

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

[www.NYSH.org](http://www.NYSH.org)



**Fall / Winter 2015**

## **Oakhurst's Pre-Vocational Program Makes an Impact**

With grant support from the Kessler Foundation, the summer 2015 pre-vocational program ("Pre-Voc") was a great success. The Pre-Voc program integrated communication skills with hands-on pre-vocational training in job readiness and introduced the campers to different types of work, to begin to prepare the campers, ages 12-19, to hold jobs in their communities.

Participants were mailed program packets prior to the start of their camp sessions and were asked to write personal, activity, and Pre-Voc goals. Upon arrival, our Pre-Voc staff assisted them in further developing their goals, and the Pre-Voc group met every morning to review progress on these goals. In job readiness, participants were taught vocational vocabulary, such as time card, professional, co-worker, supervisor, uniform, and job application, and learned about appropriate workplace behavior and suitable social conduct. The job-specific segment of the program exposed the participants to a range of concepts, vocabulary, and tasks related to clerical, retail, food and grocery service jobs.

Once the participants demonstrated an understanding of these concepts, they were able to choose a work area and apply for their camp job. Some chose mail duty, others chose to work in the popular Sugar Shack snack shop, but the favorite was planning for the end-of-session banquets! The banquet planning encompassed a large number of tasks such as theme selection, decorating, menu planning and table setting.

As a result of their new roles at the camp, participants in the program began to see themselves as part of the camp staff, and learned how to work as a team, encouraging each other throughout the session. For instance, with so many wanting to work in the Sugar Shack, they learned to alternate shifts so that everyone had a chance to participate.

A positive outcome of the program was the increase in



*Campers enjoying the pre-vocational program's banquet dance.*

self-esteem and confidence that the campers achieved, as illustrated by some of their personal stories described in the following narratives.

Daniela is a 13 year old with developmental delays, who expressed the hope of someday becoming a firefighter and helping people. She set a goal to learn the skills to be able to complete a first-aid course. At camp, she also set a goal to learn to swim independently. She worked hard during her six weeks at camp, spending extra time with the pool lifeguard during swimming sessions. Daniela's positive attitude and diligence paid off. When she left camp, she was swimming two laps in the pool independent of support. She was also one of the most conscientious workers at the Sugar Shack, encouraging her fellow workers to emulate her strong work ethic.

Alec is a 17 year old with cerebral palsy who came to camp with a positive attitude and a goal to develop his public speaking skills so that he could become a motivational speaker. His personal goal was to increase his overall physical fitness so that by the end of camp he would be able to walk without the use of his wheelchair across the dining hall to the table and eat his meal independently. During a camp banquet night, Alec not only walked up to get his meal, but also presented his motivational speech with the help of creative media. He addressed his fellow campers with the following words, "A little light goes a long way!"

# ANNUAL FALL



# THEATER BENEFIT



These are just two of the 26 stories of personal achievement that occurred within the pre-vocational program this summer. The positive energy that came out of the program was a testament to the hard work of both the campers and the staff who worked diligently to achieve success.

### A New Sensory Garden

In September, local landscaper William McDaid and his crew at Twin Resources donated labor and materials to build a sensory garden at a centrally-located area on camp grounds. The garden, which features its own irrigation system and raised planting beds, will come alive in the spring when it will be used to plant herbs, flowers and vegetables. Plants will be carefully chosen for their therapeutic and sensory value.

Sensory gardens are contained environments which have been designed to stimulate the senses. They have proven particularly beneficial for children and adults who have difficulty with sensory processing, such as autism, as well as other disabilities. The choice of what will be planted will be based on the needs of our clients.



*Our sensory garden soon after its completion.*

Twin Resources has already paved the surrounding beds to make the garden visually appealing, as well as making it wheelchair accessible. Charles Sutherland, Oakhurst's director of services and operations, commented that, "Having an accessible garden, where individuals of all abilities can become involved in the growing process is a real benefit for us. Gardening is such a therapeutic activity for our campers to be able to touch and smell the soil and pick the vegetables." An added benefit is that the vegetables and herbs that are grown in the garden will be used in our cooking program and in our dining service.

Camp Oakhurst wants to once again thank William McDaid

for making this garden possible and for his continued support of the work we do at Oakhurst.

### Fall 2015 Theater Benefit

This year's theater benefit was held on October 14<sup>th</sup>. The evening began as guests arrived for cocktails and a delicious seated dinner at world famous Sardi's restaurant. Marilyn Friedman, board president and Robert Pacenza, executive director, gave remarks updating guests on Camp Oakhurst.

Afterward, guests walked next door to the Helen Hayes Theatre to see the revival of the 1960's off-Broadway hit *Dames At Sea*. The performance was skillfully executed with a surfeit of excellent song and tap dance numbers. The event was a success, raising \$150,000 for camp scholarships.

### What's New in Respite Care

Our overnight respite program continues to grow, with attendance increasing 8% overall from a year ago, with our most significant growth in our autism population and our emergency and day respite programs.

**The day respite care program**, which formally opened in February 2015, provides a valuable service to Monmouth County working parents in need of after school care for their children with special needs. The majority of individuals enrolled in the program have previously attended other Oakhurst sessions, either in our summer camp program or year-round respite. The agency provides transportation from the school to our facility, where the children are engaged in therapeutic recreation and homework help. We have received very positive response from our families, who have become our biggest advocates.

One of our day respite clients is David, a 12 year old diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Prior to attending the day respite program, he attended as a day camper, then as a sleep away camper this summer, and in overnight respite in October.

David's family has his occupational therapist conduct his therapy at Oakhurst. His mother, in a recent email, explained: "I am very happy that your place exists and that it meets David's and our family needs. It's great that you are offering an after school program, that allow[s] us to work our full time jobs."

The day respite care program is currently accepting applications. For more information, call Donna Albanese at 732-531-0215.



*The entrance to Camp Oakhurst's main house, which greets our day respite care families each afternoon.*

**Emergency respite** also continues to be a much-needed service, providing a temporary safe haven for adults and children with special needs.

In late September, Thomas, a 14 year old New Jersey boy with autism spectrum disorder, was placed in emergency respite through New Jersey's Child Protection and Permanency (CP&P) agency. His caregiver was hospitalized and was unable to care for him. Although Thomas is non-verbal, he is able to communicate his needs in other ways. When he first arrived at Oakhurst, he had behavioral issues, but in the past two months, with intensive support and care, his behavior has improved.

Thomas, unlike most individuals who are placed in emergency respite, also attends school daily while in our care. His school is about an hour's drive from Oakhurst. CP&P has arranged his transportation to and from the school. In the meantime, Thomas receives weekly visits from his care manager, who is often accompanied by family members. CP&P will determine soon when Thomas will be able to return home

In 2015 to date, the agency has served 27 individuals with emergency care.

### Activity Building Renovations

The activity building is the heart of all recreational programs at camp. It houses the cooking classroom, media arts lab, computer classroom, music room, arts and crafts room and recreational hall and theater. Thanks to a generous grant from the Jewish Communal Fund's Special Gift Fund made through UJA-Federation of New York, Camp Oakhurst was able to commence work on renovations and improvement of the activity building in mid-August.

All exterior work, including a new roof, trim for windows and doors and siding repair was completed by late September. The interior phase, which included new VCT flooring and molding throughout the 10,500 square foot building, as well as the addition of new lights and surround sound in the recreational hall/theater, along with renovation of the entire arts and crafts activity room, was completed by mid-November. All client activities were moved to the gym and dining room while the interior work was being completed.

Clients will now have the benefit of a state-of-the-art, modernized, clean, dry and more effective facility, which will be structurally sound for decades to come. On January 11, 2016, there will be a formal re-dedication for the "new" building, recognizing the generous support of the Jewish Communal Fund.

### Main House New Roof Gets Green Light

Thanks to a generous grant from The Marion and Norman Tanzman Charitable Foundation, Camp Oakhurst was able to begin work on replacing the roof and painting the entire exterior of the main house. This building houses our commercial kitchen, dining room, new day respite care classroom, laundry and administrative offices. The second floor of the building is the dormitory for 12 live-in direct care staff.

While work on the roof began in November, we are still in the process of raising funds to complete this project. **If you are interested in making a donation, please call us at 212-533-4020 or visit NYSH.org.**

### Summer Party 2015

This summer's "Send A Kid To Camp" fundraiser was held on July 11<sup>th</sup> at the Ocean Beach Club. It was a fun evening of cocktails, hors d'oeuvres and music, with 100 guests in



*Summer Party guests relaxing at the Ocean Beach Club.*

attendance. We raised over \$55,000 for summer camp scholarships.

Aimee and Steve Frankel, benefit committee members, described the impact volunteering at Oakhurst had on their teenage children this summer. Frankie Florman, granddaughter of our board member Adelle Rathe, wrote a letter about her volunteer experience, explaining: "I was lucky enough to get to volunteer at Camp Oakhurst for two weeks. The first week I was with kids of all ages, with all kinds of different disabilities and the second with autistic kids. I always felt happiness around me – from the kids, counselors and all of the staff. I will cherish the memories I have made with the campers forever!"

### **From the Desks of the President and Executive Director**

2015 has been a year of both change and expansion for Camp Oakhurst. In order to continue to improve our facilities and provide scholarships to those who need it, we rely on the support of both individuals and foundations. This year, 14% of our nearly \$2 million budget came from our board members and 13% from individual supporters outside of our board. We appreciate your support, and hope that you will continue to enable us to provide the quality experience Camp Oakhurst has given its campers for more than 100 years.

In 2015, we have delivered high-quality, therapeutic and effective camp and respite services for people with disabilities, including formally opening a new much-needed day respite care (after school) program in February for working families with school-age children with disabilities. This year, we also made significant headway in our multi-year plan to renovate and improve our facilities, equipment and materials.

We began the year building out a 1,000 square foot day respite care classroom and fully renovating the entire first floor of our main house building. In May we installed a new perimeter cast iron-style fence replacing an old chain link fence that was along our visible perimeter on Monmouth and S. Lincoln Roads in Oakhurst. Also, as previously reported in this newsletter, this fall we undertook major overall renovations of our activity building and are replacing our main house roof.

In order to meet the needs of a changing client population, Camp Oakhurst has begun to implement an inclusion model in our respite and camp sessions. The hiring of a therapeutic recreation specialist this past year provided a

model for us to implement inclusion in our programs by helping our staff to work with families and clients to set goals and choose activities based on interests, ability and therapeutic value, allowing for our different populations to participate in the same sessions. The result has provided Camp Oakhurst with a more enriched, diverse and flexible model of service delivery.



*Campers and counselors enjoying a beautiful day at Oakhurst.*

The population of children and adults with autism and intellectual disabilities we serve continues to grow. With our day respite care program now fully in operation and our emergency respite program serving clients with urgent care needs on an ongoing basis, Camp Oakhurst will continue in 2016 to expand our capacity to serve these new needs and populations.

We have much to do in 2016 to do all we can to improve our services and positively impact on the quality of life of the people we serve. We will continue to renovate our buildings to become even more accessible and therapeutically-focused. We also plan to renovate several of our residences, as well as make improvements to our pool and gymnasium.

We are grateful for your continued support, and your partnership in fulfilling our mission. We wish you a happy and healthy 2016.

*Marilyn Friedman*  
*President*

*Robert Pacenza*  
*Executive Director*

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