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A Healthy Partnership

Marie Awn Floyd
Director of Family Support Services

Jon Goldstein and Camille Hehn are a team. Camille is a residential social worker, and Jon lives in an apartment by himself in Albany. Jon has a lot of good friends that he’s known for many years, has a good job, walks to work, has support staff who visit him in his apartment, and a job coach who helps him to be successful at work.

But Jon has had a lot of trouble sleeping at night and was able to sleep only 3-4 hours a night.

“This guy has a lot of energy, he needs to get tired to relax and sleep”, Camille said.

Camille’s son got her involved in a Cross Fit gym on Wolf Rd. Cross Fit workouts are extremely rigorous and require a strong commitment to fitness.

Three years ago, Camille brought Jon to this gym and, Jon took to the demanding regimen.

Music Therapy's Reach

Tom Schreck
Director Of Communications

Just about everyone enjoys music and it has been part of Wildwood School’s curricula for decades. Music therapy is something entirely different and goes far beyond a simple and enjoyable hobby or diversion.

“The results we see in music therapy appear to come from each individual’s emotional, cognitive and even interpersonal responses from the music they hear or their entire music therapy experience,” said Beth McLaughlin, Wildwood School’s music therapist. Beth has been at school for over thirty years.

Beth has developed a variety of music-based interventions for students. For some students it is about helping their speech, for others it’s a stress reliever, and for others it helps them focus and concentrate.

Wildwood Programs is a non-profit, non-sectarian organization that serves people with developmental disabilities, complex learning disabilities and autism. Wildwood is affiliated with the Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA).
Dear Friends...

You may be wondering why the chief financial officer is writing the welcoming letter to the wellness edition of Reaching Out.

Well, there are very good reasons.

In the last couple of years I’ve increased my focus on my own personal wellness. I’ve become infamously around Wildwood for my enthusiasm for Zumba and, more recently, I took a Non-Impact Aerobics (NIA) class. I’ve modified my diet slightly and I’m very happy to report that in the last 18 months I’ve lost 45 pounds. I feel great and my health, though never a real problem, has improved. I am now off all medications for high blood pressure and cholesterol. That is the whole point of wellness—it’s not about being sick—it’s about maximizing the “well-ness” in your life.

It may be a cliché but if you have your health you have everything. It’s no secret that we have a nation-wide epidemic of obesity and all the problems it brings with it. The people we serve struggle with being fit even more than the general population and we are doing all we can as an agency to stress the importance of good health. It really is central to the Wildwood mission to encourage the people we serve to embrace wellness as a lifestyle.

Lastly, and this is where I put on my CFO hat, it makes good financial sense to focus on wellness. If our staff takes advantage of all our health initiatives, they will not only live happier lives, but they will also miss less work time and utilize less of their expensive health benefits. We’ll have a more vibrant and energetic workforce that will serve as role models. It’s all about caring for people and really wanting the very best for them in all ways.

With our wellness initiatives everyone wins!

Gary Milford
Chief Financial Officer
A Knockout Workout

Tom Schreck  
Director Of Communications

Earlier this year two groups of Wildwood School students, one from the High School and one from the Young Adult Program, participated in a trial boxing fitness program at Schott’s Boxing. Schott’s Boxing is an old-school boxing gym in the warehouse section of Albany where professional fighters and amateur boxers train.

It also has a very busy boxing fitness program where people who don’t want to actually compete in boxing take on the advanced workout that top-level pros do.

The result of this challenging regime is some hard workouts and a superb level of fitness. One might think that this wouldn’t be the place for people with developmental disabilities.

One couldn’t be more wrong.

Under the coaching of undefeated professional boxer, Javier Martinez, the two groups of fifteen students were not only taught the fundamentals of boxing they were also taken through a very advanced exercise regimen.

Javy, one of the gym’s most popular instructors, combined an ability to adapt and breakdown his teaching technique with a commitment to not coddle the students.

“Our goal at the gym is to get people to push beyond their normal limits. I didn’t see any reason to modify that approach,” Martinez said.

The students took to the classes with unbridled enthusiasm. They followed directions, encouraged each other, and pushed themselves until they were covered in sweat. The boxing program successfully addressed many of their PE goals for the semester set forth in their curriculum. More importantly, they loved what they were doing. Javy was deliberate in his teaching but demanding as well.

For all of us who witnessed this, we learned a lot about fitness, limits, and self-esteem. Safety, of course, is paramount but pushing oneself within the bounds of safety brings a generous reward. The important lesson in this project wasn’t about boxing at all. The big lesson was that preconceived notions about limits should be questioned and challenged.

A Healthy Partnership

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Jon and Camille help and support each other. Camille picks Jon up after work two to three times a week, and they go to the gym and work out together. The workout takes at least an hour, includes a series of exercises that change daily, and includes pretty difficult strength training. At the end of the workout, when it’s really hard to finish, Jon tells Camille “You got this, you can do it.” Jon will stand by Camille, clap his hands, and help her finish. He’ll do the end of the workout with her even though he’s finished his routine.

Jon and Camille have taught a healthy cooking class together for Adult Education. They shop for clothes for Jon (not one of his favorite things) because Jon has really trimmed down since going to the gym. They entered a Cross Fit competition and won “best dressed”.

Most importantly, Jon is now very tired at night, and he sleeps 7-8 hours every night.

“We’re a team. We support each other. This is definitely better than taking sleeping pills!” Jon said.
Working Toward Wellness

Danielle Mazza
Director of Medicaid Service Coordination

A true focus on wellness captures a holistic approach, which incorporates the all of a person – both body and mind.

It’s no coincidence that holism is one of Wildwood’s values. These values are the things that make Wildwood – WILDDOOD – and also the very spirit of what our staff strive to embody in the work they do each day. Therefore, to have a spirit of wellness that is holistic across all parts of the agency, it has been a priority to foster the wellness of one of our greatest assets – our employees.

Harry DeLibero, Wildwood’s Director of Human Resources shared that although “corporate” wellness programs can have a positive effect on the bottom line, in Wildwood’s case it was “not a business decision solely. Our motivation was to promote a culture of wellness so staff feel better about themselves and realize that their employer is truly interested in their well being.”

Toward that end, Wildwood has offered a variety of wellness options and has sought the input of our employees. Our staff have brought in Zumba, NIA (Non Impact Aerobics) and Couch to 5K programs, to name a few. We have supported staff with biometric screenings, “Biggest Loser” competitions, information networks, and the ability to be flexible in how each person meets their own personal wellness goals. The response has been tremendous.

The energy among staff has really caught on. Staff who feel better want to help others feel better too. This creates opportunities for staff to support people they work with to pursue their own wellness goals, and in many cases this can be done side by side. Rather than being sideline cheerleaders, staff are partners in working toward mutual goals of wellness. And working toward a common goal is what Wildwood is all about.

As the momentum continues to grow, we look forward to all working together toward the healthiest Wildwood ever!

Yoga and Meditation

Wellness for the Body and Spirit

Tom Schreck
Director Of Communications

Wildwood’s Adapted Physical Education Department exposes students to many activities with the hope that students will find life long interests. Ryan Patrie and Rachel McDermott, adaptive physical education teachers, have been providing yoga instruction to their classes for the last several semesters. The yoga classes offer instruction in both the physical postures and in meditation techniques.

“We try to teach the students how to calm themselves. Through the basics of yoga postures and deep breathing exercises, the students can get in touch with their bodies. They can use these techniques as a form of stress management,” Ryan said.

Students have really taken to the quieting effects of yoga. Even students who struggle with being still have embraced yoga, For many students managing their anxiety is a real challenge and the meditative aspects of yoga have been a useful tool.

“We do a meditation segment at the end of class, and I challenge the students to see how quiet and calm they can be. I was amazed at how they got into it,” Ryan said.

Ryan and Rachel demonstrate a type of exercise called “Circus Yoga” where two students will balance three-foot long light wooden rods between each other using their fingertips. They then improvise movements while maintaining the balance of the rods.

“Circus yoga brings not only the thoughtful practice of yoga with it but it also helps the students learn things like cooperation and togetherness,” Ryan said.

The yoga classes, like all PE classes at Wildwood, are adapted so everyone can participate. This isn’t about perfect execution of movements as much as understanding the spirit of yoga.

“The students do the best they can and they really get into it. It helps them develop body awareness and understand their body’s movements and capabilities,” Rachel said.
Music Therapy

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“Music is a type of sensory stimulation and people respond to it because they are familiar with it, associate fond memories to it or simply because they have fun when there is music. We then try to harness those feelings and experiences to create an environment for learning and growth,” Beth said.

It is easy to see music therapy as an artistic expression but it goes beyond that. Music therapist aren’t merely musicians, they are therapists who employ evidence-based techniques to address specific issues. It is used for anxiety reduction, stress management, mood elevation, and even pain management.

“It looks like fun and frankly it is, but what we do is directed and strategic with specific goals in mind. Of course we have nothing against fun but it is important for people to understand that music therapy is much more,” Beth said.
WILDWOOD PROGRAMS’ FREE FAMILY & PROFESSIONAL WORKSHOPS

IPAD, SMART-PHONE AND TABLET APPS THAT ASSIST PEOPLE WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Presenters: Mikaela Perez is a social work student at the College of Saint Rose. She completed a research project on the use of apps and technology to support people who have developmental disabilities. Mikaela has been assisting 5 young adults with this technology who have autism spectrum disorders and who live in a group home in East Greenbush.

Ray Blanchard is in a Community Mental Health graduate program at the College of St. Rose. He has also supported these young adults in their home with the use of technology. Ray is a self-described “Apple nerd” and became interested in technology after seeing the several hundred apps for people with developmental disabilities and how they can help.

There have been many advances in technology in the past several years for people who have autism spectrum disorders and other developmental disabilities. Many of us have heard about some of these advancements. However, there are now countless applications for devices like iPhones, iPads and laptops that can be used to assist people with autism spectrum disorders and other developmental disabilities as well as their families, care-givers, teachers and those in their lives and community. This workshop will explore some of these applications, including their use, benefits, cost and how they may best support people with disabilities.

Please feel free to bring your devices as you will be able to connect to a wireless network.

When: Friday, October 26, 2012 9:00am- 11:00am
Where: Wildwood Programs Latham Office, 1190 Troy-Schenectady Rd., Latham, NY 12110
To Register: Call 518-640-3300 by October 15, 2012

COPING STRATEGIES FOR YOUNG ADULTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

Kristen Knapp-Ines, Ph.D, Center For Autism and Related Disabilities

The focus of this presentation will be on practical ways to teach coping skills to individuals with autism spectrum disorders. Specifically, techniques to assist with anxiety and problem-solving difficulties will be discussed. Dr. Knapp-Ines will place emphasis on evidence-based strategies that can be taught and used in both the home and school environment.

When: Friday, November 2, 2012 9:00am- 11:00am
Where: Wildwood Programs Latham Office, 1190 Troy-Schenectady Rd., Latham, NY 12110
To Register: Call 518-640-3300 by October 30, 2012

Questions: Marie Awn Floyd, 518-640-3346 or mawnfloyd@wildwoodprograms.org There is no charge for attendance

If you are unable to come to these workshops in person, you can now participate from home using your computer. You need to have a camera and audio capability on your computer and broadband Internet service. Please call 518.640.3355 to get connected.