

Winter 2011

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

- Money Well Spent
- Hartford Foundation Grant
- A Special Christmas
- Unplugged Ongoing Success
- Welcome To New Board Members
- Dancing The Night Away
- Our Friend Tucker
- Save The Dates and Spread The Word
- Why Give To Focus?

Mark your calendar:

FOCUS ON FOLK
March 5, 2011

DONOR APPRECIATION DINNER
April 29, 2011

FESTIVAL FOR AUTISM
June 4, 2011

FOCUS ON FUN FALL PARTY
September 16, 2011



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

MONEY WELL SPENT

Thanks to the generosity of the J. Walton Bissell Foundation and Charter Oak Insurance and Financial Services, FOCUS has been able to award \$20,000 in scholarship aid to 16 children to attend last summer's Summer Program and participate in the Extended Day Treatment Program during this school year. We were also able to use some of the funds to provide 1:1 support for some children who would not have been able to attend FOCUS without the additional support. The Bissell Foundation has supported FOCUS for five years and Charter Oak Insurance and Financial Services began a three-year commitment to FOCUS last June. These grants allow children who need services but whose families are unable to access the necessary funds to attend FOCUS and benefit from our programs.



One parent submitted her two week notice to take her son out of FOCUS because she could no longer afford to pay for the program. When we called her and told her that he could still come, thanks to our scholarship program, she burst into tears and said, "Words cannot express how grateful I am. I am a single mom with no support or help and FOCUS is the only place my son truly feels normal and accepted...thank you so much."

This is only one example of the power of these scholarships and we at FOCUS are deeply grateful to be able to help more children as a result of the generosity of the J. Walton Bissell Foundation and Charter Oak Insurance and Financial Services.



HARTFORD FOUNDATION GRANT

In December 2010, FOCUS received the good news that its proposal to the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving for a Financial Assessment grant had been accepted! A \$35,000 grant was approved to enhance our financial management program. The money will be used to upgrade computer hardware and software in the Business Office, as well as fund a part-time Financial Assistant position. Our Finance and Human Resource Director Susan Daly stated, "It means that we will be able to move forward in areas that will positively affect the entire organization, not to mention provide added support for the remarkable team we already have in place." We need to always be thinking of our future and to ensure that FOCUS will always be here so that individuals on the Autism Spectrum receive the services they so deserve. Thank you to the Hartford Foundation!

A Special Christmas

At Shannon House, our DCF-funded group home for adolescent boys on the Autism Spectrum, Christmas is a special and difficult time. For these boys who, in addition to their Autism, have suffered trauma and abuse in their lives, Shannon House is their only family for the holiday. Knowing that we can't possibly replace a real family, Shannon House staff willingly goes above and beyond, making the holiday the best it can be.

Christmas Eve is appetizers and dinner at the home of the founders of FOCUS, Donna and Fred, where a number of staff volunteer to be a part of the festivities. Following dinner, all boys have a stocking to open and eggnog to drink in front of a blazing fire. The excitement level rises as the boys realize that the sooner they get to bed and asleep the more likely Santa will arrive. Christmas morning is spent opening presents from Santa, who always makes Shannon House one of his favorite stops. Later in the day Christmas dinner is celebrated at a favorite restaurant.

UNPLUGGED ONGOING SUCCESS!

This past fall saw the FOCUS Autism Spectrum Unplugged Panels present in Bristol, Hartford, Mystic, Plymouth, Wolcott, West Hartford, and Wethersfield. Through these presentations alone, more than 300 people witnessed the power of FOCUS. Enthusiastically received, audience members continue to be deeply moved by the panel members and their stories of living with autism – many thank us with tears in their eyes. **Every member of the panel feels strongly that their mission is to “help people embrace diversity, learn to understand autism, and engage in the hope that if we learn to meet each other halfway, acceptance and understanding can follow.”** To date, six panels are scheduled for this coming spring. If you know of a place, organization or school that would benefit from a Spectrum Unplugged presentation, please contact Yvonne Gardner at 860-693-8809. Help us spread the FOCUS word! Check our website for panel dates at www.focusalternative.org and also check us out on YouTube under FOCUS On Autism TV.



WELCOME TO NEW BOARD MEMBERS

We are happy to announce that we have two new members on our Board of Directors! Deborah Rotondo from Simsbury earned an MBA in Finance and has been working in the corporate world since 1987, including Aetna, Cigna, Lincoln National Life, and MassMutual. Catherine Gibbons Way from West Hartford has an extensive background in development and marketing. Her experience in the not-for-profit world has included Miss Porter's School, Norwich Free Academy, The Ethel Walker School, the University of Connecticut Foundation (Health Center), and the Girl Scouts of America. Welcome Deb and Cathy – we look forward to your being part of the FOCUS family!



Cathy Way and Deb Rotondo

DANCING THE NIGHT AWAY!

On Friday, October 1, 2010, FOCUS had their first Fall Dance, which was held at the Cornucopia in Torrington. Despite torrential rains, FOCUS families and friends gathered to enjoy a festive evening of good food and good music. The theme, which was "60's, 70's & 80's music – Dance to Your Favorite Decade!" encouraged attendees to come dressed in their rock 'n roll finest.

FOCUS clients also came and needed little encouragement to get onto the dance floor! As a matter of fact...they stole the show with their cool dancing maneuvers, sang a few songs for the crowd and expanded the

theme to include current songs by artists such as Lady Gaga!

One of the FOCUS staff, who is also on the Spectrum, said he "would only stay ten minutes" because the word "dance" made him very anxious. This young man stayed to the bitter end and can't wait for next year's event!



We learned a lot from this experience and it really is a night for people on the Autism Spectrum to come out and enjoy themselves in a safe and nurturing environment. FOCUS made many new friends that night and everyone said that watching the kids have such a good time "was priceless!" Many thanks go to the Dance Committee - Board members Deb Grehn and Claudia Godburn and FOCUS staff Yvonne Gardner, Eric Cohen and Susan Daly - for arranging a terrific evening that started off our FOCUS year with great enthusiasm and energy!

We look forward to making this an annual event. Mark your calendars now for The FOCUS on Fun Fall Party on Friday September 16th from 7pm-11pmit's a blast!!





Our Friend Tucker

All of our Summer Program campers will remember Tucker, Fred and Donna's 18 hand, 2000 lb. Belgian Draft Horse who recently died of complications due to colic. Tucker was a "gentle giant" and a friend to many of our campers and staff. Hours were spent grooming, petting, feeding, and just hanging out with this magnificent horse. He so loved and tolerated the children and he learned to become a very effective sensory integration tool. Some only wanted to look at him, some to just hang out with him while others were unable to stop petting and touching him. No matter what the need, it seemed that Tucker respected and understood it! Ronald Reagan once stated, "There is nothing better for the inside of a man than the outside of a horse" and Tucker was proof of that. He was a great horse, a true friend, an important member of the FOCUS team and he will be greatly missed! Rest in peace, Tucker....you truly made a difference.

SAVE THE DATES AND SPREAD THE WORD!!

Three exciting events will be happening over the next six months and we want you to be a part of the fun! On Saturday, March 5th, FOCUS on Folk will return to La Trattoria Restaurant in Canton. Another One Night Stand will once again entertain us with folk, bluegrass and a little rock 'n roll. The fun begins at 7pm, admission is \$10, and delicious food is available at an additional cost. Last year it was standing room only and we had to turn people away....this year we have a bigger room so come on down! All proceeds benefit FOCUS.

On Friday, April 29th, from 6pm-9pm the annual FOCUS Donor Appreciation Dinner will be held at La Trattoria Restaurant. Join us as we thank our donors and volunteers for their generosity with a fine dinner, beautiful harp music provided by Julie Shrake, and a Silent Auction. This year we are going to highlight the Canton's Lions Club for all the cooking they have done for the past 8 years at our June Festival for Autism. They have been there for us when it was the "heat fest," the "rain fest," and the "fun fest" and they are tireless in their grilling and their grocery runs.

And how can you miss the FOCUS Festival for Autism on Saturday, June 4 from 12pm-4pm? This is a free day for families and kids, where games, fun, music, and prizes will keep everyone smiling. Once again, we will be at Mills Pond Recreation Center in Canton.

Please put these dates on your calendars and plan to celebrate with FOCUS! Tell your friends, too!

WHY GIVE TO FOCUS?

"Because the creatively wired and socially challenged should not have to go it alone." Many, many thanks to all of our loyal donors who continually give to FOCUS and believe in our mission. Our staff works tirelessly and with such love and devotion to ensure that our kids and families get what they need. The donations we receive are extremely important in fulfilling our goals and dreams. The tuition of FOCUS only covers a part of what it actually costs to fund our Extended Day Treatment Program. We must make up the difference through charitable contributions. *This is why your donation is so vital to our success.* If you have not yet made a gift to FOCUS, please consider doing so. Perhaps you would like to make a gift in honor or in memory of someone special. Does the company you work for match charitable donations? This is a terrific way to increase the gift FOCUS receives. And have you considered including FOCUS in your will? There are many ways to support the work we do, and our children and families are the ones who benefit.

Because of your generosity and support our "creatively wired and socially challenged" kids do not have to go it alone.

