

Summer Camp 2018 – Happy (and Humid) Days!



WHILE SUMMER 2018 was humid and quite hot, we had many firsts.

Attendance in our overnight and day camp sessions reached over 400 for the first time, with a total of 411 campers having a fun, safe and memorable camp experience! This includes 344 in sleepaway camp sessions and 67 in our day camp program.

Responding to the changing population and continued inquiries by campers and families, we again offered a 13-day Young Adults summer session for clients ages 23-35. In addition, we added a five-night Midsummer's Respite in early August. All ages and special needs were considered, 30 campers enrolled, and the session was a great success!

Also, to help accommodate families looking for more camp days for campers with autism, in 2018 we created two new five-day autism sessions within the Young Adults session. This follows our policy of serving clients in an inclusion modality in our respite and camp sessions when feasible, which allows for more flexibility in finding appropriate placements for all applicants, with ages and abilities helping to determine appropriateness for services and sessions, and not just diagnoses and disabilities.

Our campers and their families have weighed in on their experiences with Rising Treetops' 2018 Summer Camp. In an online survey emailed to families and independent adult clients in early November, 48 participants (45 caregivers, 3 independent adults) completed the survey. The results reported 89% (up from 74% from the first online survey of two years ago) of caregivers rating their overall experience with our summer camp services as excellent or very good. The survey also reports campers' experiences with peers (94% very positive or positive), with staff (92% very positive or positive) and with activities (93% very positive or positive), all improvements over the previous survey.

In addition, we have worked hard to improve our results in other areas, including our application/paperwork process, which had very positive ratings grow from 65% to 83%, and our arrival/departure process, which had very positive ratings of 82%, up from 50% in the previous survey. Our therapeutic activities ratings grew from an average 53% rating of excellent two summers ago to 79% this summer (see the President & Executive Director's Column for quotes about the summer camp from families from the survey.)

Thank you to our great staff and families for a terrific summer, and to all of you who support our work through donations or volunteering to help Rising Treetops fulfil its mission.

Client Story

SINCE 2012, Frederick, age 32, has attended summer camp sessions at Rising Treetops. Frederick has intellectual disability and ADHD, and is independent with little supervision required for his care needs. Frederick is very verbal, loves to sing at the top of his lungs, dance with other campers and staff, and has always been a joy to have at the camp. Frederick attended our six day Midsummer's Respite this past August. Three days after he returned home, his grandmother, with whom he lived and who was also his guardian, passed away unexpectedly. She was his greatest advocate and loved Frederick dearly. His aunt, who lived in the home as well, became responsible for his care.

Although Frederick is mostly independent, he can be quite

emotional at times, with peaceful periods of sadness. His aunt asked some weeks after his grandmother died if he could come back to camp as soon as possible because it is a place that makes him so happy. His aunt explained he was handling the passing of his grandmother well, actually serving as a great support to her, but she wanted him to have a chance to just have fun and not have to worry too much about what was going on at home. Frederick attended the first respite session of the season in late September and had a blast, and was as social and verbal as ever! We are grateful Frederick's aunt recognized his need for socializing and being with his Rising Treetops' second family, and we were so pleased to find his joyful nature still alive and well.



Summer Party

RISING TREETOPS HELD its 13th annual "Send a Kid to Camp" summer party on Saturday, July 28th at the home of Liza and Michael Risin in Rumson, New Jersey. The evening was a great success, with over 130 people in attendance and \$81,000 in donations.

During the event, guests had other opportunities to support Rising Treetops, including purchasing raffle tickets for the annual Shore Friends of Rising Treetops raffle or donating to the Dining Hall Project. The Dining Hall Project is a campaign to replace the camp's 45 year old dining room tables and chairs with new accessible, flexible and durable tables and chairs. The new furniture will enable the staff to more effectively and safely feed up to 150 campers and staff at a time in the dining hall, when we might have up to 40 clients in wheelchairs at meals and many others in need of feeding assistance.

Thanks to the generosity of our supporters during the event we were able to raise nearly \$4,000 toward the Dining Hall Project and \$2,900 in raffle ticket sales. We are still raising funds for the Dining Hall Project. If you are interested in supporting this project, please call the New



York office at 212-779-2725 or email donate@risingtree-tops.org.

A highlight of the evening was remarks by Kally, a British camp counselor, who shared her life-changing Oakhurst summer camp experiences. As a result of her experience at camp, she plans to pursue a career in working with people with special needs. Thank you to the Risins and to all involved in the event for their generosity and support, and to this year's local business sponsors: NJ Natural Gas, Atlantic Surgical Group, Better Breads, Community Hope Fund, Family First Urgent Care, James Koechlin Plumbing and Heating, Red Bank Veterinary Hospital, Saker/ShopRites and Two Rivers Animal Hospital.

2018 Theater Benefit

THIS YEAR'S ANNUAL THEATER BENEFIT was held on Thursday, October 4th, beginning with cocktails and dinner at Feinstein's/54 Below, a cabaret-style restaurant with the delightful décor of a Prohibition-era speakeasy. During dinner guests had the opportunity to view the new impactful Rising Treetops' video and a slideshow of images.

Afterward, guests went upstairs to Studio 54, where they enjoyed a performance of the new Broadway play "The Lifespan of a Fact", an explosive didactic play that focuses on journalistic integrity and poetic license in nonfiction, very relevant to our times. Performers Daniel Radcliffe, Bobby Cannavale and Cherry Jones created an atmosphere that crackled with dynamic energy, keeping the audience riveted to their seats for nearly 90 minutes.

For those fortunate to have attended the event, it was a wonderful evening, and we raised over \$132,000 in support of Rising Treetops. We would like to thank all who attended and made donations for their generosity.

Annual Theater Benefit October 4, 2018





Respite Season Underway!

THE YEAR-ROUND RESPITE PROGRAM at Rising Treetops is off to a great start. From late September through early June we have scheduled 35 different respite sessions for children and adults for a total of 158 days for our traditional youth and adult (with general developmental disabilities) and for autism populations. Adults come for five or seven night sessions, and general youth and autism groups come for two, three or four night sessions.

So far this fall we have been at full capacity, having served 128 children and adults in three adult, two youth and three autism overnight sessions, as well as 10 in our after school day respite program. Each overnight session typically has a party, theme or trip planned. So far this year we have had an end-of-the-season pool party, a cranberry bog trip, a Halloween Spooktacular party, a pumpkin picking trip, and a Veteran's Day craft party. Our client Heather posted on our facebook page after seeing a photo from the Halloween Spooktacular session: "What a great time we had as always!! We love you RTO!! We'll see you really soon."

Year-round respite has been offered at Rising Treetops for 32 years, providing a much-needed break for caregivers, and also a healthy, joyful experience for all clients still living with family and independent adult clients.

From the Desks of the President and Executive Director

WHAT A YEAR we have had.

We will again have had more than 1,000 children and adults attend our overnight and day respite and summer camp programs.

We changed our name and logo, launched a new website and video and are already seeing the benefits of a new and attractive identity.

We have made significant improvements to our facility. We put a new roof on our Oaks Cabin, rebuilt our pool

pump house, built a beautiful landscaped pavilion, removed and replaced all sidewalks and landings throughout the camp, and, thanks to a storm causing a large tree to fall and demolish our old maintenance shed, we will soon have a new modern pole barn providing a new workshop and storage facility for the camp.

We have had significant growth in social media, internet and e-communications contacts, resulting in growth in client applications and attendance, and overall increased visibility for the organization. We now have 6,939 facebook, Instagram, twitter, YouTube and e-news followers and subscribers. We invite you to follow us!

Since adopting a Strategic Plan as a guide four years ago, we have made significant improvements in the quality of our services and facilities (see the 2018 Summer Camp article about our latest family survey). Also providing evidence of the impact of our work are the recent caregiver comments from our summer camp survey:

"I want to thank the entire staff for providing a safe and very enjoyable experience for my son. He thinks about, and speaks positively about the next session as soon as the current session ends for the rest of the year!"

"It gave my son the independence he needed, and allowed him to not have to continuously rely on his family for things."

"We were able to go on vacation and have a real time of relaxation knowing that our daughter was in good hands."

These comments remind us of why Rising Treetops at Oakhurst is so impactful. Thirty-two percent of our revenues come from donations, so we, and our campers who require scholarships, thank you for supporting the important work we do.

We wish you a healthy and happy holiday season.

Marilyn Friedman, President
Robert Pacenza, Executive Director



Inspiring confidence and joy
in those with special needs

For more information or to submit articles or commentaries, please contact: Wendy Eager, Editor, Rising Treetops at Oakhurst, 1140 Broadway, Suite 903, NY, NY 10001, email weager@risingtree-tops.org or call 212-533-4020.