Playing video games helpful and not just for fun anymore

Many people play with the popular Nintendo home video game console, Wii, for the sole purpose of having fun. However, for Community Connections staff and clients, the Wii gaming system is another way to engage clients in activities that have a variety of physical, emotional and intellectual benefits.

Said one staff member, “Incorporating ‘Wii’ time into the regular Community Connections schedule allows staff to help clients improve their respective hand-eye coordination, movement and dance,” as well as allow them to play popular games like bowling, or even “The Price is Right.” It also provides a fun and recreational way to interact with friends and peers to enhance and teach cooperation and appropriate social skills, such as taking turns, winning and losing, and following established routines.

The “positives’ of video game use among the elderly, developmentally disabled and others has been gaining academic support, too. According to one study in the International Journal of Emerging Technologies and Society, users reported “psychological effects related to positive changes in self-perception’ and the “game-play deepened social connections within the group and provided a basis for shared experiences” with others. Another study pointed to the benefits of game playing even for those with limited mobility, despite the fact that “older adults with wheelchairs have fragile bodies” that cannot endure too much activity. Even for that population, “physical activity is still needed to improve their health and prevent the negative effects that aging brings.”

Congrats! Walking Warriors
SEE PAGE 2

In late Spring, various Day clients including those in the SMILE program traveled to the Smart Living Center on the Post Road in Orange operated by our electric and gas utilities.

The energy savings displays and information helped residents understand concepts of energy use and how to conserve electricity and heat in our daily activities. The exhibits, lecture and tour featured many hands-on activities that clients enjoyed.

Meanwhile, back on the farm ...

Clients enjoyed an outing picking strawberries recently.
There was no “envelope please” request nor drumroll as the winner was announced. However, each would have fitted the occasion on June 19 when staff and client representatives of Disability Services accepted a special “double award” at the Board of Directors Annual Meeting.

Disability Services, aka The Walking Warriors, was cited for raising the “most money” and for having the “most walkers” at the 2013 Fun Walk and Health & Wellness Fair held last October.

The “job well done” to the Walking Warriors and its inspirational leader, Disability Services Director Marie Watson, capped off an early evening of awards and end of fiscal year messages.

Much credit and a big agency thank you goes to the event committee, too, comprised of many Disability Services staff, for their tremendous organizational efforts including a successful raffle and some fun and interesting “challenge” stations along the walking route.

**SAVE THE DATE REMINDER** – Our next Fun Walk and Health & Wellness Fair will be held on Sunday, Oct. 5, 2014, at the Savin Rock Conference Center and boardwalk. Look out for Walking Warrior information, coming soon!

**The Jerrell father-son team cited for their volunteerism**

Also at the Annual Board Meeting on June 19, another Disability Services duo was honored, as Disability Services Program Manager Keri McLaughlin and several program clients presented a “Forever Friends” plaque to the father and son team of James and Jamie Jerrell, who for many years have provided volunteer disc jockey services for the program’s annual Halloween party.

The duo provides music to participating clients who are dressed in costume in what has become one of the favorite special events of the year.

Congratulations to The Walking Warriors, the Jerrells and all our award winners!
Memories galore at Barker Museum

In May, an entourage of clients and staff from the Community Connections program visited the Barker Character, Comic & Cartoon Museum in Cheshire, and all would agree that it is certainly a “unique institution with one of the most complete expressions of an American childhood through the ages.” The museum houses the personal collection of Gloria and Herbert Barker, and includes an assemblage of nearly 80,000 items that represents more than 40 years of collecting.

Back in the 1960s, the Barkers were in a select group of people who felt that the everyday items of childhood had a value for future generations, to bring back memories, or to express a child’s life through the ordinary toys, lunchboxes, games and tools of common usage during a particular era. The museum opened to the public in September of 1997 and includes such favorites as Betty Boop, Batman, the California Raisins and more.

The staff and clients enjoyed a walk down Memory Lane, as the collection spans the years from 1873 to present day.

MEET OUR STAFF

Katrina Turner, at her desk, right, has been busy honing her skills as a typist, as well as learning the filing system and other office procedures after starting as a Community Connections part-time receptionist recently. Katrina originally came to the Disability Services program as a client in 2006, initially in the GSE program, and eventually worked her way into the ISE program as a housekeeping aide. Katrina independently comes to and from work via the city bus. “We are thrilled with Katrina’s continued success,” said Director Marie Watson.

Priscilla, working on a project at left, is a client in our Individualized Day (ID) program where we provide individualized assistance based on need in a person’s home in the community.

Getting out in the Community

At top left, Evette poses at the Norwalk Aquarium, while immediately below Sway, Sharon, Lucy and Karen enjoy the touch tank. Below middle, clients pose during a recent visit to WTNH News-8 offices in New Haven, while in the bottom picture Tasheila, Stephanie, Caprice and LaSandra visit the West Haven Veterans Museum.
Marching and dancing in honor of our troops

Several clients march in Memorial Day Parade; many attend dance

Clients and staff chose to honor our troops in several ways in May. On Monday, May 26, Tim and Craig joined our pre-school children and families in marching with the Community House contingent in the annual West Haven Memorial Day Parade. More than 60 clients and family members marched behind the 10'-long Community House banner under hazy blue, sunny skies and were greeted at the end by Mayor Ed O’Brien, a former Community House board member, and other dignitaries.

Later that same week, on Friday, May 30, the Community House auditorium at 227 Elm St. was all decked out in patriotic ‘Red, White & Blue,’ with pennants and flags galore and many of our Disability Services clients and staff “in uniform” attended a special “Salute to the Military” dance.

Participants were honoring our men and women in the U.S. military as part of Memorial Day week. Many of our Day program participants, as well as our residents, attended. Meanwhile, at the dance, Lyza and Eric, pictured below, were a familiar dance pair on the floor, joining other residents and staff dancing to the music provided by DJ Bob.