"It takes a village… and Oak Hill is that village."

Written By: Stephanie Knightly, Donor Engagement Specialist

The Campana family grew up on the New Jersey shoreline. Frank and Emma were the proud parents of three children (in order) Cynthia, Frank Jr., and Kevin. They were always very close and supportive of one another, even the extended family of aunts, uncles, and cousins. The youngest, Kevin, was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy and Autism in the early years of his life. But the Campana family embraced the diagnosis as they do with most obstacles in life.

Cynthia Campana Girgenti, Kevin's sister and Legal Guardian says, “We looked at it as a blessing...something special that God gave us. My mom used to refer to him as “Kevin from Heaven.” This positive outlook has remained a theme throughout Kevin’s life.

In 2015, both Emma and Frank passed away within months of each other. As heartbroken as the family was, they chose to celebrate their parents' lives as much as they could. Not only was the loss traumatic, but the uprooting of Kevin from the place he had always known as home was extremely emotional and somewhat confusing for Kevin as he continued to ask, “Where’s Mommy and Daddy?”. Kevin moved in with Cynthia so that he could still have that sense of family life.

“Mom and Dad never made it look hard. They knew exactly how to balance the work and the family time. Taking over as caregiver and finding that balance was more challenging for me,” says Cynthia, who tended to her family while working fulltime at Pratt & Whitney. Although it took some time, advice from sweet aunts and uncles, guidance from her daughter who is a nurse, and a second set of hands from her understanding husband, the family rallied together in the Campana way and figured it out the best they could.

Kevin lived with Cynthia for six years. And after struggling with the decision, she acknowledged her beloved parents' guidance to find a group home for her brother while both were young and could acclimate over time. Cynthia reached out for guidance and assistance regarding Kevin's care. She had heard about Oak Hill through an acquaintance of hers and was thrilled to find out there was a group home just around the corner from her house. Her and Kevin even drove by to check it out before their tour. While Cynthia was honored to care for her brother, she was also overcome with relief when she met the Program Director Lori Calvert, who emphasized that she wanted Cynthia to have the luxury of being Kevin's sister again, not just his caregiver. These thoughtful words of kindness resonated with Cynthia. They were something she so desired after coming to understand the high level of care that her sweet brother required, leaving her exhausted at the end of every day.

Lori explains, “Cynthia is one of the most wonderful, caring human beings I have encountered in a long time. She is deeply involved in all aspects of Kevin's life. And Kevin is a wonderful addition to the Stonehouse group home. It is different for him, but he seems to enjoy his newfound independence.”

It has now been over two years since Kevin moved into the Stonehouse group home. Cynthia and the Oak Hill staff have helped with Kevin's transition by renovating his bedroom to make it his own. He has photos of family and friends all over his walls. Cynthia says it was much harder for her than for Kevin, especially when the COVID-19 pandemic hit shortly after Kevin's move.

(Continued on page 2)
Community Conversation: The Commitment to Philanthropy with Marilyn Lindsay of The Brian and Marilyn Lindsay Foundation

Written By: Michael Hoffer, Director of Annual Giving

The supporters and partners of Oak Hill offer the most significant gifts for children and adults with disabilities across Connecticut. The gift of passion. The gift of commitment. The gift of promise.

The Oak Hill mission is powered by the relationships of these supporters, supporters who believe to their very core in the commitment to philanthropy, allowing us to pave a path of empowerment and independence for those we serve. Marilyn Lindsay, of The Brian and Marilyn Lindsay Foundation, is an example of these private supporters. The Lindsay family has a long history with Oak Hill, dating back to 2007. The story of how they became involved with Oak Hill is inspiring, so inspiring that we sat down with Marilyn Lindsay for a community conversation and here is what she had to say.

Oak Hill:
Q: Marilyn, your foundation has been a longtime supporter to Oak Hill. Tell me the story about how you got involved.

Marilyn:
A: My husband, prior to passing away was the owner of B.T. Lindsay & Company, which is now owned by our son Chris. B.T. Lindsay is still a vendor for Oak Hill and continues to support the Oak Hill Annual Golf Classic. Our involvement started when we began donating to the Oak Hill Annual Golf Classic. Brian was so impressed with the services that Oak Hill provides for everyone across the state with disabilities that he wanted to become more involved. Prior to Brian's death, we had discussed creating a foundation so we could support local nonprofits.

The first thing Cynthia purchased for all the Stonehouse residents after the pandemic hit was an iPad. To this day her and Kevin have a nightly video call to talk about each other’s day, share what they each had for meals, say their prayers, and virtually tuck each other into bed.

“We're making it happen and doing the best we can to stay positive,” Cynthia says about the obstacles COVID has created.

The Stonehouse residents, staff, and family members rallied together and have been very creative through the pandemic. Cynthia played a big part in organizing surprise window visits, dropping off goodie bags, singing and dancing outside the living room window, initiating “pizza and ice cream Fridays,” making snowmen in the front yard, and decorating the famous butterfly bush for every holiday. She would find creative and sometimes humorous ways to stay connected and bring a smile to Kevin and all his friends.

Cynthia feels that Kevin found his voice and his independence through Oak Hill, which has always been part of this organization's mission. He brushes his hair, gets himself dressed (although it may not always be an outfit Cynthia would pick out!), and feeds himself. He has the ability to make his own choices.

Cynthia believes, “You can't just take this job for the money. You have to have a compassionate heart and a love for caregiving, especially caring for those that rely so much on kindhearted help from others. And the staff at Oak Hill do. They listen to Kevin; they speak to him normally; they guide him. I am so happy with the decision we made as a family to move him there. I know for sure my parents are looking down smiling at their beloved son and the wonderful strides and accomplishments he has made. It takes a village, and Oak Hill staff and families make it that village you need. There has never been a time that I have felt the administration and staff have not addressed Kevin and my needs as a priority. We all work together as one village advocating for the advancement and betterment of all at Oak Hill. It is a true blessing beyond what I could have imagined. Kevin is and will always remain a priority for our family as he is family, and we are blessed that God chose our family to care for his special and wonderful creation.”

(Continued from cover)
Unfortunately, Brian passed away prior to the completion of the foundation. I made it my goal to complete it for Brian and, when the time came to make our first donation through our foundation, we put Oak Hill at the top of our list. Even before this, the family asked that memorial donations in honor of Brian be made to Oak Hill.

**Oak Hill:**
Q: That is an amazing story! Thank you so much for sharing it with us and our fellow supporters. What is your current involvement with Oak Hill?

**Marilyn:**
A: The foundation continues to fund specific areas and initiatives throughout Oak Hill. One thing we do as a foundation is request specific needs from the various programs at Oak Hill. This allows me to sit down with the board members to discuss the different needs and what we want to support. This process makes it more personal and meaningful.

**Oak Hill:**
Q: And we are eternally grateful for the various ways you choose to fund our mission. Why do you feel community involvement is so vital to Oak Hill?

**Marilyn:**
A: When we first got involved with Oak Hill, we realized how much of an impact it has throughout the state. When you see that level of involvement, it’s so important to keep that going for years to come. That is why the foundation continues to give, because I know that community involvement is so vital.

**Oak Hill:**
Q: Can you recall a personal story that made a significant impact on Oak Hill?

**Marilyn:**
A: The first thing that comes to mind is how much Brian loved and respected the Oak Hill mission and how personal it was to him. That is why we got involved and that is why the foundation continues to give today. I’ve learned through all of this that it does not take a lot to make a difference and be appreciated for the support that’s given.

The Brian and Marilyn Lindsay Foundation continues to be compassionate supporters, partners, and advocates for those served by Oak Hill. Their support directly enhances the lives of thousands of individuals throughout the state, and for that we are so grateful.

**Thank You Lindsay Family!**
*In memory of Brian Lindsay*

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**In Memoriam**

*From the Staff at Granby North Church*

It is with a heavy heart that we share the unexpected passing of Remicia (Remmy) Francis on August 2nd, 2021. Remicia had been an exemplary employee at Oak Hill for over 12 years at our Granby North Church home. She was a very caring individual and a tremendous asset to the home.

Remicia was hardworking, dependable, and knowledgeable. She was well-loved by our individuals, guardians, and coworkers. She had a warm smile, big heart, and genuinely cared for the ladies in the home. Remicia gave 100% of herself to her career at Oak Hill. Her loyalty, dedication, and most of all the quality care she provided to the ladies who reside at the North Church home did not go unnoticed. This was reflected when she was nominated as employee of the month. She always ensured everyone was dressed nicely, the ladies attended their medical appointments, the home was clean and decorated for all holidays, and that each bedroom was decorated to reflect the personalities of those who reside in the home.

There are not enough words that can capture what Remicia has accomplished. Remicia you will be missed by your Oak Hill family and the North Church Granby Home, and your spirit will live forever in our hearts and minds.
Oak Hill's New England Assistive Technology (NEAT) Center Is Combatting Social Stigmas with Cutting Edge Gaming Accessibility Services

A look into how the NEAT Center at Oak Hill has revved up its innovative Gaming Accessibility services. Touching the lives of gamers with disabilities nationwide.

Written By: Adam Kosakowski, Assistive Technology Specialist

What is Gaming Accessibility? “Gaming” is a word describing all things involved with video games, and gaming accessibility is the process of making video game play accessible to gamers with disabilities that play them. Gaming has become a staple recreational activity worldwide and drives a market worth over $90 billion dollars. In the United States, over 170 million people are gamers! Gaming is no longer just an activity, it is also now a career for many people, and more so, a living culture. But, when gamers are faced with inaccessibility and cannot play, these barriers are synonymous with barriers to a community, socializing, and the entire culture as a whole.

The impact of inaccessibility to gaming cannot be understated. Oak Hill’s Gaming Accessibility services aim to break down those barriers by helping people with disabilities find the right adaptive gaming setup for them, whether it be specialized controllers, configurations, or in-game settings to personalize the gaming experience for them. And thanks to the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation, Oak Hill has received a Quality of Life grant to provide these services at no cost to these gamers and their loved ones.

With help from this grant, the NEAT team has been able to connect with gamers with paralysis nationwide. Recently, two of NEAT’s Assistive Technology specialists, Adam Kosakowski and Ramón Hernández met with a gamer with paralysis and his mother. The team met with the family virtually for a Play Consultation; assessing that the gamer was not able to use enough fingers to use a traditional gaming controller.

The resources at NEAT enabled the team to connect the gamer with a gaming laptop equipped with voice control software; allowing him to use his voice to control the video game character. With just a little practice, he is now able to control his character better than ever before!

The Christopher & Dana Reeve grant has also allowed Oak Hill to build a Video Game Access Station (VGAS). The VGAS is a mobile game station where up to four gamers with disabilities can play video games together. The VGAS is equipped with a variety of adaptive controllers and specialized buttons with the idea that any gamer with any disability can come try out what is available from vendors worldwide. More importantly, as gamers they can learn how to play themselves and join the gaming community. The NEAT team will soon be able to host accessible video game tournaments for the community and bring the VGAS on the road to conferences to spread awareness of gaming accessibility!

If you have questions or would like more information on gaming accessibility, contact Adam Kosakowski at Adam.Kosakowski@OakHillCT.org

JOIN US FOR THE 27th ANNUAL OAK HILL GOLF CLASSIC at TPC River Highlands!
Monday, October 4, 2021

To learn more about how you can participate or sponsor this first-class event, contact Michael Hoffer at Michael.Hoffer@OakHillCT.org

Proceeds from this event directly impact the lives of individuals with disabilities across Connecticut!