

REACH

Response
Empower
Awareness
Connect
Help

FROM TRAUMA TO TRAINING - HARRY'S JOURNEY AT CHAPTER 126

He is energetic. Determined. Driven. And has a sense of humor large enough to fill the room. Harry is everything you would imagine from a fitness enthusiast training for, count them, eight road races this coming season. However, what makes Harry so unique is his ability to maintain a disciplined fitness regime after suffering a Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) before the age of 25. To better understand Harry's story, is to know the importance of the bond between Harry and Chapter 126.

"My goal was to walk again," said Harry after recounting what was a horrible day in which his whole world changed forever. Harry McKinstry worked as an iron worker in Bridgeport, CT. He recalls being on the construction site as a two-ton beam came crashing down on him, pinning him to the ground. He can remember bringing himself to his feet, walking to the ambulance, and the rest of his recollection goes dark.

"Life isn't that bad. What could be worse than being in a coma? I knew I had to keep pushing to get myself back to a place where I could be active again."

- Harry, Chapter 126

After being in a coma for three months, Harry was grateful to be alive and conscious. Now he had to face the biggest challenge of his life. Completely confined to a wheelchair, Harry had to learn how to speak, eat, and regain all mobility he had lost. After being transferred to a rehabilitation facility for over a year, his focus remained on his strength. "I am a very independent and headstrong person. I don't like to ask people for help, and although I relied a little on my parents for some assistance, I knew I could never consider giving up," says Harry.

(Continued on page2)



Harry training hard for his upcoming races on the AlterG Anti-Gravity Treadmill

FIND YOUR MISSION!

If you're interested in learning more about how you can support Oak Hill Programs like Chapter 126, please contact Ruth Hayes, Chief Development Officer at 860.769.3834 or via e-mail at ruth.hayes@OakHillCT.org.

FROM TRAUMA TO TRAINING – HARRY'S JOURNEY AT CHAPTER 126

(Continued from cover)



Harry boasts his vivacious humor as he “pumps iron” with his 3 lb. weight.

Years of hard work and dedication helped Harry to regain minimal mobility, enough to join a gym and partake in some basic training. However, Harry wasn't receiving the direct attention he needed for his condition while working out in his wheelchair, which inevitably led to a shoulder injury. Harry was alerted to the fact that a new fitness facility called Chapter 126 Sports & Fitness, would be opening in Bristol specializing in disability services and fitness training.

Harry soon enrolled as the very first member of Chapter 126, explaining to the staff and trainers his main focus was to walk again. “Harry, also known as the Mayor of Chapter 126, is the most charismatic hardworking person you will ever meet. When Harry comes to work out our whole center instantly becomes more energized! He loves a challenge and is always looking to try something new,” boasts Kelly Boscarino, Director of Chapter 126.

Maintaining his personal mantra, “you can never take life too seriously,” Harry began working out with the trainers at his new facility, working to achieve his goal of walking. Walk he did! With endless hours of proper coaching from the highly

trained staff and Harry's willpower, he can now walk for up to an hour in the AlterG Anti-Gravity Treadmill. He has also conquered the free weights and can leg press up to 345 lbs!

Two years ago, during his routine training Harry set his sights on a new challenge, road racing. Harry was determined to participate in a 5k race. He worked tirelessly with his trainers to get himself to the level he needed to be at for the race. In doing so, they discovered that Harry moved his fastest while going backwards and pushing with his strong side; his right leg only. Quite an impressive twist to his training style. “I wouldn't have been able to achieve any of this without the help of the staff at Chapter 126. They made a tremendous difference on the improvement of my injury.”

In the 2017 racing season, Team Harry (doubly named for Harry and the Chapter 126 staff that races alongside him) is gearing up for eight races throughout the Northeast. He has been training for three 5k's, three 10k's, the Hartford Half Marathon, and will finish his tour by competing in the world-famous New York City Marathon. A race that people wait a lifetime to qualify for. Harry will conquer this feat with his admirable strength, positive attitude, and continued vision. A vision that has truly come full-circle; with the bond of Harry and Chapter 126. Beginning with a distant hopefulness of walking again; transforming with new passion and ambition that never once seemed possible.

See you at the finish line Harry!

LEAVE A LASTING IMPRESSION AT OAK HILL

As a way for our supporters to leave a lasting impression at Oak Hill, we will be launching the Commemorative Brick Program this spring. The program provides the opportunity for bricks to be purchased and inscribed with personalized messages. The bricks will then be placed in our Commemorative Brick Garden, located around the flag pole at the front of the main building on our Hartford Campus.

The Commemorative Brick Program offers a unique and lasting way to memorialize or honor a loved one, celebrate milestones such as; graduations, anniversaries, or birthdays, promote your business or show your appreciation to an Oak Hill staff member.



Bricks are available in two sizes: 4" x 8", three lines, 20 characters per line for \$100. Or in 8" x 8", six lines, 20 characters per lines for \$200. Be on the lookout for our upcoming Commemorative Brick mailing in a few weeks!

A LABOR OF LOVE: PERSON-CENTERED TEACHING



Barbara Rankin observes excitedly as her student Rory learns how to use new adaptive equipment.

When Barbara Rankin reflects back on her 36 years spent at Oak Hill School, she is humble, modest, and reluctant to see what the rest of the community sees; a true inspiration for students across Connecticut.

“I had never intended on teaching, but interviewed at Oak Hill for several different openings when I was just 19 years old. It was during one of my interviews that I came across a little boy who was experiencing sound for the first time in his classroom. I was instantly drawn to him. I found myself sitting on the floor beside him to observe his mannerisms as he explored his new-found ability. I was in awe,” explains Barbara Rankin, Special Education Teacher at Oak Hill School. “Later that afternoon, I was asked to start my job with the Oak Hill School.”

Barbara now oversees an Oak Hill classroom inside the Ann Antolini School in New Hartford, CT. A unique but successful model. Benefiting both the students in the Oak Hill classroom, as well as the students in the “typical” classes. “Many of the students in the school here volunteer and spend their time assisting in our classroom. It is very much a cohesive relationship, and it has been working since 1991 when we opened our classroom in this location,” explains Barbara.

When asked about teaching students with disabilities, Barbara’s face illuminates and her eyes soften. “It is my personal belief that every person is valuable. It is inexcusable to me that people with disabilities are disregarded. Every student can learn, and it is my job to help them get there.” Barbara attributes much of her career’s success to her support from Oak Hill. “The willingness to do things differently for an individual if needed really helps the teachers here to do their job well. There is agency-wide support from top to bottom, and every student is seen as an individual,” Barbara describes.

They say, “a teacher takes a hand, opens a mind, and touches a heart.” But in this case Barbara, you have taken many hands, opened hundreds of minds, and touched infinite hearts. Thank you, for making the choice to dedicate your life to influencing the thirsty minds that attend Oak Hill School.

“As a teacher, my Mom has always expressed the importance of individuality to me; that no one should be afraid to be who they are because of their differences. It is their characteristics which make the classroom such a special place to be.”

- Emily Rankin

THANK YOU

We would like to thank the following companies for their contribution of \$2,500 or more in support of Oak Hill’s programs and services:

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Grants Awarded to Oak Hill

Thank you to the following foundations for their support:

Beatrice Fox Auerbach Fund at the
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WILLIS TOWERS WATSON: A FULL-CIRCLE PARTNERSHIP FOR OVER TWO DECADES

In 1993, what began as a standard vendor/client relationship between Willis Towers Watson and Oak Hill, quickly escalated into an exceptional full-circle partnership that has continued for two decades and counting.



Denise Vashalifski, John Lyon, and Peter Wertsching of Willis Towers Watson present Oak Hill President & CEO, Barry Simon with a check from The Willis Foundation.

Willis Towers Watson has been hands on as the relationship progressed; coordinating with Oak Hill with vendor management, and donor/volunteer engagement.

In addition to Willis's annual commitment to being a Major Corporate Partner, Oak Hill recently received a first-time gift from The Willis Foundation in the amount of \$11,000. The vision of the Foundation is to encourage Willis Associates to participate in charitable activities nationwide.

"We recognize the large number of people being served by Oak Hill across the state, and the quality of care they are receiving; it is extraordinary!" said John Lyon, Managing Partner of Willis New England.

Willis staff members continually look for ways to further engage their time within the organization. The most popular being Oak Hill's Annual Golf Classic. Denise Vashalifski, Senior Client Consultant at Willis, has volunteered for the last 15 years as a caddy for an Oak Hill resident who is visually impaired. "Our involvement has allowed us to see how Oak Hill helps people with disabilities achieve their full potential. When I caddy for Esther, we have so much fun together out on the course," explained Denise.



Denise Vashalifski of Willis Towers Watson enjoys volunteering annually as Esther's golf caddy.

Additionally, Willis employees personally established monthly giving donations as their way of allocating funds for the Oak Hill participants. "The participants and the employees of Oak Hill feel like family to us at Willis. We are always sharing stories at the office of the incredible things that occur here, it's truly remarkable," says Peter Wertsching, long-time donor and Vice President at Willis.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Summer Employment Opportunities

If you are enthusiastic about empowering individuals with disabilities, are at a minimum of 18 years old, and would like to be considered for a position, contact Shirley Lyn, Oak Hill Camp Director at 203.640.2175 or email: shirley.lyn@OakHillCT.org or Camp Hemlocks Director Jillian McCarthy at 860.282.0393 ext.4068 or email: jillian.mccarthy@OakHillCT.org.



SAVE THE DATE:



Hop Meadow Country Club Tuesday, October 3, 2017

For information on foursomes/
sponsorships call 860.769.3834.

To become a corporate partner or volunteer, please contact Ruth Hayes at 860.769.3834 or ruth.hayes@OakHillCT.org