He was always so happy, so we followed his lead,” Kayla said. By 18 months, the active toddler started going to a traditional pre-school, and the little things that were normal at home, were noticeable at school.

“He’d run laps around the classroom, climb the furniture, and play with the toys — but he wouldn’t engage with the teachers, sit for lessons, or play with peers,” Kayla said. “He was engaging well with the environment, but socially he was retreating further into his own world,” said Jared.

It was ultimately determined that the school could not meet Decky’s needs and they parted ways. As the Hourihan’s sought solutions through speech and occupational therapy, regressions continued and concerns built. “He was always a very easy baby to engage, but we knew then we needed more guidance,” Kayla added.

In February of 2025, Decky was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

“There’s so much uncertainty after a diagnosis. We had no plan, and had no idea what to do next,” Jared said. “It took us time to digest it. And for months we went on thinking he’d be able to go to a regular school with more time and structure. We felt lost,” added Kayla.

continued on page 3



The Center's growth and impact over the past five years have been made possible by the passion, expertise, and dedication of its staff.

Five Years Of Growth, Measured In Lives Changed

Over the past five years, the MaineHealth Glickman Lauder Center of Excellence has worked diligently to expand its physical space, staff size, and programming to meet the growing needs of our community with autism and developmental disorders. Our collective effort has led to remarkable transformations.

The Center broadened its continuum of care to serve patients across the lifespan, helping

Over the past five years, the Center has emerged stronger than we could have imagined. Today, it is an inclusive and nationally recognized model of care. Our shared success can be measured by the lives we've changed, and our future can be defined by the growing number of care providers, students, patients, families, and donors who have become part of this special community.

— Nancy Pond

Community Advisory Council Member and Former Co-Chair, Glickman Lauder Center of Excellence Campaign

close longstanding gaps in care for children and adults. It has expanded educational opportunities and learning environments. Access to healthcare has been improved through the addition of innovative medical and dental spaces for patients to build comfort and confidence with receiving routine care. And the Center has provided a more accessible and connected model of care — all under one roof. Beyond the Center's four walls, the team continually works to extend care even further into the community, through partnerships, research, and training.

Today, looking back on five years of dedication and hard work, the Center has achieved its original expansion goals — during a global pandemic —while continuing to adapt and respond to the evolving needs of patients, families, and students. The impact of this work has been both inspiring and transformative.

And it is only possible thanks to the strength of this community. Because of the expansion, children are finding their voices earlier. Adults are receiving care they never had access to before. This success is not just measured in square footage or program growth, but in lives changed. Individuals are building skills, gaining independence, and achieving their fullest potential. Families are finding hope, direction, and support where there was once uncertainty. What was once a vision is now a living, evolving model of care — and its impact will be felt for generations to come.

The Hourihan family pediatrician told them about the MaineHealth Glickman Lauder Center of Excellence and within days they were warmly met with an invitation to visit.

"The first thing that struck me was how bright, happy, and positive the environment felt. We were hopeful the moment we walked through the door, something we hadn't felt after so many setbacks in his early education," Jared added.

By the fall, Decky enrolled in the Center's Early Intervention Program where he worked alongside his teachers and family, at the Center and at home, to develop an effective picture-based communication system. "When I walked into their home, I knew right away what he needed. His parents were getting care, but it just wasn't resonating with Decky," said Colleen Foley-Ingersoll, a 30-year veteran in behavioral healthcare and Senior Director of Developmental Disorder Services at the Center. "The earlier a child receives services; the sooner we can unlock a communication system and the sooner they find their voice without relying on behaviors to communicate. It is such a rewarding transformation for a family," said Foley-Ingersoll.

Today, you'll find colorful photos placed throughout the family's Cousins Island home, and a baggie of pictures that Decky eagerly sifts through to express his emotions and communicate his needs.

"When Decky pointed to that very first photo and realized we all understood what he wanted, the joy in that moment is something I'll never forget. Our eyes met, and for the first time we truly understood each other," said Jared.

Over the last five years, the Early Intervention program at the Center has continually strived to

meet the growing demand for services within this age group. "It is so important to intervene early, so you don't have to undo bad habits. And the kids in this age group are just so eager to learn," Foley-Ingersoll said.

"We didn't think services like this existed for children under three. These targeted interventions have made a world of difference. In just six months, we've watched huge gains," Kayla added.



Three-year-old Declan "Decky" Hourihan proudly uses his photo book, a communication tool developed by the Center to help him express his needs and communicate with confidence.

The Hourihans say the support they received from the Center has reenergized a bond within their family and it keeps them going on tough days. "The enthusiasm Decky's team brings every day is contagious. There were days when I was drained, and it was their genuine excitement that gave me the reset I needed," Jared said. After months of dedication and work, Decky now effectively communicates with his family, his social engagement is improving, and normalcy is returning after many months of solitude. Wyatt, Decky's 5-year-old brother, now

plays an active role in supporting him. "Wyatt now says, 'I know what he needs,' and you can see how proud he is," said Kayla.

While the road was neither direct nor easy, the Hourihans say they are proudly sharing their family's story as a source of hope and inspiration for others.

"There was a time when we felt emotionally overwhelmed and unsure if there would ever be normalcy again. But there is hope, and the resources exist. The right people and the right place opened Decky's world — and it's been incredible to see all he's accomplished," said Jared.

Stronger Together

An Innovative Partnership To Support Bright Smiles and Healthy Futures

For twelve-year-old Conner Cope, a trip to the dentist often ended with tears, anxiety, and an incomplete exam. His grandmother and legal guardian, Jennifer Cope, said that despite the challenges, she never stopped bringing him every six months.

“Conner tries so hard to sit still through each visit, but he feels ‘trapped’ by the people in the room and dislikes the sounds and sensations from the unfamiliar tools,” Jennifer said. “Even if they got just a peek, I felt like that was better than not going.”

As longtime patients of the Center, Conner’s care team had been gradually introducing him to dental tools, sensations, and procedures he’d experience during regular cleanings. Encouraged by his progress, Conner’s team recommended that Jennifer enroll him in the Center’s new dental desensitization pilot program, *Bright Smiles and Healthy Futures*.

Launched in partnership with the University of New England College of Dental Medicine, the 13-week program helps patients become more comfortable with oral hygiene and dental visits, while giving dental students hands-on experience on how to provide more inclusive care.

“This was a wonderful success,” said Albert G. Abena, D.D.S., J.D., Clinical Professor and Associate Dean for Community Partnerships at the University of New England College of Dental Medicine. “It encouraged students to think differently about delivering care while providing invaluable one-on-one experience with patients whose needs require a specialized approach.”

The pilot program saw remarkable results. All participating patients increased their ability



After completing the *Bright Smiles and Healthy Futures* pilot program, 12-year-old Conner Cope of Windham, is now able to successfully visit a dentist for routine care.



Lindsay Payeur, Behavior Analyst, laughs with Norman Gideon during a recent visit to the dental space. UNE College of Dental Medicine students Allison Loach and Madeline Larrimore look on proudly after another successful collaboration between patients, staff and students in the expanded dental sensitization program.

to participate in dental visits by 67 percent, and several successfully completed traditional dental appointments shortly after finishing the program, including Conner.

“I couldn’t believe my eyes, the program worked,” Jennifer said. “I was in disbelief as I watched Conner allow the dentists and hygienists to successfully complete an entire exam — that has never happened before,” Jennifer added.

The program also equipped Jennifer with strategies to help ensure that future visits succeed. During Conner’s appointment, she guided the dental team through each step of the process and recognized when he needed

breaks based on techniques learned through the dental desensitization program.

“After all these years of struggle, I just had to tell the dentist when to give him a quick break,” Jennifer said. “I can’t say enough positive things about this experience,” she added.

Due to the program’s success, *Bright Smiles and Healthy Futures* will expand in fall 2027 to include all 72 third- and fourth-year dental students at the University of New England College of Dental Medicine. The innovative partnership is helping both patients and future dentists build confidence and skills that improve access to care, quality of life, and long-term health outcomes.

Building a Lifetime of Possibility

The Center expands continuum of care to serve adult patients

Fulfilling the mission to make Maine communities the healthiest in America, MaineHealth’s Glickman Lauder Center of Excellence became one of the first and only centers in the nation to support patients from early childhood through adulthood. In 2021, the Center added outpatient services for adults over the age of 18, which is closing a critical coverage gap within the behavioral healthcare system in Maine.

And without it, 21-year-old Niko Gagne would not be thriving the way he is today. For twenty years, Niko struggled with restricted eating, tolerating fewer than five foods. “He was surviving on potato chips and applesauce — he wasn’t healthy and he didn’t feel good,” said his mom, Jessica Gagne. At 11-months old, Niko was diagnosed with Celiac Disease, and he lost the desire to eat. “In 2005, no one carried gluten free options, and when you could find something, it was horrible. And Niko just slowly stopped eating altogether,” Jessica said.

Over the years, the Gagne family both accepted Niko’s restricted eating, and continually worked to overcome it. For two decades, on every family vacation, Niko’s parents packed a suitcase of food to ensure that he would be able to eat something in an unfamiliar environment. “We tried food therapies, new food introductions, and supplements — all caused physical reactions and violent behaviors. He was frustrated, he didn’t look good, and we all were exhausted,” Jessica added.

At the age of 20, Niko was referred to Dr. Cathleen Small, a psychologist and board-certified behavior analyst at the Center, as the last effort to expand his diet. “She treated him like a human being and built a rapport before she asked anything of him. They liked each other and she gained his trust,” Jessica said.



21-year-old Niko Gagne is stronger, healthier, and more fit thanks to transformative care at the Center. After working with Dr. Cathleen Small, he gained the confidence to revamp his diet after two decades of restricted eating.

After a 20-year struggle, six short months of work with Dr. Small delivered transformational results. Niko not only sat at the Thanksgiving dinner table, but he enjoyed the same foods as his family. Jessica says, “my husband and I still look at each other in disbelief and ask, ‘how is this possible — how did she do it?’ Just last week I cooked fish and broccoli, and he sat down and ate it. Dr. Small is a miracle worker and we are so grateful.”

Thanks to the expanded adult program and his dedicated care team, Niko is 20-pounds lighter, healthier, and more confident in every way. Niko is one great example of how this expansion provides an easy transition, so patients don’t have to lose support. “The transition age is often when many disorders deepen due to lack of care,” Dr. Winston Chung said. After five years, the adult care program now proudly represents 25-percent of the Center’s overall patient base.

Giving Back: Tribute and Responsibility



Pictured with their daughter Katie, David and Donna Banks helped the Center’s dental desensitization program. Today, the David & Donna Banks Dental Clinic provides life-changing dental skill-building in a supportive and welcoming environment.



Joan Banks spent decades supporting free dental care at a facility serving Mainers with developmental disorders. Her work influenced the Banks family’s understanding of the challenges many face in accessing basic healthcare.

David and Donna Banks’ philanthropic approach is guided by a desire to build strong communities throughout Maine. As longstanding supporters, the Banks’ generous commitment is rooted in family history. In the 1970s, Joan Banks, David’s mother, worked at a dental office that provided free care to residents at the Pineland Center, a former care center for Mainers with developmental disorders. Her work left a lasting impression, shaping the Banks’ understanding of the barriers many face when accessing basic healthcare.

This personal perspective inspired their support for the Center’s dental desensitization program, *Bright Smiles and Healthy Futures*, which helps individuals become more comfortable with dental tools and procedures. The couples’ commitment to expanding access was also the catalyst for the new dental space at the Center, which is named in their honor.

Having dedicated their lives to children and education, Donna and their daughters were also motivated to support the growth of the Center’s educational programs, including the addition of early intervention and preschool services. Since 2021, thanks to generous support from the Banks Family and the Center community, the Center’s educational programs now serve approximately 55 students annually and welcome about 25 new students each year.

“For us, giving back is both a tribute and a responsibility. We have been very fortunate to build success in our lives, and it is our honor to support this excellent work happening within the community,” said David and Donna Banks of Falmouth.

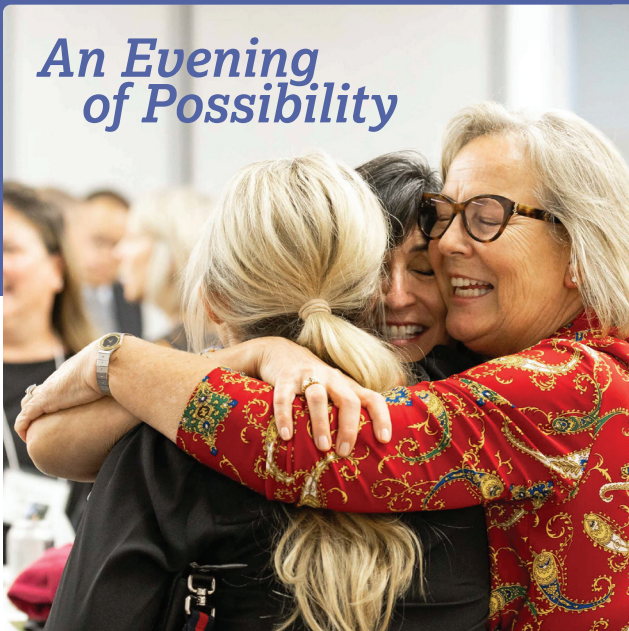


MaineHealth Behavioral Health
P.O. Box 1521
Portland, ME 04104-9973

Non-Profit Org
US Postage
PAID
Portland, ME
04101
Permit No.355

Celebrating Five Years — and the Possibilities Ahead

An Evening of Possibility



Join us for an inspiring evening to celebrate what's possible when a community comes together with purpose. Through stories, connection, and shared vision, we'll highlight the impact being made today and the opportunities ahead.

Date: **Friday, September 25**

Time: **5:30-8:30 p.m.**

Location: **Woodlands Country Club**

Learn more and reserve your spot at
mainehealth.org/bh-shine



Together, we can create a future filled with possibility.