

FOCUS MATTERS

FOCUS works to improve the quality of life for individuals and families on the Autism Spectrum

FALL 2007

Because of your support, some of this year's highlights include:

- ◆ FOCUS purchased the Dowd Avenue building in Canton
- ◆ We opened a Therapeutic Group Home & hired 30 new staff (majority of which are full time)
- ◆ The Autism Spectrum Unplugged Panel presented 18 times to over 800 people FOCUS Staff and two Panel Members Attended the Autism Society of America's Annual Conference in Scottsdale, Arizona where over 1500 people attended (see picture)
- ◆ The creation of a DVD - Milieu Therapy: A Unique Approach to Socializing Individuals on the Autism Spectrum and a free infomercial on "The Autism Spectrum Unplugged" Presentations
- ◆ Good news: FOCUS now accepts MasterCard, Visa, & Discover

Since becoming a non-profit in 2000, FOCUS has provided services to over 250 children (and their families) from over 50 Connecticut towns.

www.focusalternative.org

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Dear Friends,

Thanks to you, FOCUS is thriving! Your generosity warms our hearts and keeps our programs running strong. FOCUS is really making a name for itself around the state and nationally as a premiere organization for the treatment of individuals on the Autism Spectrum. Our goal is to expand our services so we can continue to find ways to meet these needs. We look to your continued support to keep the miracles happening. Thank you so much for believing in our mission and in us.

Respectfully,

Donna Swanson, MSN, CS, APRN
Executive Director

Spectrum Successes

RC is 15 years old and he has attended the Extended Day Treatment Program at FOCUS for the past 3 years. He comes twice a week during the school year and attends the 6 week Social Skills Immersion Program in the summer. RC has earned the status of Counselor In Training in our Mentoring Program and has this to say about FOCUS "Since coming to FOCUS, I take better care of my diabetes and I have learned how to make more friends and have better relationships. I like when people let me be myself, like they do at FOCUS."



"I like being able to help other kids because FOCUS taught me how to help myself and now I can help others"

RC's mom says she is so grateful for what FOCUS has done for RC and her family. Prior to RC going to FOCUS, he had been hospitalized six times for being physically and verbally aggressive towards his mom, younger siblings and staff. RC was about to be assigned a Probation Officer as part of a Family with Service Needs petition. RC was in a hospital for 6 weeks when FOCUS staff interviewed him in the hospital to see if we could help. We saw a young man with tremendous potential and we put together a plan. Mom states that "since starting FOCUS, RC has not been hospitalized, he has been safe and sound and he has friends for the first time in his life!" She further states that "RC was always put into a "box" and he always wanted to break out, but nobody would let him be himself. Because of that fact, he always ended up rehospitalized because he couldn't focus on the best thing which was being out of the "box" and being himself."

RC's mom says that FOCUS taught RC how to be himself, to "come out of himself and feel safe in his own skin. Many programs push children to be "in the box" and that was how FOCUS is different...it allows children to be themselves and helps parents deal with children being comfortable in their own skin." She says that "the best experience I can have as a mother is to see my son bloom into a wonderful human being, never have to be hospitalized again and be away from his family."

To see RC and his mom's testimonial on the FOCUS Milieu Therapy DVD or the "Unplugged" Infomercial log onto www.FOCUSalternative.org.

The Miracles Keep on Coming...

Five Young Men on the Autism Spectrum Find Hope and Opportunity - and FOCUS Helped!

As a huge part of our effort to increase our level of service to adolescents and young adults on the Autism Spectrum, we are pleased to announce the opening of a Therapeutic Group Home in August for five males ages 14-21. This clinically intensive program is licensed and funded by the State of CT Department of Children and Families. With the assistance of the Wethersfield non-profit, Corporation for Independent Living (CIL), we were able to find the perfect house in Barkhamsted, CT.



In addition to meeting the complex clinical needs of these young men, it is our intention to first and foremost

provide them with a home. For many of them it is their last opportunity to have a stable, nurturing environment before becoming adults. Prior to opening, staff from the group home were providing weekly visits with all 5 residents who were spread throughout the state in a variety of residential settings. We hope you can share in our excitement at being able to offer this incredible opportunity!

All the young men expressed wonderment and gratitude to live in this beautiful home and have a chance at having a successful life.

We will be hosting an Open House this Fall... details to follow.

The Workforce Has Expanded: 30 new jobs created at FOCUS

We are so blessed to have found people who share the commitment and program philosophy that is unique to FOCUS. New positions have been added to the Extended Day Treatment Program and all new positions have been added at the Therapeutic Group Home ranging from direct care workers, supervisors, nursing and clinical positions. The staff are very excited to be part of the FOCUS Team and to make a difference in expanding services of individuals on the Autism Spectrum.

No More Rent

And That's a Good Thing!

FOCUS is privileged to have been able to purchase the building at 126 Dowd Avenue in Canton. Now that we own this building, we can finally look to expand this structure so we can have a real classroom and more office space. Your financial support can help us rebuild to be able to serve more individuals on the Spectrum and their families.

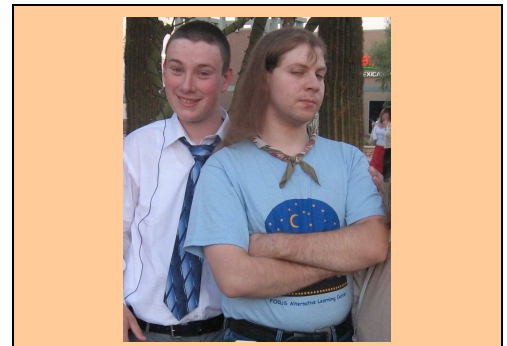
Find Out What Being on the Autism Spectrum is all About:

Walk a Mile in Their Shoes...



FOCUS panel with Mayor James Della Volpe of Ansonia

FOCUS has a panel of "experts" on the Spectrum offering new insights and hope that educates, informs and inspires families, teachers and professionals on what life is like for them. The success of these presentations can be directly attributed to the honesty, sincerity, and willingness of the Panel to share their personal experiences. The Panel feels they have been misunderstood and misinterpreted for so long, that they are eager to help enlighten those willing to listen. They are proud of who they are. Praise abounds from the many educators and service providers who have attended these presentations and say they have learned more from listening to the presentation than in any classroom or seminar.



ASA Conference - Scottsdale, AZ
July 2007

From vendors to presenters to the hotel staff - all were impressed with the social relatedness and forthrightness of our 2 attending Spectrum Unplugged panel members.

The Panel has completed 18 presentations throughout Connecticut over the past year and we have already started appearances this Fall. Inspired by Donna Swanson our Executive Director, the Panel delivers a powerful message. Their mission is to increase awareness and to change the face of autism both on a local and a national level.

A Professional's Testimonial:

"I had the great opportunity to meet with some of the most amazing young people and am very thankful for them sharing their 'life' with so many people. It has to have been one of the most heartwarming and amazing conferences I have ever been to."

For a free infomercial on "The Autism Spectrum Unplugged" Presentation or to book a Presentation, call Yvonne Gardner at 860-693-8809 or check our website at focusalternative.org for Presentations near you.

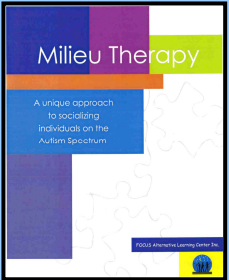
New Our Presentation infomercial can now be seen on our website. Go to www.FOCUSalternative.org

A Parent's Testimonial:

"I just want to let you know how much I appreciate your Spectrum Unplugged program. I am a bit of a groupie now as I have attended two of them in the past six months. I first attended at the Lyceum in Terryville in October 2006. That was the month that my son was diagnosed with PDD-NOS. I was really scared because I still wasn't sure what it meant. I wanted so badly to speak to someone on the spectrum to know what it feels like since my son does not yet speak. I loved your presentation and I felt so much better after hearing all of you. I wanted to thank you for all of the caring and bravery it took for you to tell us your experiences. I wish I could have told you that day, but I was too busy trying not to cry. You have all given me great inspiration and hope. Thank you."

Come On! A FOCUS DVD?

Well, folks, it's true. FOCUS has produced its very first DVD – *Milieu Therapy: A Unique Approach to Socializing Individuals on the Autism Spectrum*. This inspiring production was made by the children, families and staff at FOCUS who graciously volunteered their time. It may sound a little crazy but this DVD is a great introduction to our Model of Care™ - Milieu Therapy. As one of the only organizations providing treatment for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders in Connecticut, we felt an obligation to get the message out: Milieu Therapy is a successful, proven, treatment modality. If you'd like to purchase a copy of this moving DVD for just \$20 (+s/h), you can order online or call 860-693-8831. We now accept MC/Visa/Discover. You can check out a preview at www.FOCUSalternative.org.



Kindness Abounds at the FOCUS Summer Program

It's hard to believe that the Summer Program has already come and gone. We had a full house... 20 kids on the Spectrum per day, Monday-Friday from 9am to 4pm. The Summer Program is really a clinical Social Skills Immersion Program. The kids are with each other for longer periods of time enabling them to bond with the staff and their peers. The kids were so kind and caring to each other and we saw tremendous growth in their abilities to be compassionate and solve problems, while still having tons of fun!



Summertime Fun at Goatland!

Many thanks to our ongoing Summer Program supporters who let us enjoy their private homes and pools. As you can see, the kids and staff truly appreciated



To check out the goats and other animals visited by the kids go to doemainacres.com – great goat milk soap, too! ("google" goat milk and autism – interesting reading!)



Summer "Success" Story:

A young newcomer to FOCUS desperately wanted to catch a crayfish at the "FOCUS Island" but for two weeks was unsuccessful. On his last day, another boy noticed this, then carefully and covertly released a crayfish from his own net right near the new boy's net so he could "catch" it... This is our experience: Milieu Therapy develops social connectedness. And, as we meet new people on the road with "Unplugged Presentations" or at the recent Autism Society conference, everyone is impressed with the level of social relatedness of our FOCUS kids... their manners, concern and interest in each other.

Gaps in services

Parents are frustrated and want help

FOCUS is one of the few places in Connecticut that provides treatment for individuals on the Autism Spectrum. FOCUS offers comprehensive, practical solutions for creating a supportive home and community for the Autism Spectrum family.

"Why can't there be a FOCUS in our community?"

Our Model of Care™ is unique and parents & professionals see that FOCUS works. Our kids and families are thrilled to have a place to belong and grow. That is what is frustrating families around the state. They want the same opportunities for their kids on the Spectrum; however, funding is desperately needed to expand programs like FOCUS. FOCUS is bursting at the seams and we are looking for room to grow. FOCUS has the experience and the track record to help kids on the Spectrum, but space is desperately needed to operate efficiently and effectively to meet the rising demands for services.



How FOCUS Helps:

Treatment for Autism Spectrum Disorders is scarce. FOCUS offers a cost-effective, least restrictive, community based program that works. Around the state people are impressed with how related our kids are and the insights that they share. The skills they learn translate across homes, schools, and communities.

Our vision of the future is to be able to reach more kids and families throughout the state.

Some of our goals are to:

- o Start satellite programs
- o Develop a Training Institute to train others on our Model of Care™
- o Open a "Safehouse" so kids don't have to go to the hospital when they are having hard times
- o Offer Respite Services
- o Offer Young Adult Services such as: Supportive Housing, Supplemental Employment, Transitional Living Facilities
- o Develop a School Program
- o Continue to increase awareness on our Model of Care™. It works!

How you can help:

Your tax-deductible dollars can help us realize our vision in providing the services desperately needed for the 1 out of 150 individuals diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders. See insert for valuable giving opportunities or call Donna Swanson at 860-693-8809.

Why should you give to FOCUS? Because with your help, FOCUS can continue working to improve the quality of life for individuals (and their families) on the Autism Spectrum.

FOCUS Fun Fest Evolves!

FOCUS Festival for Autism: Save the Date: June 7, 2008

This little day of fun has turned into a big celebration for children and families affected by autism. Filled with games, raffle prizes, food, pony rides, and free activities the kids and their families can enjoy spending time with each other as well as with other families affected by autism. It is so invaluable seeing the children and families that have so many daily struggles enjoy this day (despite the sweltering heat) that we would like to make this a free event for the Autism Community. We will now "dub" this day "The FOCUS Festival for Autism." This is a terrific opportunity for autism networking and support. It's never too early to start thinking about next year. We are looking to have this whole day subsidized so kids and families can come for free and instead of collecting tickets and money, we can concentrate on making sure everyone attending is involved and having a good time.

If you or your company would like to be a sponsor, donate a raffle prize or volunteer please contact Ginger at 860-693-8831. (Donations are tax deductible!)



Messy fun had at the "find the bubble gum in the whip cream" contest