

Boston Fleet Visits Melmark New England in Honor of Autism Acceptance Month

The PWHL team's visit highlights the intersection of sports, community engagement, and autism acceptance.



(Andover, MA April 28, 2025) – Members of the Boston Fleet, an original six team in the Professional Women's Hockey League (PWHL), recently visited Melmark New England. The visit was particularly significant as it coincides with Autism Acceptance Month, a time dedicated to celebrating and honoring the experiences and identities of individuals with autism.

During their visit, players and staff from the Boston Fleet toured The Cancro Center for Adult Services, located at 280 Merrimack Street in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Melmark's community-based

adult day program provides essential supports for individuals with autism, intellectual, and developmental disabilities. The Fleet engaged in crafts and activities with participants from the adult day program, fostering a sense of community and inclusion.

“The Boston Fleet’s visit to Melmark New England’s adult day program is a testament to the positive impact of community partnerships and the importance of autism acceptance,” stated Melmark President and CEO Rita M. Gardner. “The individuals we serve want to do things that everyone does, including going to a professional hockey game with friends, ordering at the concession stands, and rooting for their favorite team. The Fleet’s commitment to inclusion gives our adults opportunities to practice their daily living skills and have fun in the community where they live and learn.”

Melmark's adult day program is designed to promote well-being, personal independence, and community integration through innovative, evidence-based vocational, social, and recreational services. Melmark’s mission aligns perfectly with the Boston Fleet's commitment to supporting meaningful acceptance and understanding within the community.

“I really enjoyed visiting Melmark New England and spending time doing arts and crafts with the individuals, many of whom are Boston Fleet fans that come to our home games,” exclaimed Boston Fleet player Jillian Dempsey. “I am grateful for opportunities like this to champion inclusion and support the ID/A community!”

As a national leader in the human services field, Melmark is in the process of developing an innovative new adult services model. The adult planned community pilot project will be located on a three-acre site in Tewksbury. With an expected cost of over \$15 million, construction will take one year to complete. To learn more about the Adult Planned Community at Melmark New England, Tewksbury, visit <https://www.melmark.org/planned-tewksbury-adult-community/>

Photo caption: Boston Fleet Players Sophie Shirley and Jillian Dempsey working with Michael on a craft.

About Melmark

Melmark is a multi-state non-profit human service organization providing clinically sophisticated evidence-based special education, residential, vocational and therapeutic services for children and adults with autism spectrum disorders, developmental and intellectual disabilities, acquired brain injuries and other neurological and genetic disorders. All specialized special education services are based on the principles of applied behavior analysis (ABA) and are designed based on each student's individual needs.

Recognized as one of the leading providers in the country, Melmark has a combined staff of over 1,500 at its service divisions in Pennsylvania, New England, and the Carolinas and serves 700 individuals from across the country. www.melmark.org.