Marc Gordon, Executive Vice President and Chief Information Officer (CIO) at American Express, has been involved with PACER for 20 years. When he lived in the Twin Cities, Gordon served on PACER’s Board of Directors. For the past five years, he has chaired PACER’s National Business Advisory Board.

“The National Board is an incredible group of people,” Gordon said. “These are some of the brightest, most energetic, most successful and kindest people I have ever met. Movie producer Chris Moore has been fantastic in helping PACER bring video to life and leverage it. David Fischer, a vice president at Facebook, has helped PACER connect platform and resources. It is a reflection of [Executive Director] Paula Goldberg that she has been able to recruit and attract these kinds of individuals to give of their time, ideas, and money to bring all of those things to bear for PACER.

“The National Board meets as a full group twice a year, and contributes in different and amazing ways,” he observed. “The group advises Paula, and she bounces ideas off us. It’s a very eclectic group of leaders.”

Gordon is passionate about collaboration, and when National Advisory Board member Jimmy Pitaro, who is chairman of Disney Consumer Products and Interactive Media, volunteered some of Disney’s team to help redesign PACER’s websites, Gordon saw an opportunity to involve American Express. “I asked if we could participate as well. It’s so energy-creating for employees; they get to work on something in their world, but do it for PACER. It’s a win for employees, Disney, American Express, and PACER.”

Volunteer Spotlight continued on page 2
Becoming involved with PACER

Twenty years ago, Gordon was new to the Twin Cities; he had moved his family (his wife, Carolyn Porter, and their son Josh) to Minneapolis to take a job with Best Buy. “I had been doing some research, looking for ways to help Josh, who was developmentally delayed, and I came across PACER. I had two thoughts: I wondered if there were resources there to help our son, and I also felt a responsibility. I had been successful, and I wanted to give back. I thought PACER might be a place I could do that. So I reached out to Paula. I made a cold call and told her I’d like to meet. She didn’t know who I was, and was very busy, but she took time to meet with me. I wanted to help, and we grew a relationship. I was so taken with Paula as a leader and social entrepreneur.”

Gordon forged a partnership between PACER and Best Buy, and before long, he brought IBM on as a PACER partner. IBM was piloting their EX.I.T.E. (EXploring Interests in Technology and Engineering) Camps for middle school girls, and with Gordon’s help, PACER became one of the first EX.I.T.E. sites.

“The first thing Best Buy did was donate all of the computers for EX.I.T.E. Camp,” he recalled. Thanks to the support of business leaders like Gordon, PACER is the only one of the 30 original EX.I.T.E. Camp programs still in existence over fifteen years later.

Also enduring is Gordon’s relationship with PACER. After leaving the Twin Cities for a position with Bank of America in North Carolina, and then moving to American Express in New York City, he maintains his ties to PACER.

Future focused

Gordon is dedicated to spreading the word about what PACER does. “PACER is such an incredible resource, with an amazing reach. When I first became involved, PACER had helped thousands. Now it’s many tens of thousands.”

Gordon credits much of PACER’s success to the leadership of Paula Goldberg and the staff. “Every time I think of PACER, I think of Paula, and I smile because she is such a force of nature! Strong, capable, smart, and innovative; she never stops learning. I just continue to have a lot of heart for trying to help her and help PACER.”

It’s clear that Gordon plans to be involved with PACER for a long, long time. He is a visionary who thinks big, and his vision for PACER is an ambitious one. “I would love to see PACER expand its presence and reach, especially with the combination of PACER as a force in Minnesota and the national reach of PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center. I’d love to see satellite offices and an expanded digital presence.”

Gordon concluded, “There’s no limit to what PACER can do.”

New members welcome!

Something for everyone on PACER’s Benefit committee

It would be hard to find a more dedicated Benefit volunteer than committee co-chair Nancy Kaysen, who has served on PACER’s Benefit committee for eight years. She is especially enthusiastic about the role volunteers play in the success of PACER’s Annual Benefit.

“Everyone at PACER knows that volunteers are key to the Benefit’s success! I am personally so appreciative of the time and energy every volunteer brings to the committee,” Kaysen said. “Committee members play many different roles, from brainstorming ideas to participating in every facet of the event. We are always in need of members, and we love to hear the fresh ideas new members bring to the committee.

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“Serving on the committee is so rewarding,” said Kaysen. “It’s a warm, wonderful group of people. The PACER staff is so committed and welcoming! At every meeting, Paula Goldberg has a different staff member speak to us about the work they do. It reminds us of the most important reason to be part of the Benefit: raising the money necessary to support the PACER programs that make such a difference in the lives of children with disabilities and those who are bullied.”

If you are interested in joining the Benefit committee to help plan PACER’s Annual Benefit on May 12, 2018, contact Raleigh Johnson or Paula Goldberg at (952) 838-9000, or raleigh.johnson@PACER.org or pgoldberg@PACER.org.
PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center (NBPC) has launched an exciting series of videos in September, “PACERTalks About Bullying,” featuring NBPC coordinator Bailey Lindgren. Most of the videos are less than five minutes long, and feature unique content. Some videos utilize an interview format; others feature frequently asked questions about bullying and information about events such as Unity Day or National Bullying Prevention Month.

“We have received an incredible response to the video series,” said Julie Hertzog, director of PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center. “We are excited about this format for sharing information and content with our audience! We are especially grateful to Chris Moore for his encouragement and the ideas he shared when he visited PACER.”

To view the videos, go to PACER.org/bullying or the NBPC Facebook page, facebook.com/PACERsNationalBullyingPreventionCenter.

The Los Angeles office of the NBPC has a dynamic Youth Advisory Board, consisting of 16 middle and high school aged leaders. In addition to playing an active role in the annual Unity Awards, members work on bullying prevention in their schools, participate in events, and take on individual projects.

Youth Board member Chloe has used the information she’s learned to call attention to bullying in her school. Youth board member Mai coordinated Unity Day at her school and teamed up with her mother to fundraise for the NBPC.

Members of the Youth Advisory Board include Aidan, Augie, Chloe, Dylan, Ella, Emma, Jack, Jake, Josy, Maddie, Mai, Mason, Natalie, Rachel, Steven, and Violet. Judy French, PACER’s NBPC staff member located in Los Angeles, coordinates the Board.

Community awareness is essential in preventing bullying behavior, and often community leaders and organizers need tangible tools to engage participants when they organize events. The NBPC has created the “You’re Not Alone, We’re Here for You” event toolkit in response to this need, said Hertzog. “We received a number of requests for materials that groups could use for awareness raising events to unite against bullying. It’s a powerful way to share PACER resources at the local level.”

These innovative toolkits cost $75 each, and contain materials for 50 participants, including posters, buttons, a fill-in-the-blank form that participants sign to show their support, handouts, flyers, and bookmarks. Each kit comes with an idea guide, which provides step-by-step information on how to use the toolkit resources.

To order a toolkit, go to PACER.org/bullying/YoureNotAlone or call (952) 838-9000.

Save the date!

PACER’s Annual Benefit | May 12, 2018
Minneapolis Convention Center

Perform to be announced soon!
The lives we touch:  
Stories from parents

**Cathleen and Cory are reaching their potential because of support from PACER**

Each year, PACER receives more than 45,000 requests for individual assistance. These stories illustrate PACER staff’s work with two families.

**Danielle and Cathleen**

Danielle’s email signature says it all: “Ensuring Cathleen reaches her greatest potential.” PACER has helped Danielle do that.

Danielle’s daughter, Cathleen, is nine years old. She has epilepsy and developmental disabilities. She does not talk or walk, and needs assistance with her daily activities. Danielle first found PACER’s website for information about early childhood special education and the Individualized Education Program (IEP), but then she came to the open house for PACER’s Simon Technology Center (STC).

“Cathleen is very social. She knows what she wants, but we don’t always know what she’s trying to say,” Danielle said. “At the open house, we learned about adapted toys, musical instruments, and communication devices.”

Danielle said the STC’s Lending Library has been a huge help to their family, allowing them to try new assistive technology. Danielle tried the Liftware Level Spoon, which allows Cathleen to enjoy her meals independently. After borrowing it from the library, the family recognized its value and purchased the spoon for Cathleen.

Cathleen’s school has also used the library to borrow assistive technology items that can be used by Cathleen and her friends while they play together.

In addition to using the Simon Technology Center, Danielle has attended workshops and worked closely with Rose Quintero, one of PACER’s staff advocates.

“She has been a third voice for my husband and myself,” Danielle said. “Rose is supportive and teaches me how to be a long-term advocate for my daughter. It’s definitely changed our lives and the lives of people we tell about PACER.”

**Angie and Cory**

When Angie’s son Cory began having physically and verbally aggressive behavior in third grade, the school tried a variety of interventions.

Cory was better behaved at home, so Angie sought advice from a close family friend and former teacher. She referred Angie to PACER.

“That’s when Bonnie Jean came into the picture,” Angie said. “She was a godsend.”

PACER staff advocate Bonnie Jean Smith has been working with Cory’s family for several years. She provided Angie with information and resources, and gave her the tools to work with the school.

“I always say that I’m the GPS system,” Bonnie Jean said. “You show me the destination, and I’ll show you all the routes to get there within the law, but you choose which route to take.”

Cory went to a new school, where the staff worked with Angie, particularly around positive behavior supports. Cory spent almost two years at the new school and responded well, learning social and behavior management skills.

Bonnie Jean credits Angie for regularly communicating with school staff and always following up on their meetings and conversations.

Today, Cory is 17. He’s a senior in high school in a regular classroom, has a job, and is interested in law enforcement.

“He’s amazing,” Angie said. “He doesn’t think so, but he is.”
PACER Center has always embraced technology as a way to assist children and youth with disabilities in being more independent at home, school, and in the community. Today, PACER is leading the way in helping students with disabilities have fun while gaining the coding skills necessary to live and thrive in a tech-driven world.

PACER’s Simon Technology Center (STC) offers exciting opportunities for teens to enjoy hands-on activities that encourage a greater interest in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).

**Tech for Teens Club**

Last year PACER launched a new project for middle and high school aged boys and girls known as Tech for Teens Club. It was so successful that sessions reached full capacity!

“So many people asked if we could have another Tech for Teens Club series,” said Paul Sanft, STC assistive technology specialist. Five events are now planned for this winter.

“This is a model that we plan to expand nationally,” Sanft said. “We want to give teens with disabilities access to technology education and coding.”

**Tech for Girls Club**

The Tech for Girls Club is designed for middle school girls with disabilities. Some are led by PACER staff as well as members of Eagan’s Green Girls Robotics Team. It began as an extension of PACER’s popular EX.I.T.E. (EXploring Interests in Technology and Engineering) Camp.

Zoe Berg, a junior at Lakeville South High School, is a member of Green Girls. “Our team has a word that we trademarked called ‘giversity,’ which is giving back to diverse groups of people through STEM,” Zoe said. “We want every single person to be exposed to STEM because it could be a possible career for them. Girls will often face challenges in STEM, so we want to show them they can do this and it’s really fun!”

Zoe said the Green Girls and the Tech for Girls Club participants have formed lasting relationships. “We know each other by name,” she said. “We really enjoy working together. We’ve bonded and that’s really cool.”

“Parents tell us how much their daughters love these opportunities,” said Tina Hanson, STC assistive technology specialist. “One family is planning to drive an hour each way so their daughter can attend.”

For more information and to register for the Tech for Girls Club or Tech for Teens, visit PACER.org/workshops, or call Bridget Gilormini, Simon Technology Center Director, at (952) 838-9000.

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**Upcoming Tech for Teens and Tech for Girls Club Events**

**Tech for Teens Club** (for both boys and girls):
- Dec. 2: Intro to Coding and Video Games
- Jan. 6: Programming Robots
- Feb. 3: Building Websites
- March 3: A Star Wars 3D Printed Universe
- March 17: Building a Robot

**Tech for Girls Club**:
- Dec. 16: Space Explorer
- Jan 20: Programming Lights and Sounds
- Feb 10: Koding with Kodu

Register at PACER.org/workshops.
Jesús Villaseñor is one of PACER’s multicultural staff advocates, working with Spanish-speaking families. He first came to PACER when he needed help for his youngest child, Tomás, who had learning differences. “I did my research, and I came to PACER,” he said.

Villaseñor has a passion for helping others, and he was so impressed with PACER that he took a job with the organization, motivated by the desire to help children with disabilities and their families. That was 21 years ago, and he has helped hundreds of families.

There is one family who Villaseñor worked with that he will never forget: a single mother, who came from Mexico, and her son.

“The mom worked as a live-in cook and housekeeper, and she and her son lived in a walk-in closet,” he recalled. “He had a very rare vision impairment and was legally blind. She was referred to PACER by the University of Minnesota. I worked with her for years, advocating for them in IEP (Individualized Education Program) meetings. She was a wonderful mom, and, like many parents, would do anything for her son.

“He did very well in school, and was an amazing writer. As he was finishing middle school, his teachers recommended that he be accepted to the IB program (International Baccalaureate, a challenging program for top students) at the local high school.

“The boy came home from the first day of high school and told his mother, ‘I’m not on the list. I wasn’t accepted. Nobody likes me because I’m blind.’”

The mother told her son, “We’re going to call Mr. Villaseñor. He can help us.”

Villaseñor called the school, and the teacher he spoke with said that the boy’s name was familiar. “He told me he would check, and call me back. He called back an hour later and said, ‘There was a mistake. He is welcome in the program.’”

Was there a mistake, or did Villaseñor’s call make a difference? “I always give people the benefit of the doubt,” he said. “The important thing is that I was able to help.”

The journey to PACER

Villaseñor’s road to PACER was a winding one. It started in a small town in northwest Mexico, near Mazatlan. He was one of five children born to a carpenter and his wife. “I am the youngest, and my siblings still treat me like a child,” he said ruefully.

Villaseñor’s father had only a third grade education, and then stopped school to go to work. “My father wanted to continue his schooling,” Villasenor said. “The parish priest went to my grandparents and said that he was so smart that the priest could get him a scholarship to continue his schooling. But my grandfather said that my father needed to work because the family needed his income.”

Although he had little formal education, Villasenor’s father believed strongly in its importance. “When my older brother decided he wanted to become a doctor, my father moved our family to Guadalajara so all of us could get a good education. It was a sacrifice for him. In order to support us, he had to remain behind. He sacrificed so much. For six or seven years we only saw him once a month, when he visited.”

The family’s sacrifice paid off. Villaseñor’s oldest brother became a neurosurgeon. His two other brothers became accountants and his sister, an executive secretary. “I always wanted to help people,” Villasenor said, “So I became a lawyer.

When he was asked how he came to the United States, Villaseñor lit up. “I fell in love with an American — I came here for love.”

Continued on following page
YOUNG PROFESSIONALS ADVISORY BOARD

Rick Strobel, who recently founded his own digital marketing company, has been aware of PACER since he was in middle school and became friends with Mara MacMillan. Mara’s family invited Strobel to PACER events, including the Annual Benefit. Eventually Mara’s brother Win Bennett encouraged him to join the Young Professionals Advisory Board.

“From early on, I have been passionate about raising awareness of PACER,” said Strobel, who is serving his third year on the board and his second as co-chair. “As young professionals, we’re at a unique time in our lives and we have a unique perspective that is hard to find. It’s exciting to be able to direct that energy into meaningful work.”

“I absolutely love doing work that helps other people be successful,” he added. “I’m so excited about PACER and am proud that I have the time and resources to commit to it.”

The Young Professionals Advisory Board (YPAB) is a group of emerging leaders in their 20s and 30s, some of whom have a sibling or friend who has been touched by PACER. Strobel said the board welcomes new members.

“Everyone on the Young Professionals Advisory Board has a really special connection to PACER,” said Strobel. “It’s a humbling experience to know so many others are willing to give of their time and skills, such as event planning and networking. We’re excited to welcome new faces to the table.”

The board, which was founded in the late 1990s by Martha Dayton and Tom Nelson as its co-chairs, includes members who are recent college graduates, as well as those who are established in their fields. They plan events and social activities to raise awareness and funds for PACER’s programs.

Strobel and his fellow board members just wrapped up another successful event, Raise a Glass—A Toast to PACER, which took place on Nov. 2 at Surly Brewing Company in Minneapolis. This year’s event raised money for PACER’s Children’s Mental Health and Emotional or Behavioral Disorders Project.

If you or someone you know is interested in joining PACER’s Young Professionals Advisory Board, email Jackie Saffert at Jackie.Saffert@PACER.org or call (952) 838-9000.

Continued from previous page

Villaseñor met Katie, who would become his wife, when she came to Guadalajara to study Spanish and he was just out of law school. “She could only say ‘Buenos dias’ and ‘Buenas noches’ when we met,” he recalled.

Jesús and Katie, who will celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary in December, lived in Mexico for 12 years before moving to Minnesota in 1989. They are the parents of three children: Fatima is an attorney who is currently an at-home mother; Emily is an OB-GYN nurse; and Tomás, the youngest, who brought them to PACER, is an award-winning illustrator, designer and animator. They have five grandchildren, all under the age of five.

“PACER gave me the tools I needed to help my son succeed,” Villaseñor said.

“In every meeting, I stand on the shoulders of great advocates who have created this wonderful organization,” he said. “I think the world of PACER.

“I believe many people say ‘life is not fair’ too often. However, life has not been fair to many of the families who come to PACER for help. It’s my job to make things more fair for them.”
PACER’s endowment fund: The gift that keeps giving

The families of children with disabilities, and children who are bullied, count on PACER. That’s why PACER has established a $20 million endowment fund: to ensure that PACER will always be there to help children and families as challenges arise.

PACER endowment fund donor Al Apple says, “When you give to a charity, you want to make sure your gift is used wisely. I think PACER gives our community the ‘bigger bang for the buck’ than any other charity I know of.” As a retired Certified Public Accountant (CPA), his words have special weight. Noting that he has no family members with disabilities, Apple said he supports PACER because he believes so strongly in its important work. “I’ve been with PACER from the beginning, and I know that PACER has community-wide and now national support. I love what PACER stands for and what it’s achieved. That’s why PACER is in my will,” Apple said.

Your gift to PACER’s endowment is permanently invested; only the annual investment income is spent. An endowment reduces the impact of economic downturns and fluctuating funding and ensures that the PACER programs that families depend on will continue for years to come.

There are many ways to give. Donors who are older than 70-1/2 can donate up to $100,000 per year directly to PACER as part of their mandatory IRA distribution without incurring income taxes on the distribution. You may also give through wills, trusts, and cash donations. It’s always important to consult your attorney or financial advisor to discuss how to make your contribution to PACER in a tax-friendly way.

For more information about PACER’s endowment, contact Paula Goldberg, PACER’s Executive Director, at (952) 838-9000 or pgoldberg@PACER.org.

“As the parent of a daughter with a disability, my family has been involved with PACER for a long time. Please join me in giving to PACER’s endowment so PACER will always be around to help children and their families.”

— Muffy MacMillan, Chair, PACER Endowment Fund