

PLuS Program Launches with The Pines Cabin Re-opening



RISING TREETOPS HAS SIX RESIDENCES for its clients with special needs 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 fully winterized. Rising Treetops completed the Pines Cabin redesign and renovation project in June 2023. Our first residence with a kitchen, laundry and living room, and semi-private sleeping areas, Pines now allows Rising Treetops flexibility to serve our clients on an emergency basis year-round, and serves as the center of our Practical Life Skills (PLuS) Program. PLuS is a vital and innovative new program for clients with special needs who have been identified as having adaptive functioning skills, which, if developed further, will help them to attain goals of living independently.

The PLuS Program, launched during our 2023 Summer Camp on July 3, engaged 23 campers over three sessions and 36 days of camp this summer. Each day, PLuS campers planned their daily schedule, took turns learning to do laundry, created menus, budgeted and shopped for snacks and groceries and prepared several meals each session, did cabin chores, set individual Prove the Potential morning activity goals, chose afternoon activities to serve as assistant teachers for the other cabin campers, and ended each day with group rap sessions.

During each session, PLuS campers and staff took NJ Transit trips to local sites, and learned to read train

schedules, purchase tickets and board trains. In addition, volunteer and talented musician Francois Mobasser led innovative music classes in the Pines Cabin for PLuS campers. In the current respite season through early June 2024, there are five PLuS Program sessions scheduled.

With sincere gratitude for their generosity, Rising Treetops is pleased to thank the following supporters of the Pines Cabin Renovation Project, helping us raise \$195,281 to support the project: Sarah & John Bonello, The Bovo Family, The Byren Family, Judith & Lewis Eisenberg, Robert Fagenson, Marilyn Friedman & Tom Block, The Fund for Individual Potential, Peter & Josephine Grayson, Melissa & Geoffrey Greener, Susan & Robert Hermanos, The Herrman Family, The Dorothy B. Hersh Foundation, Lemberg Foundation, The Long Family, The Marrus Family, Tod Mercy, Joyce & James Nunziata, Sarah Personette & David Paolo, Adelle & Robert Rathe, Andrea Scharf, and Jennifer Whyman & David Greene.

Overnight Respites In Full Swing!



RISING TREETOPS BEGAN ITS 2023-24 RESPITE SEASON on September 25. Over 36 weeks, there are 20 seven-night and 3 five-night sessions scheduled through early June 2024. All ages, genders and special needs will be considered for placement. Most sessions have either themes, parties or off-camp trips. Respite sessions are filling up! Please email respites@risingtreetops.org or call 732-531-0215 for more information.

2023 Summer Party



RISING TREETOPS HELD ITS 17TH ANNUAL SUMMER PARTY on Saturday, July 15, at the home of Cynthia and Steven Geffon in Rumson, New Jersey.

During the event, 135 guests had several opportunities to support Rising Treetops, including purchasing raffle tickets for the annual Shore Friends of Rising Treetops raffle and donating to our Gymnasium Renovations Project. The rain held off and the event was a great success, with over \$109,000 donated to Rising Treetops. Our heartfelt thanks to our lead Shore Friends volunteers, Board member Adelle Rathe and Caroline Ansell, for their dedication to another successful summer raffle.

Amazingly, an anonymous donor pledged \$160,000 to underwrite the full cost of renovating and re-equipping our gymnasium. The project will begin later this fall and will include installing new floors in the main gym and staff fitness room, and installing central air conditioning in the main gym, sensory room, fitness room, and the areas with lockers, showers and bathrooms. In addition, a divider will be installed in the main gym, and we will purchase new indoor and outdoor sports equipment.

We are grateful to the Geffons for hosting and to all involved in the event for their generosity and support.

We also offer our gratitude to this year's local business sponsors: Ansell Grimm & Aaron, By Design Landscapes, Daisy Chocolates, Geico-Oakhurst, James Koechlin Plumbing & Heating, J&J Pools, Little Silver Bottle Shop, Monmouth Medical Center, New Jersey Natural Gas, OceanFirst Foundation, Sperry Tent and Summit Realty Services.

Summer Camp 2023



RISING TREETOPS OPENED ITS 2023 SUMMER CAMP on June 16, and by the last day of camp on September 1, we held seven camp sessions with total attendance of 376, our most in recent memory! The children and adult campers 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.

In addition to the start of our new PLuS Program, this summer was also noteworthy in that we hired 78 dedicated and dynamic summer camp staff from 18 countries, including: Mexico, China, Malaysia, England, Ireland, Scotland, South Africa, Colombia, Brazil, Spain, Turkey, Indonesia, Jordan, Poland, Jamaica, Australia, Tunisia and of course the United States.

Rising Treetops Volunteers

VOLUNTEERS ARE INTEGRAL TO RISING TREETOPS' SUCCESS to help establish closer ties to the Monmouth County community. This past year, our volunteer activities, spearheaded by Board member Caitlin Bovo, increased dramatically. Volunteer groups and individuals donated time, goods and services to help improve the quality of our buildings, grounds and activities for our summer campers and respite clients.

Volunteers have included: By Design Landscape, Christian Brothers Academy Alumni Network, Christian Brothers Academy Students, Fair Haven 5th grade Girl Scouts Troop, Kids Give, Monmouth University Big Event Students, Troop 71 Oakhurst Manor Boy Scouts, Georgia Blair and Therapy Dog Mocha, Stable Minds, Carol Cerussi, Anna Becker and Trinity Hall Students, and more than 100 individuals and families from all over Monmouth County.

We are especially grateful to the CBA Alumni Network, their October 7th 1st Annual Day of Service at Rising Treetops, and to the anonymous donor who, through CBA Alumni, underwrote the cost of a much-needed Kawasaki Mule ATV to assist Rising Treetops' maintenance and upkeep of its 12 buildings and 15 acres.

Client Stories

RIISING TREETOPS HAS RETURNED TO NEAR PRE-PANDEMIC levels of attendance in our camp and overnight respite services for adults and children with a wide range of special needs. The following describe the need and impact for families:

Shanequa, Age 32



Shanequa lives in Brooklyn, is diagnosed with cerebral palsy and lives with her family. Shanequa first came to Rising Treetops in 2014, and except for 2020, has attended two or three camp and respite sessions a year every year, including the General Session 1 in summer 2023, when she participated in the inaugural PLuS Program session. The program structure helped Shanequa develop leadership skills and really shine this summer.

Shanequa is independent in her personal care and likes to help others and guide them on their choices and options at the camp. Shanequa's counselor this summer reported that she was friendly and further developed her skills to lead a group and bring people together. She likes to give campers and counselors nicknames and walk around the camp independently. She especially likes filming with an iPad in the media arts therapeutic activity, playing games in sports activities and making food in the cooking classroom. She is a great communicator and has grown tremendously the last couple of years.

Chaz, Age 22



Chaz lives in The Bronx with his family and is diagnosed with autism. Chaz first came to Rising Treetops for a spring 2015 respite session. Over the years Chaz attended mostly camp sessions, including General Session 1 in 2023. Rising Treetops' staff noted that

this year he was much more engaged than previously and especially liked shopping and cooking in the Pines Cabin as part of the PLuS Program. His counselor commented that he worked this summer on his time management, and cleaning and organizing his bunk area.

Overall, Chaz did very well this summer, especially participating in activities, and being an active and creative participant. Staff noted his caring and respectful nature, his love of arts and crafts, swimming and nature activities. Chaz is known to have a journal book with him where he draws and writes.

Chaz's mother Jeanetha reported that Chaz was very happy with his summer camp experience, loved the camp train ride and outing, enjoyed camp activities, and spoke about how fun camp was this summer.

Brian, Age 19

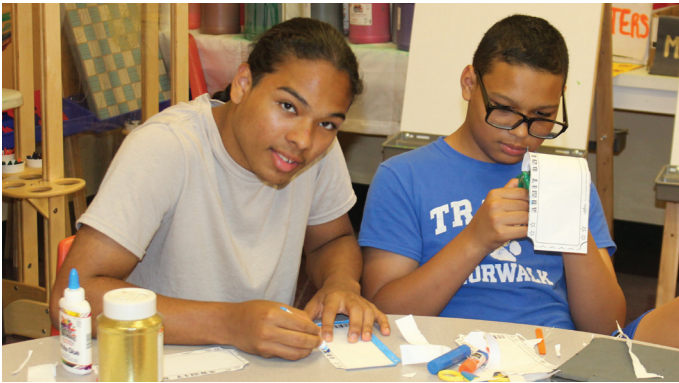


Brian lives in The Bronx with his family and is diagnosed with autism. While Brian has come to camp and respite sessions most years since he was 10, he had not been to Rising Treetops in two years and really flourished this summer.

Brian has grown to be very patient and gentle with people, and is also independent and responsible for his own things at the camp. He really likes to teach others games and to learn card games. Staff commented Brian had a very good camp session this summer.

Brian's counselor at a respite session just a few weeks ago described one of Brian's days as follows: Brian woke up, got dressed and greeted everyone "good morning." He enjoyed his breakfast and socializing with others. Then on to the gym for "Movin' and Groovin" warm-up exercises set to music, followed by some spirited basketball and table hockey. After rest time in his cabin, he went to the library for puzzles and games, and then Brian went to the music activity. He loved lunch and then after rest time in his cabin, Brian returned to the gym and played more basketball, then made cookies in the cooking class, and ended his afternoon in arts and crafts. After dinner, he returned to his cabin to rest, and then happily went to his evening activity and played games. Brian returned to his cabin, took a shower and was ready for bed. Brian's full day is just one example of the rich array of activities RTO has to offer.

Elijah, Age 17 & Amadaeuz, Age 12



Elijah is diagnosed with autism and allergies and lives in The Bronx with his family. He first came to Rising Treetops in 2018 and has since attended both summer camp and overnight respite sessions.

This summer Elijah was accompanied by his brother Amadaeuz. Also diagnosed with autism, Amadaeuz had a great time attending General Session 3 with his brother. Both brothers especially liked the iPad media arts activity, and Elijah also enjoyed his time playing games in the gym.

Elijah enjoyed time with friends on the swings and was always willing to try new activities. He readily communicated his wants and needs. Amadaeuz was very adept at technology and was a quick learner. Unlike his brother, he was not interested in sports or swimming, but was always friendly to other campers and staff!

Elijah's camp counselor reported that he really enjoyed coming to Rising Treetops and Amadaeuz's counselor commented he also had a great time.

From the Desks of the President and Executive Director

It has been a great year for Rising Treetops. At the start of 2023, we entered our first year since 2019 with all services fully re-opened after the COVID-19 pandemic.

We remain incredibly grateful to the dedicated team of direct support professionals who live on our campus to provide care for our clients in a safe and nurturing environment.

With all our services opened, donations are needed now more than ever. Costs continue to rise 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 this newsletter details, we have had two major capital projects during 2023: the redesign and renovation of our Pines Cabin, which has helped launch our PLuS Program, and a major renovation of our gymnasium. For both projects the costs totaled nearly \$400,000, most of which was covered through private donations. We could not have completed this critical work without the generous support of our dedicated community of supporters.

Over the coming months and years Rising Treetops will need to add central air conditioning in our Oaks and Marions Cabins, install lighting on a nearly half mile of paved pathways, replace the safety fence around much of our

property, purchase a new wheelchair accessible bus and a client transit van, and improve and expand housing for live-in staff.

As a result of continuing concerns about holding an intimate theater benefit and dinner and with limited Broadway show options, we again have 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 fall and holiday season, please use the enclosed reply card or visit www.risingtreetops.org/donate.

Thank you for your commitment and generosity.

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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