

FOCUS Matters

SPRING 2016



FOCUS UNPLUGGED

15 yr old Christen Backes brings the Autism Unplugged Panel to 1000 Guilford Middle School Aged Students

The Spectrum Unplugged:

Spend a day with the "Creatively Wired and Socially Challenged"

FOCUS Center for Autism is proud to present their panel of experts who are articulate, brilliant, left of center and very honest about their journey with their disorders.

Call 860-693-8809 and ask for Yvonne Gardner to set up a Panel Presentation today!

Friends of FOCUS

So many ways to help. FOF organizes fun social events for the kids and families! All you need is a desire to help! Call 860-693-8809 to find out more.

Visit us online at focuscenterforautism.org/ for more information.

In 2012 when Christen Backes was in 5th grade she attended an Unplugged Presentation at St. Raphael's Hospital with her mom. Her desire to be a special education teacher lead her to be a volunteer at High Hopes, a therapeutic riding school in Old Lyme. It was this experience that brought her to the panel that night. "The presentation was two hours and it was amazing! It made me realize how different things are and how it is not fair that people on the spectrum get treated." Christen thought the Panel's message was powerful and well worth sharing with other school kids. Christen "just wanted people to have the knowledge so they could have compassion and that they could be on the lookout for someone

who might need help."

With support from the Guilford Fund for Education and school administrators, Christen organized and got funding to realize her dream – two school-wide assemblies at Baldwin and Adams Middle Schools on October 29, 2015! The Spectrum Unplugged Panel spoke to each school for 45 minutes describing their experiences of life on the autism spectrum to help the audience gain awareness and compassion.



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Artists In Residence

Ben, a Shannon House resident, is very good at building things. In a wood shop class at school, he completed many projects including a very large cat condo. It is so well done, one of the staff purchased it and others have put in orders. Recently, Ben built a Batmobile entirely out of cardboard, duct tape and stuff from around the house. Built entirely in his room it is large enough for Ben to climb into. Ben has a healthy artistic competition with another talented resident, Anthony. Known as the “king of duct tape,” Anthony makes sabers, helmets and shields from rolls of colorful duct tape. With these two, there is always something creative going on at Shannon House!



Many thanks to everyone who is helping us celebrate over 15 years of changing lives!

Your generous response to our \$15 for 15 years GoFundMe campaign has been overwhelming. The campaign features a wonderful video of FOCUS kids talking about their experiences and thoughts. This ambitious project is helping us bring in 2016 with a bang! Please support our 15 years of service to the autism community. With more and more kids being diagnosed every day there is even more need for the great services we provide!

Visit • Donate • Share • Change Lives
www.gofundme.com/focus15for15

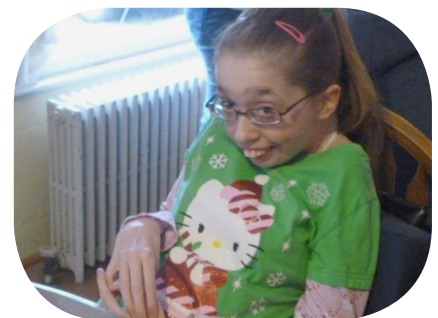


FOCUS on the ADVOCARE Foundation

FOCUS is most appreciative to the ADVOCARE Foundation Inc. of New York for their generous \$5000 grant. The grant will fund online academic courses, classroom supplies and sensory equipment for our day program students. We are very thankful for this new relationship.

FOCUS thanks:

A very big thank you to Julio and Beverly Loureiro, the grandparents of Nina, one of our students, for their generous donation of \$10,000 in support of FOCUS.



Washington House

Our new Supportive Housing Program for young adults with autism and mental illness opened in July 2015.

Formerly a DMHAS funded group residence in Simsbury for three young adults, the program moved to Torrington where our good friends from The Corporation for Independent Living renovated a three unit apartment building. Adam Cohen, the Program Director, was responsible for moving and transitioning this innovative program to its new site. The program now houses six young adults!



The building allows for 24/7 support staff to be on the property. Our clients are learning to live with more independence and self-reliance. The six young

adults love the freedom they are experiencing and are now able to walk all around town. With supports in place, they are now able to live more independently.



Something fishy is happening in the Day Program

feeding. When the fish grow into fingerlings they are ready for release into local streams in late spring. Release day is a favorite FOCUS field trip to the Farmington river where the sense of accomplishment is evident. This important program helps foster a conservation ethic and an understanding of our eco system connectivity. Many thanks to the Rotary Club of Avon-Canton and Farmington Valley Trout Unlimited for helping us establish and develop this program.

This is the second year that our Day Program students are hatching trout. The 55 gallon tank with siphons and a cooling unit is located right in the classroom. The children help to monitor water quality and assist with

After School Program: where friends happen!

FOCUS first started with our successful After School Program over 15 years ago. From 3pm-6pm, Mon-Fri, Sandy Kissel, MSN has been there to oversee the hundreds of children that have come through its doors. Under her direction it has



become a truly amazing program! As one of the first programs of its kind designed to serve children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), the After School Program provides a sense of belonging and community in a safe haven free of the day's stresses. Likened to a "social incubator," the program provides a judgement free zone

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FOCUS IN THE NEWS

New 1 in 45 study causes concern.



Did you know:

- About 1 percent of the world population has autism spectrum disorder. (CDC, 2014)
- Autism is the fastest-growing developmental disability. (CDC, 2008)

In November 2015 the CDC published the results of a new parent survey* stating that 1 in 45 (or 2%) children in the US have been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

When the news broke, Fox 61 called the experts at FOCUS Center for Autism. John Charlton, Fox 61 reporter, came out a few hours later to interview staff about autism and their thoughts on the new report.

The report aired on the evening news and you can see it here: <http://focuscenterforautism.org/1-in-45/>

* Official estimate 1 in 68 (CDC, 2014)

(FOCUS Unplugged *con't from the front*) The Panel spoke about their gifts, the challenges that being on the autism spectrum presents and how others can help. Members answered very thoughtful questions from the 500 kids present in each school gym and received standing ovations from both schools.

Panel members were amazing in how they dealt with the long drive to Guilford and the challenge of a large crowd in a bright, sensory stimulating setting. Their willingness to get out of their comfort zone, speak from the heart and provide awareness is truly unbelievable. For over ten years, Donna Swanson has presented with the Panel and is constantly in awe of the respect, caring and sharing that panel members show her and each other to accomplish this very important mission.

Thank you Christen and the Panel for this opportunity to spread our message of hope, compassion and understanding for “the creatively wired and socially challenged.” Dreams do come true!!

(After School *con't from inside*) for children to grow socially and emotionally while forging friendships. For children with ASD the social learning that takes place at FOCUS is carried over into all aspects of their lives. Many go on to college, find work and often volunteer or function as mentors at FOCUS. It truly has become a program that changes lives!

April is Autism Awareness Month



Awareness can lead to Acceptance! As part of our mission to increase awareness and acceptance for individuals on the Autism Spectrum, we were invited to speak on April 7th at the Traveler's Insurance Company by their disAbility Network and Puzzle Pieces, an Autism Support Group. About 50 people attended and the presentation was also streamed live throughout the Traveler's building.

The panel (Sandy Kissel, Program Director; Dan Lenois, Team Leader for the Unplugged Panel; Alex Cable; and Sharon Cable, Alex's mom) spoke about life on the Autism Spectrum. The focus was to give new insights on autism in the workplace, to show what strategies work and don't work with our population, as well as, bring awareness to what it is like to live with autism. The group talked about sensory challenges, the importance of being understood and having a sense of belonging. Many individuals on the Autism Spectrum are excellent employees once they find the right fit!

Make a difference by taking the time to know someone with Autism... you won't regret it!

Visit focuscenterforautism.org or call 860 693-8809 to learn more!