

Stay Connected



A publication of the West Haven Community House
227 Elm St., West Haven, CT 06516

Disability Services Quarterly

West Haven Community House Has Served the Needs of West Haven and its People Since 1941

Annual 'Family & Friends' dinner held March 21

Friends and family of residential program clients gather together once a year in the early Spring to spend some quality time with their loved ones at Anthony's Ocean View restaurant in East Haven.

At this year's gathering on March 21, karaoke was the theme of the evening as all the residents sang songs of their choice, some with back up from the supervisory team, while others were brave enough to perform "solo."

Prizes were awarded to the top four singers of beautiful gold microphone trophies. Of course, as everyone expected, the food was delightful, and the laughter and camaraderie were plentiful.

Among the singers, Dennis sang, "Another One Bites the Dust." Andrew chose, "We are the World," while Karen took home the 1st place prize with

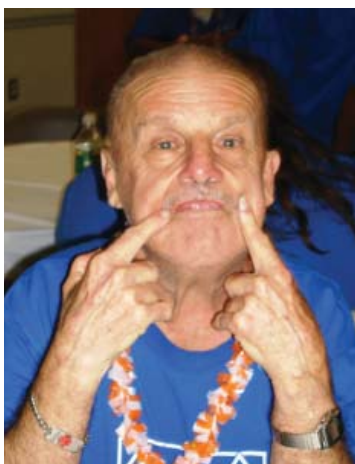


Above, Andrew holds the microphone. Top right, in their kereoke number, Enaida, Michelle and Gwen doing "Thriller," while below that are the Wood Street ladies singing.

her "Michael Jackson" singing and dance routine. All in all, everyone had a very good time and went home with bellies full and hearts happy.



Saying 'goodbye' to longtime resident, Nick Pergolotti



In February 2013, Disability Services staff and clients said goodbye to a good friend, 76-year-old Nick Pergolotti, who passed away peacefully with family and friends at his side at Branford Hospice. The following is a adaptation of our feature on Nick published in the Community House's 2012 Annual Report.

One of our long-time residential program clients is 76-year-old Nick, a lifelong West Haven resident who once was featured on the cover of the phone book for Special Olympics. In fact, Nick was known by many around the city as the "Mayor of West Haven!"

Nick was a client in our residential program

since its founding in 1984, and his situation is an excellent example of how our continuum of programs has evolved as adults with disabilities have "aged in place."

It is a phenomenon that has been recognized for several decades – people with disabilities, like the general population at-large, are living longer lives due to tremendous health and medical advancements. So, as adults like Nick live into their 70s and older, so has the focus and scope of the Community House's program services evolved.

In his early years with us, Nick was a fixture who loved to walk along the streets of West Haven, down

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Learning at the museum

The Discovery Museum in Trumbull was a January 2013 destination for a handful of Community Connections clients including Tallance, Sandy, Robert and Arnie, who were joined by staff members Ariana and Anita. The purpose of the trip was to spend a day learning about science and the environment, which included hands-on activities like shooting basketballs, viewing the planets in our solar system such as Saturn and Pluto, and experimenting with wind tunnels. Winter days in January can be especially dreary. However, this day at the museum was a great day filled with fun and learning, with Tallance and Sandy also taking some photographs for their scrap books.



Our individual Day services program welcomed its newest visitor in March. We all welcomed David as he visited our Day Services family in March 2013. David is a resident of Apple rehab in West Haven and was looking for a local program to visit in order to assist him in getting “out and about.” He has certainly found the right program for that! David periodically visits our SMILES program as well as the Day program site at 622 Campbell Avenue. And, as the warmer weather approaches, he is also looking forward to other opportunities to mingle, whether it be walks at the beach or just a chance to socialize within the Community House Day Services family. Welcome, David!

Dancing highlights ‘Olympics’ gathering!

The United Methodist Church on Center Street in West Haven was the site of a Special Olympics Dance where everyone in the residential program enjoyed a night of free style dancing in financial support of “Team West Haven.” Among those attending were the “Wood Street Girls,” including Enaida, Sharon and Karen, while Dennis, Robert, Andrew and Lucy from Savin Avenue were also in attendance. Everyone had a good time and of course they enjoyed the snacks, too!

Keeping busy: So ‘Let it Snow Let it Snow, Let it Snow!!’

Nothing like 3-feet of new snow to make the going even tougher this past winter, as several days of the SMILES program were cancelled due to the record-setting blizzard that crippled the entire Northeast region on Feb. 8 and 9. But upon their return, SMILES

staff and clients decided to have a little “down time fun,” as the air was filled with music and the real smiles were plentiful among staff and clients. It was a great way to spend some time “while the weather outside is frightful!”



Residential clients cheer favorites at local 'Super Bowl' game party

Just like the rest of the sports watching nation, residential program clients including Frank, Dennis, Michael and Andrew attended a Super Bowl party at a local hall in West Haven. There, they watched the San Francisco 49ers square off against the Baltimore Ravens on two big screen TVs complemented by a variety of snacks and other food. Dennis rooted hard for the 49ers to win, led by their rookie phenom quarterback Colin Kaepernick against the big, bad Ravens led by their retiring leader, Ray Lewis. Michael didn't take any chances and was rooting for both teams, but Frank was most interested in talking to the girls, according to staff attending.

Exercising helps pass the time

Winter is always a tough season for clients. For weeks on end activities must be restricted to the program sites. But clients used the indoor time well this past winter by lifting weights, doing some indoor bike riding, and walking for several miles at a time on the agency treadmill to keep their spirits happy and bodies healthy. Renee (left) and Sterling (below) enjoyed showing off their abilities on the equipment!



Which PEZ dispenser is your favorite?



A visit to the local PEZ factory in Orange is always a fun outing for Community Connections clients and the trip in late February was no exception. Pictured above are staff member Kristina with client Nina, with client Zandra, pictured at left. The trip to the nostalgic candy museum allowed Zandra to closely check out some of her favorite dispensers, both past and present. It is indeed a treat to have such a famous candy maker so close!

Making Our Voices Heard

A periodic column to encourage our family members, friends and supporters to advocate for programs and funding vital to our constituents.

Preserving the social safety net!

In these times of financial hardship and difficulties for all, families, participants and day providers joined together in January to let our state leaders in Hartford know of our growing concern. It is imperative that the various department budgets and "safety nets" currently in place continue to be so that our participants can continue to experience meaningful and fulfilling programs in which to continue their personal growth and independence. Our program clients and staff wanted to join the chorus including other service providers statewide in letting legislative leaders understand our concern that individuals with development disabilities are not just numbers in a ledger, but living and breathing individuals, active and vital in a diversified society.

Remembering Nick -



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to the beach, and to the parks. He loved to play bocce with the various people who also played on the public courts, and he even worked small jobs for pocket money.

Marie Watson, the Community House's director of disability services, noted that Nick was among the first residents at the Elm Street group home, also known as a CLA (Community Living Arrangement). These homes vary in size from three or more residents, and the Community House provides 24/7 staff support in each CLA.

Once Nick gained the skills necessary for less supervision, he moved into an apartment with a roommate. When the opportunity presented, Nick and his team thought it was a wonderful opportunity for him to live on his own.

After Nick's roommate moved on and as he needed increased Community House support, Nick and his team decided it was best for him to move back into the Elm Street group home. Despite being in the more structured living situation, Nick was still capable of having

unsupervised time in the community, which was not the case with most group home residents at the time.

The years began to take its toll on Nick's health. As the 1990s gave way to the new century, his medical condition declined



At left, Nick with his sister, Betty, taken in March 2012.

Below, Nick, in red shirt, on the cover of the 1995-96 phone book with other Special Olympic athletes.

to the point where he needed 24-hour supervision, along with mobility assistance, which the CLA residences are designed to provide.

Despite his age and health, Nick continued to enjoy his routine for many years. As his health allowed, he met his brother for breakfast most every Saturday, with the only difference being that his brother in later years came to pick him up rather than Nick walking there.

He also continued to enjoy his visits to his sister's house, another example of how the Community House enabled Nick to maintain family ties by keeping him living

locally in West Haven instead of at an out-of-town facility.

Nick also enjoyed the company of his "agency family," too, dressing up for Halloween and being the "life of the party," and taking "his girl" – another one of our female residents – to the agency's annual semi-formal gathering each March.

"Nick was one of our oldest clients," Watson said. And it's important to understand that "once you become part of the Community House residential program family, we strive to meet your needs throughout your life – whatever your individual circumstances are – or may become."

Watson noted that there are several delicate issues that come into play as adults with disabilities continue to age, specifically concerning "quality of life" and how it pertains to "end of life" issues.

In the summer of 2012, the agency renovated the Elm Street group home to create a first floor bedroom for Nick, who had been living on the second floor.

This bedroom met Nick's acute ambulatory needs, as well as provided him a safe living environment enabling him to exit quickly from the first floor, if needed.

"It wasn't something we had to do," Watson said, but it was a decision made in the best interest of Nick, and one that allowed him to stay longer with us than he might otherwise have been able to.

As Watson noted, "Nick was family, part of our family," and family members take care of each other.

