

The CAMP OAKHURST CHALLENGE



www.NYSH.org

Fall 2010

Pre-Vocational Training Program Launched This Summer at Oakhurst

Thanks to a grant from the Kessler Foundation, Camp Oakhurst initiated a Pre-Vocational Training Program this summer for adolescents and young adults. Ages ranged from 12-25, with the average being 17. The group was nearly equally divided between males and females, with 22 enrolled for six weeks, 16 for four and 5 for 2 weeks.



Camper filming a theatrical production

The program was designed to aid individuals in developing self esteem and confidence, while acquiring the basic skills necessary to prepare them for eventual entry into the job market. Each individual chose both a personal care goal and a Prove The Potential activity goal and worked with

trained counselors toward accomplishing each. Time spent on activities varied according to individuals, although most spent between two and three hours daily on related activities.

Several business-like activities were created, including the establishment of a mobile canteen, which was very popular during the days when the temperature soared over ninety degrees. Adolescents learned general household and vocational skills while working in the laundry room, dining area, and in the Camp office. Their experiences enabled them to develop basic skills inherent in all occupations, including prioritizing duties and learning to handle responsibility and take direction.

Campers developed a sense of pride and accomplishment making progress toward their goals. In addition, campers made strides toward becoming more independent, not necessarily by doing everything themselves, but by being in control of what needs to be done for them.

With this first success behind them, Camp plans on continuing the program next summer.

Agency Announcements

They say pictures are worth a thousand words, and this truism certainly applies to the one of Marvin Raps and Alan Kee. Marvin and Alan met the first summer both went to Camp – Marvin as a young man working as a cabin counselor and Alan as a first time camper. Through the years their friendship

blossomed, as this picture taken last summer clearly illustrates.



Marvin and Alan enjoying a conversation at Camp

For over forty years Marvin dedicated his service to the agency. And during that time he saw the agency undergo major changes, including closing its New York based programs to concentrate on operations at its Camp in New Jersey instead.

In the 1980's, Marvin was instrumental in initiating a Year-Round Respite Program for children and adults, which gave care givers a break while sending their family members to Camp. An Adult Off-Season Vacation Program was added alongside Adult Respite, for those adults who lived alone and were looking for an enriching social and recreational experience.

In 1992, the agency began a major restructuring program, which included building a new gymnasium and an enclosed swimming pool with retractable roof, as well as renovating the Elms Activity Building, and all residential cabins.

This year was Marvin's last at the agency, and he is now happily enjoying his time pursuing his many hobbies. For all of those who knew and worked with him, both campers and staff, his energetic

presence and kind words will be missed.

Robert Pacenza, joined the Agency in April 2010 as the new Executive Director, working closely with Marvin for several months before fully taking over the reigns of running the agency this summer.

Robert comes to us with more than twenty years of experience in the non profit sector, working within the health care and human/social service fields for such organizations as Help USA, Big Brothers, Big Sisters and Planned Parenthood. Most recently he was Executive Director of the Food Allergy Initiative, a medical research foundation closely affiliated with Mount Sinai Medical Center.

Please join the Board of Directors and staff in welcoming him.

Summer Benefit 2010

On July 31st, the agency held its fifth Annual Party for the Benefit of Camp Oakhurst at the home of Aimee and Steve Frankel, members of the Benefit Committee.

It was an unexpectedly beautiful, cool evening, in contrast to the many hot days we had this summer, and the 120 guests who attended were treated to an evening of live music, cocktails and hors d'ouvres. Marvin Raps, former Executive Director, was presented with a lovely gift by Board member, Todd Balestro, on behalf of the Benefit Committee, in honor of his many years of service. Marilyn Friedman, Board President, also addressed guests and thanked them for their support.

Over \$45,000 was contributed in support of Camp Oakhurst and its important services for the physically and developmentally challenged.

The agency wants to thank all those who participated for making the event a success.

Campers Diagnosed With Autism Attend A New Summer Session

In the fall of 2009 the agency initiated a Respite Weekend Program for autistic children. Staff were given extensive training to work with this population, with emphasis placed on repetition and appropriate activities for these children. With the success of the program and the demand for service, the agency added a five day summer session for children and young adults diagnosed with autism.

The session ran from August 30 - September 3, with 27 individuals attending, ranging from ages 8 to 25.

Additional training was given to staff prior to arrival. However, activities were the same as any other summer session, with individuals engaged in sports, arts and crafts, drama, music, computers, etc. but tailored to fit into the needs of the participating campers.

Families were very excited to have their children attend this camp session, and many planned to take short vacations, engage in much needed household activities or just have some quiet downtime.

We look forward to working with the families and others to serve clients diagnosed with autism in our respite session where we have scheduled 13 sessions with 12 clients attending each.

Joe Viola - "A Man Who Didn't Know The Meaning Of Can't"

Joe was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis at the age of ten but never considered that he had a disability. In fact, he chose to live his life as if he did not have one. He worked as a taxi driver, a jeweler, and even a short order cook.

Joe came to Camp Oakhurst nearly two decades ago, and it was there that he learned to accept his own disability. At first he was intimidated by the severely disabled people he met, but in his first year

made life long friends, and came to see Camp as his "second home."

At Oakhurst, he found his niche – helping others more handicapped than him, always willing to listen to their stories. Staff and campers described him as a "kind and loving person." He was especially known for his cooking skills, and we are told, his meatballs were "not to be missed."



Joe could be seen dashing about the camp grounds in his electric scooter, socializing with the many friends he had made throughout his years at Oakhurst. He enjoyed the many activities, especially dancing. He believed in living his life to the fullest.

Cooking up something delicious

Joe died on February 6, 2010, and to all those who knew him at Camp, the joy he spread wherever he went will be greatly missed.

(Special thanks to Toby Schuster and Marvin Raps for sharing their memories with us.)

Camp Oakhurst On The Internet

The Camp Oakhurst website can now be visited through the new website address www.NYSH.org (the abbreviation for New York Service for the Handicapped). The old website address of www.campoakhurst.com will still get you to our site, but will no longer be the primary web address we will be promoting. The change is needed for as an organization to be clearly identified as a non-profit by having the ".org" designation meant for

charities, but also to help separate us from the other Camp Oakhurst that resides in California and has a similar web address.

All our email addresses are now also ending in @nysh.org, so you can email general camp questions to info@nysh.org, questions about jobs at Camp through staff@nysh.org or any staff member by emailing their first initial and last name @nysh.org.

In addition, look for us to launch a brand new state-of-the-art website sometime in 2011. For now, the best place to receive timely, current information on Camp Oakhurst is on our Facebook page that you can find by doing a search within Facebook for "Camp Oakhurst/New York Service for the Handicapped". Once you find our page, be sure you click on the "Like" button at the top so can join the more than 200 people who have become part of our Facebook "family." You can then receive notifications whenever we post photos and updates.

From The Desk Of The Executive Director

I am so pleased to have joined the Camp Oakhurst family as Executive Director of the New York Service for the Handicapped.

From the moment I first learned of the job and of this terrific organization, I was drawn to its important mission and more than 100 year history of service to the physically and developmentally disabled. I have worked for a variety of social service and healthcare nonprofit organizations over the last 23 years, but never until now for one where I have personal experience related to the mission of the organization.

I have a 15 year old daughter with life-long developmental and emotional disabilities. It has been a struggle to find the right school, medical/therapeutic professionals, after-school programs and summer camps that are appropriate for her. The perspective I bring as Executive Director at New York Service for the Handicapped is that I am a care giver of a disabled child and I know the importance of high-quality, safe and

effective services for those in need. In five short months, I have found Camp Oakhurst's programs to be uniquely positioned to make an impactful difference in the lives of the individuals and families we serve.

Our pilot program this past year with three 6-client respite weekends for individuals diagnosed with autism is moving forward with a significant expansion. In addition to our 5 day camp in August where we served 27 autistic children, we now have scheduled thirteen 12-client respite weekends over the current season. We of course will continue to have as a priority serving 300 physically challenged children and adults in our 8 week summer camp, 16 physically challenged children and adults at each of 21 overnight sessions this respite season, as well as 8 physically challenged Monmouth County adults 6 hours a day 6 times a month in our year-round day recreation program.

What all of us involved with this great organization can be most proud of is that there is in fact no other place like Camp Oakhurst in the New York/New Jersey metropolitan area that provides both children and adults year-round overnight services for the physically and developmentally disabled. And no other agency has a commitment to serve individuals and families who could not on their own afford such critical services without our tireless efforts to help cover the costs through our fund-raising and government service contracts.

I am proud to have joined the staff team at New York Service for the Handicapped and look forward to working with many of you to provide as many people as possible social, recreational and educational services through our programs provided at Camp Oakhurst.

– Robert Pacenza

Camp Oakhurst News© is a publication of the NY Service for the Handicapped. For more information or to submit articles or commentaries, please write to: Wendy Eager, Editor, The New York Service for the Handicapped, 1140 Broadway, Suite 903, New York NY 10001 or email us at w.eager@campoakhurst.com