Abraxas Youth Center Celebrates 20-year Milestone

On September 20th, the Abraxas Youth Center hosted residents, staff, retirees, and volunteers to a luncheon and an afternoon celebrating AYC’s 20th anniversary and success.

The event offered the opportunity to BUILD CAMARADERIE, SHARE PAST STORIES, and to ACKNOWLEDGE and HONOR the work of those who have made the Youth Center what it is today.

Since its opening 20 years ago, the Abraxas Youth Center has increased capacity to serve more youth and offers a wider variety of programs and transitional support activities promoting positive youth development. Its program model recognizes the developmental needs of youth and encourages them during the various phases of their social, physical and intellectual maturation. Today, the Abraxas Youth Center continues to truly exemplify its founding mission of PEOPLE CHANGING PEOPLE.

The theme of the celebration was “I GOT YOUR BACK” and during the opening ceremony Facility Director Mike Grassmyer highlighted the achievements which solidified that theme. Executive Vice President, Jon Swatsburg was also in attendance. As Mr. Swatsburg reflected and shared a story of his time at AYC, he thanked staff and said, “The Abraxas Youth Center has had many changes over our 20 years, but one thing that has not changed is the dedication and loyalty of staff committed to our partners and those entrusted to our care.”
On September 25, 2019 a benefit luncheon was held in Mohican Dorm, in support of Recovery Month. Employees made covered dishes and desserts to donate for the buffet style meal. All employees were invited to attend for a donation of $3.00. Girls from Mohican Dorm helped serve the meal. A wide variety of homemade meats, salads, soups, side dishes and desserts were enjoyed by many on campus. As a result, nearly $200 will be donated to the care of drug enforcement dogs in our local county. Combined with the proceeds of a basket raffle, we will be able to donate approximately $320.00. Thank you to all who participated. We hope to make this a yearly event!

---

**A Little Guidance in Life**

**Abraxas I Guidance Counselors Help Set Students Up for Success**

Do you ever think about the behind the scenes people who are so important that the ship would sink without them? For Abraxas Marienville students those people are Dawn Hornburg and Charlie Scott, our Guidance Counselors.

Charlie has been with Abraxas for over 30 years with 12 of those as a Guidance Counselor and Dawn for 3 years. Together they are a Dynamic Duo. They do quite a number of things to help our students be successful. One of those things is that they develop a transcript for each student that is unique in nature in that it is accumulative. It not only tracks what a client does educationally while here at Abraxas I but anywhere and everywhere he or she has accrued credits. This includes past schools and placements if applicable. With an accumulative transcript, schedules can then be developed to provide classes that are required for the student to graduate. Charlie and Dawn also work with various Transition Specialists, not only in Pennsylvania but also in West Virginia and Washington, D.C., to ensure students are taking classes that are required by their home state or home school for graduation. Per Charlie, “Every transcript is developed with an eye toward transition”.

As a matter of fact, they do such an outstanding job that they will be presenting “Guidance and Child Find Services for 1306 Students (students in placement) at the Neglected and Delinquent Symposium the first week of November in Seven Springs, PA.

When asked what the most important impact of their jobs is, Dawn replied, “It is so important to send students back to their home school with all the credits that will help them graduate, they are in such a better position.” Charlie’s response was, “I like to think that we instill hope in our students. We let them know that there are options and alternatives and they are more than capable of doing things differently when they go home.”

The work that is accomplished in this little office tucked away in the Arlene Lissner High School is invaluable - thank you Dawn and Charlie for a job well done!
Jack Brewer’s American Heroes Visit Abraxas I

Over three days in early October, Abraxas I hosted a unique program organized and run by former National Football League Players. Jack Brewer’s American Heroes Program was an opportunity for our young people to interact with former NFL athletes. These men shared their stories of inspiration to help motivate our clients to get out and stay out of the juvenile justice system. As an added bonus, Jack and his team of NFL athletes attended the Abraxas I/Sheffield High School football co-operative practices for several days to help coach and assist with game day preparations. On Saturday, October 5, they were on the sidelines as the Sheffield Wolverines won their first homecoming game in 10 years!

We’d like to express our gratitude to the athletes who provided our clients with a once in a lifetime opportunity and made this amazing experience possible:

- **Jack Brewer**  
  New York Giants, Arizona Cardinals, Philadelphia Eagles, Minnesota Vikings

- **Thomas Tapeh**  
  Philadelphia Eagles, Minnesota Vikings

- **Anthony Montgomery**  
  Washington Redskins

- **Darius Butler**  
  Indianapolis Colts, New England Patriots

- **Tommie Harris**  
  Chicago Bears

- **Johnathan Casillas**  
  Washington Redskins
Over the past few months, Abraxas I staff and clients have been building a 32 by 40 pavilion as an addition to our campus. This structure will be dedicated to the remembrance of Carol Sprague. Carol passed away last year following a battle with cancer; she was a positive influence and made a difference in so many young people’s lives. We aspire to use the pavilion not only for picnics with staff and clients but to host our annual Family Days as well.

The students assisting in building the pavilion are learning valuable job skills, along with the step-by-step process of constructing a pole building. The project has been a lot of hard work, trial and error, and a lot of fun! This pavilion is a project where students will be able to see the final product of a lot of planning and hard work, a beautiful structure that they helped build.

The project has been in process for the past three months and will hopefully be completed before any more snow falls. Under the tutelage of Tom McCloskey, students are learning skills that will last a lifetime. Abraxas staff and students working together to build this structure has been rewarding for all!

This fall, we celebrated the season by holding a fun-filled “Harvest Festival” for our residents and staff. This event was a group effort by members of our Youth Sanctuary Core Team, Teaching Staff and Core Team. The Youth Core Team sharpened their organizational and leadership skills by planning, organizing, and running outdoor activities such as an obstacle course, pumpkin painting, a donut eating contest, and the making of a harvest trail mix.

The residents also enjoyed academic activities planned by the Teaching Staff which included making an origami pumpkin, writing a scary story, learning the history of the Day of the Dead, and coloring a candy skull. Further festive educational activities included calculating the circumference and surface of a pumpkin and calculating how many pumpkins it would take to fill the Empire State building. The fun continued throughout the day with a cookout, coloring contest, and cookie decorating. This event was a great success and a fun time was had by all!
ABRAXAS I

Enters Float in the 66th Annual Clarion Autumn Leaf Parade

Under the amazing creativity, craftsmanship and guidance of Work Force Team Member, Tom McCloskey, Abraxas entered our very first float in the Clarion Autumn Leaf Parade. The Autumn Leaf Festival is a week-long yearly event in nearby Clarion, PA. The festival is very well attended and this year there were over 100 floats, marching bands and other entries in the parade on October 5, 2019.

Tom created our float based on this year’s theme, An American Autumn. After all, what is more traditionally American than sitting on the front porch of your log cabin surrounded by wildlife under Old Glory with everyone decked out in flannel shirts?

Along with Tom, a special thank you to several of our kids and staff who volunteered to ride or walk beside the float during the parade: Bradley, Connor, Nickolas and Brian along with staff members Jamie Confer, Angie Cratty, Erica Niznik, Kevin Smail, Kevin McCloskey and Jeanne Godlesky.

Although we did not win an award for our float, Tom is already thinking ahead to next year and is more determined than ever!
In October, Southern Peaks Regional treatment Center (SPRTC) hosted motivational speaker Ethan Fisher for a youth impact project spanning two days. Ethan shared his powerful story with the youth at SPRTC through lyrical expression, visual impact, and moving confession. A talented athlete with a promising basketball career, Ethan lost everything due to the choices he made. His emotional story shows others that it is possible to come back from poor choices to not only excel personally, but to create positive change in the lives of others. Ethan’s life path and the way in which he shares it with youth enables others to have hope that life continues to hold opportunities for those who choose to face up to their responsibilities and make choices that support their goals. After hearing Ethan’s speech, one youth wrote, “he actually let me know that I can change and there is hope for me.”

Ethan is a living example to youth that changing choices changes lives. Not only did he come back from a devastating tragedy in his life, he went on to earn two Bachelor’s degrees and a Master’s degree, build his own lucrative business, and continue to meet the goals he set for himself. As a follow up to Ethan’s sharing of his story with the youth at SPRTC, Ethan also taught workshops to each of the classrooms in our on-site school, The Phoenix Academy. Ethan spent time with each class sharing resources to assist youth with future planning and financial stewardship. Students learned multiple ways to plan for retirement and think about their future with hope. One youth wrote, “It actually made me want to change and get my life together.”

Students at SPRTC found this project meaningful and deeply moving. They all felt they could relate to Ethan’s struggles with substance abuse and poor decision making. Some youth had similar stories to share, with whom Ethan spent individual time processing and encouraging them that there is hope in the future by working through their trauma and changing the choices they make with accountability and focused goal planning. The message many youth reiterated was, “It is never too late to turn your life around.”

This project was meaningful and worthwhile to the SPRTC student group and to staff as well. As one staff member put it, “I started out thinking, ‘wow this will be helpful for the kids,’ and then I ended up saying, ‘hey I can relate to this myself!’” Several staff were emotionally moved by Ethan’s speech and shared that the life and financial advice he gave was deepened by the fact that it supported much of the information they had been trying to convey to youth, but with which they had struggled to really make a connection that led to a change in behavior. Hearing this same goal-oriented and choice-making advice from Ethan supported the trauma-informed stance toward future thinking that SPRTC staff works daily to instill in youth. Being presented with information from a different person who has been down a path similar to theirs and who lived to prove that there is hope made all the difference in the world to our youth.
THE Chosen ONE

3RD ANNUAL CHOSEN ONE COMPETITION AT AI
Abrazas I recently held their 3rd annual competition, The Chosen One. All clients who choose to participate by singing, dancing, or playing an instrument endure three rounds of elimination prior to appearing on stage for the final judging.

Special congratulations to Aliyah, our 2019 winner!

As always, guest judges, TJ Griffin and Jose Rios, music industry representatives, assisted with the judging and provided an opportunity to the winner and several others to record their music the following day.

This year, congratulations go to all competitors who had the “guts” and self-assurance to perform before staff and peers - an amazing performance by all! Special congratulations to Aliyah, our 2019 winner! Aliyah has a beautiful voice, writes her own songs and has already done some recording and will soon make her premier performance on a local radio station near her home.

In today’s fast paced society, it is easy to get caught up in the distractions of the world, social media and anything else that may be going on. Taking the time to learn more about yourself and how you contribute to the larger society has become increasingly less frequent of an activity. This fall, Abraxas LDP and Gettysburg College students had an opportunity to collaborate with one another in a course aimed at examining oneself.

On August 26th, six LDP students and twelve college freshman from Gettysburg College introduced themselves to one another in the first of fifteen classes titled, “You. An Experiential Inquiry.” The class was open to college freshmen as an elective course and LDP selected students who were in their junior and senior years of high school who had expressed interest in attending college in the future. Course facilitation was also a collaborative effort between two Gettysburg faculty members and two primary Experiential Learning supervisors from LDP.

Although students from LDP would not earn any college credits, they would be expected to complete the same course work as the Gettysburg students. This included reflective journaling, oral presentations, experiential activities participation and a final exam. The objectives for all students was clearly defined as an opportunity to learn from one another’s life experiences and be able to share those experiences with the communities from which they belong. This course challenged each member with gaining a better understanding of socio-cultural influences, community impact, moral development, critical thinking and social justice.

Through the first half of the course, students and faculty have both reported having an intense experience. The classes are not limited to the classroom, as students have been part of experiential activities that involved team building and problem solving on the challenge course, on hikes through the local forest and on the campus of Gettysburg College. Every Monday, the students meet at the pre-designated location to review course work and journal entries to help them prepare for their final presentations and reflections in December. Due to some youth discharging successfully from LDP, ten different youth have been able to participate in various aspects of the course. This experience has already encouraged many of the LDP youth to look at higher education more seriously than they did prior to admission.

The end of the semester is quickly approaching and LDP and Gettysburg College will review the benefits of the course for all members and the possibility of future courses. One of the most interesting quotes to help students understand the purpose of this joint venture comes from Kahne and Middaugh;“Participation in democracy does not occur instinctively nor does it develop organically. How we think, where we think and with whom we think matters.”

BY: 
Jeanne Godlesky
Abraxas I
Marienville, PA

BY:
Craig Schmidt
Abraxas Leadership Development Program
South Mountain, PA

www.abraxasyfs.com
A Day in the Woods

FULL OF ADVENTURE, TEAM BUILDING AND LEARNING

By Bryan Coy
Open Residential Program
South Mountain, PA

On September 6, 2019 the staff and residents of the Open Residential Program participated in a full day of off-grounds learning. The program partnered with the Pennsylvania Department of Forestry and scheduled several experiential learning activities for the day to include fishing, hiking and visiting a local watershed.

The residents and staff learned about efforts at the state level to improve our ability to conserve natural resources. The boys participated in group discussions about the impact pollution and development have and were able to see the effects first hand. For many of our youth this was their first experience fishing. After some basic education and numerous attempts learning to cast, many of them were able to catch and release several fish. After the educational events we all joined together for a cookout at the local state park. Burgers, hot dogs and dessert was a great way to end a day filled with adventure, team building and learning.

LDP Paint Night

By Lindsey Kell
Leadership Development Program
South Mountain, PA

October is a remarkable month here at Abraxas LDP as every October we strive to raise money to support the fight against breast cancer while also creating awareness and providing education to our youth. This year, we decided to do a Paint Night for the girls in the LDP Female Unit. The girls were able to choose what they wanted to paint representing Breast Cancer Awareness and encouraged to spread their wings with their creative minds.

This is the first time we have done a Paint Night at LDP and it was extremely successful. Our ladies were also given the opportunity to enter their finished paintings into our annual basket auction to help raise money for breast cancer. Our goal was not only to raise money, but to give our ladies an opportunity to participate in an activity that they could further explore when they return home to their community.
OCTOBER IS ALWAYS A BUSY MONTH AT THE HECTOR GARZA CENTER

Each week provided staff and residents with the opportunity to support a good cause and give back to those who are in need of a bright smile.

Residents spent some time gearing up the seniors at the Blanco Villa Nursing Home for their annual Halloween Bingo game. The ladies helped paint faces, set up bingo and help anyone who needed assistance in filling up their board. By the time the ladies were done everyone was all smiles. Later that week the ladies were also able to get their faces painted and go to the Annual BCFS Fall Festival.

HECTOR GARZA CENTER JOINS THE FIGHT AGAINST DRUGS WITH RED RIBBON WEEK

Red Ribbon Week is an alcohol, tobacco, & other drug/violence prevention awareness campaign observed annually in October. It serves as an opportunity to affirm your commitment to a healthy and drug free life. Each day at Hector Garza Center during this week there is a fun theme about committing to being drug free and the week ends with a fun Trick or Treat event.
AYC Cardio Club Runs Local 6k

BY: Jennifer Barnhart
Abraxas Youth Center
South Mountain, PA

The 9th annual Sophie’s Six, a 6K Run/1mile Walk and Fun Run held in memory of Sophia Grace Martin took place on November 23. The event was hosted by Wilson College, Chambersburg, PA. Six residents from the Abraxas Youth Center trained and participated in the local race. One resident placed First in his age division (16 to 19 yrs. old) and another resident placed Second also in the same age group. All six residents along with the six staff members running with them ran across the finish line completing their first major race!

Proceeds from this event will go to the Sophie’s Six Project which provides scholarships to students who are pursuing a career related to counseling.

The six young men who participated are in the Abraxas Youth Center’s Cardio Club, in which they have been training two days a week for the past three months for this race.

Cardio Club will take a break over the winter and the next group will start again in March and end with another local charity run in June. This is the 4th race AYC residents and staff have participated in.