

# FOCUS Matters

## WINTER 2021

### Reinventing Tradition

For 13 years Christmas Eve has been a tradition to come to Donna and Fred's house for the residents of our FOCUS housing programs. Many of our residents either have no family or were unable to go home for the holidays and for these adolescents and young adults there is no holiday tradition. Our alumni were always invited and many began asking in August about Christmas at the old homestead. Over the years, Donna and Fred created a Christmas Eve that included a fire in the fireplace, a great dinner for residents and staff, and of course dogs running in and out. Most importantly each resident received a stocking and a carefully crafted letter from Santa. The opening of these stockings and the reading of these letters became our 13-year tradition!

This year with the pandemic affecting everything social we had to cancel our in-person Christmas Eve celebration. Using the resourcefulness of Mr. Claus however, we came up with Plan B. Donna and Fred outfitted their van with antlers and a red nose, threw their trusty reindeer (dogs) in the back and loaded up the stockings and letters. Delivery was made to Washington House first where the letters from Santa were read to each resident. Stockings were given out and we all had a good time, albeit in the parking lot! Next our trusty sleigh was on to Shannon House where each resident was presented their stocking full of goodies and their letter was read out aloud-in the driveway! Definitely not our usual holiday but everyone came together in FOCUS fashion and the tradition was kept alive! Many thanks to all the staff that made this new Plan B a reality!



Donna, Fred, and the dogs visit Washington House on Christmas Eve



Next stop for this sleigh, Shannon House!

### Advocare Foundation Supports the Fresh Start School

FOCUS Center for Autism was once again a recipient of a grant from the Advocare Foundation! The funds will help provide needed supplies for the Fresh Start School including Chromebooks for our students which is now more important than ever with remote learning. The grant will also allow the students from the Transition Program to continue their visits to Shepard Meadows Therapeutic Riding Center in Bristol, CT where they learn valuable job skills and participate in therapeutic horsemanship. Other supplies purchased include scientific calculators, academic subscriptions and curriculum, and a basketball hoop for gym class and sensory breaks. FOCUS is so grateful for the many years of support from the Advocare Foundation!



Thank you Advocare!



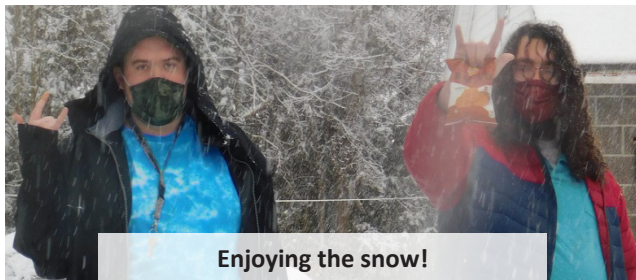


## Adult Support Services

Our Parent Support Group continues to be virtual and we have created a second support group. We have been doing Young Adult Social Clubs on Friday nights at FOCUS or in the community for years. Then last March the pandemic hit, and everything changed! We immediately made our Social Clubs virtual, although we added some outdoor gatherings when weather permitted. As it got colder, we realized our folks were feeling more isolated and many struggled with anxiety and depression. We added Nightly Check-ins, so our folks could see friends and talk every evening via Zoom. Many of the participants talked about loneliness and lack of activities, so we added three daytime virtual sessions for games, movies, and fitness classes. And so, the FOCUS Adult Support Services Pilot Program began during a global pandemic. Ultimately, Adult Support Services will provide services and supports to adults by helping them develop social skills, recreational skills, daily living skills, and job skills.



## Residential Programs



The Supportive Housing Program is going well and is at capacity. The winter weather and virus made us pull back on the activities we were briefly allowed to do because of the beautiful weather. We had a virtual holiday party, that went really well once the technological kinks were worked out. The residents and staff said that 2020 has been hard for us all for many reasons but they learned they can survive, find new ways to enjoy life, and not to take the simple things for granted because they are the big things!

## Shannon House Scores 100%

During a Private Non-Medical Institution (PMNI) review required by the Department of Children and Families, Shannon House staff must send all coaching notes, individual notes, group notes, family notes, and psychiatric notes for a specific marking period. Additional information required includes treatment plans and provider authorizations. This review occurs every six months; however, other information is required quarterly. In January, Shannon House received a score of 100% for the second time in a row. We are very proud of our team, way to go Shannon House!

## Virtual Panel

The FOCUS Center for Autism Spectrum Unplugged Panel presented for the first time in the virtual realm! DCF asked FOCUS for trainings on working with children and adolescents with autism and with their help we were able to present virtually. Our panel included children and young adults with ASD, a parent, a clinician, and our executive director sharing experiences about life on the spectrum. We spoke about why our treatment model is effective and what works, and



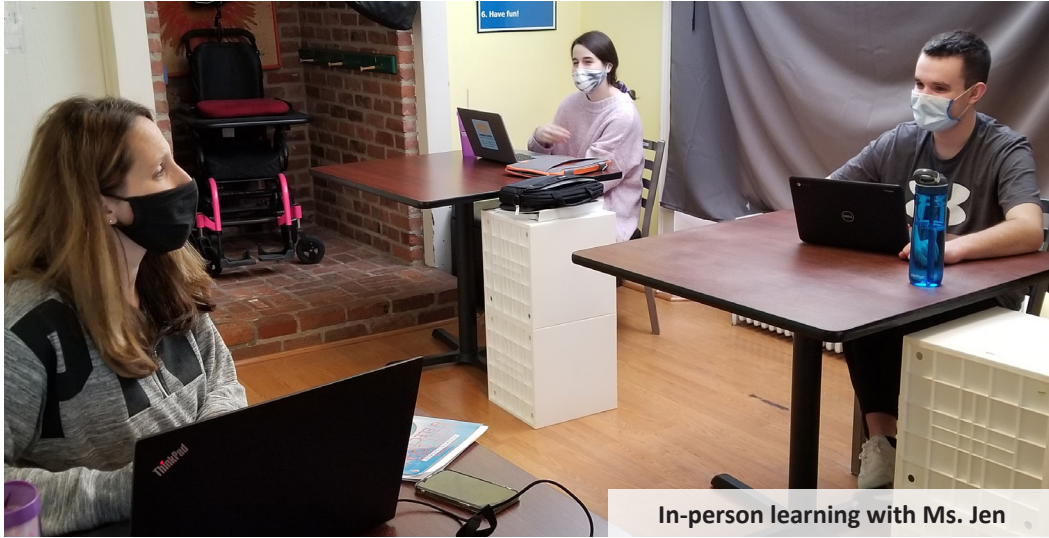
what doesn't when working with children and young adults with autism. The conversations were raw, honest, and created a meaningful dialogue.

One attendant wrote, "The panel was brilliant! Hearing their stories in their own words is the most powerful way to try and understand one another. We need more classes like this that are not book-oriented but real person-focused!" We are thrilled that the virtual panel was a success! To book a panel for trainings or educational purposes, email [development@focusautismct.org](mailto:development@focusautismct.org).



## Fresh Start School

The Fresh Start School was remote before and after the holiday season as a COVID-19 preventative measure. The academic team have become skilled at being able to switch to virtual learning if needed, and the students, staff, and teachers remain happy. We can't thank our parents enough for supporting the students in the home to make this possible. The pandemic has taught us all how to be more flexible. Our Fresh Start School Transition Program continues to adapt to the pandemic. Our students are still able to attend the Shepard Meadows Therapeutic Riding Center to tend to the horses and gain therapeutic time with the animals. Despite many job placements on hold, the Transition Program continues to work on job readiness through building social thinking skills and participating in mock interviews. Our transition students are enthusiastic to rejoin their placements.



In-person learning with Ms. Jen



Checking horse vital signs at Shepard Meadow

## Friends of FOCUS

We often say "it takes a village" when we talk about the excellent support our students and housing residents receive. The Friends of FOCUS are a cherished part of our village. The group of volunteers and donors continue to find creative ways to support our agency throughout the pandemic. The Friends of FOCUS have cooked meals, and delivered PPE and supplies for our residents. The Friends donated items to our holiday boutique, that allowed our residents and adults to safely shop for items to gift their families. The Friends donated items to our tag sale, collected cans and bottles, and raised money for our Adult Support Services programs. Thank you, Friends of FOCUS, for your dedication to our community. The FOCUS family is grateful for your support! To become a Friend of FOCUS contact Sharon Cable at 860-693-9128.

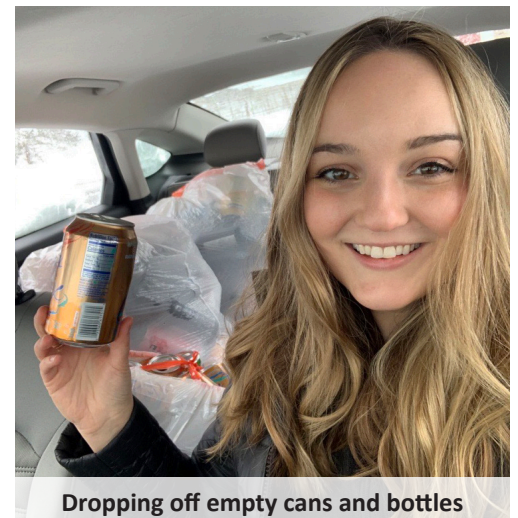


Handmade cards mailed to all employees along with a beautiful message and gift card enclosed

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## Can & Bottle Drive

Adult Support Services is running a can and bottle drive. All cans and bottles can be dropped off at our office at 326 Albany Turnpike Canton, CT or 7 Bidwell Farm Road, Canton, CT. Funds raised from the cans will help fund our latest initiative of providing services to adults with autism who are in desperate need of support.



Dropping off empty cans and bottles

## Save the Date!



Wednesday, March 24 @ 6PM

When was the last time you played bingo? FOCUS is hosting a virtual Bingo with a KICK! fundraiser on March 24 at 6PM. The evening will include 6 rounds of bingo and 12 prizes! Winners of each round will choose between a designer handbag or \$100 gift card, and here's the kick - the prize not chosen will be raffled off!

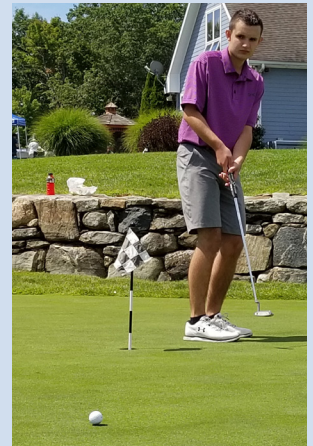


To sign up, scan this QR code or visit our website under the calendar menu.



Friday, August 20

We are hosting our 3rd annual benefit golf tournament Fore Autism at Fairview Farm in Harwinton on Friday, August 20, 2021. Last year, the tournament was hosted with great success and fun in the midst of the pandemic, and while we hope the state of affairs will improve by August of this year, we know we can rock an exciting event regardless of the state of the world! We hope you will join us.



Sponsorships and tickets will be available in the coming weeks at [www.foreautism.com](http://www.foreautism.com).



Did you know that FOCUS has an Amazon Wish List? Items available to purchase include activities to benefit residents in need of activities to maintain good mental health during the pandemic's long winter months, school supplies needed by our Fresh Start School students, and everyday goods required by our staff. You can access our wish list on our website under donate or by scanning this code.

## Job Opportunities

Have you ever dreamed of being a part of a caring team that positively impacts the lives of others?

We currently have opportunities to join our community as a per diem Direct Care Staff for our residential programs. To apply, you must have an Associate Degree or at least 60 credits and a valid driver's license. FOCUS requires criminal and DCF background checks.

If interested, please send your resume to [employment@focuscenterforautism.org](mailto:employment@focuscenterforautism.org).