

## Winter 2013

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

- Fall Party
- Save the Dates
- The Eagle Scout
- New clubs forming
- ARTISM
- Community Foundation of NW CT Grant
- Summer Program
- Whale of a Time
- Meet Nancy
- More than one hat
- Day Program Update
- I See in Gray
- What if there was no FOCUS?

Mark your calendar:

**WINTER PARTY**  
February 22, 2013

**PARENT AUXILIARY BRUNCH**  
March 23, 2013

**CELEBRATE FOCUS DINNER**  
April 26, 2013

**FESTIVAL FOR AUTISM**  
June 8, 2013



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# FOCUS MATTERS

Because the "creatively wired and socially challenged"  
should not have to go it alone

## FOCUS Center for Autism & LACASA Celebrate at Fall Party

Friday, September 21st was a night to remember! In collaboration with LACASA (Litchfield County Autism Spectrum Association), the third 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 and where they could just be themselves without any worries. Many thanks to the FOCUS staff and members of LACASA for donating their energy and time. And a big thank you to Jim Obst and Jan Calabro from CJR for donating the space and helping to make things run smoothly. FOCUS and LACASA would also like to thank BJ's of Torrington for their gracious gift card donation, and The Rock 106.9 WCCC and 96.5 WTIC for helping promote the event. When asked if we should do this event again, a resounding "YES!" reverberated throughout the room from all attendees!



Karaoke time



Cotton Eye Joe line dancing!

## SAVE THE DATES!

### FOCUS Center for Autism & LACASA Celebrate at Winter Party

Back by popular demand...on **Friday, February 22nd** FOCUS Center for Autism and the Litchfield County Autism Spectrum Association (LACASA) will be holding its first **Winter Party** at FAVARH at 225 Commerce Drive in Canton...right down the road from FOCUS! The party will be held from 7:00pm – 10:00pm. Please join us for Music, Snacks, Games and Fun. The cost is \$ 5.00 per person and \$ 20.00 per family. Please come join in the fun and for more information please contact Jamie at [Jamie.Cohen@focuscenterforautism.org](mailto:Jamie.Cohen@focuscenterforautism.org) or Sharon Cable (LACASA) at 860-693-9128.

### FOCUS Center for Autism & Parent Auxiliary Brunch

FOCUS Center for Autism and the FOCUS Parent Auxiliary Group will hold its first **FOCUS Brunch** at FOCUS at 126 Dowd Avenue in Canton, on **Saturday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>**. The brunch will be held from 10:00am – 1:00pm and is open to all FOCUS families. This is a great opportunity to meet other parents, while your children play games and socialize with each other. Don't miss out on this exciting opportunity and please mark it on your calendar! For reservations or to find out more information please contact Jamie at 860-693-8809 or [Jamie.Cohen@focuscenterforautism.org](mailto:Jamie.Cohen@focuscenterforautism.org).

## FOCUS and the Eagle Scout!

On January 19, 2012 Alex Boon van Ostade, a determined Boy Scout working on his Eagle Scout Project, had his first of many visits to our FOCUS Extended Day Treatment Program. On his first visit, he asked a simple question, "How can I help FOCUS?" With that simple question, he was given a list of not so simple projects that needed to be completed throughout the building. Alex chose the very challenging project of making over the room we call the "Lego Room". This is a highly utilized room and it was in dire need of a makeover.



Alex and his volunteers painting

Over the next year Alex committed to writing the custom blueprints and constructing hanging cabinets, a TV stand, and a free standing storage cabinet. In addition, he enlisted his Scout friends to help him paint the room. **Alex funded the entire project through donations and completed the work using only his own hard labor and the help of volunteers.**

FOCUS would like to thank Alex and everyone who donated money and time to the project. Alex was not only successful in getting enough support for the materials and construction, he was also able to put the final touches on the room, making it a room for all to enjoy! **We will have a reception to thank Alex...date to be announced!!**



Sandy with Alex in the finished room

## New Clubs Forming



A game of Magic

Tom Cable, a Direct Care Staff member, is in the process of forming two new clubs to be held on Saturdays and Sundays for kids interested in playing/learning how to play Magic: the Gathering and chess. Other strategy board games may be added later. The Magic club will be held from 1pm-3pm on Saturdays or Sundays, and the chess club will be held from 3pm-5pm on those days. The cost will be \$50 for five two-hour sessions (five consecutive weeks) of one of the clubs, or \$100 for five two-hour sessions of both clubs. **If enough kids sign up, the clubs will take place on both Saturdays and Sundays.** Experience in Magic and chess is not necessary, as they will be taught by a Focus staff who is an expert in both. There will also be other Focus staff providing supervision. It is not mandatory for kids to bring Magic cards or chess sets from home but they can if they want to.

**Please call Yvonne at 860-693-8809 ext. 11 or Sharon Cable at 860-693-9128 if you are interested.**

## ARTISM

FOCUS wishes to thank the **Fund for Greater Hartford** for supporting our **FOCUS on the Arts Program** that runs every week in our Extended Day Treatment Program. The \$3000 grant will be used to purchase supplies for the program over the next year. The program is a hit with our kids and we are proud to show the work of a number of awesome artists.



Creations made using a variety of medium

## FOCUS Receives \$3,800 Grant from Community Foundation of Northwest Connecticut

We wish to thank the Northwest Community Foundation for providing scholarship money for our Summer Program. The FOCUS Summer Program provides kids on the Autism Spectrum incredible opportunities for socialization and is a time where children can learn to make friends and have fun! This grant is very exciting for FOCUS and we are very grateful as it will be used to scholarship two children from the Litchfield County area for a total of 2 weeks each in our Summer Social Skills Immersion Program... **THANK YOU SO MUCH!!**

Playing in the brook during the summer program



## Summer Social Skills Immersion Program

It might seem early to be thinking about summer but slots in our Summer Program are already beginning to fill up fast. **Remember that when you sign up, you should let staff know of any scheduled absences, vacations, etc. in order to be able to help as many families as possible!** We don't want to let one spot go unused as the kids learn so much in this program when they are free from the worries of school!



Group activity in the summer

## A "Whale" of a time with the CT Whale

On December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012, over 100 members of the FOCUS family came out to the XL Center in Hartford to see the CT Whale take on the Syracuse Crunch. While the Whale lost the game 4-3, those who attended were treated to 3 hours of excitement, entertainment, and overall fun. Program Developer Jamie Cohen participated in the ceremonial puck drop at the beginning of the game, and even got a zamboni ride during the first intermission! The fun didn't stop there... Direct Care Team Leader Jen Archer and a resident from Shannon House went head-to-head in a hilarious tricycle race, with Jen being the winner! Some of the best moments, though, didn't happen on the ice. Four students from the Clinical Educational Support Program attended the game with their families, and were seen laughing, eating, and enjoying the game together, a testament to the success of FOCUS's programs. We hope to see you next year!



Friends hanging out at the CT Whale game

## Meet Nancy Our New Finance and Human Resource Director

Just when we thought we could never replace Susan Daly, along came Nancy Reed-Nevin to fill the slot. We were lucky enough to hire her as she relocated back to Connecticut from Tennessee where, believe it or not, she worked for an elephant sanctuary. Nancy has had an interesting life and she has a strong background in finance and human resources. This is just the fit we were looking for and Nancy has easily become a part of the FOCUS family. We are grateful to have her!

## Wearing More Than One Hat

Some new changes in staffing at EDT are happening, all for the good by the way! Due to the increased numbers of our kids we felt that some restructuring was necessary. Maeghen Plourde-Harris, a clinician, is now our Assistant Director and will assist both the EDT Director (Sandy Kissel) and the Director of Education (Carol Doiron). Daniel Sitcovsky will continue in his role as clinician but will also take on the role of Activity Coordinator. In addition, we now have two full time Special Education teachers in our Clinical Educational Support Program as Cynthia Colton-Reichler is now a full-timer. Jen Archer has now grown into the Lead Direct Care Staff in our EDT Program. Alan Looper continues in his role of Direct Care Staff and is also the Team Leader of the FOCUS Mentorship Program as he also grows and develops this vital program. It seems that most of us wear many hats at FOCUS, but that's how we get it done!

## Day Program Updates

The Day Program or Clinical Educational Support Program runs from 9a-3p Mon-Fri and is nearly at capacity. This is an exciting aspect of our EDT Program and much is happening. Our staff and volunteers bring a wealth of experience and talent to this clinically oriented educational program that enriches the FOCUS experience for all who participate.

Erika Davis, our lead Special Education person has provided us with the following updates to the program.

- Our recent OT intern, Dulce Pomaski(Goodwin College for Occupational Therapy), created a beautiful holiday wreath put together by using felt cutouts of the hands of staff and students
- We have a new OT intern named Leslie Pascuali (Goodwin College for Occupational Therapy), who will be working with us until early spring
- We have 2 social work interns, Abigail Vacca (UConn for her MSW in Social Work) and Tracey Follert (St. Joseph's College for her BSW in Social Work) working with us as well
- Thanks to a grant from the National UNICO Foundation we have received 2 Mimio smartboards for each of our classrooms and an iPad2
- We have started new activity groups led by various staff members highlighting Arts & Crafts, Music, and Yoga
- We recently visited Petals & Paws in Canton, CT for our dog therapy program and will return in the spring



Felt hands wreath



Drum circle

## I See In Gray

A Poem by Olivia Case

(A talented 15 year old attending the FOCUS After School Program)

She looks into my eyes and she can't understand  
She can't accept that I see in gray  
I see many shades of gray  
She sees in black and white

We are divided by the color wheel no matter what I do  
I'm lost inside her world with no form of defense  
All she sees is black and white  
There is no in between  
She can't understand the way I see the world

From the very first moment, I saw in gray  
But she has never seen the color in her entire life  
With every word of criticism, she breaks another piece of me  
Transforming the color of serenity  
into a vast expanse of bleakness  
So I must hold on and remember who I am  
I am the girl who sees in gray

To her, there is always right or wrong  
That is the only place where she has ever been  
But I can't and I won't conform to her harsh standards  
Because the in between of gray is the only place  
that I have ever known

So now, I stand here, scared and alone  
Silently crying in pain because of her  
I am frozen in a jagged slice of time  
Unable to reach out and take your hand  
I know you can save me, I know I can heal

But my strength could be gone this time

When will she understand that black and white only goes so far?  
For gray is not merely a color but a way of life  
Gray is a spirit that lingers in my soul  
But she will never understand

## What if there was no FOCUS?

On January 30, 2013, approximately 20 kids and staff from FOCUS Center for Autism joined many nonprofit organizations at the Capitol to come together for the **Rally To Protect the Safety Net**. The purpose was to come together and let our legislators know how deeply budget cuts impact our ability to provide quality programs and services for people desperately in need of these services. Please support us and if you could not attend in person, please call your legislators. **For us the question is... WHAT IF THERE WAS NO FOCUS???**

