



**FOCUS**  
Center for Autism

# FOCUS Matters

WINTER 2023



## Highlight on the Transition Program

Now in its 6th year, the Fresh Start School Transition Program continues to help students aged 18 through 21 prepare for a smooth transition post-graduation. With a team consisting of certified teachers, licensed professionals, and teaching assistants, the program utilizes a variety of classes, community outings, and work studies for students to build executive functioning and life skills.

In addition, the Transition Program helps students develop independent living skills such as cooking. Each week students take turns finding a recipe of interest, making a grocery list, shopping for the needed items, cooking the food, and sharing the final product with everyone at the school.

Financial Literacy is taught for students to learn important skills such as consumer skills, budgeting, banking, and financial decision making.

In Personal Advocacy class, the students work on building their self-determination skills such as understanding how our reactions to situations can either be a bridge or barrier to advocating for ourselves. They also work on developing the skills needed to make informed decisions in their lives, education, and communities.

Community outings are used to help students utilize the skills they have learned and gain experience out in the “real world”. Outings have included a trip to the State Capitol to meet with legislatures and using the public transit system to visit museums.

Fresh Start students are placed in a variety of work studies to gain skills for job readiness, improve their confidence, and learn about different fields that may interest them to pursue beyond graduation. Students are supported on site by Fresh Start staff. Current placements include Larson’s Garden Center, American Flatbread, and Oxbow Farm.

The skills and experiences gained through the Fresh Start School Transition Program help the students have a successful future into adulthood.

The Transition Program is looking for more job opportunities and new experiences to meet the diverse interests and skills of our students. If you own or know of a business that would like to collaborate, please email [info@focuscenterforautism.org](mailto:info@focuscenterforautism.org) or call 860-693-8809.



Freshly shredding cheese for American Flatbread



Helping to setup displays at Larson’s Garden Center



Folding American Flatbread merchandise



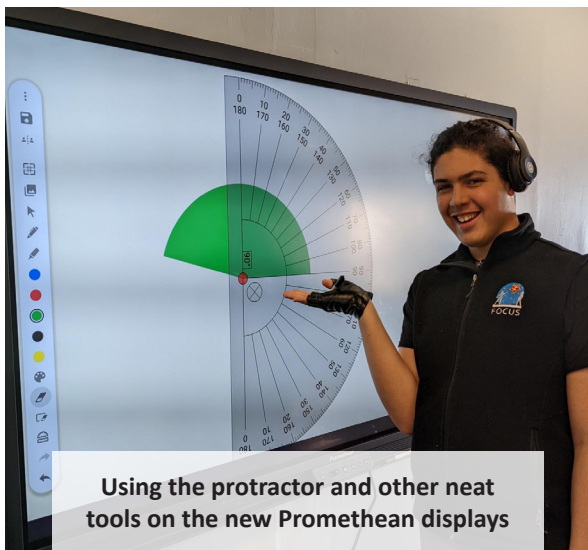
Cleaning trays that are used to grow fresh, local microgreens at Oxbow Farms





## Promethean Interactive Displays

We are so grateful for Union Savings Bank Foundation and UNICO Foundation for granting FOCUS with funds to purchase 4 Promethean interactive displays. The displays are installed in our Fresh Start School and Adult Support Services Program. With the features of a whiteboard and computer, the panels allow our students and participants interactive, collaborative, and engaging educational experiences and entertainment!



Using the protractor and other neat tools on the new Promethean displays

## Ongoing Support from the Community

FOCUS Center for Autism received a grant from the Northwest Community Bank Foundation to help fund a workforce development program for adults with autism. On January 10th, the foundation held a reception at the American Mural Project in Winsted, CT. Our staff and our FOCUS Adult Support Services participants enjoyed mingling with people from the bank and the foundation while viewing the spectacular mural which is the world's largest indoor collaborative artwork!

We would also like to thank the Advocare Foundation for their continued support and once again awarding a grant to FOCUS! The funds will help provided needed supplies for the FOCUS Fresh Start School and Adult Support Services Program.

FOCUS is thankful for all the support we receive from the community!



Mingling at the Northwest Community Bank Foundation Reception

## Autism Spectrum Unplugged Back In Person

Our panel presentations are like snowflakes – there will never be two that are exactly alike!

The FOCUS Autism Spectrum Unplugged provides a variety of unique perspectives on how to best meet the needs of those living with autism, anxiety, trauma, and sensory disorders. The panel presented at the Connecticut Youth Services Association annual conference to a group of professionals who provide different services to youth across our state. It was a powerful presentation that helped shape new perspectives for our audience members!



Presenting to youth and family service workers from all over CT at the CYSA Annual Conference

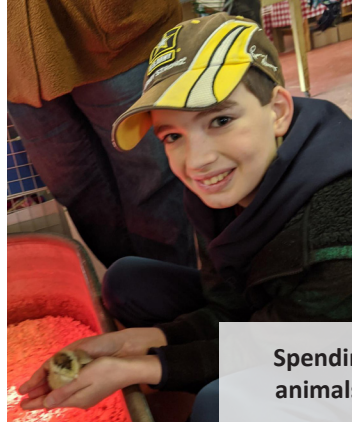
We also had a wonderful time as part of a panel hosted by the Bristol CT Diversity Council. We were joined by Alison Willette (FOCUS alum, Diversity Council Member and autism advocate) and Jordan Lopez (writer and autism advocate). We met new friends and exchanged stories and new understandings. It was very heartwarming!

To book or learn more about our FOCUS Autism Spectrum Unplugged Panel, call 860-693-6127.



## Flamig Farm Field Trip

The Fresh Start School has two buildings for our students, one for our transition students and the other building for our middle and high schoolers. While both buildings are within walking distance, our students treasure the moments we come together as a school to make special memories! Our students had an excellent adventure at Flamig Farm, visiting their animals and spending time together in the community! It's safe to say all our students love furry friends and spending time with their peers making this trip a success!



Spending time with the animals at Flamig Farm



## Thanksgiving Feast

One of the best parts of November is our Thanksgiving celebration! The feast is annually hosted at the Fresh Start School by our students and staff.

Our school gathers as a community and shares meals, laughter, friendship, and a tradition of sharing what we are thankful for. And this year, we had a dance party!



Post Thanksgiving feast dance party

All of us at FOCUS are grateful for our community that continues to grow!



Taking advantage of the nice weather Thanksgiving week

## The Holidays With Our Residential Programs

FOCUS Founders Donna and Fred had the privilege of sharing their 14th Christmas Eve with the guys from our residential programs. Good food, letters from Santa, stockings, Klondike Bars and amazing shrimp from Deepwater Seafood. What the guys all say when we do our appreciations is how import-



Meeting a new friend, Kip



Stocking time!

ant this tradition of ours is, the importance of belonging, and the feeling of family. Their ability to tell us how much this means to them is priceless and humbling at the same time.

We were happy to have our Adult Services holiday party for the first time in 2 years! It was at the Cobblestone Restaurant in Torrington and everyone was so appreciative of being together. Attitudes of Gratitude Abound!



Adult Services participants and staff happy to be together for the holiday party



## Pasta for A Cause

On January 22, FOCUS Alum, Matt Bregman organized a wonderful Pasta Dinner Fundraiser for FOCUS. A large crowd came together for delicious food, a great raffle, and a fun time all while raising money for FOCUS! Thank you to Matt for your hard work and dedication to FOCUS, Bad Dog Brewing for being excellent hosts, Angie's Coffee & More for donating the food and Nat's Off the Wall Entertainment for donating her time, and everyone that came out and making the event so fun and a success!



Thank you Matt for organizing such a wonderful event!



Packed house full of smiling faces at the pasta dinner

## Neighborhood Assistance Act

Thanks to generous grants from PeoplesBank and ConnectiCare and help from Homestead Comfort and CNG, FOCUS Center for Autism was able to recently upgrade from an aging oil boiler and leaking oil tank to a new 95% efficient natural gas boiler! This was part of the State of Connecticut's Neighborhood Assistance Act that allows for corporations to receive a 100% tax credit for contributions to energy conservation projects like this one. Not only does switching to natural gas reduce FOCUS' carbon footprint, but also helps to save money on utility expenses!



Thank you PeoplesBank (pictured) and ConnectiCare for contributing to this project!



New high efficiency natural gas boiler

If you know of a corporation that may be interested in contributing to this year's energy conservation project and receiving a 100% tax credit, please email [eric.cohen@focuscenterforautism.org](mailto:eric.cohen@focuscenterforautism.org) or call (860)693-6127.

THE FIFTH ANNUAL

**FORE AUTISM**  
CHARITY GOLF TOURNAMENT  
BENEFITING FOCUS CENTER FOR AUTISM & FRESH START SCHOOL

**MONDAY JUNE 19, 2023**  
TORRINGTON COUNTRY CLUB

FOR MORE INFORMATION:  
[WWW.FOREAUTISM.COM](http://WWW.FOREAUTISM.COM)

# JOIN OUR TEAM

Positions to be filled are the following:

**Therapeutic Group Home  
Barkhamsted, CT**

- Clinician
- Residential Supervisor
- Direct Care Staff

**Fresh Start School  
Canton, CT**

- Special Education Teacher
- Teacher
- Teaching Assistant
- Administrative Assistant

Send your résumé or questions to [employment@focuscenterforautism.org](mailto:employment@focuscenterforautism.org)