

## Summer 2010

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

- Donor Appreciation at the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary
- FOCUS On Folk
- Jumping in the Zone
- Wilderness School
- Bissell Grant 5<sup>th</sup> Year!
- Festival for Autism
- Charter Oak Grant!
- High School Graduates
- The Spectrum Unplugged and on TV

### Mark your calendar:

**Rock Cats Game  
August 18, 2010**

**Dance Party  
October 1, 2010**

**FOCUS on Folk  
March 2011  
Date TBA**

**Festival For Autism  
June 4, 2011**



**We will  
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

## FOCUS's 10th Anniversary Donor Appreciation Celebration!!

It is hard to believe that TEN years ago, FOCUS was only a small one-building after-school program just beginning to accommodate children on the Autism Spectrum. Donna Swanson and Fred Evans, the founders of FOCUS, had a dream and all their dedication really paid off! FOCUS has grown in so many ways, but despite the changes, FOCUS continues to maintain its original philosophy of caring for the children, youth and young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders that we serve. Our staff has been with us through the good times and the hard times and their loyalty and devotion to the FOCUS kids and families are key to our success and growth.

FOCUS could not have managed 10 years without the continual support received from our families, supporters and donors. This support was celebrated on April 30th at our 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration where over 100 people attended!! The dinner was hosted by La Trattoria Restaurant in Canton, CT where all were able to enjoy the elegant buffet dinner and musical talents of Caroline Justin (vocals), Cathy Lord (piano) and Julie Shrake (harp). We are most thankful to our sponsors and patrons for their monetary donations and the many special items donated to the very successful silent auction.

The evening was dedicated to our special FOCUS friend and supporter who recently passed away, Florence Matolina. We will never forget you and your faith in our mission!

FOCUS staff and clients cannot thank our supporters enough for a hard-won 10 years! Your continued support helps us develop and sustain a continuum of care for the children, youth and young adults of our Autism Community. We are inspired by our children and families and hope to continue to be dedicated teachers, advocates, role models and caregivers for another ten years and then some!! Thank you so much for all you do!



## FOCUS on Folk

FOCUS on Folk was a lovely and well-attended evening at La Trattoria restaurant in Canton on March 6th. The musical talents of "Another One Night Stand" with our very own Caroline Jestin (vocals), Arlene DeMaris (fiddle), Steve Gensemer (banjo), Steve O'Brien (bass), Gwen Couch (voice), and John Gruff (voice, guitar and mandolin) were enjoyed by all who attended.



A jam-packed room of staff and families of FOCUS enjoyed the bluegrass and folk music for hours through cocktails, appetizers and dinner. Some of the crowd was actually forced to move into the foyer because the event was so well attended! There were several requests made and an encore encouraged at the end. It was a well needed chance for staff members to socialize and meet each other's families. The evening was a success and all the ticket proceeds benefitted the FOCUS program. We would like to thank all who attended and donated their time especially Caroline who helped pull the event together while still managing to function as the program Director of Shannon House. FOCUS on Folk will be back next March to help drive away the winter blahs and provide an opportunity for friends of FOCUS to reconnect.



## Jumping in the Zone

"An afternoon of fun" at the Jump Zone was one of our FOCUS 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations for our clients and families. The Jump Zone features six massive inflatable structures designed for kids to jump, slide and run to their heart's desire. Space was limited and filled up quickly! This event, held on April 17<sup>th</sup>, was organized as a day for families with children on the Autism Spectrum to get the chance for a carefree afternoon of fun. This private party, hosted by Donna and Fred, allowed FOCUS parents to know their children were safe as they enjoyed the company of their peers and friends. Our Extended Day Treatment kids also got to hang with their friends from Shannon House.

The Jump Zone is located in Canton on 13 Cheryl Drive. Private rooms can be rented for birthday parties or other events. The Jump Zone staff was very accommodating and we thank them for hosting this memorable event.

## The Wilderness School - A Continued Partnership

FOCUS continues to partner with the Wilderness School in East Hartland as they offer outdoor "challenge by choice" activities for our Summer Program kids on Wednesdays during our six-week program. This program is a huge hit with our kids and the Wilderness School staff who have found a special place in their hearts for them as well.

We were also lucky enough to have just completed a staff development day at the school on June 28<sup>th</sup>. In sweltering heat, staff from all FOCUS programs and one board member (way to go, Gail) worked on team building activities for most of the day, interspersed with the opportunity to try the famed zip line. Judging from the appreciations given at the end of the day FOCUS staff and the Wilderness School staff have developed a strong partnership based on respect and caring for all!



## Bissell Foundation Supports FOCUS for the 5th Year in a Row!

The J. Walton Bissell Foundation has again supported FOCUS by providing a \$10,000 grant for scholarships in our Extended Day Treatment program. For 5 years in a row we have been blessed to be supported by this foundation. All the money, every dollar we have received over the years from the Bissell Foundation, has gone to give scholarships to families of FOCUS that have children in need of services but who are unable to access funds for these services.

We are most grateful to the Bissell Foundation for their continued support and for their ability to put smiles on the faces of the kids who will benefit from this grant! This is an amazing foundation and we thank you so much for your support and generosity over the years.

## 8th Annual FOCUS Festival for Autism

The eighth annual FOCUS Festival for Autism was a success! Over 300 families and friends of FOCUS attended the free event on a very hot June 5th afternoon. The crowd was amused by FOX 61 TV reporter Jeff Valin, our special guest this year.



Jeff did an incredible job and was a natural fit with our kids and families. He maintained a sense of humor even while commentating on our lightly-attended pet parade with only 4 dogs! Jeff, encouraged by Donna Swanson, also completed his wrap-up session for the day. His Appreciation was all the hospitality that was shown to him, his High Point was the egg relay, and his Low Point (no surprise) was the heat! Jeff Valin will continue to have our support on FOX 61 and has gained some new fans!



This year's events included the rock wall, petting zone, pony rides, face painting, dunk tank, and the talents of the silent but all-knowing Acorn the clown. A new treat this year was the snow cones which helped beat the heat. The sound of the high

striker could be heard continuously all day as child after child stepped up with mom and dad to test their strength. The day was also a birthday celebration for the founder of FOCUS, Donna Swanson and her twin brother, Dave. The crowd sang "happy birthday" to the smiling pair who remain "ageless"!

We are so appreciative of all the donations this year for our silent auction and raffle. The prizes were generous. As always the Festival could not have been possible without all the staff and families that donated their time and talents. Together we have helped make some happy memories for our children. Thank you as well to the Festival planning committee that put on a great show!!!



SAVE THE DATE for the 9<sup>th</sup> annual FOCUS Festival for Autism- **June 4, 2011 from 12pm-4pm!**

We will see you there!!

## Charter Oak Insurance and Financial Services Donates \$10,000 in Scholarships

"No FOCUS means no happy Autistic kids," a powerful quote from a group home adolescent that illustrates the importance of keeping our FOCUS programs alive. Charter Oak Insurance and Financial Services in Farmington, CT is helping keep this wish possible for all our Extended Day Treatment (EDT) children and families. They recently formed a three year charitable relationship with our FOCUS EDT Program. Their first donation was \$10,000 that was utilized to give scholarships to ten children in our Summer Social Skills Immersion Program. The families that were chosen to participate were those with a child with intense clinical needs and that had limited financial resources.

Charter Oak Insurance and Financial Services chose FOCUS because of their "inspiring goal to be a big fish in a little pond." In addition to FOCUS, Charter Oak has pledged three-year commitments to Whole Children of Western Massachusetts and New Pond Farm in West Redding, CT. Charter Oak has not only made a financial commitment but they have also pledged "sweat equity" and to take part in fundraising activities throughout the year. Several of their staff have already contributed by donating their time and hard work at the 8<sup>th</sup> annual FOCUS Festival for Autism. Our new friends at Charter Oak Financial have already made some summer dreams come true and our FOCUS children and families look forward to this very special partnership! They also donated much needed office equipment such as computer chairs, filing cabinets, etc. and they had it delivered to FOCUS from New Haven for an added bonus. What an awesome deal for FOCUS and we thank you so much, Charter Oak!



## High School Graduates

**FOCUS is proud to announce the high school graduations of two of our young adults from North Mountain House!**



Andrew P. graduated high school from ACES (Area Cooperative Education Services) on June 21<sup>st</sup> 2010. Andrew has

been with our Young Adult Service (YAS) program at North Mountain House since May 2010 and even though he has been with us for only a short time, he has made a huge impression as he is a very polite young man who demonstrates great care and patience with the other residents and staff. He enjoys playing board games, is an excellent sport and tons of fun. Andrew says "if you look up cute in the dictionary you will see a picture of me!" We are so proud of your accomplishment Andrew!!



Arthur P. graduated from FUTURES on June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2010 Arthur has been with the program for about seven months. Arthur prefers to spend his free time playing video games or rebuilding his electric car. He is very talented with electronics and we hope he continues this

hobby. He is working on being a mentor to the younger boys and he has a great love for animals. Arthur continues to work hard at FOCUS and we are very proud of him!!

Both young men have traveled a long and hard road to be where they are now and we feel lucky to have them in our program. Andrew and Arthur can remain with the FOCUS YAS program until they are 25+ years old and they will be able to move on to less-restricted living when they are ready. Staff continues to work with them on independent living skills, to attain and maintain employment or to continue their education depending on the path they choose. These young men are motivated, talented and have the potential to make a difference in this world. Congratulations, Arthur and Andrew, from your FOCUS family!

## Unplugged and on TV

The FOCUS Autism Spectrum Unplugged has now presented 79 times to thousands of children, families, educators, legislators and service providers across Connecticut and parts of Massachusetts. The panel presentations have proven successful in many arenas but lately it is school systems, including students and teachers, who have been creating the demand for these inspiring as well as educational presentations. Panel members (our experts) continue to set the record straight on what life with Autism Spectrum Disorders is like, while at the same time informing professionals on what works and what does not.

On June 16<sup>th</sup> the Spectrum Unplugged spoke to 15 graduate students in the Psychology Department at the University of Hartford for 3 hours and they were so impressed with the panel's scope of knowledge and their ability to share their experiences of "life on the spectrum". The following is a letter from one of the graduate students that says it all...

**Dear FOCUS group,**

**As I write this letter I am still in awe of how amazing, courageous, and aspiring you all are. I rushed home and told my husband about all of you and how incredible I thought you were. Whether you are helping someone with autism or conquering autism yourself, you illustrated the reality of the struggles and triumphs and how meaningful both are. You are one of the best groups I have heard speak, and one of the most impactful in my learning process.**

**Learning about your experiences first-hand was better than any book or lecture because it was real and honest, and I am very grateful for that. Lastly, I have to mention how hilarious you all are!**

**You are truly great people in every sense of the word. I wish you all the best and keep up the great work!**

**Best,  
Kathryn G, M.A.**

Members of the panel as well as staff and clients from all three programs have also completed their work with Nutmeg TV for the time being. The diligent work of our staff and clients has now managed to complete 25 half-hour TV productions entitled "FOCUS on Autism." All the shows were produced by FOCUS staff and will eventually be able to be viewed on YouTube. Each episode tackles a particular issue surrounding Autism and is essentially a live and spontaneous production. We are on Sundays from 8pm-8:30pm on Nutmeg TV and we are also on AT&T U-Verse. Some of our episodes are currently on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/user/FOCUSonAutismTV>. Check us out!

We have so much to look forward to and so much to be grateful for. Please keep our mission to provide a continuum of care for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders close to your heart and continue to support FOCUS in any way that you can. After all, it is because of **YOU** and your faith in FOCUS that we have accomplished what we have and there is so much more to do.

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! from FOCUS and the 1:110 kids on the **Spectrum!** We could not do it without **YOU!**