

MEET MATEO

Mateo Figueroa, 25 years old from Staten Island, has attended Rising Treetops at Oakhurst's overnight respite and summer camp programs regularly since 2018. Living with autism, Mateo is partially verbal. When he stays at camp, he loves crossword puzzles, practices drawing in arts and crafts, and enjoys the iPad in our therapeutic media arts program.



Long-time Rising Treetops client Mateo Figueroa

Mateo was excited for our Autism summer camp session as well as our Summer Send-off session in late August. When his mother, Tiffany Pacheco, dropped off Mateo for his first session, she shared some heartbreaking personal news: her sister was diagnosed with cancer. She would be undergoing surgery while Mateo was at camp. Mateo's aunt would require much post-surgery assistance as she healed and Ms. Pacheco stepped up to serve as her sister's main caregiver.

Rising Treetops also stepped up, because that's what we do when families need us. In addition to hosting Mateo for the two summer camp sessions, we offered our overnight emergency respite care (in between the sessions as well as until early September). Ms. Pacheco was grateful that Mateo would be safe at Rising Treetops so she had the space to support her sister's recovery. Read Ms. Pacheco's touching letter here...

FROM MATEO'S MOTHER

"Dear Rising Treetops at Oakhurst Team,

I'm writing to express my deepest gratitude for the incredible support and compassion you showed our family during one of the most difficult times in our lives. When we received the devastating news that my sister had been diagnosed with breast cancer and needed immediate surgery, our world was turned upside down. There were so many unknowns, and as a family, we were doing our best to stay strong and support each other.

During all the chaos and worry, one of our biggest concerns was ensuring that Mateo would be okay, that he would have a place where he felt safe, supported, and happy, even while we were going through such a painful experience. Rising Treetops of Oakhurst became that place. **Not only did you keep Mateo safe, wanted and loved, but you also gave our family the reassurance and peace of mind we so desperately needed.**

Your kindness and generosity allowed Mateo to stay at camp, surrounded by people who truly care. **The staff, the environment, and the community you've created gave him a sense of normalcy, joy, and belonging when everything else felt uncertain.** Knowing he was in good hands meant that we could focus on helping my sister through her treatment and recovery, without constantly worrying about where and who would care for Mateo, and how he was coping.

To say that we are grateful would be an understatement. You gave our family a gift that we will never forget. **You stepped in during a time of crisis and showed us what true compassion looks like. For that, we will always hold Rising Treetops in a very special place in our hearts.**

Thank you for making a difference, not just in Mateo's life, but in the life of our entire family.

With deepest appreciation,

Tiffany Pacheco"

A RECORD-BREAKING SUMMER BENEFIT!

Rising Treetops held its 19th annual Summer Benefit on Saturday, July 12th in Rumson, NJ, raising a record \$246,286 in donations to support our mission. Jonathan Cotto – a long-time client living with autism – shared, **“If I gave a rating to Rising Treetops, the rating would be billions of trillions!”** Jonathan and fellow client James Hetem joined veteran volunteer Francois Mobasser in a rousing musical performance honoring Rising Treetops.



Rising Treetops at Oakhurst Board members. Caitlin Bovo, Aimee Frankel and Krista Long (center) spearheaded the Benefit Planning Committee.

Thank you to our gracious hosts Sarah Personette and David Paolo and to our generous sponsors:

Diamond Sponsors: Rob and Caitlin Bovo, Marilyn Friedman and Thomas Block.

Platinum Sponsors: Anonymous, The Chin Family, and The Marrus Family.

Gold Sponsors: The Angelo Family Charitable Foundation, Anonymous (2), Barbara H. Block, The Byren Family, The Fagenson Family, Ali and Dave Kamin, and Susan Stearns.

Silver Sponsors: Daisy Chocolates, Lewis and Judith Eisenberg, EZ Dock Marine Construction, Will and Dana Herrman, and Merrick Construction.

Bronze Sponsors: Anonymous, Ansell Grimm & Aaron PC, Andy and Janis Arno, The Ashinoff Family, Bain's Outdoor Living, Richard and Ana Blank, Diana Breen, The Charleston Family, Danielle and Eric Cohen, Lucy and Mike Danziger, Robert De Bare, Jaime and Josh DeMaso, Erbach Communications Group, Grassi, HunterPark, Mastershot Film, The Nunziata Family, Tim and Jane Orr, The Paulus Family, Dr. Charles and Anna Pierce, Ronnie N. Potter, Marc Solomon, Sarah and G.T. Sweeney, Alice and John Tepper Marlin, Tom NYC DP, Kirsten Ward, Jennifer Whyman and David Greene, and The Yeh Family.

LEAPS PROGRAM EXPANSION PLANNED

Rising Treetops at Oakhurst needs support to renovate our Peter's Cabin so we can significantly increase the number of clients we serve annually in our successful **LEAPS (Life Experiences And Practical Skills) Program**. We project this renovation can help us deliver up to an additional 336 client visits in the LEAPS Program annually (at full capacity of eligible clients).

Launched in 2023, the LEAPS Program serves higher-functioning adults in a home-like facility with kitchen, laundry and communal gathering spaces. The high-impact, 21-day program balances our traditional activities with skills development to help foster independence or semi-independence in the home (such as laundry, meal planning and preparation) and outside the home (including grocery shopping, travel training, trip planning, personal safety and restaurant dining).



Staff Counselor Yessica Martina and client Jillian Martinez are all smiles.

The Peter's Cabin renovation, planned for fall 2026, includes significant improvements to boost life-skills training opportunities, and safety and privacy updates for our clients in their home away from home. Built in 1975, Peter's Cabin is one of six residences for clients with disabilities for year-round overnight respite and summer camp programs. We will add a kitchen, laundry and living room plus privacy and security updates for the sleeping areas and bathrooms.

This critical renovation will cost upwards of \$500,000. Our heartfelt thanks to NJ State Senator Vin Gopal and Assemblywomen Margie Donlon and Luanne Peterpaul for securing \$100,000 in the NJ State budget for us!

AND THE SURVEY SAYS...

Did you know that every year we survey our clients and their families? We are proud to deliver high-quality programs they enjoy and trust, better understand what's working well for them, and make improvements.



Lucello Aponte and his brother have been Rising Treetops clients for many years!

Our most recent client satisfaction survey shows:

- **92%** of respondents rate their overall experience at Rising Treetops as **"excellent"** or **"very good"**
- **100%** of respondents indicated they would **recommend Rising Treetops' overnight services** to other caregivers or clients
- **92%** of respondents indicated that they **plan to return this year**, having either already received services or are applying for services in 2025.

OVERNIGHT PROGRAMS IN FULL SWING

Rising Treetops began its 2025-2026 overnight respite season on September 22nd. We offer 24 overnight respite sessions for clients through early June 2026. All ages, genders and special needs are considered for placement. Most sessions have either theme days, holiday parties or off-camp field trips. Respite sessions fill up fast so please email respite@risingtreetops.org or call (732) 531-0215 for more information. Please know we accept both New York OPWDD and New Jersey DDD funding year-round for eligible individuals for out-of-home respite care as a family support service. Thanks to generous donors, we also have some scholarships available.

In our 2025 overnight summer camp alone, we served 386 summer campers, up from 297 campers in 2024! The children and adult campers alike had an engaging and fun summer, joyfully taking part in our accessible swimming and sports, therapeutic arts and crafts, music, drama, iPad media arts, nature/gardening, cooking, puzzles and games as well as cultivating new and lasting friendships.

REECE'S STORY: A FIRST-TIME CAMPER FINDS A SECOND HOME

Reece Maurer is 21 years old and living with autism, OCD and anxiety. He arrived at camp in August 2025 for the first time. Not only was he new to Rising Treetops, but it was also the first time he was spending a night away from home.

Reece loved singing karaoke, drama class, and swimming in our accessible pool. His experience at Rising Treetops gave his family something equally valuable: the opportunity for his mother to move his sister into college while knowing Reece was thriving in a supportive environment.



Reece Maurer enjoying the Rising Treetops playground.

That excitement was evident in his mother Kristin Maurer's email: **"We weren't even home and Reece was checking out the brochure and asking if he can do the pool party week at the end of September! I can't tell you how happy I am that he is so excited to be at Rising Treetops! He hasn't stopped smiling and laughing!"**

Reece indeed returned for an overnight respite session this September. His mother noticed remarkable changes: he began interacting with staff and asking their names, something he hadn't done before.

"We let our clients be who they want to be here. They feel that and thrive," reflects Donna Albanese, Rising Treetops Placement and Training Coordinator. "We see the contentment on their faces. Parents are over the moon with excitement about it."

HONORING OUR PARTNERS

Rising Treetops at Oakhurst hosted a special event to recognize the wonderful partners that make our work possible. Our inaugural Very Important Partner (VIP) Luncheon honored nonprofits, volunteers, funders, local businesses, and elected officials who help us fulfill our mission.



Client Hannah Davis and Counselor Valentina Gironza enjoyed Carnival Day at the Very Important Partner Luncheon.

The day included brief remarks from Rising Treetops Board members and senior staff as well as tours of our beautiful 15-acre camp and therapeutic client activities. Our partners at Sysco generously donated a delicious professionally catered lunch. A highlight was hearing from a client's parent, overcome with emotion and in tears; Educator Crystal Foster spoke to how much Rising Treetops means to her 17-year-old daughter Brielle and to her as a single mom. The event concluded with Carnival Day featuring a petting zoo, face painting, dunk tank, and sweets enjoyed by our guests and clients alike.

REWARDING VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCES

Volunteers are integral to Rising Treetops' success by generously donating their time in service of our campers and respite clients. This year, we've welcomed volunteers from Christian Brothers Academy, OceanFirst Bank, Trinity Hall, Monmouth University, and more! If you're interested in a rewarding volunteer experience (as an individual or with a group), please contact Family Liaison and Volunteer Coordinator Maria Monzon at mmonzon@risingtreetops.org.

FROM THE DESKS OF THE PRESIDENT AND INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It's an exciting time at Rising Treetops as we close on our 119th year! We celebrate the many accomplishments behind us and look forward to a bright future.

In 2024, thanks to generous donors, we completed needed gym renovations and purchased a 14-passenger, wheelchair-accessible bus to safely transport our clients. It was also the first year we fully re-opened our services since COVID, and we hosted 979 client visits.

In 2025, we are stronger than ever. We are on track to host more than 1,000 client visits for the year. We began interviewing for a new long-term Executive Director to lead Rising Treetops into its next impactful chapter. We remain incredibly grateful to the caring team of professionals who care for our clients and provide a safe and nurturing environment. We applaud our enthusiastic volunteers and dedicated board of directors who are critical to making this important work possible.

But we still face challenges. With demand for our services growing, donations are needed now more than ever. Expenses are on the rise for staffing, therapeutic program materials, and upkeep and cleaning of all 12 buildings at camp. Many of our families continue to need scholarships for our services.

Our clients and their families rely on us, and we rely on you. If you can support our life-changing services, please visit www.risingtreetops.org/donate.

Thank you for your commitment and generosity in partnering with us to inspire joy and confidence in people with special needs.

With gratitude,

Marilyn Friedman, President

Diana R. Breen, Interim Executive Director

For more information, to donate, or to tour our camp, please contact:

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