

## Rising Treetops and the COVID-19 Pandemic



DESPITE THE PANDEMIC, in June we re-opened our summer camp serving 125 campers. In September we re-opened our overnight respite program for the first time in 18 months and through late November had cared for 63 children and adults during five 13-day respite sessions.

Rising Treetops' overnight respite, day and summer camp services have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, except for a long-term COVID-19 Emergency Respite Program, we suspended all other planned overnight respite and day programs, and subsequently extended the suspension of services to include our 2020 Summer Camp and all but our emergency services until June 2021. We plan to re-open full services in 2022.

## Summer Camp 2021

THE 125 CHILDREN AND ADULTS who attended Rising Treetops' 2021 Summer Camp had a healthy, engaging and fun summer, joyfully taking part in our swimming, sports, arts and crafts, music, drama, iPad media arts, nature/gardening and cooking therapeutic activities.

With COVID-19 health and safety concerns and challenges hiring counselors, nursing staff and support staff, Rising Treetop opened a modified 2021 Summer Camp in June. Instead of our usual 40-63 campers per overnight

session, this summer sessions were limited to 25 campers each. Due to the same concerns and challenges, we were unable to provide a day camp in summer 2021.

All campers and staff in summer 2021 were required to be COVID-vaccinated, and in order to make it easier and more flexible for families the 2021 Summer Camp sessions were open to all ages and disability diagnoses.

Campers and counselors in each cabin travelled to and participated in activities and meals together, keeping separated from other cabins to ensure limited COVID exposure risk. This model was successful with no COVID-19 cases at Rising Treetops in the summer camp program or in any services since the start of the pandemic.

## Respite Services Re-open in September



IN LATE SEPTEMBER 2021, we resumed our overnight respite program with modifications due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Respite sessions were limited initially to 10 clients and as more staff have been hired, the number has increased to 16 respite clients per session.

With continued concerns over COVID-19 variants, as well as having significant challenges hiring vaccinated direct care workers willing to quarantine and live at our facility, overnight respite sessions scheduled from September 2021 through June 2022 have been limited to 12-night and 7-night stays.

## 2021 Summer Party



RISING TREETOPS HELD ITS 15TH ANNUAL SUMMER PARTY on Saturday, July 24th at the home of Ana and Richard Blank in Rumson, New Jersey. The evening was a great success, with 100 people in attendance and over \$96,000 donated to Rising Treetops.

During the event, guests had different opportunities to support Rising Treetops, including purchasing raffle tickets for the annual Shore Friends of Rising Treetops raffle and donating to our Gymnasium Roof Project.

Board Vice President Andrew Marrus provided heartfelt remarks about Rising Treetops, our COVID-19 pandemic services and the continued need for support. We are grateful to the Blanks for hosting, to all involved for their generosity and support, and to this year's local business sponsors: Ansell Grimm & Aaron, Daisy Chocolates, Sperry Tents, Monmouth Medical Center, Two Rivers Animal Hospital, and James Koechlin Plumbing & Heating.

## Major Renovations in 2021



IN MAY 2021 we completed extensive renovations of our Lehman's Cabin and in September replaced the roof on our Peter's Gym.

In the Lehman's Cabin, we replaced the roof, all walls, ceilings, floors and

the entire bathroom, winterized the cabin for the first time (installing central heat and air conditioning, ducts, vents and insulation), and repaired the foundation, doors, posts and rails.

Built in 1994, Rising Treetops' 9,000 square foot Peter's Gym has a main gym as well as a fitness room and a sensory room. In addition, the gym has a hallway

with lockers and showers that connects it to the 6,000 square foot swim center, with a heated indoor/outdoor accessible pool.

Peter's Gym is a much-used main center of socialization and recreation at Rising Treetops, making the replacement of the entire roof necessary to stabilize the integrity of the building, and critical to helping fulfil the important mission of Rising Treetops.

The Peter's Gym roof work included removal of the existing roof, replacing roof rafters as needed and all new treated plywood and waterproof insulation, asphalt shingles and vents were also installed. We are grateful to Rob and Caitlin Bovo for their donation to support the new roof.

## Client Stories

The need for emergency respite services, summer camp and overnight respite care has become even more critical during the COVID-19 pandemic. What follows are profiles of four clients we served this past year.

### Heather, Age 28



FROM WEST MILFORD, NEW JERSEY, HEATHER has been coming to Rising Treetops for summer camp and overnight respite services since 2016. Diagnosed with cerebral palsy, Heather lives with her parents Jon and Katherine. Heather has several other friends who receive services at Rising Treetops and as a result often has her own social group when she attends a camp or respite session. She needs full assistance in all of her care needs although she can control her power wheelchair very well on her own.

Heather expresses kindness and affection for everyone around her and is a constant positive voice whenever she is in residence. Even when she comes to Rising Treetops

without friends, she easily socializes with everyone around her. Heather is also a great advocate for herself and others – she recognizes when someone else has a need and will seek assistance for them.

Whenever Heather is at Rising Treetops, she and her parents appreciate the break, especially in a recent respite session, which coincided with her father’s birthday and allowed her mother to take him on a birthday trip. Heather’s parents often travel together while she is here, and recently told our staff: “We are so thankful for all of you and this amazing program.”

**Gil, Age 28**



FROM MANHATTAN, GIL LIVES WITH HIS MOTHER Marilyn and three younger sisters and is diagnosed with cerebral palsy. Gil has attended summer camp and overnight respite services since 2016. Gil also came to Rising Treetops in spring 2021 for care under our COVID-19 Emergency Respite Program.

This past summer, Gil’s mom was suffering from sciatica and needed surgery. While we were not able to coordinate a stay immediately after her surgery, we were able to provide her with respite earlier in the summer and early this fall so she could rest and recover. Gil requires assistance with most of his personal care, but he can control his power wheelchair well and can feed himself at meals with assistance.

Gil often wishes he can stay longer than was originally planned. His mother recently told one of our staff: “Having Gil attend Rising Treetops has helped me out in so many ways. I am a single parent with no help raising 4 kids. When he’s away I can focus so much more on my 3 daughters and take care of my many health issues like my sciatica back surgery. Gil loves everyone at Rising Treetops and wishes he can attend as often as possible.”

**Elizabeth, Age 27**



ELIZABETH LIVES IN OCEAN GROVE, NEW JERSEY, only about 5 miles from Rising Treetops, with her mother Sara. Elizabeth is diagnosed with Down Syndrome and has attended summer camp and respite sessions at Rising Treetops since 2012.

Since Sara was unable to work after the pandemic shut down Elizabeth’s day program, Elizabeth came to Rising Treetops for a four-week stay in our COVID-19 Emergency Respite Program in early 2021. Elizabeth was displaying a decline in social skills and was seemingly depressed.

Once at Rising Treetops in late January, Elizabeth warmed up and expressed her love for everything and everyone. She was very affectionate and always looked forward to greeting and chatting with staff and peers. She created artwork for her favorite people at the camp, which everyone appreciated.

Her mother’s comment to our assistant director was that she did not realize how much she really needed the 28-day break until she had it; it allowed her time to take care of things for herself and not worry about caring for or entertaining Elizabeth. She was also happy that Elizabeth could continue to participate in her virtual day program sessions while at Rising Treetops. Elizabeth’s full four-week COVID-19 Emergency stay was paid for by a scholarship generously funded by The Taft Foundation.

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**Please note that Rising Treetops’ New York administrative headquarters has moved. Same building, different floor and suite: 1140 Broadway, Suite 507, New York, NY 10001**

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## Zachary, Age 33



ZACHARY COMES TO RISING TREETOPS FROM CHARLOTTE, North Carolina where he lives with his parents Royce and Donna. Zachary is diagnosed with cerebral palsy and he is also visually impaired.

Zachary been attending summer camp sessions at Rising Treetops for 15 years. In most summers, he has attended camp in Oakhurst for 6 weeks. Zachary utilizes a manual wheelchair, requires full assistance in all of his care needs and sometimes needs additional help due to his visual impairment.

Zachary loves being at our summer camp – he is very social and always has a smile on his face. Staff report that he is constantly cracking jokes with staff and peers, will sing along with music any time it is on, and has no trouble adjusting to camp life.

In the past, his family has taken the opportunity to travel while Zachary was with us. This summer, due to the limitations in place during the pandemic, they chose to drive to and from Oakhurst and enjoyed their time with local vacations. His mother mentioned that she thoroughly enjoyed a trip to the beach and also visited with their New Jersey family while Zachary was at Rising Treetops.

## From the Desks of the President and Executive Director

It has been a challenging but promising year for Rising Treetops at Oakhurst. When we began 2021, we were still only providing a COVID-19 Emergency Respite Program. It was a privilege to serve the 76 clients that enjoyed their average 33 day stays at Rising Treetops in the emergency program. We remain incredibly grateful to the dedicated team that lived on our campus throughout the first 15 months of our providing only emergency services, and who continue to be willing to quarantine and live at our facility in the six months since we began to re-open services in June. 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 \$120,000 renovation of our 60-year-old Lehman's Cabin and in September completed a \$65,000 full replacement of the roof on our Peter's Gym.

In addition to our usual expenses, such as staff salaries, insurance, utilities, food/cleaning supplies, and New York City office rent, we have had increased costs to keep our existing vital staff safe and protected, healthy, trained and supported, and to recruit new staff in a very challenging labor market. Covering these expenses, with a combination of governmental support and the generosity of our donors,

allows us to provide our emergency services during the pandemic, our modified summer camp this summer and our re-opened overnight respite program this fall.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we had to move our usual fall theater benefit from in-person to a virtual performance, and our needs have obviously 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](http://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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