



## Summer Camp 2022

DESPITE CONTINUING CHALLENGES hiring counselors, nursing staff and support staff, on June 17th Rising Treetops opened its 2022 Summer Camp and Day Camp.

The 259 children and adults who attended summer camp had an 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.

As we continued to follow COVID-19 health and safety protocols, all campers and staff in summer 2022 were required to be COVID-vaccinated, including booster shots, if booster shot-eligible. 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. We are happy to report that summer theater performances and end of session celebrations returned throughout the summer!

## Overnight Respite Fully Open

RISING TREETOPS began ITS 2022-23 RESPITE SEASON on September 26. Over 37 weeks, there are 20 seven-night and 3 five-night sessions scheduled through early June 2023. All ages, genders and special needs are considered

for placement. We will continue the COVID-19 protocols outlined above. Respite sessions are filling to capacity. Please email [respite@risingtreetops.org](mailto:respite@risingtreetops.org) or call 732-531-0215 for more information.

## Pines Cabin Re-Design

Rising Treetops has six residences for its clients with disabilities on its 15-acre campus in Ocean Township, New Jersey. The Pines Cabin is the oldest, built in 1955, and is the last to be renovated and fully winterized. With the help of a pro bono engineer, Felipe Rodas, Rising Treetops broke ground on a transformational redesign and renovation of the cabin in November, and we expect the work to be completed by January.



The Pines Cabin will be our first self-contained residence, with a kitchen, laundry and living room added to what are usually just sleeping areas and bathrooms. This critically important project will allow Rising Treetops more flexibility to serve our clients with disabilities on an emergency basis year-round, and to be able to isolate clients in any future pandemic/contagion kinds of crises. The Pines

Cabin will be a prototype of a group home model of care for adults with developmental disabilities, a service in the tri-state area that is in critically short supply.

As of December 1, we have raised \$123,300 toward the \$218,960 total cost of this important project. We have \$95,660 still to raise. If you are interested in contributing toward this important project, please contact Robert Pacenza at 212-779-2725 or [donate@risingtreetops.org](mailto:donate@risingtreetops.org).

## 2021 Summer Party



RISING TREETOPS HELD ITS 16TH ANNUAL SUMMER PARTY on Saturday, July 9th at the home of Caitlin and Rob Bovo in Rumson, New Jersey.

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 Pines Cabin Project. The event was not only a wonderful evening, but also a great financial success, with 125 people in attendance and over \$133,000 donated to Rising Treetops.

Board Vice President Andrew Marrus, client parent and Board member John Byren and host Rob Bovo provided heartfelt remarks about Rising Treetops. We are grateful to the Bovos for hosting and to all involved in the event for their generosity and support.

We offer our gratitude also to this year's local business sponsors: Ansell Grimm & Aaron, Daisy Chocolates, Sperry Tents, Nelson, Fromer, Crocco & Jordan, OceanFirst Foundation, Two Rivers Animal Hospital, Family First Urgent Care, James Koechlin Plumbing & Heating, AccessRec and J&J Pools.

## Freedom

The following article was published on BRICK SHOREBEAT'S website on JULY 7, 2022. We print it here because it so encapsulates the difference Rising Treetops makes to families.

MY NAME IS KIMBERLEE McCAFFERTY, and I am proud to say that my eldest son Justin, who is profoundly autistic, recently spent an entire week at sleepaway camp at Rising Treetops at Oakhurst.

It was the first time our son had spent a night away from home without his family in nineteen years. We had sent him there to day camp once three years ago. It was closed in 2020 along with the world, and last year they were only doing two-week sessions of sleepaway camp.

We trust the staff at Rising Treetops completely, but the enormity of him being away from us for that long was just overwhelming. His father and I were just not ready to take that leap with him. And a leap of faith it was.

We tried to prepare him as best we could. His teacher and I bought two calendars, one for home and one for school, and we wrote on each square "home" or "school" for several months. When it came to his camp week I pointed out all the squares that said "camp," and sent the calendar with him in the hopes that staff would show it to him daily.

You see, one of the biggest fears my husband had was that he would think he'd be staying there forever, that we'd never go get him. This is the only way I could think of to let him know he'd come home again.

Apparently, it worked. According to the staff member who worked with him the most, he ate well. He slept, although up at 5:00 a few times, but he slept. They said he even smiled.

When I went to pick him up there was no mad rush to my arms, as befits a teenager. But when I called his name he walked up to me, leaned in, and rested his head on my shoulder. No words needed.

I asked him if he had had fun, and he gave me the coveted nod. I asked if he'd like to go back again, and saw him nod again. For Justin, that is a rousing endorsement.

His father and I are thrilled. We are ecstatic that there is one more thing we can add to his leisure repertoire, which has scant few activities to accompany it as the years progress. And we are thrilled, as this camp does respite throughout the year.

It opens up the possibility for Jeff and I to get away for a weekend. It may let us attend friends' children's weddings. It enables the three of us to take Zach on college tours. It will let me slip away with my girlfriends and know my husband is only left with one kid to care for. It is a miracle. It is freedom.

It is an accomplishment made by his family, teachers, therapists, and everyone else who's helped him become his best self over almost two decades. It is an achievement forged in tiny steps, in avoiding short cuts, in sticking to demands made. It is a milestone made in hope.

And despite all the help, it is mostly his. Because if he didn't want this broadening of his life experiences, it never would have happened.

I can't thank the staff enough for providing a safe, fun place for my son to thrive, and for their compassion and kindness. I can't thank them enough for the gift of giving my husband and I the ability to dream and make plans.

I can't wait until next summer (or sooner). I am so proud.

## Client Stories

The need for summer camp and overnight respite care became even more critical during the final year of the pandemic, and our clients needed us more than ever:

### Hailey, Age 21



Hailey, age 21, lives in Monmouth County, NJ, is diagnosed with autism and lives with her family. When Hailey saw Rising Treetops at a resource fair more than three years ago, she came running up to our table and told her mother Rising Treetops is what she was looking for. Hailey first attended a

2019 autism camp session and has since attended camp sessions in 2021 and 2022. Camp at Rising Treetops has been a great opportunity for Hailey to socialize, try out fun activities and open her up to trying new things. Hailey's favorite activity is swimming, and she also really enjoyed cooking, sports and media arts.

The first summer, Hailey was quiet, shy and a little withdrawn compared to the enthusiastic, bubbly self that she showed at the resource fair. She was very attached to her counselor and, at first, she seemed to just be taking it all in. Her father informed us that she would frequently check

Rising Treetops' social media posts, scanning the photos to see if she could find herself in any of them. Hailey was eager to return in 2021 but nervous about the longer stay (12 nights instead of 4). She had a fantastic time – it was a different group of girls in her cabin, girls that usually attended our longer camp sessions who were quite social and vocal. Hailey returned to camp this summer and would tell us every day that she was having a great time.

### Nicole, Age 23



Nicole lives with her family in Brooklyn and is diagnosed with intellectual disability and a seizure disorder. Nicole first came to Rising Treetops in May this year. She came for a respite session so we could observe her in our program. Her respite stay went very well.

Nicole's family wanted her to come to Rising Treetops to have new experiences and make friends. Initially, Nicole was shy, quiet and cautious around staff and peers. A few days into her summer camp session this year she was quite the social butterfly! She was a great friend to her peers, helpful to staff and experienced very few minor seizure episodes during her summer stays. Nicole always wants to be part of the nature activity and loves to go on the Rising Treetops adaptive swings. Nicole had two fantastic camp sessions and is contacting our staff frequently asking for more time at Rising Treetops.

### Tyler, Age 8



Tyler lives in the Bronx with his mother and is diagnosed with ADHD and intellectual disability. Tyler's mother first began trying to enroll him in our program in December 2019. Tyler's mother continued to check in, and eventually, once Tyler became vaccinated, he was able to attend summer camp.

Tyler's mother had him involved in activities outside of school but also wanted Tyler to have new experiences and thought sleep-away camp would be fun for him. Initially, Tyler seemed quiet and shy, taking it all in. As his 2022 summer session went on, he became more active and vocal, finding a buddy with another youth camper who has attended for a few years now. Tyler was very active and wanted to be in the pool whenever he could, and loved sports and any outdoor activities. It was worth the wait for Tyler and his mother.

## Rickie, Age 40



Rickie lives in Clifton, NJ, with his family and is diagnosed with cerebral palsy and intellectual disability. Rickie attended overnight respites at Rising Treetops from 2010-2012 and since then went to other camp and respite programs, but asked to return to Rising Treetops this year.

Rickie missed being at our camp, and remembered many of the staff and other campers from years ago.

Rickie is extremely social. He uses a power wheelchair and while his mother was concerned about how well he would be able to maneuver it himself at Rising Treetops, he steered it himself all over throughout his session. His speech can be difficult to understand at times but he

would repeat himself whenever needed and would often start giggling when staff stated what they thought he said but didn't quite get it right. In fact, Rickie is uncomfortable speaking in public because of his speech impairment, so his goal this summer was to narrate parts of a play that our drama class put on, and he did just that.

Rickie seemed like a natural in terms of adjusting to camp life – he had no issues with making friends and bonding with his staff. He would come and go from activities, checking in on everyone and reporting back to administrative staff when he thought something needed to be addressed.

Rickie's mother is a great advocate for her son and others with developmental disabilities. She was thrilled that Rickie enjoyed himself so much and was able to work on his driving skills as well.

## From the Desks of the President and Executive Director

It has been a challenging but promising year for Rising Treetops. At the start of 2022, we were still providing modified overnight services, and today we are fully re-opened, now that our after-school service resumed in September. We remain incredibly grateful to the dedicated team that lives on our campus to help provide care for our clients in a safe and nurturing environment.

With all our services re-opened, donations are needed now more than ever. As a result of the pandemic, we continue to have added costs for cleaning and hygiene supplies, pandemic-related PPE, and COVID test kits. Given persistent inflation, costs have also risen for staffing, meals, transportation, equipment and materials for therapeutic recreational activities, utilities, and upkeep and cleaning of all 12 buildings at the facility. Many of our families continue to need scholarships to attend our camp and respite programs.

As the article in this newsletter details, our Pines Cabin is under construction and when completed will allow us more flexibility to serve our clients with disabilities on an emergency basis year-round, and enable us to isolate clients in any future pandemic crises.

Despite a year with continued pandemic limitations and challenges hiring staff, our beautiful and historic 15-acre campus has continued to need repairs and maintenance to remain in quality working condition. In addition to the current Pines Cabin renovations, in the late spring we

completed a \$60,000 major renovation of our Gore Staff Residence and did \$70,000 of major repairs and preventive maintenance on our indoor/outdoor pool roof.

As a result of concerns about holding an intimate theater benefit and dinner with the lingering COVID-19 pandemic, we had to cancel our usual fall theater benefit, yet 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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 212-533-4020 or 732-531-0215  
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