

Rising Treetops and the COVID-19 Pandemic



RISING TREETOPS at OAKHURST'S services continue to be significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. As of March 20, 2020, we suspended our planned overnight respite and after school respite programs, and have since extended the suspension of services to include all summer camp programs originally scheduled to run through September 4 and have now suspended all overnight respite (the exception being our overnight Emergency Respite program) and after school program services through February 28, 2021. We will decide on or about January 15 whether we will resume these services on March 1, 2021.

At this time, we cannot resume these services because of the current availability and reliability of testing for COVID-19, the lack of a vaccine for our clients and direct care staff, the inability to ensure safe social distancing at our facility with large client populations, and the lack of availability of live-in direct care staff.

Please know that the safety and health of our clients, campers and staff is always the highest priority at Rising Treetops. We will continue to work closely with our local public health department and our partners at New York's Office of People with Developmental Disabilities and New Jersey's Department of Human Services to maintain safe and effective protocols to resume our vital services at Rising Treetops.

The service we have continued and are committed to providing during the COVID-19 pandemic is our Emergency Respite Program. We have continued throughout the pandemic to provide services to a limited number of vulnerable individuals with developmental disabilities on a long-term emergency basis. COVID-19 has impacted our usual protocols and criteria for accepting and serving clients with development disabilities on an emergency basis. See the Emergency Respite services section of our website, email respite@risingtreetops.org or call 732-531-0215 for more information.

Free Virtual Interactive Magic Show Streaming Live on January 13, 2021



RISING TREETOPS is hosting a Virtual Interactive Magic Show which will stream live on Zoom on January 13, 2021 starting at 8:00 p.m. The magic show features the amazing magician **Bryan Saint**, who will perform for us a close-up magic show, with sleight of hand and audience participation. Be sure to have a deck of cards for everyone in the room to share, have your webcam turned on (on your laptop, tablet or smart phone) and join us.

Please go to: risingtreetops.org/magic for all details and to click on a link to live stream the Magic Show.

The performance is supported by donors but is FREE to the entire Rising Treetops community, including clients, campers and their families, and volunteers. We look forward to seeing you virtually for an evening of magic, laughs and fun!



Local Families Supporting Clients and Staff in Isolation

WE CONTINUE to be grateful to the many Monmouth County families who have donated meals and desserts, as well as activity and essential supplies to our camp in Oakhurst during the pandemic over the last nine months. It has meant so much to the clients for whom we have provided long-term care since March and to the committed and dedicated staff who have lived and worked full-time while in isolation at our facility in Oakhurst.

We are especially grateful to Jennifer and Andrew Marrus for their generous and delicious weekly donations of meals as well as holiday decorations, costumes and party supplies. Thank you also to Dana and Will Herrman, Marilyn Friedman, Nikki Byren, and many others who have donated amazing food and supplies during the pandemic.

The Main House Gets a New Roof



IN OCTOBER we began construction on a complete replacement and reconfiguring of the roof on our Main House building, our largest building, which contains our commercial kitchen and dining room, our day program classroom, administrative

offices and a dormitory style residence for 12 live-in staff. The roof had four different flat sections which have all now been reconfigured to have traditional roof pitches to allow for proper drainage. Thank you to Adelle and Robert Rathe and Marilyn Friedman for helping to support the roof renovations.

The Taft Foundation Scholarships

THE TAFT FOUNDATION has been an important major funder of Rising Treetops since 2012 and in late October provided new grant funding for three need-based scholarships for our COVID-19 Emergency Respite Program.

The first scholarship was awarded in December to our client Robert, who is 32 years old, and lives alone with his mother just a few miles from our respite facility in Monmouth County. Robert is diagnosed with neurological impairment and Down syndrome, is verbal and semi-dependent for his care needs.

Robert first came to Rising Treetops in February 2006 for respite services and has attended 20 respite and camp sessions over the years he has been receiving services, including three weeks in summer 2019 and a Christmas holiday week respite in December 2019. His mother (and only caregiver) is retired and informed us that Robert's day programs were cancelled all spring, and are again now suspended as of a few weeks ago for at least two more months. His mother has experienced significant changes in her health status recently that have left her debilitated and in great pain.

Robert is now confined to their home and his mother has told us she is unable to provide him with the care and attention he needs and, as she says, "deserves." She also put on her scholarship application "I know that when he has been at Rising Treetops he is happy and I believe a valued addition to the family-like environment that is there." Poignantly, his mother cried when our Director of Services & Operations Charles Sutherland told her a few weeks ago about the availability of the Taft-funded scholarships. Robert is scheduled to arrive on December 26 for his 28-day stay.

We are grateful to The Taft Foundation for their commitment to our work, especially for extending their 2020 funding to include emergency respite scholarships.

Emergency Respite Services

SINCE LATE MARCH, Rising Treetops has had the direct care and supervisory staff to safely serve between five and eight emergency respite clients at a time, and seven at a time as of December 2020. Since March we have served 48 individuals in the program for between 28- and 45-day emergency stays.

New emergency respite clients are cared for by Rising Treetops' direct care staff, and are isolated from all other clients and staff for the first 14 days after arrival. All direct care staff at Rising Treetops are live-in staff and are on-site and not leaving the facility for at least 14 days prior to caring for any clients and throughout the clients' placement at Rising Treetops.

The need for emergency respite services has become even more critical this winter, and Rising Treetops has eight direct care workers and three supervisors all providing care this winter in the program. What follows are profiles of several emergency clients we served since July.



Melissa, Age 31

MELISSA LIVES IN BROOKLYN with her mother and arrived on July 13 for a 30-day emergency placement because her mother works for both the police department and the post office as an essential worker and Melissa's day program being shut

down. While Melissa was at Rising Treetops for her emergency stay, her mother was able to return to both jobs.

Melissa has diagnoses of moderate intellectual disability and asthma, first came to Rising Treetops in 2013 and has attended camp and respite sessions ever since. Melissa loves her time at Rising Treetops but especially enjoys a session when attending with her friend, Julissa. During this emergency session, Melissa enjoyed being outside and making and collecting various strings, bracelets and small items, and as a result of her 30 day stay, she was able to amass quite a collection. Her counselor also reports that Melissa enjoyed participating in cooking activities and learned how to make chocolate chip cookies.



Neil, Age 27

NEIL ARRIVED ON JULY 15 for a 30-day emergency placement from Brooklyn, where he lives with his mother. His mother is an essential worker and was worried about Neil being alone at home, since his day

program was shut down. Neil became depressed and anxious worrying about their safety during the pandemic.

Neil has diagnoses of Arnold Chiari Malformation and asthma. Neil has been coming to Rising Treetops for 10 years year-round and has always brought joy to everyone. He loves to help staff and peers whenever he can.

Neil periodically would ask staff to check on his mother, and was comforted when he was reassured she was doing well. Neil's mother reported she was very grateful for Neil to have the opportunity to spend time at Rising Treetops this summer. Several staff have commented on Neil's giving spirit and his frequent question "You need help?" Neil so often pitches in he fully earned his self-appointed title as a counselor in training and all staff enjoyed his spirit and his help.



Phillip, Age 30

PHILIP ARRIVED FROM QUEENS for his 30-day emergency respite placement on July 28. He lives with his mother, an essential worker for the New York Police Department. Phillip's mother has been working a lot during the COVID crisis and had difficulty finding others to be with Phillip while she works. Phillip needs supervision as a result of his seizure disorder.

Phillip has diagnoses of cerebral palsy, moderate intellectual disability and seizure disorder and has been coming to Rising Treetops for services since 2012. Phillip did well in his emergency placement and benefitted from the smaller group and from essentially the 1:1 attention and care he received. He always had a huge smile on his face, loves his time at the camp, and really enjoys being engaged in conversation and typically initiates conversation by beckoning people to come towards him with his hand, and then waits for the other person to speak first. Counselors report Phillip loved listening to music and brought a set of drum sticks with him to play along with music. He loves to be around people when he visits Rising Treetops.



Bernard, Age 53 & Michael, Age 48

FROM QUEENS, brothers Bernard and Michael arrived on August 31 for 30-day emergency placements. They live with their sister and brother-in-law, both have diagnoses of autism and mild intellectual disability and first came to Rising Treetops in 2018. They arrived in August because their father was very ill and receiving hospice care and their day program being shut down. Their sister felt she



was not giving them the attention she should because she was having to care for their father. She also reported

Bernard and Michael were becoming more withdrawn as the pandemic wore on.

Staff describe Bernard and Michael as independent, rule followers, and active participants in activities. They socialize with anyone, although they both are quiet and shy. Bernard loved to do arts and crafts and Michael participated in every activity; his favorite being nature activities. Their sister was very grateful for having the time to care for her father and not worry about Bernard and Michael.



Jillian, Age 36

JILLIAN IS FROM THE BRONX, lives with her mother and sister, and began her 30-day emergency placement on October 3 at the request of her mother and care manager. Her mother has been working from home since the pandemic — she

works for an agency that serves individuals with disabilities — and was concerned for Jillian’s well-being after episodes of crying and depression. Also, Jillian’s sister was expecting in early November, so her placement allowed

her mother the ability to work without interruption and to care for her daughter (who gave birth in late October!).

Jillian has diagnoses of cerebral palsy and intellectual disability and first came to Rising Treetops in 2012. Jillian was thrilled to be back and checked in daily with her mother by video chat. Jillian is frequently heard laughing and squealing in delight. Her mother has reported that Jillian always loves coming to our camp, and when Jillian sees mail from Rising Treetops she reminds her mother it is time to schedule another respite stay. When Jillian arrived on October 3, our staff could hear her squealing with joy as she descended from the bus.

Jillian loved participating in all therapeutic activities, her favorites were singing karaoke with bunk mate Courtney, listening to music, working on arts and crafts projects, and swimming. Jillian loves to interact with others and always smiles. One counselor reported that Jillian got to video chat her sister shortly after she gave birth and was so excited she started to cry with joy. Jillian’s mother told us the timing was perfect as Jillian’s sister went into labor, had the baby and was home before Jillian returned home so they were able to have a few days to get settled in.

From the Desks of the President and Executive Director

It has been an incredibly challenging year for Rising Treetops at Oakhurst. On March 20th we had to suspend our traditional respite services, but we immediately began a COVID-19 Emergency Respite Program. It has been a privilege to serve the 48 clients that have enjoyed their stay at Rising Treetops. We are also incredibly grateful to the dedicated team that has lived on our campus. We could not have provided these services without their willingness to put their own lives on hold to care for clients who are in the most need of our help.

Despite an overall reduction in services and revenues, our beautiful and historic 15-acre campus has continued to need repairs and maintenance to remain in quality working condition. As noted above, in the spring we completed a full \$100,000 renovation of our 60-year-old Marion’s Cabin and in October began a \$160,000 complete replacement and reconfiguring of the roof on our Main House building.

In addition to our usual expenses, such as salaries, insurance, utilities, food/cleaning supplies, and New York office rent, we have had increased costs to keep our existing vital staff safe, healthy, trained and supported. Covering these expenses, with a combination of governmental support and the generosity of our donors, allows us to continue our

emergency services during the pandemic, and to be ready to resume our services when it is safe to do so.

As a result of the pandemic, we cancelled our fall theater benefit, but our needs have not diminished. If you are able to support Rising Treetops’ critical services this holiday season, please use the enclosed reply card and envelope or visit www.risingtreetops.org/donate. Thank you for your commitment and generosity. Please stay safe.

Marilyn Friedman, President
Robert Pacenza, Executive Director



Inspiring confidence and joy
in those with special needs

For more information, please contact:

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