

Summer Camp 2019

We are excited for a great summer 2019!

Beginning on June 14, Rising Treetops has eight summer sessions scheduled. We have one session for adults (ages 26+), a session for young adults (ages 23-35) and two sessions for youth (up to age 25) with general developmental disabilities, as well as four sessions for youth and young adults diagnosed with autism. Rising Treetops will also be renting its facilities over two weeks in August to two nonprofit organizations for their summer camp (see page 2) programs.



Rising Treetops also has some new additions for summer 2019. New activities include archery and an expansion of our sensory room for daily use. We also have purchased WaterWheels®, which is a 'floating beach wheelchair' that will be used in the pool. WaterWheels® is a three-wheeled buggy that is designed so that the user remains in a reclined position in an ergonomic chair. The WaterWheels® seat has 3 positions, one to transition the user to the chair and two to recline the chair.

Seventy seasonal summer staff arrive between mid-May and early June, with our all-staff summer training and orientation kicking officially off on June 6th.

A Client Story

NIECEY IS A 25 year old woman who currently resides in New Jersey, and is diagnosed with autism and epilepsy.



Her aunt, Darlene, became her guardian a number of years ago and moved Niecey to New Jersey to provide the appropriate care she was not receiving in her home in the deep south.

Niecey attended sleep away camp in the south and loved it, so her aunt wanted to find something similar for her in New Jersey. Darlene found Rising Treetops online and Niecey attended summer camp sessions at Rising Treetops in 2017 and 2018. Niecey is sweet, loves to help her peers and really enjoys playing sports. She can do most of her personal care herself, but needs assistance to ensure everything is done thoroughly and correctly. Niecey is verbal and will talk continuously (unless redirected)!

In December 2018, Darlene called Rising Treetops when a close member of their family became very ill and was likely to pass away soon. Darlene was concerned about Niecey being around during the likely imminent funeral - dealing with her own grief, attending to all that needed to be done and consoling Niecey. We let Darlene know Niecey could come to Rising Treetops when she needed during that time, regardless of the planned respite session schedules and we could care for her in our emergency respite program.

Darlene called in late January and let us know that their family member had just passed away. The timing

coincided with the start of an adult respite session. Niecey, who had only been to Rising Treetops during the summer, was a little confused about “winter camp” as she called it. When Darlene arrived to pick Niecey up, first she cried with joy while hugging her aunt, then she looked up at her and said, “Can I please stay just one more day?”

We are pleased to be able to support Niecey and Darlene, as well as all the clients and caregivers we serve. Thank you to the donors, volunteers and care managers who make all our work possible.

Bill Potter—A Friend for Fifty Years

IN DECEMBER our longtime volunteer and supporter Bill Potter passed away. The Board of Directors and staff of Rising Treetops are deeply saddened by Bill’s passing. Bill was a member of our Board of Directors for nearly 50 years: President and Vice-President in the 1970s and 1980s, and Treasurer for over 25 years. A generous supporter with a deep commitment to our work with children and adults with disabilities, Bill helped lead the transformation of the agency from a small summer camp to a vibrant independent year-round modern respite and camp facility open to all individuals with varied special needs.

The outpouring of remembrances and donations in Bill’s honor has been unprecedented. To date, 82 people have made donations in Bill’s memory totaling over \$72,000 for Rising Treetops. With this generous support, we are renovating our Maples Cabin, which will be renamed Billy’s Bunkhouse after the renovations are completed.

We sincerely appreciate the donations in Bill’s memory. His warm and giving presence will be greatly missed.

2018–19 Respite Season – Busy and Bustling

RISING TREETOPS HAD a great 2018–2019 respite season with many special events and fun activities. Clients and staff celebrated with parties for holidays including New Year’s, Mardi Gras and Valentine’s Day and took trips to places such as Jenkinson’s Aquarium and Boardwalk, the Poconos, pumpkin patches and a cranberry festival!

Clients also enjoyed our onsite therapeutic recreation activities, including cooking, arts and crafts, media arts, drama, music, nature/gardening, sports and swimming. This spring we even enjoyed a visit from the New Jersey Devils’ mascot. The Devils also donated hockey equip-



ment for our gymnasium adapted floor hockey activity. After our last respite session ends in early June, we will have had a total of 40 sessions in the 2018–2019 respite season, with estimated total attendance of 750 adults and children attending our overnight and day respite programs.

Thank you to everyone who made our 2018–2019 respite season a huge success!



Rental Groups

THIS SUMMER, two nonprofit organizations will be renting Rising Treetops’ facilities for their summer camp programs. The Arthritis Foundation is renting our facility for the first time for their New Jersey camp session. The Arthritis Foundation provides camp for kids and teens with juvenile arthritis and other childhood rheumatic diseases such as lupus, dermatomyositis, and ankylosing spondylitis. The Foundation expects to have 60–65 campers ages 8–17. Additionally, they will bring six Peer Group Leaders, young adults with arthritis who serve as

“mentors” to the children. About 75% of the campers are from New Jersey and the other 25% are from other states in the northeastern United States.

Camp Chatterbox, part of Children’s Specialized Hospital, will be returning to use the Rising Treetops facilities this summer as well. Camp Chatterbox is a one week overnight camp for children and young adults, ages 5-22, who use synthesized Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices. Parents and siblings are able to attend as well. Campers come to Camp Chatterbox from all over the United States!

Therapeutic Recreation Evaluation and Training

IN DECEMBER 2017, the J.E. & Z.B. Butler Foundation awarded Rising Treetops a grant to support a new activities evaluation and training program for the nine therapeutic activities provided to clients at Rising Treetops. The first year of this project was completed this winter and the results for the initiative have been transforming for this foundational component of our respite and camp services.

The Butler Foundation grant helped fund this important initiative to have outside expert consultants evaluate, make recommendations and train our staff on new equipment and materials, and improved activity plans for our therapeutic activities.



As a result, we now have a far more enriching therapeutic experience for our clients in our arts/crafts,

music, drama, iPad media arts, cooking, nature/gardening, swimming, sports and sensory room activities.



We will continue to use this model of annual activity evaluations, with ongoing trainings for our staff being held seasonally in June and September each year. Our therapeutic recreation specialist going forward will evaluate and continuously monitor the activities for effectiveness and therapeutic engagement of clients. Our goals are to:

- Have all of our therapeutic activities regularly evaluated and staff trained each season on recommended new activity plans, materials and equipment.
- Have the programs be as effective and engaging as possible, and to evaluate the effectiveness of our program through expert observations, caregiver surveys and staff evaluations of trainers.

Our clients and their families weighed in on their experiences with the changes in our therapeutic recreation activities. In late 2018, an online survey emailed to families and independent adult clients found that our therapeutic activities ratings grew from an average 53% rating of excellent two summers ago to 79% this past summer.

From the Desks of the President and Executive Director

SINCE 1906, Rising Treetops has been a safe haven that nurtures growth, inspires confidence and celebrates joy. The organization was created by a group of socially conscious women volunteers to help address the need to educate the 7,000 children with disabilities in New York City who were not being provided an appropriate education at the time. The Crippled Children's East Side Free School, with its Summer Home in Oakhurst, New Jersey, was created, nurtured and supported by volunteers.

Three name changes and 113 years later, volunteers continue to be integral to our ability to fulfill our mission to enhance the quality of life for children and adults with special needs, including autism and physical and intellectual disabilities, and to provide respite for their families. In addition to our 19 member volunteer Board of Directors, we have dozens of volunteers each year who help us become a stronger organization focused on providing quality innovative services for people with disabilities.

Rising Treetops at Oakhurst is always seeking enthusiastic and motivated volunteers to support our important work. Volunteers help with camp improvement projects, assist with a seasonal client event, or serve as volunteer activity counselors.

Camp Improvement Projects - With 15 acres and 13 buildings on our campus, volunteers are needed to help with camp improvement projects. These include improving and beautifying the camp through painting, cleaning or landscaping projects. This can be done by individuals and small groups, or we can accommodate groups up to 50 people (or even more at times) for landscaping and painting projects. The expertise needed can range from having painting, cleaning or landscaping skills on a personal level to having a willingness to learn. Larger group (with more than 12 people) volunteer projects are best scheduled in September/October or April/May each year for painting and landscaping projects. Smaller groups of less than 12 can be accommodated generally between April 1 and October 31.

Seasonal Events - With total attendance of 1,100 clients in our 50 different camp and respite sessions each year, there are many opportunities to volunteer at a seasonal

event (i.e., holiday parties, summer camp theme/banquet days) working with clients and staff. These seasonal events are held 12 times a year - four days each summer and eight on/around the most festive holidays the rest of the year.

Volunteer Activity Counselors - These volunteers gain valuable hands-on work experience by helping to plan, organize and facilitate daily therapeutic recreational activities for our clients with special needs. This opportunity is for individual volunteers. While having personal or professional experience with people with special needs can be helpful, our main requirement is for an individual volunteer to simply have a commitment to helping others AND having an interest in one of our therapeutic recreational activities (arts/crafts, music, drama, iPad media arts, cooking, gardening/nature studies, sports and swimming). Volunteers can assist in activities year-round, with up to 5 hours a day available 3-5 days a week during 7 weeks in our summer camp, or for 5 hours a day on approximately 20 Saturdays from October through May. These are great volunteer opportunities for high school students and others fulfilling community service hours.

If you are interested in volunteering individually or with a group on a project, please contact Charles Sutherland at 732.531.8607 or at volunteer@risingtreetops.org.

We are thankful for our volunteers and supporters who help make the programs and services here at Rising Treetops possible. Without you, Rising Treetops wouldn't be the special place that it is today.

We wish you a healthy and happy summer! Please stop by our facility anytime.

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: Melissa Miller, Rising Treetops at Oakhurst 1140 Broadway, Suite 903, NY, NY 10001, email mmiller@risingtreetops.org or call 212-533-4020.