

Thanks to your support, some of this season's highlights include:

- NPR and Faith Middleton
- New FOCUS Website
- Rejoin FOCUS
- A Storm to Remember
- FOCUS on the Arts
- Working with LACASA
- Parent Support Group
- Summer Social Skills Immersion Program
- Upcoming Events!
- Advocacy Seminar
- Commotion Promotion

Mark your calendar:

FOCUS ON FOLK
March 3, 2012

CELEBRATE FOCUS DINNER
April 27, 2012

FESTIVAL FOR AUTISM
June 2, 2012



We will see you there!

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FOCUS MATTERS

Because the "creatively wired and socially challenged" should not have to go it alone

NPR and Faith Middleton

Recently Donna Swanson, our Executive Director, along with our good friends Sharon Cable and her son Alex were featured on the Faith Middleton show on National Public Radio. The show centered around a discussion on what life with autism is like for the child, the parent and the family. It was quite an education for Faith, as she'd had little experience with this special population, but became quite enamored with Alex and his ability to describe his experiences. Donna and Sharon were also able to explain the benefits to the child and the family when a program such as FOCUS is available to them. They talked about the supports families need and how the FOCUS model of treatment grounded in Milieu Therapy helps each child to grow socially and emotionally. All in all it was a great and informative show and Faith is a most gracious host! Below is Alex's latest letter which Faith read on the show.

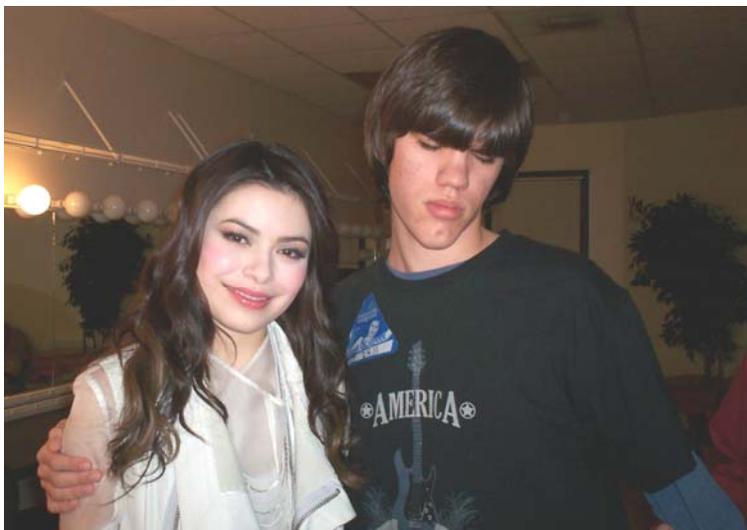
Alex Cable

11/10/2011

My New FOCUS Letter (SpongeBob Movie Parody)

Dear Parents and Friends,

My name is Alex and I'm an 18-year-old teenager with autism. Yeah, that's right, I'm autistic. And you know what? I've been through a lot in the past 7 years, 4 months, 1½ weeks, and if I've learned anything in that time, it's that you are who you are. And no amount of musical talent, or staff promotion, or "some other third thing", can make me any more than what I really am inside-autistic. But that's okay, because I did what everyone said an autistic kid couldn't do. I met the girl of my dreams, Miranda Cosgrove, I graduated high school, I got a job at FAVARH, and I'm a graduate mentor at FOCUS!



Alex Cable meeting one of his favorite stars, Miranda Cosgrove

FOCUS Gets a New Website

Thanks to our good friend Lauren Tancredi, FOCUS will be getting a new website in the near future. The new site will be much easier to navigate, will include more information and be more interactive and user friendly. The social media links have been expanded and opportunities to share information have been improved. Keep checking the site for the changes and let us know what you think of it! We'd love the feedback!

Rejoin FOCUS!

If you were a friend of our old Facebook page, then rejoin as a friend of our new page! Now under FOCUS Center for Autism, we invite anyone associated with FOCUS in any way to become a friend. Learn what's going on and who's doing what! Spread the word so others can join as well!

Toughing it Out! A Storm to Remember

For the staff and residents of our young adult therapeutic housing program in Simsbury the October storm was a time they will never forget. The loss of power, coupled with some pretty extensive damage to the house, including a branch through the roof into a resident's bedroom, forced the whole program to pick up and move to the Simsbury emergency shelter in the high school. The warm welcome they received there will always be remembered and the fact that the residents were given their own classroom made the transition and operation of the program much more manageable. The eight days spent in the shelter actually offered a rich social environment that the program residents seemed to enjoy. All the shelter volunteers were very supportive and many new friendships were forged as the community hunkered down together and waited out the devastation and loss of power.



Roof damage where tree limb fell

Enough cannot be said of the FOCUS program staff that braved the tree-fallen roads, worked extra shifts and covered for each other as they took their shifts and managed the program from the shelter. It was an extraordinary challenge that both residents and staff stepped up to! We are so blessed by staff that put so much love and caring into all of our programs!

Fallen tree that just missed the house



FOCUS on the Arts

Knowing that children on the Autism Spectrum have incredible and unique artistic talents we have finally found a way to start up our FOCUS on the Arts Program. The program began January 18th and is on Wednesdays from 4:00p-5:30p. There will be no additional charge for children already enrolled on those days. We are very proud to have our own Maeghen Plourde head up this program and everyone agrees there is no better person for the job. Maeghen, in addition to being quite talented artistically, has worked very hard to put this program together on a very limited budget. It is truly a labor of love.

Finger-painting colorful rainbows



Maeghen wanted us to make sure that we give a special thanks to those who donated money and supplies to the program. So a big thank you goes out to Sandy Kissel, Carol Doiron, Jolene and Kevin Zerbe, Deborah and David Frankfurter, Diana Lee, Marcia and Ron Tanquay, Sue and Craig Foley, and Carlie Yeager and friends.



Dancing and movement with guest Linalynn Schmelzer

We hope this is only the beginning!



Experimenting with water colors

Working with LACASA

LACASA is a local non-profit that is comprised of families with children, adolescents and young adults that have Autism Spectrum Disorders. Our good friend Sharon Cable is the head of the organization and we have been looking for ways to help each other. What has come to our attention recently is the need for the older kids to have social opportunities, just to be able to hang out with each other. Young people with autism often feel isolated and lack a sense of community with their peers. At FOCUS we have been working on this issue for some time by offering a number of social groups each month. We are now collaborating with LACASA and have invited their young people into the FOCUS fold, so they too can enjoy the peer groups and social opportunities we have to offer. It is a win-win for both organizations as our local autism community continues to grow and get stronger!

As part of our collaborative effort between LACASA and FOCUS, beginning in February there will be a monthly social club for high school students ages 14-18 on Saturday afternoon from 1p-4p.

For a modest fee of \$75 for 5 sessions, the social club will be staffed and includes snacks. All FOCUS and LACASA families seeking social opportunities for their high school student are invited.



Don't Miss Out on Parent Support Group

All parents/guardians of children enrolled in FOCUS programs are entitled to attend our twice monthly scheduled Parent Support Groups free of charge. These meetings allow parents to share their experiences, learn from each other and to obtain advice from our experienced clinicians. Childcare and dinner are provided. Check our website for a schedule of these meetings. Alumni are also welcome and everyone who wants to attend is asked to please let us know that you are coming so that we will have adequate staff and, of course,....food!!



Summer Social Skills Immersion Program!

The FOCUS Summer Social Skills Immersion Program may seem a long way off, but we are already receiving calls! Last year, the Summer Program was full by May, and we are anticipating another full program this summer. The 6-week program starts on Monday, July 9 and runs to Friday, August 17. Children ages 5 - 18 may attend from one week to all six weeks. Please don't wait too long to start thinking about your summer plans as it is a first come, first serve basis. We don't want your child to miss out on this fun and educational summer experience!



Commotion Promotion

In November, FOCUS learned that it has been awarded \$500 worth of promotional merchandise through the One Good Turn Project of Commotion Promotions. Based out of Arizona, Commotion Promotions provides a wide range of items to promote an organization or an event. FOCUS received this award as a result of a proposal submitted to Commotion Promotions and, impressed with the work we do, the grant was awarded almost immediately. After some deliberation, a water bottle with our information was picked. Look for these great additions to our marketing materials at our upcoming events!

Upcoming Events

Excitement is rising as we begin to prepare for our three spring events! On Saturday, March 3rd, the annual **FOCUS on Folk** will once again bring Another One Night Stand to the stage to perform folk and rock music to entertain us all. This year the event will be held at Tower Ridge Country Club in Simsbury. Advance tickets are \$15, at the door tickets are \$20. Tickets include hearty hors d'oeuvres and there will be a cash bar. There is a dance floor and lots of room to "get our groove on". We hope to see you there!!

On Friday, April 27th, the annual **Celebrate FOCUS Dinner** will be held at Tower Ridge Country Club and a Silent Auction will once again be the highlight of the evening! Advance tickets are \$50, at the door tickets are \$60. Tickets include a delicious meal and there will be a cash bar.

The year would not be complete without the annual **FOCUS Festival for Autism!** This year marks our 10th year of having the festival and it sure has grown! It will be held on Saturday, June 2nd from 12-4p and we will return once again to Mills Pond Recreation Center in Canton. Rides, games, food, animals and the raffles will entertain us all. Don't forget- we will have the Euro-Bungee again this year! **Mark your calendars for these events and come and support FOCUS!**

Disability Advocacy Seminar

On Thursday, January 12th, six members of the FOCUS family attended Advocacy Day 2012 -- CT Speaks Up at the University of Hartford. This informative day began with welcoming remarks by Deb Heinrich, Nonprofit Liaison to the Governor, about the importance of speaking up and how we can all work together to strengthen the essential partnership between the state and nonprofits. Four break-out sessions allowed participants to work with professionals in the areas of Development, Media Relations,

Advanced Strategies, and Advocacy How-To. The Commissioners of seven state agencies were also on hand to network with participants -- the Department of Children and Families, the Department of Social Services, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, the Department of Revenue Services, the Department of Correction, the Department of Developmental Services, and the Judicial Branch of Court Support Services Division. This day proved invaluable as our FOCUS representatives talked with other agencies and commissioners, coming away with more ideas on how to promote FOCUS even better.



FOCUS is sitting front and center at the seminar



FOCUS with DCF Deputy Commissioner Janice Gruendel

Annual Giving

"I want to keep my son at FOCUS as much as possible, as he benefits so much from your program. Our family is greatly indebted to you and all the staff!"

This statement was made recently by a parent of a child in the FOCUS program. It reflects what many parents have said about the impact of FOCUS on their child. Hearing such affirmations of what we do increases our commitment and dedication to serving individuals on the Autism Spectrum...but we cannot do it alone. We cannot do it without the financial support of donors like you. Please consider making a gift that will keep us going strong. No matter the amount, your gift makes a difference!

