

Fall 2011

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

- FOCUS Center for Autism
- Summer Program
- Record Opening
- Ronald McDonald House Charities Grant
- FOCUS On Fun Fall Party
- Ethel Walker Collaboration
- FOCUS Gets A Hand
- Young Adult Social Club is a hit
- Artism

Mark your calendar:

FOCUS ON FOLK
March 3, 2012

FESTIVAL FOR AUTISM
June 2, 2012



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

FOCUS CENTER FOR AUTISM

FOCUS Alternative Learning Center is now **FOCUS Center for Autism**. After 11 years as a non-profit specializing in the treatment of children, adolescents and young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders we decided to select a new name that better reflects what we do. Since our inception we have grown and developed the scope of our services and we continue to be committed to creating a continuum of care for the Connecticut autism community. We feel that this new name, **FOCUS Center for Autism**, will better accommodate our new growth and direction in a way that the old name could not. So join us in celebrating the new name and help us spread the word!

FOCUS



Center for Autism

SUMMER PROGRAM

The FOCUS Summer Social Skills Immersion Program was once again a huge success. This is our 18th year of offering this program which began in 1993 with only a handful of kids and was run out of Donna's private practice office in Avon. This year the program was full every day and a waiting list was established.

Two days a week the program was at Donna and Fred's house where outdoor activities, including playing in the brook and catching crayfish, proved to be a hit. On the hotter days everyone hunkered down inside and played games, did arts and crafts and watched movies. It was joyous to watch the kids socialize with each other, take care of each other and bond with the horses and the dogs...so much life learning to be had on the farm!

We were also lucky once more to partner with the Wilderness School every Wednesday for six weeks. The school offers incredible opportunities for challenge by choice activities and provides a variety of individual and team building activities. They went canoeing, hiking and had a Pirate Day complete with a scavenger hunt... Arrgggh! We are most thankful to their awesome staff!

And no one will forget Mondays at Coco's pool. Coco (Rita Stepka) has most generously offered her pool to our kids for the past few years free of charge. The kids love it almost as much as Coco does! Coco has been a loyal and devoted friend of FOCUS for many years and we are so grateful for her generosity. Thanks so much, Coco!

The six weeks ended with the annual talent show, which allowed the attendees to flaunt their hidden talents. "The high point of the Summer Program," stated Sandy Kissel, Program Director, "was seeing the growth in the children and seeing them safe and happy."



FOCUS ON FUN FALL PARTY

Friday, September 16th was a night to remember! In collaboration with LACASA (Litchfield County Autism Spectrum Association), the second annual FOCUS on Fun Fall Party was held at Connecticut Junior Republic (CJR) in Litchfield. For three hours, more than 100 children and their parents came to play games, socialize and dance. FOCUS provided snacks and drinks, and LACASA provided delicious desserts. CJR generously provided space for the evening in their spacious dining hall and terrace where FOCUS and LACASA kids enjoyed an "autism friendly" night of fun. The parents were glowing as they watched their kids have fun in a safe and caring environment where they could be just be themselves without any worries.

Many thanks to FOCUS staff and members of LACASA for donating their energy and time. A big thank you to Jim Obst from CJR for donating the space and helping to make things run smoothly, and to the volunteers from The Ethel Walker School in Simsbury who enthusiastically interacted with the children and teens throughout the evening. A very touching moment happened when the last song, "Happy Trails," was played and a large group of kids joined their arms together in a circle and danced "until they meet again." When asked if we should do this event again, a resounding "YES!" reverberated throughout the room from all attendees!



RONALD MCDONALD HOUSE CHARITIES GRANT

FOCUS was grateful to receive a grant of \$6500 from the Ronald McDonald House Charities. This is our second grant from the foundation and it will be used to help purchase necessary audio and video equipment we need to bring our Autism Spectrum Unplugged panel presentations into the future. Our intention is to also offer professional grade in-services to parents, educators and professionals on our unique Milieu Therapy Model of Care®, on working with children who have Autism Spectrum Disorders and to promote strategies that work. We are spending the money as we speak and are most thankful to the Ronald McDonald House Charities for their continued support!



RECORD OPENING

The 2011-2012 school year at FOCUS opened with a record number of children and teens enrolled in the Extended Day Treatment Program! FOCUS' capacity is 20 participants a day and two days per week were full on opening day, with the other three approaching full. As of mid-September, 59 children from 32 towns were registered. A waiting list has begun as news of FOCUS and what we can offer spreads!



THE ETHEL WALKER SCHOOL COLLABORATION

Last May FOCUS presented an Autism Spectrum Unplugged Panel at The Ethel Walker School in Simsbury. The response from the students was overwhelmingly positive. Within a couple of days, the Community Service Club of the school contacted us to say they wanted FOCUS to be one of their on-going service projects. When the students returned in September, they once again contacted us to learn how they can help. On Friday, September 16, eight girls participated in the FOCUS on Fun Fall Party, helping to decorate, working with attendees on beading projects and other games, selling raffle tickets, and socializing with the FOCUS and LACASA kids. Their enthusiasm and energy was infectious and greatly appreciated by all. Many thanks to The Ethel Walker students for becoming part of our FOCUS family. We look forward to further collaborations!



FOCUS GETS A HAND CLEANING UP!

On Wednesday, September 21, volunteers from Fireman's Fund Insurance Company came to FOCUS to do a fall clean up. For three and a half hours, 8 volunteers cleaned out the gardens, painted our window trims, washed windows, planted flower boxes, and cleaned out the area under the back ramp. When they were done, 10 large garbage bags had been filled and the EDT property and building had been spruced up! Many thanks to our friends at the Fireman's Fund for their generous donation of time and labor!



YOUNG ADULT SOCIAL CLUB IS A HIT

The FOCUS Young Adult Social Club is proving to be an important way for young adults on the autism spectrum to socialize with peers, establish relationships and to make friends. The group is comprised of young adults from our group homes, FOCUS alumni and FOCUS friends. Each meeting addresses a topic related to social skills training followed by dinner and an activity such as a movie, bowling or a trip to the batting cages. FOCUS staff attends each meeting and offers support and guidance as members learn to become adults. Word is spreading, however, and young adults from the community are asking to join. The club is filling up fast!



ARTISM

People on the autism spectrum have many talents, especially in art. FOCUS is recognizing an opportunity to fill that need and is hoping to offer a new program! Every other Saturday morning, arts and crafts would be offered for interested children. From 9:00am to 1:00pm, experienced teachers and volunteers from the community will guide the participants through different arts activities. Each session will cost \$40 and includes lunch. Interested parents should contact the FOCUS office.



BE A PART OF THE DREAM

Our dreams include further development of our services and programs as well as teaching others about our unique Model of Care®.

FOCUS goals include:

- ★ Further expansion of our young adult supportive housing program.
- ★ Development of other young adult transition services including supportive employment and education, and helping to create social opportunities.
- ★ Creating educational workshops on Autism and our Milieu Therapy Model of Care® for parents, educators and other service providers.
- ★ Development of an arts program where children and adolescents can grow and express their unique talents.

Because of you we have come a long way in 11 years! Please stay a part of the dream by supporting FOCUS as we continue to develop a continuum of care that serves the Connecticut Autism community!

