

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

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Summer 2016

Adult Respitees Give A Shout Out!

Since 1984, when Camp Oakhurst offered its very first adult respite to clients who had aged out of the children's program, adults have had the opportunity to engage in therapeutic recreational activities at the camp year-round. There are now 15 one week adult respite sessions during the regular respite season, and one week of adult summer camp. During each session clients can engage in familiar camp activities such as arts and crafts, cooking and athletics, as well as take part in off-site trips to places such as Philadelphia, the Amish country or Mt. Airy Lodge Casino, as well as themed dances and barbecues. Each respite has a specific theme attached to it which is described in the calendar that is mailed out to the clients. The atmosphere during respite is more relaxed than the busy summer camp sessions. Groups are smaller, with an average attendance of 20 individuals per session.

On March 24th, during an unexpectedly chilly early spring day, I had the opportunity to visit and talk to the clients in attendance. Morning activities were divided into two arts and crafts groups, which was followed by a delicious lunch of home-made tomato soup and grilled cheese sandwiches. The afternoon also had two activity choices, after which there was time for adults to get together and socialize in their cabins.

During the morning activities, which were led by respite supervisors, Christine and Eli, clients were involved in painting mandolin harps or constructing pine cone bird feeders. My first stop was the arts and crafts room, where campers were painting mandolins, prior to their adding strings. Marta, who has been coming to Oakhurst since she was a child, is now 34 and loved the project. She is very enthusiastic about all arts and crafts activities, which she also does at home. In the afternoon, Marta was one of the people most engaged in making fruit figures, as pictured on the right.

Many of the adults in attendance had first come to camp

as children, often at the recommendation of friends who had previously been to Oakhurst. Angel is one such individual. His first session was in 1992. Angel created a number of fruit people in the afternoon activity, which he designed to go along with a Viking ship and a native warrior, both created with the assistance of staff members. Angel, who lives in the Bronx, said he relished the quiet, relaxing atmosphere that respite offers, as well as the chance to "hang out with old friends." His favorite activities are the day trips.



Christine assisting Marta with her fruit figures

Shanquette is a young woman who also first came to camp as a child. She recalled those early years and the camaraderie she first experienced there. Some of her old friends have families of their own now, she said, and "don't get to come to camp as often." Wistfully, she added that she missed their presence.

At one point, Rafael, another camper, cruised into the room in his motorized wheelchair. Like the others, he started attending sessions as a child and became active in sports. Now 27, Rafael has traveled the world as a participant in the Paralympic Games. Some of Rafael's achievements have included participation in the Bocce Nationals from 2012 through 2015, and the Special Olympics in Beijing in 2014. A resident of Long Island, he also plays with the Wheelchair Yankees in

Eisenhower Park and basketball with the Nassau Kings, in which the latter team won three championships. Rafael said, "I enjoy the opportunity to play competitively and travel to play sports with people of all kinds of abilities."

In addition to taking a very active role in competitive sports, Rafael is a part-time volunteer at the Rehab Institute in Westbury, Long Island. After speaking with Rafael, you cannot help but become inspired by all he has accomplished, as well as his positive outlook on life. Due to his hectic schedule, this was his first respite in a few years and he was just happy to be back at camp and get re-acquainted with old friends.



Rafael discussing his sports activities

One of the truly amazing things about visiting Camp Oakhurst is that no matter what mood you arrive with, you can't help but leave with an upbeat feeling of empowerment. It is something that often times escapes words, but gives a lasting impression that only a visit to camp can truly capture or explain.

(This story is reported by staff member Wendy Eager after her March camp visit.)

Summer Party 2016

We are pleased to announce that this summer's "Send a Kid to Camp" fundraiser is to be held at the home of Krista and David Long on Saturday, July 9th, from 6:30 to 9:30 in Rumson, New Jersey. It will be an evening of cocktails, hors d'oeuvres and music. Last year's event raised over \$55,000 for summer camp scholarships. If you would like more information on the event please email us at events@nysh.org.

A Day with Sandra Baker: Intake at Camp Oakhurst

The first step in the process of attending a camp or respite session at Camp Oakhurst begins with a personal interview in which the intake coordinator meets with a prospective client and either their caregiver, teacher or counselor. For New Jersey residents, most of the interviews take place at Camp Oakhurst. However, for those individuals who live in the five boroughs of New York City or other locations, intake staff member Sandra Baker often travels to their homes, schools or programs to meet with them. She starts her day off in the schools and later does home visits. Sandra's day can include up to five interviews.

During school visits Sandra has time to observe the clients interact in a classroom setting and assess their abilities and needs. Afternoons are generally reserved for home visits. She finds home visits to be more relaxed and put the clients at greater ease. In general, an intake visit in the home lasts about an hour.

During Sandra's home visits she has the opportunity to talk with the family first, before their child returns from school. She also has the opportunity to see how the client interacts with family members, as well as observe their behaviors and care needs. Sandra feels that home visits are very informative because she can observe both a client's needs as well as the family's. Many caregivers have never had a day away from their child and really look forward to a much-needed break.

For more information about applying for camp or respite services, please call the camp at 732-531-0215.

Activity Building Rededication

After major renovations to its Activity Building made possible by a generous gift from the Jewish Communal Fund (JCF) through UJA-Federation of New York, Camp Oakhurst held a rededication ceremony on January 11th. Nearly 40 people were in attendance.

In attendance and speaking to the rededication audience were Sue Dickman, JCF Executive Vice President and CEO, Mark Medin, UJA Executive Vice President,

Financial Resource Development, and Marilyn Friedman, Camp Oakhurst's Board President. "Thanks to this generous gift from JCF," Ms. Friedman stated, "the building will remain structurally sound and stable for many years to come."

There also was an unveiling of the commemorative plaque, as well as a ribbon-cutting ceremony. Respite client Matthew Martinez, who was also in attendance, also gave remarks. After the dedication, tours were given of the campus.



Campers in the arts and crafts room in the renovated Activity Building

Meet Antion Myatt, Program Coordinator

Antion Myatt, program coordinator at Camp Oakhurst, has a long history of serving people with disabilities. He began volunteering at age 12 at Camp Baker, a camp in Virginia for people with disabilities.

Antion recalled that even as a young child he felt drawn to helping others, which he partially attributed to being a caregiver for both his two younger sisters and his mother, a diabetic who became increasingly dependent.

While most of Antion's school friends spent their summers at sports camps, he found himself helping others at Camp Baker, first as a volunteer and later as a counselor. According to Antion, giving up sports to work with people with special needs was an easy choice. He said, "The chance to make a camper smile was worth the sacrifice." It was at this point that he knew it was a direction he wanted to pursue in life.

In 2007, Antion was offered a job at Oakhurst by Charles Sutherland, his former director at Camp Baker. He enjoyed working at Oakhurst that summer, but did not immediately return due to college and other commitments. In 2012 he was offered a position

to return to the camp as a respite counselor for the emergency respite program, and at that time he decided that Camp Oakhurst was where he wanted to be. Antion enjoys working with the clients and continues to feel inspired by their positive attitude. They in turn, are happy to have him there as well.

Another Kind of Giving

Camp Oakhurst is pleased to thank William McDaid from Twin Resources for a generous donation of labor and plantings to make our new sensory garden beautiful and accessible for the many campers who will benefit from it. Mr. McDaid was responsible for designing and building the garden in fall 2015.

Camp Oakhurst staff are excited to be integrating this wonderful garden into our therapeutic recreation program. There are so many benefits that will come out of this amazing one-of-a-kind garden.

Having an accessible garden, where individuals of all abilities can become intimately involved with the growing process, is a real benefit for us. By nature, gardening is a therapeutic activity. It is very stimulating for our campers to be able to touch and smell the soil and pick the vegetables. The produce from the garden will be utilized in our therapeutic cooking activities.



The sensory garden after the plantings

Another in-kind donation this spring came from a local Home Depot store in West Long Branch in the form of a community project. "Team Depot" spent a few days at Oakhurst helping to improve our Marion's Cabin residence. In addition to painting the interior of the cabin, they also donated a variety of plantings.

Young Professionals Committee in the Works

This spring the agency contacted friends and former staff to help organize a Young Professionals

Volunteer Committee to target New York City metropolitan area young professionals in support of Camp Oakhurst's important mission. We will plan a late 2016 volunteer project at the camp and a social event in Manhattan to benefit Camp Oakhurst. The committee is open to any and all ideas for future events and activities and is seeking people who believe in our mission to help get the word out!

If you are interested or know other people who live or work in the greater NYC area who would be interested in helping us plan events, please email events@nysh.org to let us know. We will be posting updates on Facebook so make sure to follow us!

International Staff at Camp Oakhurst

This January, Charles Sutherland, director of services and operations at Camp Oakhurst, traveled overseas to recruit international staff at the Camp America job fairs held in Edinburgh, London and Amman, Jordan. Some of the fairs attracted as many as 3,000 students.



Summer 2016 staff attending an all-staff training session

The recruitment process this year was enhanced by the use of networking between agencies that referred prospective employees to each other based on their particular interests, which made for a more productive event. The utilization of social media tools, including Skype, enabled Charles to interview prospective staff in countries whose fairs he was unable to attend. The trip was successful and this summer there are 55 international staff at Camp Oakhurst, including new and returning ones.

According to Charles, one of the benefits of employing international staff is that it offers a cultural exchange for campers. He noted that campers really enjoy emulating the mannerisms of the staff such as asking "for a spot of tea," in addition to learning about their different countries and cultures. Camp theme days offer an opportunity to focus on these cultural exchanges.

This summer we have staff from Jordan, Scotland, England, Wales, Poland, South Africa, Australia, Bolivia and Turkey.

What brings international staff back to Oakhurst?

For some it is the intensive structured training that not only prepares them to work with Oakhurst's client population, but gives them the tools for future employment in many special needs areas. For others, it is the positive philosophy of the camp which focuses on inclusion, not exclusion. Unanimously, it is the special bond that develops between them and the campers. It is this bond that not only has made Camp Oakhurst a unique place, but one that brings both staff and clients back year after year.

From the Desks of the President and Executive Director

Since its founding in 1906, New York Service for the Handicapped has gone through several name changes that highlight the evolution of our client mix and mission over time.

Regulatory changes required by our government funding, increasingly complex client needs, and rising costs for providing services have challenged our board of directors and staff to think about new ways to use our campus, develop stronger partnerships, and identify additional sources of revenue. As a result, in spring 2014 we undertook an intensive strategic planning process, finalizing a multi-year plan in June 2014. An important component of this plan is to re-brand the organization to better identify who we are and why people should use our services and support our agency.

Thanks to funding from The Taft Foundation, over the coming months we will be working with a consulting firm to develop a new name that reflects the organization's primary audiences and stakeholders, services and strengths. As part of this process, we will also develop a new logo, website, promotional video and general purpose brochure.

We are grateful for your continued support and your partnership in fulfilling our important mission.

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.