

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



Disability Services raises thousands at walk

On Oct. 28, the Community House sponsored its own fundraising Walk-a-thon along the boardwalk in West Haven the Disability Service programs, led by the Day and Residential programs staff and clients, raised nearly \$3,000 in support of the event, which overall netted the agency about \$7,000.

Despite the threatening weather, as Hurricane Sandy was approaching and would hit the region hard the

very next day, nearly 70 walkers including clients and staff braved the winds and threatening skies, completing the 2.5 walk in about 40 minutes. Clients walking included Lucy, Andrew, Susan, Evette, Karen and Enaida, and they were joined by staff members including Gwen, Davaul, Michelle, Dianna, Ed and Marie.

Sporting their own special "Walking Warriors" t-shirts, the Disability Services contingent certainly stood out as they made their way from the start at West Haven High School, crossing Captain Thomas Boulevard, and onto the boardwalk near Jimmie's and the Savin Rock Conference Center. Walkers then proceeded about one mile down the boardwalk to the water station, and then doubled back the way they came, and were greeted with refreshments and cheers upon their return.

"We made it," exclaimed Andrew upon arriving back at the high school. Lucy was wondering if she would do it again, while Evette simply stated, "My legs hurt."

All in all, though, it was a tremendous effort by Disability Services for this event, said Development Director Chris Carroll. "Your fundraising



ED WELLER'S SIGN WARNS AWAY HURRICANE SANDY

results were beyond expectations," he added. "A great job by all involved and I'm looking forward to working with everyone in Disability Services when we do this again in 2013!"



The holidays always joyful in the programs

A wonderful evening was had by all residents and staff on shift at 228 Elm Street on Dec. 20 for the Annual Holiday Party. There was holiday themed music, dinner catered by Elm Street Diner and a grab bag themed gift exchange that celebrated the close friendships between the residents. The spirit of the season was certainly evident all evening.



Easter Seals held its holiday party on Dec. 14 at the West Haven Italian American Club on Chase Lane attended by several residential program clients, including Lucy and Andrew.



Lucy was overhead saying, "I want my picture taken with Santa," while Andrew countered with, "I want my picture with the Grinch!" In fact, Santa, his elves and even the Grinch were all on hand to help with the festivities, including great food and hip-hop dancing enjoyed by all.



Fruit aplenty at Lyman Orchards



Who doesn't love the crisp, clear and clean Fall weather? Well, Community Connections clients including Carlos, Robert, Brent, Brian, Karla and Yolanda took advantage of the fine weather in October when they visited the Lyman Orchards to pick some seasonal fruit and just enjoy each other's company and fruit of their labors.



Clients learn: practice makes perfect in sign language, singing presentation

Assisted by their life skills coach, Kristina Needham, a trio of Community Connections program clients – Nina, Russell and Caprice – practiced



their sign language and singing skills for many weeks in preparation for their presentation before their friends and staff at the SMILE program room on Dec. 20. It took a little while for the three to believe they were ready after practicing so long and so hard, Kristina noted. However, their friends and peers were very impressed with their efforts, and even began to sing along with them as they performed. And in an encore performance, the trio showed off their signing and singing skills to Disability Services Director Marie Watson after they returned to 622 Campbell Avenue.



At the car show!

For more than three years, Robert has been waiting patiently for the opportunity to visit a car show with his friends and peers. Well, finally last November, Robert received his chance as he was joined by Carlos, Theresa, Yolanda and Brent at the XL Center in Hartford at the annual Car Show. With much anticipation, the group traveled to Hartford and were thrilled to see all their favorite vehicles gleaming on the showroom floor. Among the favorites cited were a Porsche, Mustang and Fiat, to name a few.



Day program has holiday celebration

With just one week remaining before the official celebration of Christmas on Dec. 25, clients and staff from the Community Connections Day program got together on Dec. 18 for its annual Holiday Celebration at the Community Connections building. It was a chance for new and old friends to get together for some holiday cheer. Food came in catered from Elm Diner, and there was plenty of music and games all evening. It was loud, even chaotic at times but always full of smiles, especially when "a favorite" volunteer made a special appearance.

Welcome new client Isabelle!

In October, the Community Connections family welcomed a new participant, Isabelle Torres, a recent West Haven High School graduate. While Isabelle can be shy at times, her life skills coaches agree that she is quickly learning the routines of the Day program, where Isabelle enjoys

attending. She is eager to observe what the other clients are doing, and she has found familiar faces as well as discovering some new ones. As the new year 2013 dawned, Isabelle continued to explore the new opportunities in the program while fostering her skills development.

Spaghetti dinner supports Special Olympics athletes

The Special Olympics organization held a spaghetti dinner last Fall at First United Methodist Church on Center Street to help raise funds for the athletes who take part in the athletic competitions each year. Residential program clients attending the dinner included Sue, Andrew, Dennis, Lucy, Robert, Karen, Enaida, Kim and Barbara, who were joined by staff members Kendra and April. Everyone agreed that the food was good, and many clients are looking forward to Special Olympics competition in 2013.

Residents root for Bulldogs

Five clients of the residential program joined the legion of Yale football fans on Oct. 20 at the Yale Bowl for a game against Penn. Yale beat the visitors, 27-13. Dennis, Robert, Andrew, Lucy and Michael joined staff members Kendra and Tameka on the short van ride to the Yale Bowl, where everyone enjoyed mingling with the crowd and, of course, the snacks from the concession stand. It was a great way to spend a Fall Saturday afternoon rooting for the home team!

Thanksgiving 'delicious'

Thanksgiving came a bit early last Fall when the residents at 228 Elm Street hosted a Thanksgiving Dinner with all the trimmings that included turkey, mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce, veggies and pies for dessert, all prepared by the residential staff for everyone to enjoy and be thankful for.

'Let's go to a dinner & show'

A client and staff member were treated to "dinner and a show" on Dec. 16 at the Shubert Theatre in New Haven. Both Susan and April enjoyed the Christmas show, "The Rat Pack is Back," which was a comedy presentation featuring classic and holiday music, all backed by a 12-piece orchestra. Dinner afterward at TGIF was delicious, too, which just added to the happy mood that the December holidays evoke in all.

Visit to Peabody Museum always educates

As one staff noted, there can never be enough visits to the Peabody Museum at Yale in New Haven because each time our clients visit there they always come back with yet another fascinating fact dating back many centuries ago. Nina, Russell and Carprice were among those visiting the museum in October. On this particular visit, Russell seemed to enjoy the prehistoric animal section best.



Having some Halloween fun!

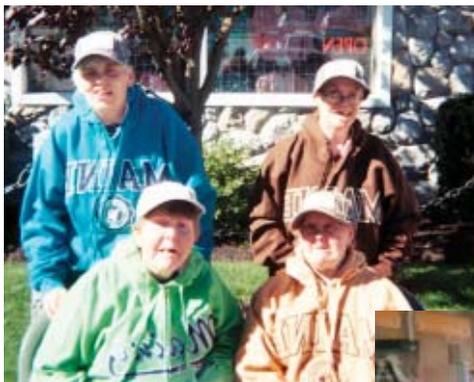


The auditorium at 227 Elm Street was again the site of the annual Halloween Party for Community Connections and Residential program clients last Oct. 25. Many program clients and staff including all shift workers, supervisors and directors took part in the festivities. Also joining the fun were clients from other agencies including SARAH Seneca, Oak

Hill, Hart and the Kennedy Center. As always, the clients went "all out" to celebrate, enjoying wearing their fun and scary costumes. They also relished the various food and dessert treats on hand. They included Subway sandwiches, as well as cupcakes and drinks. Jamie and his Dad provided the musical entertainment and staff worked really hard decorating the party venue. Overall, it was a fun evening of costume contests, music, dance and games. "The Community House throws the best parties for clients" noted one staff member. "It's so nice to see the clients having such a good time." For their part, clients are already looking forward to the dress-up Halloween party next year, several already said.

Trip to Maine pleases residents

Two residential staff members accompanied four residents on a unique Fall vacation in Maine, staying at a cabin on a lake in the town of Ogunquit. The season had just



changed in late September when Sharon, Virginia, Deborah and Kim set off on the adventure, joined by staff members Tamila and Venita. The ladies enjoyed having their nails done at a local salon, as well as visiting area restaurants and enjoying the Fall atmosphere in the state of Maine, famous for its 4-season recreational opportunities.



Helping our Veterans

Day clients 'giving back to community'

Veterans of our armed forces who are now senior citizens in West Haven are the beneficiaries of a leaf-raking program that clients in the Community Connections program conduct throughout the Fall. During the year, Community Connection clients "give back" to the greater West Haven community in a number of ways. And one way every Fall is for clients to rake leaves for senior veterans. Among the clients visiting local homes to rake and bag leaves this past Fall were Chuck, Lasaundria, Joe, Carlos, Robert and Brent. Team Leaders Ed and

Dave noted that clients are genuinely pleased with the opportunity to assist these families and as a result they have created friendships with the families they assist. Work visits often offer an opportunity for "catching up." Program clients doing the work take their jobs seriously, too, working hard and faithfully counting how many bags they fill with leaves and other debris every visit. Another upside to enjoying their visits with the families of veterans is that the workers are often rewarded with home baked goods for their hard work and dedication, which is always appreciated.



Therapy rescue dog visits SMILE

As noted in another story involving clients visiting the local animal shelter (see above, right), Community Connections clients really enjoy interacting with animals of all kinds and sizes. And last November, clients in the SMILE program were thrilled to spend some quality time with a very special dog, a therapy rescue dog who came to visit them in the Upper Lang's SMILE program room on Elm Street.

Some clients took a few minutes to warm up to the visitor. However, others like

Sharon very quickly took the opportunity to "get up close" and personal with the friendly lab mix who was visiting. All participants sang songs, banged on some drums and generally had the opportunity have some fun as part of the agency's overall "Pet Therapy" efforts with clients.

Pet Therapy, also known as Animal Assisted Therapy, has as its core goal: the improvement of a client's social, emotional and cognitive functions and development. There are several reasons

researchers believe Pet Therapy to be effective with the most prevalent being that the therapist who is accompanied by an animal can be perceived as "less threatening" and therefore less likely to receive push-back from clients, not to mention that domestic animals such as cats and dogs have a long history of bonding with their human masters, which was certainly the case with SMILE clients and their canine friend.



SMILE client redemptions help shelter cats & dogs

During the final months of 2012 leading up to the holidays, SMILE program participants saved their recyclables and used the money from redeeming their cans



and bottles to purchase dog and cat treats for the local animal shelter. A side benefit for the clients is the chance to visit the animals in the shelter, and even to "pet" some of them. Sharon and Patrick particularly enjoyed the opportunity to interact with the animals during their surprise visit to deliver their donation on Thanksgiving Eve. Jennie also joined the group as well as SMILE program staff in visiting the shelter that day.

Remembering the children at Sandy Hook School

In December, SMILE program clients took part in the "Snowflakes for Sandy Hook" effort where they made decorated snowflakes for the students at the school in Newtown, CT, after the tragedy there that took the lives of administrators, teachers and 20 students. Clients were pleased to be able to do something positive to show their support to the Newtown and Sandy Hook School community after this very sad incident just a week before Christmas.

More Holiday pics

