



FOCUS Matters

SUMMER 2021



Shannon House Receives Three Year CARF Accreditation!!



Shannon House, our DCF funded Level II Therapeutic Group Home was required to go through an accreditation process through the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF International). The process took months of preparation and required numerous policies and procedures to be written in order to meet the extremely high standards set by CARF. Every aspect of our organization was scrutinized including administration, finance, human resources, technology, health and safety, and of course the Shannon House program itself. After uploading all necessary documents, a two-day virtual survey was required. After completion of the survey a two-month wait for the results was long in coming.

We did it however, and received the maximum 3-year accreditation! We hear from reliable sources that not many organizations get a 3-year accreditation on the first try. So, a huge thanks to Eric Cohen, Lauren Evans, Jeannie Nadeau, Yvonne Gardner, Jenee Hepp, and Fred Evans who made this all happen! Both FOCUS as an organization and Shannon House in particular can be proud of this accomplishment! It's a big deal!

Fresh Start School Celebrates!

In June, we celebrated our Fresh Start School students and their accomplishments during our annual graduation ceremony at Camp MOE in Torrington. The past year was challenging, and our students and staff overcame many of the pandemic's obstacles.

Our graduation ceremony celebrated four students who completed their educational journeys with the Fresh Start School. Two students also earned their degrees, and two students will be moving on to new programs. Staff celebrated each student and spoke of their unique achievements. Students had a chance to share their poetry and appreciations for the year with our guests.

We thank Camp MOE and their staff for hosting our celebration. It was a beautiful day ending a difficult year. We are so proud of the hard work of our staff and students and look forward to a great summer program!



Congratulations Class of 2021 and all our students and staff for a wonderful year!





Tree Planting on Arbor Day

Going green is a big deal at the Fresh Start School! On Arbor Day, the Fresh Start School traveled to Memorial Boulevard Park in Bristol and planted six trees. The project came together with the help of Fresh Start School staff Shannon. Shannon partnered with the City of Bristol to plant trees in a local park as a part of the Parent Leadership Training Institute class through the United Way of West Central Connecticut.

Tree Planting at Memorial Boulevard Park in Bristol



Fresh Start students learned from Sarah Larson, the Deputy Superintendent of Bristol Parks, Recreation, Youth and Community Services about the importance of forests, native trees, and the positive impact our six trees will have on the park. Sarah, her team, and the students and staff of Fresh Start School broke ground and planted the trees. It was a wonderful morning that helped kick off the 100 trees in 100 days initiative in Bristol! Our students and staff are very passionate about the environment and sustainability, and we were so happy to help make a difference and hope to be a part of this initiative in years to come!

American Savings Foundation Grant

FOCUS was awarded a Community Grant of \$2000 from the American Savings Foundation to be used for a new fitness and health group that will be started this summer for adults with autism. The group will include walks, other physical activities, healthy meals, and another way for adults to connect and build friendships. The funds will be used to purchase fitness tracking devices to encourage more movement by setting personal and group goals. For more details, contact Sharon Cable at sharon.cable@focuscenterforautism.

FOCUS Autism Spectrum Unplugged Panels Go Virtual

Making a difference one voice at a time! The FOCUS Autism Spectrum Unplugged held a three-course series of presentations for DCF. Participants in the course learned firsthand about autism, anxiety, the effects of trauma, and the strategies to help manage them. Our panelists, comprised of professionals, clinicians, and people with autism, shared their experiences, talked about the power of relationships, how to recognize anxiety symptoms, and what strategies work best for them. DCF participants shared feedback, "Your panelists were insightful, open, and honest, which was refreshing and made the class much more personal." and, "I thought the young men on the panel did a wonderful job at articulating what life is like for them, obstacles, and their own individual strengths." We are so proud of our panelists for sharing their stories to help educate others!



The Panel is excited to present to DCF



Proud panelists after sharing their stories

FOCUS on the Arts

Art plays an essential role at FOCUS and is found in a variety of forms. During mindfulness and meditation practice, FOCUS often incorporates the talents of live musicians. Indrani Mukherjee, a trained Indian Classical Music vocalist, uses chanting and melodies to promote inner peace and mindfulness in students. Marcie Swift, a harpist, uses her harp as a therapeutic modality to promote healing and harmony. Though different, the music of both musicians has positive effects on both staff and students.



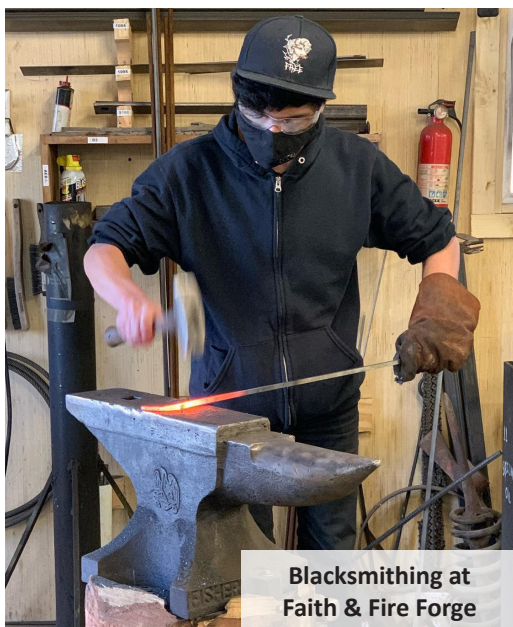
Harpist Marcie Swift playing for the students



Our art educator Donna Frustere encourages our students to express their creativity through different media. Recently, Canton's Gallery on the Green featured the artworks of our Fresh Start School students in a spotlight gallery. The collection was a culmination of work throughout the years and highlighted the inner creative world of the Fresh Start School students. The arts at FOCUS are an opportunity to explore creativity, meet sensory needs, and promote healing and balance.

Providing Work Experiences

The Transition Program at Fresh Start School helps students develop skills such as resume writing and interviewing, and provides meaningful work experiences. Job placements have included Faith & Fire Forge, Shepard Meadows Therapeutic Riding Center, Roaring Brook Nature Center, and more. We plan to get more individualized placements next year when the world is more open.



Blacksmithing at Faith & Fire Forge

Town Hall with Congresswoman Jahana Hayes

Fresh Start School had the honor to speak with Congresswoman Jahana Hayes. The former National Teacher of the Year and current U.S. Representative for Connecticut's 5th congressional district virtually visited Fresh Start students and staff. Our students came up with a set of thoughtful questions about her career, policies, and current events. She took the time to answer each question and learn about our school and students. The conversation was insightful and inspiring! The meeting left us feeling grateful to have a U.S. Representative that is genuinely passionate about students and their education.



Fresh Start students having their questions answered by Congresswoman Hayes

All New Episodes of Life on the Spectrum

Life on the Spectrum has returned to Nutmeg TV for six episodes! The new episodes feature conversations facilitated by FOCUS founder Donna Swanson with her guests. Guests include FOCUS staff, parents, residents, students, and adults with autism. The discussions are brave, honest, and thought-provoking. Each conversation provides insight into the world of autism and offers many lessons for all to learn from.

Scan the QR Code to the right or visit www.youtube.com/user/NutmegTelevision to see all available episodes!



Feeling cool on the brand new set at Nutmeg TV

FORE AUTISM CHARITY GOLF TOURNAMENT

August 20, 2021
Fairview Farm

BENEFIT FOR FOCUS CENTER FOR AUTISM & THE FRESH START SCHOOL

www.foreautism.com



The 3rd annual Fore Autism Charity Golf Tournament will once again take place at the wonderful Fairview Farm Golf Course in Harwinton, CT. Join us on August 20, 2021 for a great day of golf, lunch, and a lot of ways to win great prizes! Every golfer will receive a complimentary round of golf to be used at another time at Fairview Farm. Thank you AXA for being our title sponsor! All proceeds help support the direct services provided by FOCUS to children and adults with autism throughout Connecticut.

Visit www.foreautism.com for more details on golf and sponsorship opportunities!

www.focuscenterforautism.org
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