

# The CAMP OAKHURST CHALLENGE

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



Fall/Winter 2017

## Summer Camp Happenings

International staff hired each summer to work our summer camp are always popular with campers. They enjoy the experience of learning about other cultures. During camp theme days they have an opportunity to focus on the cultures, the food, art, and costumes. This summer there were staff from England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Bolivia, the Netherlands, Jordan, Jamaica, Australia, Turkey, Poland and the Ukraine.

This summer the agency also incorporated a new life skills component in a new young adults session (ages 23-35). The two week session, which ran from June 26-July 8, focused on teaching clients basic skills in everyday living, with the purpose of developing the skills needed to live independently, either on their own or in a supervised facility.

The program was designed to teach the practicalities of daily living, from learning the basic skills of cooking (i.e. how to use a stove, boil water or make spaghetti), to making a bed or doing laundry. Recreational activities, such as iPad media arts, cooking, nature studies, music, drama and swimming, were enhanced to meet the life-skills focus. During cooking sessions clients learned the importance of good nutrition as well as acquiring the basic skills and knowledge to prepare meals.

The program also focused on preparing young adults to enter the job market, which included learning how to write a resume and prepare for a job interview. Clients were given an opportunity to experience job interviews by applying for various positions at camp.

At the end of the two week session a skills competition was held, and clients had the opportunity to show off their achievements as well as reinforce what they had learned. This was thoroughly enjoyed by campers. Plans are underway to expand the program for summer 2018, which will include off campus trips and opportunities to engage in volunteer work.

## Emergency Respite Story

Since its inception in 2012, our emergency respite program has continued to provide an important service for individuals with special needs during periods of unexpected crisis. In 2017 the agency was able to assist a diverse group of individuals who not only benefited from its service, but developed unexpected friendships, receiving joy and comfort in a nurturing environment.



*Clients enjoy activities in respite*

Nicky, a young man in his twenties from New Jersey with autism and Wiedermann-Steiner Syndrome, a genetic disorder, has been attending summer camp sessions since 2013. A friendly extroverted individual, he communicates mostly through single word phrases and gestures, and occasionally uses a communication device. He is known for his infectious smile and laugh, as well as his sense of mischief, at times playing harmless pranks on the staff, such as giggling while hiding behind doors and knocking.

In January, Nicky's mother had to undergo cancer treatments and was unable to care for him during that time. Her first thought was to send him to emergency respite at Camp Oakhurst where she knew he would be comfortable and well-cared for. At first Nicky expressed

signs of homesickness, repeating the word “home” frequently, but as he settled in “home” was heard less and less.

As Nicky’s school was nearby, the agency was able to provide transportation, as well as pack a lunch, snacks and juice box, thus enabling him to continue his regular daily routine. While in residence, he took part in all the regular respite activities, and particularly enjoyed music and dance.

Alan, a 50 year old man with mild intellectual disability, arrived for an emergency respite stay in mid-March. His mother, who was his sole caregiver, had medical issues that required a prolonged hospital stay. At first Alan expressed nervousness, but thanks not only to the caring staff at Oakhurst, but Nicky as well, Alan was able to settle in quickly and find comfort during a rough patch in his life.

This sense of inclusion, of belonging in what sometimes is a new and unfamiliar environment is not solely indicative of emergency respite, but is part of what makes Camp Oakhurst so special.

## 2017 Fall Theater Benefit

This year’s annual theater benefit, which was held on Thursday, November 9<sup>th</sup>, began with cocktails and dinner at Sardi’s. During the event, Board President Marilyn Friedman and Executive Director Robert Pacenza presented their remarks, which included the unveiling of the agency’s new name and logo (*see the last article in this newsletter for details*). Following dinner, guests walked a block to the Booth Theatre, where they were treated to a performance of Steve Martin’s new comedy *Meteor Shower*. The star studded cast, which included Amy Schumer, Keegan-Michael Key, Laura Benanti and Jeremy Shamos, provided guests with ninety minutes of non-stop fun.

The sold out event raised over \$165,000. The board of directors and staff want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who participated in this event for making the evening a huge success.

## What's New at Oakhurst!

Visitors, particularly those who haven’t been to camp recently, can’t help but notice all the incredible improvements that have been made both internally and externally. In addition to the sensory garden, built in 2015, which has been providing campers with fresh

vegetables for the cooking sessions; this summer we were able to construct a beautiful, state-of-the-art sensory room.



*The New Sensory Room*

Thanks to a special projects grant from The Taft Foundation, this summer we were able to replace an old unused 560 square foot fitness room, attached to our gymnasium, with a multi-sensory environment.

With our client population incorporating more individuals with intellectual and autistic disabilities, behavioral and sensory issues has become more of a concern and the inclusion of a sensory room with a calming and relaxation focus more important. The sensory room, in addition to being a calming and relaxing space, also provides therapeutic benefits such as developing hand-eye coordination, motor skills, and color recognition, all of which have been documented as providing significant improvement with an emotional sense of well-being.

Soon we will also build an outdoor pavilion, and purchase a much-needed new camp bus.

Thanks to the generosity of donations made at our summer “Send a Kid to Camp” party, along with the generosity of Bill McDaid and Twin Resources, this fall we will be constructing a 20’ x 28’ fully accessible and landscaped pavilion in the courtyard, near our swim center. The pavilion will allow therapeutic activities to take place outdoors during inclement weather, and offer clients the opportunity to socialize with their peers in the cool shade on hot summer days.

Also this fall, thanks to the generosity of The Marion & Norman Tanzman Charitable Foundation, as well as our board member Robert Fagenson, and funds received from the estates of our beloved former board members Charles De Bare and Jane Rau, we are now able to purchase a much-needed new 14 seat camp bus.

# ANNUAL FALL



# THEATER BENEFIT



## The Benefits of Therapeutic Recreation at Camp Oakhurst

The therapeutic recreation program at Camp Oakhurst connects health and recreational activities at camp by utilizing these activities as a means to improve physical, cognitive, social and emotional functions. By using both individual and group techniques in activities in areas such as arts and crafts, swimming, drama, iPad media arts, music and nature studies, it not only helps maintain physical, emotional and mental well-being, but also develops skills needed for everyday life. For example, with hand-on-hand therapy, which focuses on recovering basic motor functions, the therapist works on opening the client's hand, and with the assistance of a trained staff member, assists the individual to draw, hold a bowling ball or plant a seedling in a garden. Activities used to stretch and manipulate the muscles enable individuals to take part more fully. Public speaking and performance in drama activities help to develop confidence and self-esteem. By engaging individuals to perform in public they are able to become more comfortable with public speaking. All of these activities while fun and rewarding, have the dual purpose of preparing individuals for activities of independent daily living (ADL). The objective is to train staff to focus not only on the specifics of the activity, but to place emphasis on the experience and to develop skills as well.

During the summer sessions, the camp was able to make full use of its therapeutic sensory garden, which was built in the fall of 2015. The sensory garden benefits individuals with special needs by engaging all of their senses. This year, they were able to harvest vegetables including several varieties of tomatoes, peppers, eggplants and green beans, as well as help grow a beautiful assortment of flowering plants.

Clients had the opportunity to work hands-on with the earth; planting, watering and nurturing plants as they grew, as well as touching, smelling and eventually tasting them. The harvested plants were used in the cooking program and to enhance meals. In fact, the sensory garden has become one of the more popular location at Oakhurst.

Overall, summer activities were expanded to include more hands-on activities. The focus was on experience and practical knowledge. The aim was to gain the experience and skills that are needed for independent daily living.



Clients take part in nature activities

Activities were designed to focus on what clients indicated they wanted to improve in their lives, such as swimming, writing a poem or developing self-esteem. Activities for each client were tailored to those personal challenges and became part of the core of their activities this past summer. This focus is just the beginning of what is planned for 2018.

Thanks to generous grants from the Lemberg Foundation, OceanFirst Foundation, Greek Orthodox Ladies Philoptochos Society, St. Georges-by-the-River and Monmouth Park Charity Fund, the agency will be able to further enrich its therapeutic recreation program which will include purchasing new and innovative musical instruments, costumes, art supplies, iPads, sensory and sports equipment.

## Summer Benefit 2017

On Saturday July 29<sup>th</sup>, Camp Oakhurst held its 12<sup>th</sup> annual "Send a Kid to Camp" party to raise funds for summer camp scholarships. The event was hosted for the second time at the home of Krista and David Long. It was a great success, with more than 140 people in attendance and funds raised over \$78,000.

During the course of the evening, there were other opportunities to support Camp Oakhurst, from purchasing a raffle ticket for the annual Shore Friends of Camp Oakhurst raffle to donating funds toward a new accessible camp pavilion. (*See What's New article for more info.*)

We are pleased to report that through the generosity of those in attendance, we were able to also raise \$10,000 toward the pavilion and \$2,300 toward the raffle.



*Participants at the July 2017 summer party, (left to right) Curran Scoble, Liz Donato, Corbett Donato, host Krista Long and Sue Gilbert.*

The agency wants to thank the generosity and kindness of our hosts and guests for a memorable evening.

### **Giving Tuesday**

This season on Giving Tuesday, the global day of giving, Camp Oakhurst received generous donations toward the purchase of new therapeutic recreation equipment. A portable basketball hoop and other items will arrive soon. Thank you for these holiday gifts!

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

Early in the new year we will be publicly announcing our new name, which we believe will better reflect who we are and all that we do.

With a grant from The Taft Foundation, we were able to employ consultants to help us with the name change and the development of materials that will enable potential clients to better understand how we can be of service to them, and that will improve our ability to garner support for our work. We put together a special committee to help with this project, which included members of our Board as well as outside volunteers with years of experience in messaging. The consultants interviewed representatives of all of our stakeholders — board members, funders, professionals, and caregivers.

We then set criteria for what our name must achieve:

- Does it serve as a north star for our organization?

- Is it inspiring and comforting to parents and caregivers?
- Does it feel timeless?
- Will it resonate with funders?
- Is it differentiating?

We chose a name that we believe to be evocative and inspirational, with a theme line descriptive of our work.

We hope that our new name and identity will resonate with you:



**Inspiring confidence and joy  
in those with special needs**

Rising Treetops maintains a reference to our core camp activities, without limiting us to those activities; Oakhurst provides a link to our historical name. The logo, a tree with entwined stylized hands for the leaves, references both our physical and emotional environment. The theme line communicates to those with special needs that our staff is truly committed to providing a joyous experience that will also inspire confidence through the development of potential.

In addition to soon announcing our new name, we will launch a new website, new agency printed materials and a new video! Thank you to all of you for supporting the important work we do.

*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 [weager@nysh.org](mailto:weager@nysh.org) or call 212-533-4020.*