

Stay Connected



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Disability Services Quarterly

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

Animal therapy is gaining acceptance as a healing tool



Nitsa is all smiles as she takes her turn petting her new friend.

Deaf border collie, Keifer, delights clients

Serving as an inspiration and a help aid to humans with disabilities, Keifer, a deaf border collie, came to visit the clients and staff at Community Connections in December 2013.

Despite his hearing difficulties, Keifer has managed to work through his disability and is now a certified therapy dog.

Animal-assisted therapy (AAT) is a long practiced type of therapy that involves animals as a form of treatment for any number of conditions, including working with adults with developmental disabilities. Among the goals of animal therapy is to improve a patient's social, emotional, and/or cognitive functions.

Studies suggest and advocates believe that animals are useful for educational and motivational effectiveness in that therapists who are accompanied by a pet are often viewed as less threatening to participants. This can work to increase the bond between therapist and a patient.

Animal therapy continues to grow in popularity across a spectrum of populations, including children who have suffered abuse, and even military veterans suffering various illnesses after service. It is also well known and documented that older adults who would otherwise be living alone benefit greatly from the presence of a family pet.

Among the animals most commonly used for therapy are domesticated pets including dogs, but also farm animals and even dolphins.

Wood Street home welcomes its new resident supervisor

Residential clients and staff at the Wood Street group home welcomed a new house supervisor recently as long-time staff person Cheryl Hyslop-Antunes was promoted to the position last October.

According to Disability Services Director Marie Watson, Cheryl has worked in the residential program since November 2005, and has undertaken a rather ambitious professional and personal schedule since then.

"Cheryl went back to school to receive her degree while still working with us and also running her own daycare business," Watson noted, and her experience juggling many tasks are certainly serving her well in her new position.

Prior to her promotion, Cheryl was working on the second floor at Wood Street and she was praised for her balanced personality. "Cheryl has always displayed a calm demeanor no matter what the situation is, and that is a very important quality to have when working with our residents and our staff," Watson added. "We all certainly wish Cheryl all the best in her new position."



Above, Karla takes a turn giving some love and attention to Keifer, the deaf collie who visited the program recently.

Keifer the collie and his human "Mom" were very pleased to be visiting the Day program on Campbell Avenue, and together they worked to inspire our clients and staff to look beyond their difficulties, and always strive to do their very best to succeed.

Keifer was reportedly a "big softie" himself, too, letting individuals hug and pet him, and he certainly seemed to enjoy all the attention.

When 'losing' is a good thing; clients learn 'healthy nutrition'

Clients in the Residential program recently participated in a Nutrition Education Workshop presented by "The Choices Program."

It was last October when members of the Work Out Club joined together at the kitchen located at the Campbell Avenue facility to cook a nutritional meal with staff support from Choices.

Residents were able to taste the great food and to learn different ways to eat healthy.

Eating better and staying fit are among the themes emphasized at The Work Out Club, which has had 10 residents participate in this program over the past five years.

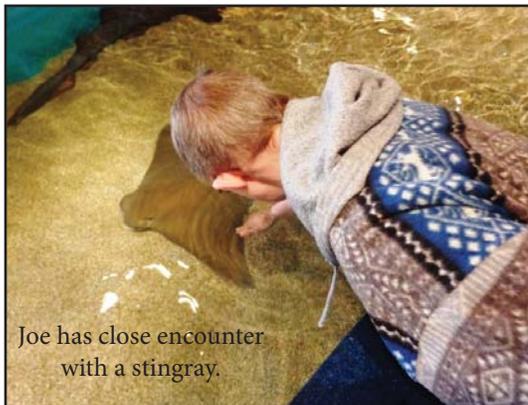
Congratulations goes to Barbara, who has earned the title of the "Biggest Loser" with an overall weight loss these past five years of 48 pounds. Great job, Barbara, and to all those who continue to learn about nutrition and exercise and how it improves overall health.

Visits to Maritime Aquarium are both fun and educational

For both clients and staff, visits to the aquarium never gets old or boring. Last fall, several groups of clients and staff visited the Maritime Aquarium at Norwalk, which offers opportunities to learn about the many natural resources of Long Island Sound.

The facility is located in a refurbished 1860s factory, and Joe (pictured below with a stingray), Carlos, Karla, Kim, Marcus, Russell and Robert were among those enjoying the touch tanks and the more than 34 exhibits featuring more than 1,200 marine animals of 259 species.

Robert, Carlos and Karla enjoyed taking pictures throughout the aquarium's exhibits. Among the maritime creatures on display were sharks, seals, river otters and sea turtles. A great and educational time was had by all.



Joe has close encounter with a stingray.

It's Friday and the 'girls will be girls'

A favorite Friday activity at Community Connections Day program is for the ladies to have their nails done. Many of our female participants enjoy re-doing their nails in a variety of styles and colors - in keeping with the latest fashion, of course.



Clients have learned to detail their nails with designs and take pride in showing off their creations. And not to be left out of the fun, some of our male participants also enjoy indulging in some hand massage and grooming activities as well.

Hand-picking apples 'for pies'



Fall is apple picking time, and clients and staff traveled to Bishop's Farm to pick apples for baking into pies. Caprice (pictured above), Stephanie and Nina were among those on the excursion.



The annual Halloween party is always fun, giving clients an opportunity to dress up in costume, spend quality time among friends and of course, enjoy a fantastic buffet dinner. There's also music and dancing, and a little bit of candy to round out the evening, which is held in the auditorium at 227 Elm Street.

Helping out the 'Food Bank'



Working alongside other agency departments, Disability Services staff and clients, pictured at left, held a food drive to support the local food bank, WHEAT throughout the month of November. The food collection effort is consistent with the mission of the agency and the Disability Services program itself, specifically to provide adults with developmental disabilities meaningful enrichment opportunities that increase and enhance community integration. And what better way to help our community than to help keep the local food bank stocked, especially during the Thanksgiving holiday season. Many thanks to all those in the agency who supported the food drive with a donation of a canned or other item.



Adding frosting on the cake!

Pictured here is James, wearing his 2013 Fall Fun Walk tee-shirt, applying vanilla frosting to a cake as part of a recent bake sale.



Leaf-raking helps our local military vets

For the third year in a row, a group of willing participants including Lasaundria, Robert, Joe, Chuck and Nitsa joined staff Dave to offer their time and effort to



Helping our Veterans!!

assist local Veterans with their leaf raking last Fall. Through the years, the various participants and Vets have become friends and everyone looks forward to helping every year. It's a great way to be a part of our community and give back to such deserving members - our local military veterans.

Colors abound at Gozzi's Farm

Gozzi's Turkey Farm in Guilford is well-known for its colorful turkeys of many colors. No, the turkeys are not naturally found in these colors, but are dyed with a non-toxic, vegetable based food dye that does not affect the meat, as the local turkey supplier provides tens of thousands of turkeys to local consumers at Thanksgiving. Pictured above is Chuck, who was among several Community Connections clients and staff who visited the farm last Fall in what has become an annual pilgrimage.



Clients, staff enjoy a December 'Winter Holiday Celebration'



On Dec. 19, the Day services building on Campbell Avenue was the site of a 'Winter Holiday Celebration' to observe the holidays and to mark another



year of fun and merriment. Refreshments and gifts were compliments, in part, to Walter B. & his wife, our favorite volunteers, and special holiday cheer benefactor. Everyone indulged in food,



music and good cheer as long-time friends were reunited for the occasion and everyone prepared to say goodbye to the year 2013 as January and the new year were on the near horizon.



Residential marks the holidays



The Residential program's holiday Christmas party was held at 622 Campbell Ave. this year, not its traditional venue at the group home at 228 Elm Street, as the program has grown larger than the house can accommodate.

The residents enjoyed the service, too, as they were waited on by staff serving food from Biagetti's. There was also a dance-off competition with all residents. It finally came down to the top three dance finalists: Michael, Theresa, and Barbara.

Andrew and Karen, below, enjoy a moment at the residential party, as did Enaida, pictured above.

With "coaches" giving them water during their final break and loosening up their shoulders and muscles with rubs, the three "danced their hearts out," with Barbara being named the overall winner.



The residents closed out the evening with a secret gift exchange and a light dessert! Next up on the calendar as residents look forward to the new year in 2014, the First Annual Valentine's Dance, which will be held in February!



Generators will provide power during outages

New generators were installed in December at our 228 Elm St. and 40-42 Wood St. residential program homes to keep the electricity on during power outages, preventing possible relocation of residents during weather emergencies.