



FOCUS Matters

WINTER 2020

20 Years in 2020

This year, we are asking you to help us celebrate 20 years as a non-profit organization providing services to the Connecticut autism community. Yes, it has been quite the journey! The dream was much bigger than the pocketbook and we soon learned that creating a non-profit organization out of thin air was going to be a daunting task. With some significant help from our supporters, a lot of hard work and a little bit of luck, we were able to create programs that are truly unique.

Our evolution has been an effort to help meet the needs of the autism community while simultaneously dancing to the demands of fundraising. We continue with this balancing act to this day! In the non-profit world, the uncertainties become a way of life and it is not uncommon to do a lot with a little and to ask staff to wear more than one hat. Many are asked to do things outside of their job description and their comfort zone. But it is because of these multi-talented people that we are what we are today!

FOCUS moves into its 20th year with confidence in the strength of its programs and the model of treatment we have created. As we reach this milestone, we are introducing a new logo (which can be seen on the top left) that represents our vision of belonging and reaching for the stars. We remain committed to helping to develop a continuum of care for children and young adults with ASD and related disorders. We hope that you will continue on this incredible journey with us!

**We Thank You for
20 Years of Support and for
Believing in Our Mission!**

With Gratitude,

Donna Swanson Fred Evans
FOCUS Center for Autism Founders



Over the past 20 years, the name has changed



but the FOCUS has always been on the kids!



The “Annex” Expansion

This fall, we expanded our Fresh Start School into the “Annex” building we are renting right down the street on RT 44. This expansion gives our older students their own special place and allows the younger students to have more room at our Dowd location or “Mother FOCUS” as it has become known. Many of the older adolescents are participating in transition programming, which involves work study/job placement and this extra space gives everyone, including our teachers, a little more breathing and working room. The added space also allows us to increase our enrollment. We are also very lucky to have a wonderful and caring landlord in Bob Cirilli.



Transition Program students enjoying delicious hummus that they shopped for and prepared



The Harry Potter Room at Storyteller’s Cottage

The Storyteller’s Cottage

Fresh Start Students visited the Storyteller’s Cottage in Simsbury. The Storyteller’s Cottage is a unique historic building with many different themed rooms that can ignite the imagination and can suit a wide variety of events. The Fresh Start students explored the building with wonder. They later settled in to meditate with Friend of FOCUS and harpist Marcie Swift. Marcie played songs on her harp and held conversations with the students about what each song meant to them. It was a wonderful, creative visit.

Friends of FOCUS

The Friends of FOCUS are a volunteer group of parents and community members committed to the mission of FOCUS. The group meets monthly and is a great way to support the growth and development of FOCUS programs. To become a member, contact Sharon Cable at (860)693-9128 or sharon.cable@focuscenterforautism.org.

FOCUS on the Board

In the last few months we have added three new board members. All three are great additions to our already great board! We welcome Jeannette Brodeur, Roy Wang and Andrew Komarow. Jeannette is a long-time friend of FOCUS and a parent of children with ASD. Roy is employed by the state Department of Public Health and Andrew is a financial planner from Farmington, CT. All three bring unique organizational skills, willingness to help and a deep fondness for our mission. We look forward to working with them!

Support Services Update

Sensory Friendly Yoga is Twice A Week!

Join us Tuesdays 11:30-12:30 and Fridays 1:00-2:00 at Sanctuary Power Yoga in Canton. Drop in fee is \$5.00.

All New Robotic Class

There will be a Robotic Class offered for teens and young adults at Next Gen Smarty Pants located at The Shops at Farmington Valley in Canton on February 24th and March 2 from 10 am -11 am. The total cost is \$40.00.

For more information, contact Sharon Cable at (860)693-9128 or sharon.cable@focuscenterforautism.org.



Stretches at Sensory Friendly Yoga

Unplugged Lives On

The FOCUS Autism Spectrum Unplugged Panel has now presented somewhere between 150-200 times—we have lost count! This incredible rotating panel of experts has brought hope and heart to thousands while remaining true to its message of educating and inspiring. Many folks attending panels inevitably cry and audiences are always asking to learn more, so that they can help more!

Most recently the panel presented at the DCF Conference—“Relationships Matter” at SCSU as a breakout session about life on the spectrum. The panel also spoke at the New Britain Museum of American Art to over 80 docents, helping them to learn to work with individuals with autism and other special needs who visit the museum.

The panel is always a hit and the great feedback we get keeps us going. To book a panel call Yvonne at (860)693-6127.



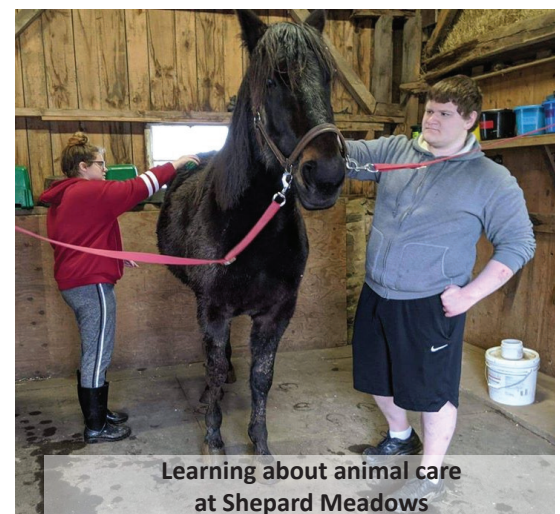
Giving Back

Fresh Start students and FOCUS staff recognize the importance of giving back. This holiday season, students traveled to Hartford's Foodshare facility and helped to bag over 500 pounds of onions into smaller portions to provide to families in need. Our student Dillon summed up this act of kindness by exclaiming, “This is so fricken therapeutic!” Students also created a food drive throughout the holiday season and delivered the goods to Gifts of Love in Avon. FOCUS staff spent a Saturday helping those in the Canton community who need an extra hand with yard work and chores by volunteering through FOCUS on Canton. As a non-profit, we always look for ways to give back to our community that has given us so much.



Work Studies

As a part of our expanding transition program, The Fresh Start School is forming relationships with local businesses and organizations to offer our students opportunities to explore different careers. Current placements include, Shepard Meadows Therapeutic Riding Center, Audette Motorcycle, Canton Public Library, Thomaston Opera House, and Roaring Brook Nature Center. Students are placed according to their interests and strengths. These placements offer students opportunities to strengthen their skills for employment readiness after graduation. The transition program lets our students recognize the potential within themselves and allows businesses to recognize the many benefits of hiring employees on the spectrum. We are looking forward to continuing to expand our transition program with more businesses.



Alumni Spotlight: Keep on Truckin’

TJ White moved on from our clinical after school program a number of years ago. When he called this year to offer to bring the tractor trailer he was driving down to the Fresh Start School and show the students what it was like to drive eighteen wheelers, we were all excited. As he backed the big rig into the driveway, those of us on staff who knew TJ when he was young were all in awe. The rig, which barely fit in the driveway, was a huge hit with the students as were his stories of being on the road. Everybody got their picture taken with TJ and the truck and the lesson for the day was - if you want it bad enough Anything is Possible! Keep on truckin’ TJ!



TJ in the FOCUS Summer Program 2001



TJ (gray shirt and beard, at center) with the Fresh Start School students and his rig

Upcoming Events

Date, Time, & Event	Details
April: All month Autism Sweets	All month long, local restaurants and bakeries will be donating a portion of their proceeds to the Fresh Start School. See the list of participating eateries at focuscenterforautism.org and on the FOCUS Facebook page.
April 11 @ 1pm Hartford Yard Goats	It is Autism Day with the Yard Goats! See a great game of baseball at the wonderful Dunkin’ Donuts Park in Hartford.
May 16 @ 8pm FOCUS Rocks Benefit Concert	A night of great music with The 70’s Project and Mixed Signals at Bridge Street Live in Collinsville. All proceeds benefit FOCUS.
May 29 - June 28: Fri-Sun 1-5pm Fresh Start School Student Art Show	Amazing art from the students of the Fresh Start School will be on display at the Gallery on the Green in Canton.
August 21 Fore Autism Charity Golf Tournament	Golf a round of 18 at the wonderful Fairview Farm Golf Course. More information and registration will be up at foreautism.com soon. All proceeds benefit the Fresh Start School.

Stay up to date on all upcoming events at focuscenterforautism.org or on the FOCUS Facebook page!