

An apple for the teacher

Upper Township Elementary School: Jamie Nicholl

Connect with children in an inclusive classroom

By KRISTEN KELLEHER
Cape May Star and Wave

MARMORA — Jamie Nicholl's uncle, who is mentally disabled, is the reason she is a special-education teacher.

Nicholl, who teaches at the Upper Township Elementary School, said her grandparents helped her uncle become as independent as he could. He held a job as a janitor for about 30 years, knows how to take public transportation and to deposit a check, according to Nicholl.

"I always wanted to help students like that," the Ocean City resident said.

She earned her undergraduate degree at the Pennsylvania State University and has a master's degree from Arcadia University.

Her career began in central Bucks County, Pa., where she taught for about six years. Nicholl, originally from the Doylestown, Pa., area, moved to New Jersey because her husband lived in the area.

This is her sixth year teaching in Upper Township.

She was named the Upper Township Elementary School Staff Member of the Year.

Nicholl said she likes that it is a small community and that everyone is supportive of each other.

"It just seems like a very unified and supportive township in general," she said. "We have some students who have been sick and other things, and losses, and I always feel like everyone pulls together to support one another, which is very impressive."

Nicholl co-teaches in an

inclusive classroom, where regular education and special-education students learn together.

She also teaches the Wilson Reading System for one class period per day.

On inclusive classrooms, Nicholl said she feels like it benefits the students socially.

"Some have better social skills than others do, and I do think it's good. I think they're able to form friendships better (in an inclusive classroom)," she said.

Nicholl's students follow a curriculum similar to the regular education students, which Nicholl modifies depending on her students' needs.

"Their path might look a little different, but at the end of the day, they're still getting to what we would hope for all students," she said.

During her time in the classroom, Nicholl felt that standardized testing increased and that the curriculum became more rigorous.

"I don't think that's a negative thing," Nicholl said about the curriculum. "I think a lot of the students are challenged. I think they have to really think about what they're learning, and I think that's good, that the students really have to think about what they're doing and what they're learning in the classroom."

In addition to teaching, Nicholl spent about three years serving on the school's Intervention & Referral Services (I&RS) team.

She is currently pursuing her supervisory certificate.

When asked about her edu-



Kristen Kelleher
STAR AND WAVE

Jamie Nicholl teaches in an inclusive classroom at Upper Township Elementary School.

cational philosophy, Nicholl said she believes everyone is capable of learning, one way or another.

"It's just kind of finding that way to connect with that child to get them to be successful, and I always find that every child is very different and you kind of have to be patient with them," she said.

Nicholl added that it is important to build a relationship with children and be a strong role model for them, "because, at the end of the day, a child needs to love to learn," she said.

Lower Cape May Regional High School: Joanie Dilling

Special-education teacher has a green thumb

By JOHN ALVAREZ
Special to the Star and Wave

ERMA — Joanie Dilling is a special-education teacher at Lower Cape May Regional High School who always had a desire to grow plants.

When someone donated a greenhouse to LCMR about 20 years ago, the administration asked if anyone was willing to start a program. Dilling, an Ocean City resident, stepped up to the challenge.

Today she teaches gardening skills to about 60 special education students from all four grade levels at the school in Lower Township. Looking back, she reflects on how much has changed since the program began, starting with the greenhouse itself.

"The first greenhouse was on the ground, dirt floor and plastic," Dilling said, standing in the school's newer greenhouse, which was built six years ago. "It was nothing compared to this."

The students, who have physical and emotional issues, start the school year by growing poinsettias and herbs to be sold around Thanksgiving and the holiday season to raise the money that supports the greenhouse program.

"People use the herbs for ingredients in their stuffing," Dilling said. "We had a sale for the poinsettias and we sold 350 the students had grown here. After this, we start the spring planting as well as tomatoes, squash, zucchini and fast-growing annuals for sale in April."

The students are responsible for growing poinsettias and the herbs of their choosing. Dilling will have students come up with recipes for their chosen herbs so, one class a week, they can prepare a meal for the other students.

"All the students came up with recipes and we all choose which one we want to cook," she said.

The students learn everything about plants from the roots, stems and leaves to



John Alvarez/STAR AND WAVE

Joanie Dilling, a special education teacher at Lower Cape May Regional High School, in the school's greenhouse.

how to take care of the specific plants.

"It's a science course first," Dilling said. "It's about reading and studying. It's also about trial and error. The students learn photosynthesis, how plants work and parts of the roots. It's the natural progression to come in here to the greenhouse and see what it all does."

Students have done well in the program. For this reason, Dilling hopes they keep hands-on programs in high schools.

"This is what students need," she said. "Not everyone is going to college. If nothing else, the students learn something they can do at their home. Classes like these need to stay."

Memorial

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Lunde has been teaching kindergarten for 12 years, starting as a substitute. She said early on in her career, she was drawn to teaching kindergarten.

"They need so much love and there's a great foundation that I can build there," she said.

Her classes have included children who come from difficult home lives. She has collected money for children who have recently lost their parents.

Lunde's mother was child development director at Coast Guard Training Center Cape May for 30 years and now teaches music at Bishop McHugh Regional Catholic School. Lunde's brother teaches music in Delaware.

Her classroom has a multitude of activities including dress-up day and mural painting.

"I still do a lot of the stuff that old kindergarten is based on but I incorporate a lot singsonging, I sing all the

time," Lunde said. "I'll sing 'everybody please sit down, please sit down.'"

She also chants daily activities such as the morning arrival routine: "folder, book bag, sign in, wash your hands, write your name." Each student has a job in the classroom such as helping present the morning calendar and "peacekeepers" who try to solve any problems that may arise.

For playtime, she has Legos, games, toys, bean bags and Barbie dolls, a number of items that she said she purchased at her own expense.

Lunde said she serves on a number of committees in the school and organizes social events for the staff. During her 12 years of teaching kindergarten, the family dynamic has changed with a stronger presence of drugs and alcohol in families, she said.

Today's youngsters may be more oriented to typing on computer keyboard or swiping on a screen than holding pencils, Lunde said.

"When we're doing handwriting, we've noticed that a lot of them with their fine motor grasp aren't prepared to write," she said.

Lunde said a number of children have difficulty cutting with scissors.

Her art background shows through with her classroom's walls filled examples of the students' artwork and writing.

Lunde said she will receive visits from students long after they have moved on from her class.

"I like it when the kids are coming back and they still hug you and they still remember kindergarten, and that's what really warms my heart," she said.

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