

## Winter 2009

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

- ◆ Nutmeg TV Appearance and DVD being shown on Community TV
- ◆ Academic Support Team expands
- ◆ Shannon House is full with all kids in school and doing well
- ◆ November Appeal Is a Success!
- ◆ Fundraising Training Program sponsored by Hartford Foundation for Public Giving
- ◆ Autism Awareness Kick-Off Event at Lyceum sponsored by FOCUS

**Mark your calendar:  
Festival For Autism  
June 6, 2009**



**We hope to  
see you there!**

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# FOCUS MATTERS

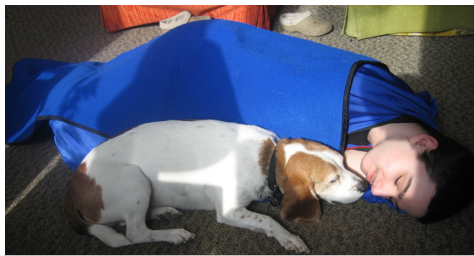
FOCUS works to improve the quality of life for individuals and families on the Autism Spectrum

Dear Friends of FOCUS,

So many good things continue to happen at FOCUS thanks to your support and belief in our mission. In addition to being one of the only places in the State of Connecticut offering treatment programs for individuals on the Autism Spectrum, our role in Advocacy is increasing. 20 representatives from FOCUS, including staff, children and families attended a Forum on Autism moderated by Congressman Chris Murphy. Many of the 100 people present knew of FOCUS and the quality programs that we provide. FOCUS is also joining forces with the Connecticut Autism Coalition to provide an Autism Awareness Forum to offer an opportunity to network with key non-partisan advocates, legislators, and experts in the Autism Community in Connecticut.

Times are tough and FOCUS also feels the pain. We are doing our best to “hunker down” and find creative new ways to meet the needs of our children and families. **Your ongoing support is needed now more than ever and we are always so grateful for all that you do. We have each other and that makes all the difference in the world!** Please read the newsletter for the “rest of the story”.

Respectfully,  
Donna Swanson, MSN, CS, APRN  
Executive Director



Ben and Lady having a “sensory” break



Jon

## November Appeal

**Over 250 children, adolescents and their families from over 45 Connecticut towns have now been served by the FOCUS Continuum of Care.”**

Highlighted in the appeal was Jon, one of our young men from the Young Adult Therapeutic Supportive Housing Program. Jon came from a lifetime of institutionalization, trauma and loss. He has overcome the odds and become an empathetic, generous young man. He earned a part-time position as a Direct Care Staff in our Extended Day Treatment Program and will begin a class at North Western Community College this month. In the eyes of our children, he is a role model and a leader. We are proud of the man Jon is becoming and how he has learned to give back. Jon states; “working with the kids at FOCUS means so much to me. I know it is important work and helping them actually helps me as I keep moving forward”. This is but one example of the “Circle of Giving” and the FOCUS Continuum of Care at work!

We want to extend our heartfelt thanks to all of our donors! We wish to also thank the FOCUS Board of Directors and Staff, who by donating further illustrated their loyalty and commitment to the well being of our children and families.

**We will continue our promise to you by ensuring each and every child in our care is given hope for the future. For a child with Autism, the world can be a lonely place. But with supporters like you, they are given the chance they deserve. Thank you.**

## FOCUSING On New Strategies

Members of the FOCUS Board of Directors and the Executive Management Team attended an intensive 5 session Fundraising Training Program sponsored by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving to learn new strategies to survive the tough times all non-profits face today. FOCUS was one of 7 agencies chosen from the many that applied to attend this special training. The timing was excellent as we had just completed the training for our Technology Grant (also awarded by the Hartford Foundation). The grant not only helped us meet our technology needs, but strengthens our infrastructure as well, enabling us to administer our programs and provide services in the most efficient way possible. We have learned a great deal in the past 6 months and we appreciate the Hartford Foundation for all of their support.

**Our goal is to sustain the growth and keep the miracles happening!**

## Nutmeg TV Features the FOCUS Team

FOCUS staff and students were proud to be invited as guest speakers on the Nutmeg TV show "My Kind of Town". Noreen Zurell, delightfully hosted the half hour program in November that depicted the struggles encountered by individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Donna Swanson, Executive Director, introduced the FOCUS team which included Emily Looper, Lucas Hofstatter, Andy Cables, and Alex Cable. She discussed the wide range of functioning of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders and addressed the common misperception that all "Autism" is the same.

The speakers were enlightening as they expressed the emotional hardships each of them experienced growing up. A common theme was the difficulty they all encountered in social situations and the isolation they experienced because of it. Emily and Lucas discussed their educational difficulties and pointed out how schools at that time were not equipped to support children on the Autism Spectrum.

**Because of people like you who believed in them and supported FOCUS, coupled with hard work and dedication, all are working on having a future.** Emily went to FOCUS and earned her GED and is currently enrolled at Tunxis Community College pursuing a future in graphic arts and works part-time at FOCUS. Andy earned his Associates degree from the University of Hartford and works in our Extended Day Treatment

Program. Lucas is completing an Outdoor Leadership Program at Northwestern Community College and is employed full time at FOCUS working in two of our three programs. Alex is currently attending high school and dreams of owning a condo in Jamaica where it is warm!

## FOCUS Alternative Learning Center Is Hosting The Kick-Off Event for Autism Awareness Day on March 12th at The Lyceum.

This is an educational, State-wide opportunity to develop new insights into what has become one of today's major healthcare and disability issue of epidemic proportion; and one that impacts individuals and families over their entire lifespan.

- Meet and network with key non-partisan advocates legislators and experts and experts in the Autism Community in Connecticut.
- Support the Connecticut Autism Action Coalition (CAAC) in organizing the development of service access and delivery to Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Meet the FOCUS Alternative Learning Center's Autism Spectrum Unplugged Panel and learn about Autism in a way that will forever change your life.



FOCUS on "My Kind of Town", a show hosted by Noreen Zurell on Nutmeg TV



Donna listens as Emily tells her life stories



## FOCUS on the Academic Support Team

A Win - Win Situation For All!

### Because of you we are able to continue to meet the needs of children on the Autism Spectrum

The ever-evolving FOCUS team has once again added some valuable players. With 1 in every 150 children diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder, there is a severe lack of services available for children and families. We are presently expanding our Extended Day Treatment program to help meet these needs and we have some awesome staff to accomplish this!

Carol Doiron, the FOCUS Special Education Clinical Coordinator, has been a Special Education for over 30 years, including Being a Director of Pupil Services. She is also a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW). Carol brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to our program and is eagerly developing new ideas for further expansion. She will serve as our School Liaison as well as work hands on with the children. In addition to her expertise, her kind heart and flexible nature have assured her a place at FOCUS and in the lives of our children and families.

Seasoned staff in the Extended Day Program have expanded their roles and services to support the growing program needs, especially in the area of Therapeutic Academic Support. When children on the Autism Spectrum can be taught early how to socialize, problem solve and advocate for themselves, the transition to a more traditional setting is strengthened and the "fit" enhanced in a positive way.

Beth Nyerick, a Certified Special Education Teacher, Jamie Cohen, Academic Support Program Coordinator and along with other FOCUS clinicians that will be rotating throughout the program. Yvonne Parenteu is a Certified School Psychologist and Jessica Rhodes is a Certified School Counselor. This is the basis for a very strong and knowledgeable team that have extensive experience with this population and are committed to the FOCUS mission.

Our Direct Care Staff round out the rest of the team and offer the children additional support. Their valuable experiences growing up as children on the Autism Spectrum helps our children understand that if they work hard and apply themselves, they can be successful too.

If you have any questions about our Academic Support Program, please contact Carol Doiron (860) 693-8809 (extension 20). For intake appointments, please contact Jennifer Haggerty (extension 14).



Beth and children with Lady

Working hard on academics



Academic Support Team Senior Staff with Max

### Update on Shannon "HOME"

One of our newer residents at Shannon House recently said:

**"...I have been involved in many programs that have taken care of me throughout my life...but FOCUS is the only program that has "cared" for me".**

This quote is a touching illustration of the growth that can be made. The road can be bumpy but the boys can learn to thrive emotionally, socially and academically.

FOCUS has tried to make Shannon House as much like a real home as possible. Many of these boys come from broken homes and have been raised in institutions. Although we know we can never replace a real family, Shannon House has become its own unique kind of family.

**It is a family where a lot of caring FOCUS staff work hard to help five boys overcome the past and create a future.**



Shannon House Boys around the Christmas tree.

## Weaving a Continuum of Care...What Does This Mean?

It is our hope that through your support we can continue to develop a continuum of care for people with Autism Spectrum Disorders!

### But what does a continuum look like!

For starters our current Continuum of Care includes:

- Our co-ed Extended Day Treatment Program for children and adolescents ages 6-18 which includes an Academic Support Program and an intensive Social Skills Training Program
- A Therapeutic Group Home for adolescent males ages 14-21
- A Young Adult Residence for males ages 18-25
- The Autism Spectrum Unplugged panel of hope and inspiration
- Parent Support Groups
- Social Clubs for children and adolescents
- An extensive and very effective Mentoring program that is woven throughout all of our programs which emphasizes older children mentoring younger children and higher functioning children mentoring lower functioning children.

**A lasting continuum is built one step at a time. With your support our dreams of developing more clinical, academic and young adult services can become a reality!**



### Why should you give to FOCUS?

Because **with your help**, FOCUS can continue working to improve the quality of life For Individuals (and their families) on the Autism Spectrum.

Your **tax-deductible dollars** can help us realize our vision in providing the services desperately needed for the 1 out of 150 Individuals diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

It's now easy and safe to donate at: [www.focusalternative.org/donations.htm](http://www.focusalternative.org/donations.htm)