

## Summer 2011

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

- Spectrum Unplugged
- Ronald McDonald
- FOCUS on Folk
- Celebrate FOCUS
- New Faces
- The Fun Never Stops
- Save the Date
- Max's Babies
- Enroll Soon
- Toey the Horse!
- Gifts to FOCUS

### Mark your calendar:

**FOCUS ON FUN  
FALL PARTY  
September 16, 2011**

**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

## The Autism Spectrum Unplugged Panel

Since August 2010, the FOCUS Unplugged Panel has presented 15 times. Every presentation was enthusiastically received with emotional and supportive responses from the audiences....and many standing ovations! At each, adults and students had good questions and feedback.

Here are a few of the highlights from our year on the road:

We spoke at the Dare To Dream conference on The University of Rhode Island's campus to over 300 people of all kinds of abilities and disabilities. They were incredible. A National Guard soldier in uniform stood up at the end our presentation and said **"We both fight a different kind of war and YOU are my heroes."** We all had chills running up and down our spines!

We spoke at the Ethel Walker School during their chapel hour to 200+ young women and staff. They welcomed us with a beautiful piano solo, and a small group of singers sang about hope and acceptance. **The Panel made such an impact on the students at Ethel Walker that as part of their Community Services Program they are going to partnership with Avon Old Farms and establish a Volunteer/Mentoring program with FOCUS.** This is so exciting for all of us and is what our kids dream of...being genuinely accepted by their peers for exactly who they are! This is the Power of the Panel!!



## The Ronald McDonald Foundation Supports FOCUS

The Ronald McDonald Foundation has provided a grant to FOCUS to help support the Autism Spectrum Unplugged presentations. The money will be used to purchase audio and video equipment enabling us to tape and prepare new presentations. We also received money for supplies that help keep the panel occupied on our journeys.

**Trivia:** Did you know that to do a 1-2 hour presentation often takes the panel 6 hours from start to finish? Between travel and a very special "bonding" meal and our need to get there ahead of time so we are on stage first are all major factors to our success.

Our panel of "experts" is **most** grateful to the Ronald McDonald Foundation as this is the second grant we have received from them in support of this awesome program that allows us to continue to increase awareness and provide hope!

## FOCUS on Folk Brings in the Crowds!

For the second year, the folk ensemble **Another One Night Stand** drew a crowd of more than 120 people for 2 hours of great music in support of FOCUS! This boisterous evening filled the banquet room of La Trattoria Restaurant in Canton and, while the music played, audience members enjoyed food, drink and good conversation.

**Another One Night Stand (Gwen Couch, Caroline Jestin, John Groff, Steve O'Brien, and Scott Mitchell)** performs for free, allowing all proceeds to benefit FOCUS. We are most grateful to the musicians for their ongoing, selfless support of FOCUS. We look forward to a repeat of this fun evening next year so stay tuned for the date!



## We Celebrate FOCUS!

On Friday, April 29, 100 people gathered at La Trattoria Restaurant in Canton for our third annual *Celebrate FOCUS!* Dinner. This event, which included a Silent Auction and Tea Cup Raffle, was an evening for all of our supporters to socialize and celebrate the on-going work of FOCUS. Delicious food and drink, accompanied by the beautiful music of Julie Shrake on the harp, created a festive atmosphere for FOCUS Friends, Board Members and Staff.

Special acknowledgment was made to Charter Oak Insurance and Financial Services for their generous 3-year commitment of \$10,000 per year for scholarships in our Extended Day Treatment Program. Brendan Naughton of Charter Oak addressed those gathered on how the search for community based organizations to support came about. They decided that they would "like to be a big fish in a small pond and really make a difference! He then presented Donna

Swanson with their second year check for \$10,000. The gift will put a smile on the faces of many of our FOCUS families. We are so grateful to Charter Oak for believing in us and for enabling us to provide scholarships... which to our families are **priceless!**



## New Faces in Extended Day Treatment

We are delighted to welcome four new staff members to the FOCUS Extended Day Treatment family! Erika Cox is the new Head Teacher and has been settling in beautifully, using her special education background to create a terrific learning environment that helps to break down the barriers that challenge the autism population.



Jerrica Collins, a graduate student from Fordham University, did a clinical internship at FOCUS for the past 9 months and has been hired as our new clinician. Her transition has been seamless and she is already making a difference with her talent and compassion.

Maeghen Plourde, a graduate student at UCONN studying to become a Social Worker, has been hired as a new Direct Care Staff. Her enthusiasm for learning and her positive outlook are admirable. Like Jerrica, Maeghen has been with FOCUS since September doing a clinical internship, so her transition has also been a smooth one.

**These 3 are an awesome addition to the Clinical Team and their enthusiasm and caring for the program and the kids is contagious!**

In addition, as a result of a grant from the Hartford Foundation, we were able to hire Patty Powers, who has joined the Business Office in a part-time position as a Financial Assistant. New to FOCUS, she is quickly “learning the ropes” and providing much needed assistance to our hard-working Business Office crew. It’s a small office for any of you that have visited, and Patty fits like a glove and exudes a quiet demeanor and a “git-er-done attitude”!

**To all, we are glad to have you aboard!**

## The Fun Never Stops

The 9<sup>th</sup> annual FOCUS Festival for Autism was on Saturday, June 4 at the Mills Pond Recreation center in Canton from 12 to 4! For 9 years, this festival has been an afternoon of fun, games, food, music, and even animals for all to enjoy! Our kids look forward to this event all year long and the excitement and buzz that happens as the date approaches is palpable.



This is where old friends and new friends meet and share good times. Families feel free and safe to let their kids have some extra space as they know all the FOCUS staff and volunteers will be taking excellent care of them. As Max said to his parents the night before the Festival...“Tomorrow is MY day!”...which says it all!!

This year we had some new and cool things to do. We had a Euro Bungee that people of all ages enjoyed (see more pictures on our Facebook at FOCUS Alternative Learning Center...while you are there, become our friend on FB!). The weather was perfect, the food provided by the Canton Lion’s Club rocked, Sweetheart Mountain played incredible music and people just had FUN!!

We also unveiled our new logo on our first ever Festival t-shirts. We have a few left so if you are interested in purchasing one, give Jamie a call!



## Save The Date

On Friday, September 16 from 7:00pm to 10:00pm, the FOCUS on Fun Fall Party will be held at the Cornucopia Banquet Hall in Torrington. For the second year, it will be an evening of fun and socializing for all of our families and children – a great way to kick off our new year! There will be a mobile video game arcade, a disc jockey who is tons of fun and gets the crowd hopping, great food, games and a Lego station.... something for everyone. So PLEASE Save the Date and join us for a good time as we continue to celebrate the work and families of FOCUS! Torrington is not as far as it sounds as our guests found out last year and it is easily accessible from the north, south, east and west!

## Max's Babies

Max is 15 and attends our Day Program and Max loves babies! For a project he chose to interview two of our Extended Day Treatment Program staff (Jamie and Yvonne) both of whom became moms again recently. They also have one other young child in their family and Max remembers everything about those 2 boys.

Max is an inquisitive kind of guy and he asked a lot of interesting questions such as:

- What is the most challenging part of having a newborn?
  - How big was your baby?
  - How did the other brothers react to the new baby?
  - How did their first shots go?
  - Why do they cry and what calms them down?
  - How is diaper changing going?
  - Have the other brothers ever tried to act like a baby?
  - And finally:
  - How did you and your husband feel when you held the babies for the first time?
- Jamie replied:

“It was a wonderful feeling. We both couldn't stop smiling and giving her hugs and kisses”!

Max learns so much about life through his love of babies and he has really grown in all areas of his life. We are so proud of him!



## Mistletoe

Mistletoe (or Toey as we call her) came to Fred and Donnas about 8 weeks ago to fill the void created by the loss of Tucker and to be a friend for Gibbs, their other horse. Gibbs was very much affected by Tucker's loss and would spend hours searching for him.

Strangely enough Toey lost her best friend right around the time we lost Tucker and from the same kind of colic situation. We adopted Toey and her owners were clearly having a difficult time letting her go but finally approved of the living situation in Granby. Toey is a 14 year old mare and is part Welsh Pony and Quarter Horse. She is so sweet and we know she will be a hit this summer with the kids! Gibbs is now a happy camper!

## Enroll Soon!

The demand is greater than ever for slots in our Extended Day Treatment Program. The Summer Program is already full with a waiting list for all six weeks! People are already signing up for slots in the fall. **If you wish to enroll your child for the fall we urge you do so as soon as you can as it is on a first come, first serve basis.**

## Gifts To FOCUS

Our 2010-2011 fund raising year ends on June 30<sup>TH</sup>. To date, we are slightly ahead of last year! Your donations keep FOCUS vibrant and successful. As a result of your generosity, we are able to fund our Extended Day Treatment programs, provide families with needed financial assistance, and are better able to plan for the future. As Mike from one of our group homes stated, “Without FOCUS, there would be no happy autistic kids.” If you have not yet made a gift, please consider doing so before June 30<sup>th</sup>. **Your gifts, no matter the amount, truly make a difference!** Thank you for supporting the happiness!

