



FOCUS Matters

SUMMER 2022



Brightwood: New Beginnings

FOCUS's newest venture is the program we have started at our location on Brightwood Ave, in Torrington. This two-family home was purchased and renovated by our long time FOCUS friendly landlord. We are indebted to him for becoming our autism friendly landlord. We were able to move two graduates from our Washington House Supportive Housing Program into the first floor of this Brightwood home. These young adults, Jesse and Jason, still receive support services but are now able to live much more independently and are learning to become more self-reliant. With the help of Nick, our Young Adult Transition Coordinator, and the staff at Washington House, they are doing fantastic!



Jason and Jesse in their new apartment at Brightwood

The second-floor apartment has become the solution to our space problem at Washington House. With very little meeting space available, we are utilizing the second floor at Brightwood for groups, activities, and meetings. The pandemic isolation affected our residents in terms of their autism and their mental health. Staff too were feeling the effects of virtual meetings and the loss of a sense of team. This new space allows us to use the space for social clubs and groups including cooking and healthy eating, arts and crafts, movie night, and a regularly scheduled walking group. Outside we also have space for barbecues and gardening.



An in-person social gathering outside Brightwood

Staff are now able to get together utilizing the space for clinical and staff meetings. Having this space to meet has been invigorating for everyone and the effects can be seen throughout the program.

This second-floor space has become a unique opportunity. We are now able to offer more in-house program activities. These activities really help residents with making connections, establishing relationships, and improving their overall social learning IQ. We are grateful to all who helped make this a FOCUS one-of-a-kind program!

Workforce Development

FOCUS is honored to have been awarded a grant from the Northwest Community Bank Foundation. The funds will be used to create and implement a Workforce Development Program for adults with autism that are falling through the cracks and currently not receiving employment support. This program will include one to one job coaching and other supports to assist participants in learning the skills needed for obtaining and maintaining job or volunteer positions.



Making a Difference One Voice at a Time

This past spring, the panel hosted a three-course series of virtual presentations for the Connecticut Department of Children and Families. Participants in the course learn firsthand about autism, anxiety, the effects of trauma, and the strategies to help manage them.

During these presentations, our panelists, comprised of professionals, clinicians, and people with autism, shared their experiences, talked about the power of relationships, how to recognize anxiety symptoms, and what strategies work best for them.

Conversations are raw, honest, and insightful. For two of our panelists, this series was their FOCUS Autism Spectrum Unplugged panel debuts. They shared their unique experiences, participated in meaningful conversations, and shared new insights.

A DCF participant shared, "I thought the young men on the panel did a wonderful job at articulating what life is like for them, obstacles, and their own individual strengths."

In May, we had our first in-person panel in two years, speaking in Suffield to over 300 enthusiastic McAllister Intermediate School students between 3rd and 5th grade. They were the most fantastic audience. Their kindness, amazing questions, and feedback were wise beyond their years.

This FOCUS Autism Spectrum Unplugged panel presenting to McAllister students was comprised of teens, Johnny and McKenzie, and adults Alex and Jesse, who shared their experiences of living with autism alongside clinician Dan, parent Sharon, and FOCUS founder Donna. Our panel was glowing and so proud to help students understand autism and how to create a school environment accepting and inclusive to all - learning from those who understand the unique needs of the spectrum best - the panel!

We are so proud of our panelists for their bravery and honesty in sharing their stories to help educate others!

If you are interested in booking the FOCUS Autism Spectrum Unplugged panel at your school, business, or organization, call 860-693-6127 for more information.



Friday Night Adult Social Club enjoying their time outside Fresh Start School

Social Opportunities for Adults

Adult Support Services continues to offer 15 hours of Zoom programming each week. In addition, we have added several weekly opportunities to meet in person. We also have a walking group, Friday Night Social Club, and a Saturday afternoon group that meets at the Fresh Start School's Annex Building in Canton or our new space on Brightwood Ave. in Torrington.

Adult Support Services is having a Tag Sale on Friday, 7/8, Saturday, 7/9, and Sunday, 7/10 from 9:00-5:00. Please come and visit our Tag Sale at Sharon's house at 7 Bidwell Farm Road, Canton. The money raised will be used to provide more activities this summer.

Advocacy at Fresh Start School

Democracy is like a practice sport, and our students are getting in the game! The Fresh Start School took our civics class to our State Capitol in April. Our Canton representative, Representative Kavros Degraw made a special visit, further encouraging our students to advocate for their needs and passions. Our students toured the Capitol and learned about its history and how it functions today.

During our civics class, we met with the advocacy team at Autism Speaks. Their advocacy team encouraged our students to advocate for their needs reminding our students that they are the experts in their stories and that their voices matter.

Our students put their advocacy skills to use when we welcomed Congresswoman Jahana Hayes during a special visit in May. Students engaged in a conversation with her on the need for the expansion of adult services and proper training for police departments on how to interact with individuals with autism.

The students loved having the opportunity to talk to her and wished she could have stayed longer because she was so personable. She spoke on the importance of the need for more support for individuals with autism, especially adults after leaving a transition program.



Meeting Representative Kavros Degraw at the CT State Capitol



Special visit from Congresswoman Hayes at Fresh Start School

Fresh Start School: Wrapping up the Year

It was a great end to the school year here at Fresh Start! We were able to have a smooth end to the academic year while also having lots of fun activities during the last week. Highlights included Giant Bubbles activity, Tie Dying and a great art activity making centerpieces for our upcoming golf tournament! The students also presented their end of year music projects where they researched musicians of interest and had a great time doing it.

Another highlight was our transition students showing off their job skills by making and serving pizzas for the younger students at American Flatbread. All the staff and students were so impressed by their pizzas and the way they handled themselves. It was hard to tell they were just there for a job placement instead of full-time employees! Continuing the food theme, we also had a year-end International Food Festival where students were able to present different cuisines and actually make the food themselves. Everything was delicious!

We are looking forward to continuing all the fun this summer; with our Extended School Year program starting on July 5th. It is a going to be a great summer!



2022 Graduate!



Fun with giant bubbles



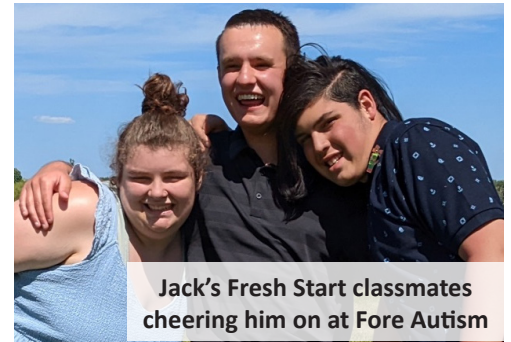
Transition Program serving pizza to students and staff

A Great Day of Golf and Support!

FOCUS Center for Autism had our fourth annual golf tournament Fore Autism on Monday, June 20. This year, we hosted our tournament at Torrington Country Club and enjoyed beautiful weather, a challenging course, exceptional raffles, great food and drink, and most importantly - outstanding supporters!

Fore Autism began four years ago when Fresh Start Student Jack Tanner and his father Jerry Tanner, had an idea to help give back to the school that helped their family. With Jack and Jerry's love of golf, their family's shared strength and resilience, combined with the "FOCUS family," the tournament has grown into a sold-out event hosting golfers and sponsors that share both community and fun-loving values to benefit our mission.

FOCUS aims to provide a continuum of care for people with autism, allowing each individual who walks through our doors to achieve their full potential. Every dollar raised directly benefits the students and clients of FOCUS and the Fresh Start School. Thank you to all who golfed in our tournament, those who joined us for dinner, and those who sponsored Fore Autism! We will see you next year!



Jack's Fresh Start classmates cheering him on at Fore Autism



Enjoying the challenging greens at Torrington Country Club

100% Tax Credit Opportunity for CT Businesses

FOCUS Center for Autism would like to make you aware of a potential opportunity for your business to earn tax credits by supporting our local non-profit organization. Through the Neighborhood Assistance Act Tax Credit program your business could be eligible to receive up to a 100% tax credit for your contribution (\$250 minimum) to FOCUS Center for Autism.

Our Fresh Start School building at 126 Dowd. Ave in Canton is in desperate need of heating/cooling upgrade. This program offers a very special, clinically supported educational program for children with autism ages 10 through 21. We are looking to raise \$30,000 to improve the energy efficiency and carbon footprint of our current system by converting from oil and electric heat to a natural gas system with central heat and air conditioning.

If your business is interested, please contact Eric Cohen by September 1st at (860)693-6127 or eric.cohen@focuscenterforautism.org.

This is a great way to support a grass roots community based non-profit and earn tax credits too!



Job Opportunities

FOCUS Center for Autism has job openings including Direct Care Staff at our therapeutic group home in Barkhamsted as well as Teacher Assistant at Fresh Start School in Canton.

For an up to date list of openings, search FOCUS Center for Autism on Indeed.com.