

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

www.NYSH.org



Fall/Winter 2014

Day Respite Care Service To Open February 2015

Building Walls and Opening Doors is the theme for the launch of our new Day Respite Care program for children with special needs, including autism and physical and intellectual disabilities, which is scheduled to open in February 2015. For the last few years, Camp Oakhurst has provided, on request, limited day respite services for families struggling to find care for their children with disabilities after school and on school closure days. Our positive experience with this limited service helped us decide to formally open a Day Respite Care program and create an attractive, accessible and therapeutically engaging program space to provide a supportive lifeline for more working families in need.

The objective of this service is to fill a very real need for local families in the community who have had difficulty finding appropriate care for their children during work hours when the children are no longer in school. Transportation will be provided from schools to Camp Oakhurst during afternoons after school lets out, thus allowing for easier access for working parents who would not otherwise be able to bring their children there.

While our clients are in attendance, staff will be available to assist the children with homework, as well as engage them in adapted recreational activities, including arts and crafts, music and dance, sports and recreation – all provided therapeutically in a supportive setting.



Briana, one of the clients in Day Respite

The Main House, which is the building that will now be housing the Day Respite Care Program, will soon be renovated. Originally the space was an annex to our dining room, but will now be sectioned off to provide 1,000 square feet for a recreational and educational space. We will build out walls for the new program space, and install new floor tiles throughout the Main House. The space will be bright and inviting, furnished with cheerful accessible furniture and decorations, as well as therapeutic activity items such as games, toys, activity boards – all items created and adapted to engage the children who will be attending the program.

The agency is raising money through a campaign which includes soliciting local children-focused businesses in the community, as well as online via Giving Tuesday, the international fundraiser day which was held on December 2.

For more information on the program and how you can help, visit us on our website at nysh.org or at [facebook.com/campoakhurst](https://www.facebook.com/campoakhurst). We very much look forward to opening day!

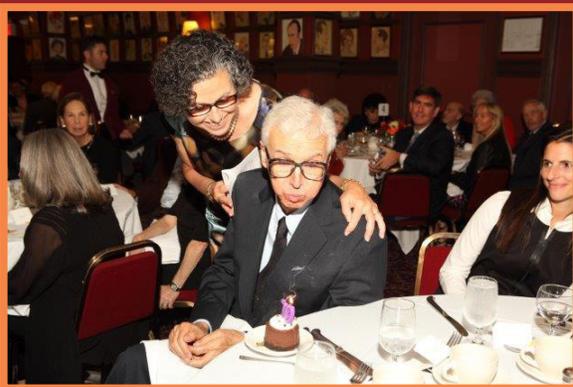
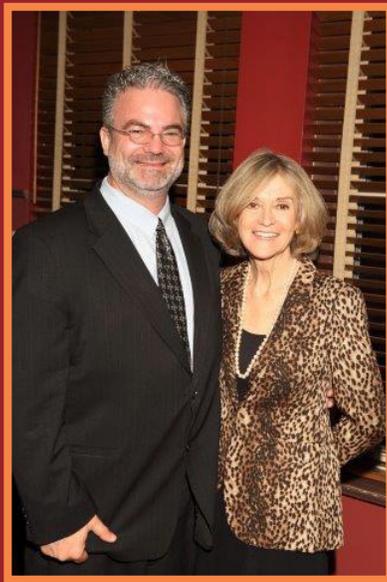
ANNUAL FALL

Fall Benefit 2014 Breaks a Record

This year's theater benefit, held on October 2, was a resounding success, raising over \$224,000.

The evening started with dinner at Sardi's, world renowned as the unofficial Broadway Hall of Fame, with over 1,200 portraits of famous individuals who frequented its environs, most notably in its heyday. The design is still very much reminiscent of that era with its dark brocade and burgundy and gold color scheme. Guests enjoyed an elegant three course meal while enjoying the ambiance. The evening also celebrated the 70th birthday of long-time dedicated supporter Thomas Block, husband of board president, Marilyn Friedman. It was a special moment when he blew out his birthday candle to resounding applause.

After dinner, guests attended the star-studded performance of *It's Only A Play* at the Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre. Of course, Nathan Lane received the most laughs! It was a lovely, balmy October night to end a memorable evening.



THEATRE BENEFIT



An Emergency Respite Story

Camp Oakhurst's emergency respite service, now two years in existence, has become critical in supporting families in crisis. It has given adults and children with disabilities in New York and New Jersey a temporary safe haven, often when there was no other place for them to go.

The program was designed to provide overnight respite services beyond our scheduled sessions, and has been instrumental in caring for these clients when a caregiver has medical issues or during a transition period after leaving the care of family members while waiting for a placement in permanent housing. The vast majority of our referrals have come to us through either New Jersey's Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) or New York State's Office of People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD).

Since its incorporation into our available services, emergency respite has made the difference between despair and hope in the lives of those in our care, adding comfort at a time when it was so desperately needed. So far, in this year alone, the camp has been able to provide emergency care for 20 individuals, many for long periods of time while they wait for a permanent placement.

Quite recently we assisted a long-time client during a traumatic moment in his young life. Jonathan is a personable 24 year old young man with cerebral palsy and a moderate intellectual disability, who although non-verbal, has never had a problem communicating his wants and needs, whether with gestures, sign language or a communication board. As one staff member put it, "he is the most verbal non-verbal person I ever met."

Jonathan has been coming to camp since he was 12 and is known for his upbeat personality and his black ponytail. Until recent circumstances, he lived in low income housing

with his father, his sole guardian and caregiver. Recently his father became terminally ill. In his final days, Jonathan resided in a bed next to him in the hospital. There was no other place for Jonathan to go. At a time when a person should be grieving over the loss of a loved one, Jonathan was facing the crisis of where he would live and who would care for him. This is when Camp Oakhurst stepped in. The hospital couldn't find anyone to assume responsibility for Jonathan. After discovering his relationship with the camp, as well as with the help of state family support services staff, Camp Oakhurst agreed immediately to pick up Jonathan from the hospital and care for him in our emergency respite service.



Jonathan (in yellow) in arts & crafts

As of late November, Jonathan is at Oakhurst until a suitable supportive housing option becomes available. Oakhurst staff have provided for all of Jonathan's care, and he is engaged in camp activities, and is comforted by being with the staff and other campers that have been his extended family for the last dozen years.

Jonathan and Cecilio, another young man currently in attendance, have bonded and are spending time engaged in activities together. Jonathan especially enjoys the music activities, to which he hums along. He is also interested in tactile arts, and at the moment is working on painting a piece of ceramic.

Camp Oakhurst has proved to be a much needed lifeline for Jonathan, as it has been to many others in this invaluable emergency service.

Summer Camp 2014 Recap

Summer 2014, Camp Oakhurst's 109th in operation, was one of our most successful and well-attended in years, with attendance reaching 353 and our expanding summer day camp growing to 30 campers. For the third year, we offered an 8-day session for adults and three 13-day sessions for youth in our traditional camp for individuals with physical and developmental disabilities. In addition, again this year we offered two 5-day sessions for youth and young adults diagnosed with autism.

A mostly cool and dry summer was enjoyed by everyone. Of the 75 summer staff hired, we had staff from the U.S., France, Jordan, Poland, Scotland, Ireland and England. A dedicated, caring and engaged summer staff of counselors, nurses, specialists, housekeeping and office staff joined our year-round staff to provide a terrific, safe and healthy summer of fun, with therapeutic recreational activities provided daily in music, drama, media arts, arts/crafts, sports, swimming and nature. We also continued our pre-vocational program for adolescents this summer, without dedicated grant-funding, for 20 participants. All this over nine weeks!

We were proud to have our friends from Children's Specialized Hospital also take over our camp for one week during the third week of August. We look forward to another great summer in 2015!

Overnight Respites 2014-2015

Camp Oakhurst's 2014-15 overnight respite season began on September 24th with 25 adults in a week-long session. In total, to date through November 1st, we have served 117 individuals in respite, with 12 of those attending two or more sessions. Of those served, 11 were served in emergency respite and 3 additional clients also attended for day respite care. For the remainder of this respite season, which runs through early June, we have a planned schedule of five 3-4

night stays for youth and twelve 5-7 night stays for adults with physical and developmental disabilities. We also have eleven 2-4 weekend stays for youth and young adults with autism.



Enjoying the boardwalk at Point Pleasant

While attending an overnight respite, clients have access to adapted seasonal therapeutic recreational activities.

During the October 15 - 22 session, clients went on a trip to the Jenkinson's Aquarium in Point Pleasant. They were very excited to not only view the exhibits, but also pet some of the creatures such as stingrays and baby sharks. They loved watching the penguins and seals at feeding time. Afterward, they had the opportunity to enjoy the sights at the Point Pleasant boardwalk. Other trips are planned throughout the year, as well as dance parties and holiday celebrations.

We are a barrier-free short-term residential facility and provide individuals with disabilities an opportunity to stay at Camp Oakhurst in a fully supportive overnight respite environment outside the home. The program's goal is to help strengthen the entire family by giving caregivers timely breaks, and enriching the quality of life for our clients. Adults who live alone or in community residences can also attend a respite session, but priority is given to those who live with a family caregiver.

If you or someone you know is interested in applying for a session, contact us for more information. We look forward to serving you, your child, your friend or family member, or your client/consumer this respite season!

Summer Benefit 2014

This year's summer benefit couldn't have been more perfect. It was held on Saturday, July 12th from 6:30 – 9:30 at the Ocean Beach Club in Elberon, just steps from the beach.

The weather was as if made to order – cool, dry, with a hint of ocean breeze. Guests were treated to cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, while others danced under an outdoor tent to the strains of musical tunes selected by a DJ.

At least a dozen staff members, both American and international, were in attendance, assisting guests and giving them a taste of Camp Oakhurst hospitality. The event was successful, and raised over \$74,000 towards camp scholarships.

From the Desks of the President and Executive Director

We wrote in this column in April about the challenges facing Camp Oakhurst, and the goal of our then in-progress strategic planning process to help evaluate and develop a blueprint to fulfill the agency's mission and future viability. We are pleased to report that our board of directors finalized our strategic plan in June, and we now have started implementing some of the strategies needed to meet the goals of the plan over the next 3-5 years. Our vision for Camp Oakhurst is that it be a preeminent resource to provide safe, accepting, and accessible services that allow our clients to gain confidence, reach their potential, and build a community of friends, while enjoying all that our camp has to offer.

Among the enhancements that we have begun to implement as a result of our deliberations over the strategic plan are the following:

- To meet increasing demand, we are expanding a day respite care program to serve children in Monmouth County after school and on weekends. We are setting up the program in our Main House with cheerful furniture, therapeutic materials and other appropriate equipment.

- To assure that we provide an excellent experience for all our clients, we have hired a therapeutic recreation specialist who will work with our staff to increase the impact of our recreational activities and a housekeeper to assure the highest levels of cleanliness. We have renovated our health center, installed a new sound system in our theater, and have purchased all new computers for our computer room. In an ongoing effort to keep our facility in good order, we are renovating the bathrooms and installing all new floor tiles in our Main House.

- To improve access for our families, we have created a larger parking lot.

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, the growing need for unplanned emergency respite care as well as day respite care for local working families, to new limitations in government funding and the availability of private donations. Our ability to meet these challenges will be crucial to help ensure a viable and more effective Camp Oakhurst.

All of the improvements detailed above are part of our commitment to provide high quality services and facilities to the people we serve. The expenses related to these improvements place a strain on our finances, which we must alleviate through fundraising. We are grateful to our supporters, volunteers, and nonprofit and government partners for assisting us in these endeavors, and we ask for continued support so that we may continue to assist those families that cannot afford to pay the increasing costs of operating Camp Oakhurst. Thank you.

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.