

The **CAMP OAKHURST** **CHALLENGE**

www.NYSH.org



Summer 2013

What's New At Camp This Summer

We are pleased that two of our most popular programs have been completely renovated and upgraded this spring!

In the process of hiring a contractor to complete the full renovation of our teaching program kitchen, Alfano Kitchen & Baths, a company which specializes in special needs home design, was so enthusiastic that they provided appliances and materials at cost, with nearly all the labor donated. Thank you, Alfano!



Camper Preparing A Meal In The New Kitchen

The teaching kitchen, located in the Elms Activity Building, is used year-round for our cooking program. It now features a beautiful new interior, including a new floor, appliances, a ceiling fan, sinks, counter tops, cupboards and table. It is barrier-free and is already a huge hit!

The media arts program has also been fully

upgraded. All hardware and software has been replaced and there are now 12 iPads instead of a single video camera. There is now a new instructor's computer, a projector for viewing and editing, and all new adapted furniture. The program offers our clients an accessible state-of-the-art opportunity to create short films or produce their own DVDs.

These are just some of the new things campers are beginning to enjoy this summer!

What's Ahead For The Pre - Vocational Program

Thanks to a grant from the Kessler Foundation, the Pre-Vocational Program, under the guidance of Lori Schenck, Director of Intake Services, offers young adults at the camp the opportunity to prepare themselves for future work through personal care and program goals, as well as through training in developing vocational skills. The training includes filling out job applications, preparation for interviews and taking on the responsibility of work, through participation in various jobs at the camp such as working in the Sugar Shack, delivering mail and party planning for each session's theme days and banquets.

The program provides campers with the opportunity to choose one personal goal and one program goal, and to work toward reaching them during the course of each session.

Last summer's theme was "Just Be You." It was composed of three main aspects. Individuals chose goals in personal care, ones that they would want to do on their own and were assisted

by the counselors to achieve them. By breaking these goals down to individual components, campers found the task much less difficult and easier to work through. Some campers wanted to be able to dress themselves and with staff assistance were able to achieve their goals. One girl, Alyssa, wanted to walk and, with the assistance of two staff members, was able to take six steps in the pool. As one of the staff recalled, “The joy on her face was a sight to behold and well worth the effort for all concerned.”



Planning For The Future In Media Arts

The second part involved a “theme word” for each day which was incorporated into aspects of daily activities. There were daily discussions regarding these goals which worked very well in communicating ideas back and forth between program staff and campers.

The third part was vocational preparation. The major focus, of course, was the banquet, in which campers engaged in such aspects of party planning as decorations, food preparation, menu planning, setting up tables and engaging entertainment for the event.

This summer, in addition to campers running the Sugar Shack, doing mail delivery, as well as banquet preparation, there is more focus on what job opportunities are available. This concept is incorporated in the theme “What Can You Do?” This theme evolved out of discussions last year with campers regarding how to stay positive when seeking employment. The idea was to focus on what can be done to make things work for you, such as what will you do to make yourself employable or what you can do or take

when going out to find a job or what your family or educator can do to help you.

A significant amount of time is also spent accessing the internet to do job research, pointing campers in the right direction and finding out what resources are available. There are also off-campus trips, such as to a local radio station, a favorite for all the children participating in our summer media arts program.

Our campers are very positive and excited about the new additions to the program this year, and it is shaping up to be a very fulfilling summer.

The Need For Emergency Respite

In 2012 Camp Oakhurst reached an agreement with the states of New York and New Jersey to be able to accept clients in respite on an emergency basis. This is a necessary service for the many struggling families who are unable to care for their relative with disabilities due to a major medical condition, death or abandonment. For these families there are no other options until they are able to resume care again or until a more permanent alternative becomes available. For these individuals with disabilities and their families Camp Oakhurst is a lifeline which has been reaching out to reel them back in.

Since last year, over 30 people have received the benefit of an emergency respite. Everyone who has attended is an individual with a unique story. Nearly all are referred to us through New Jersey’s Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) or New York State’s Office of People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD).

Each person’s story gives impetus to the absolute necessity of this program within the community.

Adam, a young man in his early twenties from New Jersey, has a neurological impairment and requires a feeding tube. He is non-verbal, and although ambulatory, is fully dependent in his

care needs. Adam's mother had become too ill with Parkinson's disease to take care of him. He had no other living relatives, and was placed as a ward of the state. After six months, they could still not find him a home. However, Adam eventually did find a home last October -- here at Camp Oakhurst.

Nicholas is a young man from Queens with Cerebral Palsy and cognitive disabilities. He, along with his older brother, who was also his care giver, were displaced from their home last October as a result of Hurricane Sandy. The State of New York sent Nicholas to us in November for emergency respite. Shortly after Nicholas was in residence at Oakhurst, his brother determined that he no longer wanted guardianship and placed him with the state. Nicholas remained at Camp Oakhurst through April, when the state placed him in a permanent residence.

There are so many more stories to tell. Ones such as that of a young woman, Elizabeth, whose terminally ill father's wish was to find her a place that would help care for her. In his letter of thanks, Elizabeth's father said, "I regret that we did not find you earlier in my girl's life. Please don't ever go away! It took us too long to find you! There is a quality of life thing involved here with Elizabeth and all your campers. You go a long, long way towards enhancing that. We feel like we have known you forever."

All of the stories speak of the joy these individuals feel upon their arrival at Camp Oakhurst, as well as the dignity and care they receive from our staff whose motto is "putting people first."

As long as this very real need exists, Camp Oakhurst will continue to provide these services. For further information on this program, contact our Camp Director, Charles Sutherland, at the New Jersey office.

Rebuilding After Hurricane Sandy

When Hurricane Sandy pounded the New Jersey coastline last October, Camp Oakhurst, located one mile from the Jersey Shore, lost power for eight days and cancelled two scheduled respites. Our staff and emergency respite clients in



Campers Enjoying The New Gazebo

residence had no place to go. The camp purchased two generators to provide limited power and the health center became the locus of operations as the incredible clean up began.

Sandy demolished the camp's nature shack, tore down trees, damaged roofs and broke windows, pool glass, doors, gates and fences. Without power, all of the perishable food spoiled. The laundry room's ceiling collapsed and a power surge damaged a dryer and stove. The cost of repairs and lost income was over \$40,000.

But like everyone else on the Jersey Shore, Camp Oakhurst began the long process of rebuilding. Now, eight months later, our staff are welcoming campers to the 108th summer season!

There is a brand new gazebo where the nature center stood. Japanese maple trees have been planted where old ones were torn up by their roots. There is a new roof on the health center, and all other repairs completed. It was a long hard process, but this summer campers are finding the grounds better than ever.

Spring Benefit 2013

This year's annual spring benefit was held on Wednesday, April 24th. It was a wonderful evening of dinner and theater, in which the agency was able to raise over \$166,000 in support of our programs at Camp Oakhurst.

Guests started to arrive at Blue Fin around 5:30 for cocktails and a seated dinner, followed by an 8:00 pm performance of the new Broadway hit *Motown: the Musical*. The show, which features many of the catalogue hits that we are all

familiar with, was well received and some guests were even spotted dancing in their seats during the performance.

We want to thank all of our many generous donors for their support of our year-round services for youth and adults with physical and developmental disabilities at Camp Oakhurst.

Once again we urge you to visit Camp Oakhurst during the summer sessions, which run from June 21 to August 30. Please call Charles Sutherland at 732-531-0215 to arrange a tour.

From The Desks Of The Executive Director And President

There are many challenges facing Camp Oakhurst, from a client population with increasingly more profound disabilities, to the emergence of autism as a significant disability, to new limitations in government funding and the availability of private donations. As a result, New York Service for the Handicapped will soon undertake an organizational assessment and strategic planning process in order to ensure a viable and more effective Camp Oakhurst.

For the past nearly 30 years, Camp Oakhurst has grown substantially as an out-of-home overnight respite provider. We have experienced major changes in respite program reimbursements due to new state regulations. These changes have reduced the total amount received each year, and made this funding increasingly hard to access.

While the agency is still committed to serving people without regard to their ability to pay, the fees charged to families are an important source of revenue and we continue to work with families to have their loved ones attend Camp Oakhurst. As a result, we provide more than \$300,000 in annual scholarships, even with fees of \$137 a day charged for overnight services being far below our real costs of \$317 per day.

In 2013, we will serve over 400 children and adults with physical and developmental disabilities, including autism, with the total number of visits expected to be over 1,200. Our

clients' needs are more socially, medically and psychologically complex than ever, requiring a staffing ratio of 1:2 or 1:1 and with significant clinical inputs.



Making A Birdhouse In Arts & Crafts

As a result of these challenges, our staff and board of directors are exploring new ways to use our campus, develop stronger partnerships and identify new sources of revenue. That said, the assessment and planning process will address the following strategic issues: services, programming and target populations, mission statement and branding, outreach and marketing, staff recruitment and development, capital improvement to facilities, client fees and scholarships, endowment and capital funds, and board recruitment and development.

We anticipate that the strategic planning process will begin this fall so that we can begin to implement recommendations by mid-2014. We will be seeking input from our constituent bodies, including campers, families, donors, and government agencies.

We look forward to this planning process and the expected outcome of a stronger and more visible organization.

*Marilyn Friedman
President*

*Robert Pacenza
Executive Director*

The Camp Oakhurst Challenge is a publication of New York Service for the Handicapped. For more information or to submit articles or commentaries, please contact: Wendy Eager, Editor, New York Service for the Handicapped, 1140 Broadway, Suite 903, NY, NY 10001, email w.eager@nysh.org or call 212-533-4020.