

Oak Hill Newsletter

A Newsletter for Friends of Oak Hill

Making Dreams a “Reality” at Oak Hill

What if we told you that we could make any dream a “reality” at Oak Hill? Even the dreams you thought were unattainable... even the dreams you were told were impossible.

Five-year-old Reality, a plucky, social, and truly engaging student at Oak Hill School, could not have imagined life without her trusted wheelchair. Joining our Bristol classroom two years ago, Reality needed more support than her home district could provide for her. She struggled to keep up with her peers, especially when it came to her gross and fine motor skills. At age five, Reality could not walk on her own and relied on a wheelchair for mobility. She struggled to pick up and hold objects, a necessary skill for autonomy and independence.

Taking an individualized approach to treatment and education, we empower our students to reach new heights. At Oak Hill School, our meaningful and functional approach to education means that each student receives an education tailor-made to their needs. For Reality, this meant one-on-one support from her teachers, paraprofessionals, and physical therapist to achieve her goals. She relied on her wheelchair, but our staff knew that her journey to independence was just beginning.

Reality worked diligently every day to build strength and stability. With the expert guidance of physical therapist Gina Monahan, Reality slowly but surely developed her confidence. Transformation doesn't happen overnight. Reality needed time, space, and an individualized approach to achieve each building block to safely use her legs. Her first challenge was to develop the muscles in her legs and core to provide her with balance. The second? Persevering through what often felt like slow progress. In the end, it took two years.

After 730 days of dedicated physical therapy and encouragement from our staff, Reality walked for the first time. Surrounded by her treasured teachers and peers, she rose out from the seat of her wheelchair and put one foot in front of the other. There was not a dry eye to be found. Today, Reality zips around the Bristol classroom, even climbing stairs with ease!

Reality's teacher, Rita Miller, describes her as a student who easily gets bored. Now that she's conquered the once daunting task of walking independently, she's on to her next challenge: meaningful communication with her peers, loved ones, and community. Collaborating with our team of Assistive Technology Specialists at NEAT, Reality will soon be outfitted with a state-of-the-art communication device that will enable her to push buttons to communicate more easily with those around her.

In the past two years, Reality's life has transformed, but her Oak Hill journey is not over. Be sure to follow along as we celebrate Reality and her amazing metamorphosis at Oak Hill School.

*Interested to learn more about our therapeutic philosophy at Oak Hill School? Contact **Michael Champlin**, Senior Director of Support Services, at Michael.Champlin@OakHillCT.org.*



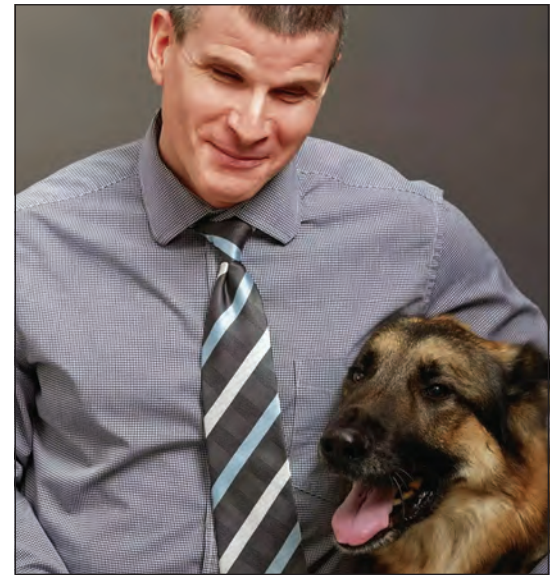
Remembering Steve Famiglietti- A Legacy of Impact at Oak Hill

Oak Hill lost our dear friend and colleague Steve Famiglietti in November of 2022. Steve was a member of our Oak Hill family for over twenty years, pioneering new, innovative services within the Eleanor Brooks Blindness Support Center. Under Steve's leadership, the Eleanor Brooks Center helped scores of blind and low-vision individuals in Connecticut live full, joyful lives. We remember Steve as ever the patient teacher and trusted advocate for those in need. An avid storm chaser and lover of cuckoo clocks, we also remember Steve's courage and undeniable zest for life.

On June 26th, 2024, members of the Oak Hill Community, Steve's friends and family, and so many of the individuals he touched came together to celebrate his wonderful life and impact. Our friends at the **National Federation of the Blind CT**, Maryanne Melley and Mary Silverberg dedicated a beautiful bench in Steve's honor. It will provide comfort and respite to visitors to Oak Hill's campus for years to come.

To honor Steve and the incalculable impact he made on Oak Hill, we are proud to announce the establishment of the **The Steve Famiglietti Memorial Fund**. This fund will expand opportunities for blind and low-vision individuals in Connecticut to receive the enrichment and assistive technology services they need to reach the highest degree of independence. Thanks to the incredible generosity of the E. Matilda Ziegler Foundation, Steve's impact will live on. Representatives from the foundation Cynthia Ziegler Brighton, Marcia Cleary, and Stephen Deltatto attended to dedicate a very generous gift in Steve's memory. Please join us in expressing our heartfelt gratitude to the **E. Matilda Zeigler Foundation** for their commitment to building a more equitable world for blind and low-vision individuals!

*To learn more about our blind service offerings at Oak Hill, or to make a gift in Steve's memory, please contact **Lucy McMillan**, Chief Development Officer, at lmcmillan@gileadcs.org.*



Innovations in Grants

Fighting Food Insecurity and Creating Healthy Habits at Oak Hill School!

Thanks to a very generous *Easterseals and W.K. Kellogg Foundation* grant in the amount of \$20,000, our Oak Hill students are developing a deeper understanding of nutrition and how to make healthy choices for themselves and their families. The innovative “MENuS” (Meal Education and Nutritional Support) Program engages our Oak Hill School students in developing and carrying out every aspect of preparing a hearty and nutritious meal! Students select and reproduce a recipe, shop for ingredients, and sort them into kits which are sent home with students to participating families. MENuS ensures our OHS families have the resources they need while our students gain valuable transferable skills like money and time management, organization, and collaboration. Hats off to the chefs!

Professional Development for Our Talented Education Staff

When our staff shine, our students shine! Oak Hill School doubled down on their commitment to providing career growth opportunities for staff, thanks to funding from Bank of America Charitable Foundation. Our Career Pathways program allows entry-level Assistant Teachers to explore their passions and create their dream careers at Oak Hill. Thanks to this generous funding, our Assistant Teachers received critical training that would allow them to progress to a higher level of responsibility at OHS. We believe that every member of our OHS family should have the chance to grow!

A New Sensory Experience for Community Programs!

Thanks to the continued support of the Brian and Marilyn Lindsay Foundation and Marie H. Brookreson Trust, Kathleen Flynn, our Occupational Therapist Extraordinaire, will pioneer a new sensory room for Community Programs! Housed on our Hartford Campus, this sensory room space will provide much needed sensory integration therapy to the individuals we serve. Utilizing state-of-the-art equipment including a soothing vibrational chair and a linear style swing, Kathleen and her team will be poised to provide the best care possible to the individuals we serve!

Adaptive Gaming Shines at Oak Hill Centers!

A generous \$25,000 grant from the Consumer Technology Association Foundation strengthens Oak Hill’s capacity to provide assessments and assistive gaming technology to individuals with disabilities of all ages! Online gaming provides a vehicle of meaningful interpersonal connection for individuals with communication differences. This wonderful support will give hundreds of experienced and novice gamers opportunities to fully participate in and connect with their communities, resulting in enhanced social connection and satisfaction.

*To learn more about how philanthropy creates new opportunities for the individuals we serve, please contact **Kate McOmber**, Director of Innovation and Grants, at Katherine.McOmber@OakHillCT.org.*



Programmatic Highlights

Our Summer at Camp Harkness

Camp is back in session at Oak Hill! This summer, group home residents from Community Programs and youth from the Bureau of Rehabilitation Service enjoyed residential camp at Camp Harkness! Utilizing our beautiful grounds and cabins, campers engaged in all manner of summer fun! From boating, to ocean swimming, to campfire sing-a-longs, our campers have been having the summer of dreams. At Camp Harkness, Connecticut's dedicated recreation grounds for individuals with disabilities, our campers face no boundaries to summer recreation. Everything, even the path through the sand to the ocean, is accessible. Joy, fun, and friendship know no boundaries at Camp Harkness.

To learn more about community engagement opportunities in Community Programs, please contact Eric Scharf, Chief Administrator for Community Programs, at Eric.Scharf@OakHillCT.org.



Social Club's "Summer of Fun" Series!

It's been a busy summer! Thanks to the generosity of the **Brian and Marilyn Lindsay Foundation**, Community Programs' Social Club has provided recreation and enrichment opportunities like never before! As part of our "Summer of Fun" initiative, group home residents from around the state have gathered for socialization opportunities such as an outdoor hibachi lunch on our campus green, live concerts beneath our Oak Hill tree, and adaptive waterskiing on Lake Zoar!



Will we see you on the green?

Join Oak Hill for our 30th Annual Golf Classic on Monday, October 7th! Sponsorship, raffle, and volunteer opportunities are still available! This annual fundraiser supports our mission to empower individuals with disabilities.

Contact *Stephanie Knightly, Donor Engagement Specialist, at Stephanie.Knightly@OakHillCT.org to get involved today!*

Transform Lives by Leaving a Gift to Oak Hill

A planned gift has the power to make a transformative impact on Oak Hill. This gift is symbolic, reflecting your commitment to Oak Hill's mission, values and vision.

It's a task most of us put off, but creating or updating your will can provide peace of mind for yourself and your loved ones. As an Oak Hill supporter, your donations make a difference right now. *When you include Oak Hill in your estate planning, your gifts could impact students and participants and the Oak Hill community in perpetuity.* Planned gifts made to Oak Hill are invested in our endowment, ensuring valuable stability for the organization and the individuals we serve for years to come.

There's no end to the good you can do!

Here are some simple ways to include Oak Hill in your estate planning:

- **Bequest in Your Will.** Leave Oak Hill a specific asset, dollar amount, percentage of your estate, or balance of your estate after taxes, expenses, and other bequests. Donation is fully deductible for estate tax purposes.
- **Gifts of Life Insurance.** Name Oak Hill as a beneficiary on an existing policy. Donate a policy to Oak Hill, receiving a tax deduction for the cash value of the policy.
- **Naming Oak Hill as a Beneficiary of a Retirement Plan or IRA.** Estate and income taxes can claim up to 70% of the original value of the IRA asset when given to heirs. Oak Hill is not subject to estate or income taxes and receives the full value of the asset. Oak Hill can be one of several beneficiaries.

*Please contact **Lucy McMillan, Chief Development Officer** at lmcmillan@gileadcs.org or 860-301-6634 with questions or to learn more.*

Runways, Red Carpets, and Graduation Caps!

Our Oak Hill School students have sure been busy! From a fashion show, to Prom, to Graduation, our students are having a summer they won't soon forget!

In Memoriam: Treasured Members of the Oak Hill Community

Alfred W. Banas	Anne Dobbins	Jane McMillan
Florence Barile	Nathan Giacomino	Robert Morris
Lucy Battista	David E. Goranson	Joan O'Brien
Nancy Biddleman	David Grondin	J. Lucien Plante
Peter R. Blum	Linda Harriau	Priscilla Prior
Barbara Bocon	Justin B. Holbrook	Bob Quigley
Roland Brown	David Horn	Mark Sargent
Betty Butler	David Horowitz	Charles W. Simons
Josephine Carrier	Robert Howard	Joseph Tartaro
Stanley Cohen	Arlene Kivlehan	Frema Weinstein
Constance W. Cross	Marc Liptak	Lisa Marie Williams
Alan J. Desmarais	Nadeysha Lopez-Medina	Carrie Zahacewski

Oak Hill - 2024

Moments & Memories



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