

abilis Advances

The Newsletter of Abilis Inc. | FALL 2019



Michelle Yoon

Abilis Teams Up with Greenwich Hospital to Help Young Adults Transition Out of High School and into the Workforce

In September, nine young adults with disabilities began internships at Greenwich Hospital through Project SEARCH, a high school transition program designed to secure competitive employment for people with disabilities. The goal of the nine-month program, a partnership between Abilis and Greenwich Hospital, is to help young adults 18 to 30 years old become more independent, and obtain meaningful jobs.

"We look forward to our new partnership, which will offer increased opportunities for young adults to achieve their goals and fulfill their potential," said Amy Montimurro, President and CEO of Abilis.

It couldn't have come at a better time for a population that struggles to find work locally and nationwide. In fact, only four in ten adults with disabilities are employed. Once a student graduates high school, and ages out of the school district at 21, options for employment are limited.

Project SEARCH was founded in 1996 at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center and has since expanded to more than 600 host sites around the world. Greenwich Hospital is one of five Project SEARCH host sites in Connecticut.

"It's not just 'go to a job and get support,'" said Stacey Green, Volunteer Services Director at Greenwich Hospital. "We are working on skills and refining those skills to make sure they are successful."

Partnering with Project SEARCH allows Abilis to provide real-life work experience, extensive hands-on job training and classroom instruction for individuals with disabilities. What differentiates Abilis' program is that we will be able to offer interns better training opportunities that will help them develop transferable skills, according to Luis Velazquez, Abilis' Senior Director of Day Services. "We are not necessarily training people to work in a hospital," said Velazquez. "We are building skills for any setting."

Students will attend the program at Greenwich Hospital for a full school year, and will graduate in May. Throughout the year interns will receive employment skills training, combined with several internship experiences, focused on developing competitive, marketable skills in their targeted fields. "This is pretty intense—it's nine months of

total immersion in the workplace," said Velazquez. Interns begin their day in a classroom at Greenwich Hospital, where they receive instruction in everything from resume building to workplace etiquette. Then they move to their internships, where they are taught distinct skills. At the end of the day, the interns return to the classroom to reflect on their day, discuss challenges and evaluate their progress.

Michelle Yoon, 21, is one of the Project SEARCH interns. Yoon, who lives at home with her mother and father in Greenwich, is picked up and driven to Greenwich Hospital each morning from Monday through Friday. After the classroom instruction, she is transported to her current placement, working at Greenwich Hospital's Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Center.

Yoon's supervisor, Jaclyn Falk, hands her a typewritten sheet titled "Michelle's Daily Tasks." The list includes a dozen or so tasks such as checking rooms after each use, cleaning exercise equipment in the gym, filling treatment rooms with linens, and cleaning exercise mats after patients use them.

According to Falk, the internship has taught Yoon how to develop a routine and become organized. "I like that she has to figure out what to do next which helps her become more independent," she said. "I think it's a great program, she's learning a lot and I hope that in the future she can go out and get a job and gain skills here to do that."

On the first day, Yoon was hesitant, but Abilis and Greenwich staff helped her get settled in, and she says that she is definitely more self-sufficient now. "It's like when your mother drops you off at kindergarten," she said. "I feel like it really helped a lot."

Along the way, Yoon and the other interns are also increasing their independence, self-confidence and self-esteem.

"It's been amazing to see how they've developed and grown in the few weeks they've been here," said Montimurro. "It's been a great experience for everyone involved."

CONNECT WITH ABILIS [f facebook.com/AbilisInc](https://www.facebook.com/AbilisInc) [@ instagram.com/Abilis_Us](https://www.instagram.com/Abilis_Us)

50 Glenville Street, Greenwich, CT 06831 · www.abilis.us · (203) 531-1880



Advancing abilities for people with special needs since 1951

Therapeutic Services

1150 Summer Street, Stamford, CT
(203) 324-1880 x300

Life Services/Headquarters

50 Glenville Street, Greenwich, CT
(203) 531-1880

www.abilis.us

Board of Directors

Officers

Alonso Martinez, *Chairperson*
Jerry Cincotta, *First Vice Chairperson*
Martin Clarke, *First Vice Chairperson*
Ulrika Drinkall, *Secretary*
Michael Beloff, *Treasurer*
Amy Montimurro, *President/ CEO*

Directors

Kathy Malitz Altamore
Vincent Annunziata
Theo Brown
Edith Chen
Mitchell Cohen
Aimee Comis
Dick Franck
Richard Goldsmith
David Gortz
Debbie Hilibrand
Catherine Polisi Jones
Anne Kampmann
Howard Levy
Margot Michalski
Jenny Patchen
Cesar Rabellino
Ellie Ritch
Andrew Schirmer
James Shapiro
Lindy Urso
Marco Viola
Lisa Wise

Abilis Advances Editor:
Erica Klair, *Director of Marketing*

A Letter from Our CEO

Dear Family and Friends,

This past year has been an exciting time with great progress as the seeds we have planted have begun to grow. As I complete my first full year as the CEO of Abilis, I am so thankful for our amazing staff, board of directors, volunteers, and our engaging community. We have expanded our services and developed new initiatives to achieve our goal of providing quality supports and offering resources that meet the needs of each individual and their families. We have celebrated, honored and made new friends, developed partnerships, and together we are opening doors and creating opportunities for individuals to achieve success.



Our skilled Therapeutic Services team continues to provide children and their families with all the support they need to make progress during the critical formative years. We are by their side every step of the way, increasing their confidence, capacity, and progress.

Thanks to our committed funders, Project SEARCH successfully launched in September. This new partnership with Greenwich Hospital is providing an internship program for young adults to provide personal and social development with transferable work skills in a supportive and inclusive environment. At Abilis, we believe nothing should ever stand in the way of finding the job or life of your dreams. We are committed to helping individuals build the skills they need to achieve their personal goals.

Our LEAP program provides young adults with a seamless transition from high school, ensuring skill building, community access, and job readiness. We are already at work planning for new grads in 2020!

Our Day Support program has expanded, offering various options for a meaningful day for adults through the senior years, and we're seeing an increase in the number of people competitively employed with the help of our Individual Life Plan, and Ticket to Work program, which launched earlier this year.

Thanks to Planned Giving and donors like you, we were able to purchase two new homes that are now in the renovation process which will meet the needs of the aging population and those who need an accessible home.

Our new summer internship program and university partnerships provided value to our students and the people we support. This mutually beneficial situation has provided Abilis with a fresh perspective and a pipeline to a dedicated and enthusiastic workforce in the future.

Enjoy this newsletter, which highlights some of our services, new partnerships and friends. Learn about some of the new initiatives happening at Abilis and how you can become more involved in changing lives. Once again, thank you for your contributions throughout the year, which ensured successful outcomes for our community.

With Best Regards,

Amy Montimurro
President/CEO

Our Mission

Abilis is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that provides services and supports for over 700 individuals with special needs and their families from birth through the life span. Abilis has been a leader in serving the special needs community in lower Fairfield County for 68 years and has a long-standing reputation for high quality care.

Abilis Art Show at the First Bank of Greenwich



Diego Rabellino and Janet Blake

"SOLD, someone bought my art work!" said Janet Blake, one of the artists whose work was featured at an exhibit on July 10 at the First Bank of Greenwich.

The Cos Cob bank hosts art shows several times a year, but this exhibition was unique in that the paintings, photographs and digital art were created by 14 individuals with special needs from the Abilis community.

At 26, this was not only Blake's first art exhibit, but it was her first time using a camera. "It's really exciting because it feels like I did a good job doing something," said Blake, who had two pieces exhibited in the show. She used an iPad to take the photographs, one of a water scene in the Montgomery Pinetum titled "By the Sea," and the other was a close-up of a dragonfly titled "Seagull."

When she arrived at Abilis in February 2017, Blake was shy, a little withdrawn and anxious, recalled Jen O'Gorman, Abilis Director of Clinical Services and Admissions, who has known Janet since the day she arrived at Abilis. "It was very hard for her to trust people because she'd been bounced around so much," she said.

Two years later, Blake, who participates in our day program activities and lives in an Abilis residence in Greenwich, is more social and outgoing, she has formed relationships and she's more independent. She has now discovered a newfound talent and ability thanks to Abilis.

"It's something she really enjoys doing and the recognition helps with her self-esteem," said O'Gorman. "She's super proud of it and it's kind of therapeutic too."

After being told that she "had a good eye," Blake, who also likes to paint, was encouraged to take more photos and get more exposure. That's when the First Bank of Greenwich, an Abilis community partner, stepped in and offered to showcase the skills and abilities of the Abilis community members. During the art show, the bank was filled with the artists, patrons and members of the Abilis community, all eager to view and purchase the 27 original paintings, digital art and photographs created by adults who are supported by Abilis and participate in Abilis' programs.

"I love all of the pieces," said Frank Gaudio, President and CEO of the First Bank of Greenwich. "Abilis is very near and dear to me and what they do is very special. In life you find a few things you are passionate about and this is one."

The art show was festive, with the Garden Catering food truck, drinks, and music performed by Abilis client Misa Shimada on the piano. In addition to the art exhibit, Abilis Gardens & Gifts ran a popup shop at the bank where guests could purchase handcrafted products, soaps and candles.

All of the artwork being displayed was available for purchase and several pieces sold quickly.

Abilis is so thankful for their friendship with the First Bank of Greenwich. It is a true community bank committed to leading local businesses and residents, and lending a hand to help organizations like Abilis.



Misa Shimada and Martha Eustis



Frank Gaudio, President and CEO of the First Bank of Greenwich and Amy Montimurro, Abilis CEO

Congratulations to Our Annual Meeting Award Recipients!

The Abilis Choir kicked off this year's Annual Meeting on Wednesday, April 3 with a performance of "That's What Friends Are For." Afterward, Alonso Martinez, Chairperson of Abilis Board of Directors, welcomed new members of the Board, Jenny Patchen, Lindy Urso and James Shapiro. He also acknowledged retiring board member Nancy Fogwell.

Another special part of the annual gathering, held at First Presbyterian Church in Greenwich, was the presentation of staff, participant, and community partner awards. This year, the awards presentation began with a tribute to [David Gortz](#), recipient of the **Abilis 2019 Lifetime Service Award**, recognizing his longstanding commitment to Abilis. Gortz, of Wilton, Connecticut, was instrumental in helping establish Abilis in the community (see story on page 7).

Next up, the **Rookie of the Year Award** went to [Stanley Valentine](#), a life coach who currently works with our senior clients. Stanley, who started working at Abilis two years ago, was recognized for his creativity and commitment to those we support. He represents the best of Abilis.

Senior Director of Day Supports Luis Velazquez presented [Peter Franck](#) with the **Employee of the Year Award**. Peter is a veteran of Abilis' Competitive Employment Program who commemorated his 30th work anniversary with the Greenwich Library in 2018.

The Greenwich Council of the Boy Scouts of America/Camp Seton was honored as the **Abilis Employer of the Year**, an award also presented by Luis. Camp Seton has employed 16 Abilis program participants since 2009.

[Luis Velazquez](#) remained onstage to receive an award, earning a spot on **Abilis' Wall of Fame** – photographs of those who have made significant contributions to the organization. Luis began his employment with Abilis 19 years ago in our Family Resources Department, and has worked with children, and young adults through seniors to help in all areas of need for individuals and their families.

[The Boys and Girls Club of Greenwich](#) received the award for **Outstanding Community Partner**. The award was presented by Kim Trudden, Director of Case management. Accepting the award were Bobby Walker, Jr., CEO, Ryan Accurso and Camryn Ferrara.

[Virginia Blum](#) received the **Volunteer of the Year Award**. Blum joined Abilis as our volunteer coordinator in 2017, more than a dozen years after her daughter received services through our Birth-to-Three program. Virginia has brought in more than 300 new Friends of Abilis, corporate sponsors, and rejuvenated our Youth Board.

Four students received the **Peter Bloomer Citizenship Award** for demonstrating sensitivity toward people with disabilities through leadership, involvement, and participation in activities that benefit citizens with disabilities: [Avery Imp](#), an 8th grader from Western Middle School, in Greenwich, and Greenwich High School Seniors [Katie Baumgarten](#), [Dylan Dreher](#) and [Sydney Noble](#), who were presented with certificates and cash awards for their exemplary volunteer service. Abilis was pleased to honor these teenagers for their volunteer work as inclusion club leaders at their schools.

The **Team of the Year Award** went to [Admissions and Clinical Services](#), a group of three talented women credited with a record 32 new admissions at Abilis this year. Award participants included Jennifer O'Gorman, Director of Admissions and Clinical Services, Chelsea Soars, Behavioral Analyst, and Kim Trudden, who was recently promoted to our Director of Case Management.

Two employees were selected by their peers to receive the **Spirit Award** this year: [Jean Wang](#) and [Cesar Ruiz](#). They were honored for their enthusiasm, strong work ethic and respect for the people we support.

The 2019 Abilis Award Recipients



Peter Bloomer Citizenship Award
Avery Imp



Peter Bloomer Citizenship Award Dylan Dreher
pictured with Virginia Blum and Amy Montimurro



Peter Bloomer Citizenship Award
Katie Baumgarten



Peter Bloomer Citizenship Award
Sydney Noble pictured with Virginia Blum
and Amy Montimurro



Employee Appreciation Award Luis Velazquez
pictured with Joey Mancuso and Amy Montimurro



Outstanding Community Partner, Boys and Girls Club of Greenwich: Ryan Accurso, Camryn Ferrara and Bobby Walker, Jr., CEO
pictured with Kim Trudden and Amy Montimurro

The 2019 Abilis Award Recipients



Rookie of the Year Stanley Valentine
pictured with Luis Velazquez, Kim
Trudden and Amy Montimurro



Spirit Award Cesar Ruiz pictured
with Pat Ferris



Spirit Award Jean Wang



Volunteer of the Year
Virginia Blum
pictured with
Amy Montimurro



Employee of the Year
Peter Franck



Team of the Year-Clinical Services
Kim Trudden, Jen O'Gorman and Chelsea Soars
pictured with Amy Montimurro

**Our 2020 Annual Meeting
is scheduled for
April 1st at 6:30 p.m. at
First Presbyterian Church
in Greenwich, CT.**

Abilis will be honoring Greenwich Hospital for their partnership launching Project SEARCH, which helps individuals develop work skills, and Fred Astaire Dance Studios of Greenwich for their commitment to raising awareness and critical funds for new initiatives.



David Gortz of Wilton Honored with Abilis Lifetime Service Award



David Gortz with his family, Linda, Katie, Scott and Kelly

On April 5, David Gortz was presented with the 2019 Lifetime Service Award at the Abilis Annual Meeting, in recognition of 30 years of service.

Gortz became involved with Abilis in 1989 when his 19-year-old son Scott moved into an Abilis (known as ARC) group home in Greenwich. At the time, Gortz served on the board of a different non-profit serving people with special needs. "I switched my allegiance to Abilis after that," he said.

Gortz became a champion for Scott and other children with special needs. At the same time, he and other Abilis parents became concerned that low-income and minority families weren't necessarily getting the same services. "We felt we could advocate for our son, and we could also help others who didn't have the same access, and this was something that means a lot to my wife Linda and me," he recalled. "That's what started me along this path."

That path has turned into a long and winding road.

As soon as Scott was settled in the group home, Gortz joined Abilis' Board of Directors. He has served on the Board for 28 of the last 30 years (he took a two-year hiatus), and he has twice rotated through the officer posts to become Board Chair.

Gortz and his family are deeply indebted to the Abilis staff for helping Scott develop life and work skills beyond their most optimistic dreams. He is also grateful because Abilis provided Scott with a great life – friends, a home and wonderful staff who takes care of him. Scott, 49, still lives in an Abilis home, in the Glenbrook section of Stamford.

Gortz told the audience gathered at Abilis' Annual Meeting that his time with Abilis was his way of making the world a little better. "I love Abilis because it allowed me to use my time, talents and treasure to help the people we serve," said Gortz, who has lived in Wilton for 40 years. "Abilis is really a terrific organization because people get together to voluntarily help those less fortunate – how can you think of a better thing to do?"

Gortz identified several ways the organization has changed over time – all for the better. First, there are a lot more programs reaching more people. He pointed out that Abilis ran about six residences in 1989, and now there are 40. "That requires a lot more excellent talent to run an organization with so many employees and moving parts – like the 50 minivans operated by Abilis," he said. "It's much, much bigger and much more important to the people we serve and it serves so many more people."

Gortz always has had a positive outlook, said Abilis CEO and President Amy Montimurro. "He never says no, and he demonstrates the infectious enthusiasm to involve others," she said. "David has always been determined to build Abilis to be the best organization and has always volunteered to help in any way he could. He'd give you the shirt off his back and then ask if you needed his belt, too."

LEAPing into a New Life and a New Home



Rebecca Yormark and Shelley Caruso

Rebecca Yormark grew up in Westport, where she lived with her parents, two older brothers and her beloved Golden Retriever, Hogan.

After Rebecca spent three years at the Riverview School on Cape Cod, her parents faced the dilemma shared by many families with young adults with special needs. Where can my child go after she reaches 21 and ages out of the school district? How can she get on a path toward independent living and employment? What programs and services are available to her as a young adult? Is my child prepared to live independently, find a job, and navigate the community?

Last year, Rebecca and her mother Diane learned the answers to some of these questions at an open house hosted by Rebecca's school, where they found out about housing options and activities offered by Abilis. Rebecca knew Abilis was the place for her.

"My dream was to be near my family," she recalled. "It was at the top of my list because it's closer to home, my family, the train station, and a lot of stores." In June, Abilis helped transition Rebecca from Riverview to a home in downtown Greenwich, where she lives with a roommate. Rebecca, 22, is one of roughly 70 young adults who is part of Abilis' LEAP program, which is designed to help provide students with a seamless transition from high school to adulthood. The goal of the program is to help young adults become more independent, obtain meaningful jobs, and participate in community activities.

LEAP was previously known as Life Skills, but it's been rebranded and renamed LEAP (Life Skills, Employment, Advocacy, and Partnership) to more accurately reflect its mission.

"We renamed it because Life Skills was just one little part of what we do on a regular basis," said Shelley Caruso, Director of LEAP. "It's almost like a college for the next step in life, which will hopefully be employment for the majority of people in the program."

Abilis offers multiple LEAP transition programs throughout Fairfield County, in Greenwich, Stamford, Westport, Wilton and Ridgefield. LEAP participants learn what Caruso refers to as "functional" skills like how to handle money, use a computer, and social skills. "Everything is geared toward learning how to navigate and utilize your community with your new Abilis friends," she explained. For example, they eat lunch at a restaurant every Friday, and they need to figure out how to order, how much money is in their pocket, what to spend, what they can pay for and how to appropriately socialize and interact with friends."

While the First Presbyterian Church in Greenwich serves as home base for the Greenwich site, the participants spend the majority of their time in the community. For example, every week Rebecca and other LEAP participants volunteer at the Food Bank of Lower Fairfield County in Stamford, helping to stock shelves. Two of Rebecca's favorite things to do are serve lunch at the "60s and over club" at St John's Episcopal church in Stamford and do grocery shopping for seniors.

Rebecca is a welcome addition to the Abilis family. "She's so friendly, compassionate and helpful," said Caruso. "She takes it on to help other people and she's good with her peers."

In fact, Rebecca's mom Diane said she hasn't missed a beat since arriving at Abilis. "She has visited the Bronx Zoo, played miniature golf, gone to the movies with friends and enjoys a weekly Zumba class," she said.

In October, Rebecca was also Abilis' Walk/Run ambassador at Tod's Point. "I love Greenwich - this is my favorite place," she said. "I love it here, and I love being independent and getting up on my own, cooking on my own and visiting my family on my own."



For more information about LEAP, please contact Shelley Magee-Caruso, Director of LEAP at 203-561-3520 email: caruso@abilis.us www.abilis.us

Record-breaking Turnout for the 14th Annual Walk/Run for Abilis

On Sunday, October 20, more than 800 walkers, runners and supporters came together at Tod's Point in Old Greenwich for the annual Walk/Run for Abilis. The event, now in its 14th year, raised a record-breaking \$160,000 and was a day packed with excitement, community building and awareness.

New to the Walk/Run for Abilis was a change in the course. Previously a three-mile run, this year the course was certified as a 5K, drawing many new participants. Also new was an option to "virtually" run the race, and we had some "runners" from as far away as England!

While many of the elements of the Walk/Run for Abilis were familiar—including the return of the popular Carnival for a Cause, brought to Abilis by Daniella Jones, President of the Abilis Youth Board and her family—there was new excitement with our celebrity emcee Billy Blanks, Jr. who kicked off the walk.

This year's Walk/Run for Abilis Ambassador was Rebecca Yormark, 22, a native of Westport, Connecticut, who helped lead the Walk. Rebecca currently attends Abilis' young adult LEAP transition program in Greenwich. Rebecca and her family were honored to be part of such a wonderful community event.

"This year's Walk/Run for Abilis was a tremendous success," said Amy Montimurro, President and CEO of Abilis. "This annual event celebrates inclusion and diversity and is created for people of all ages and abilities. We love that it brings together Abilis families, local business partners, and community members from throughout Fairfield County to build awareness and raise critical funds for Abilis programs. It is such a special day in support of the local special needs community we serve."

As always, events of this magnitude are due in large part to devoted event co-chairs. A special thanks to Abilis Board members Vinnie Annunziata, Dick Franck, Catherine Polisi Jones and Jenny Patchen, whose dedication and leadership helped ensure that no detail was overlooked.

We would also like to thank members of our Board of Directors, Abilis Youth Board, community volunteers and Abilis staff who all helped make the Walk/Run for Abilis a success. We are also grateful to our many event sponsors including: Holland & Knight, Fran and Mitch Cohen, Berkshire Hathaway: Nancy Fogwell and Cesar Rabellino, Toyota of Greenwich, J. Dwyer Builders, Carnival for a Cause and Moffly Media.

Please keep an eye out for details about our 2020 Walk/Run, a 15th anniversary celebration!



Billy Blanks, Jr. warming up the walk crowd



Lisa LaRusso



5k Runners

Abilis Launches New Federally Funded Employment Program



PJ Vecchiolla

On April 1, Abilis became an approved service provider for a free federal program called Ticket to Work sponsored by the Social Security Administration. The goal of the program is to help anyone who receives Social Security disability benefits feel good about themselves, find employment that may lead to a career and become self-sufficient. Adults 18 through 64 who receive Social Security disability benefits can take advantage of the program, which is open to people who live in Fairfield County, CT.

"Ticket to Work was designed to help people get off of Social Security and make their benefits more fruitful when they retire," said Kim Trudden, Director of Employment Case Management. However, the Ticket to Work program allows participants to continue to collect Social Security benefits while developing work experience through approved service providers like Abilis. The program offers access to employment to more people with disabilities than ever, according to Trudden.

"Ticket to Work has a broader category of individuals you can assist compared to other competitive employment programs, which assist only individuals with specific mental or physical disabilities," she explained. For example, Ticket to Work allows Abilis to work with veterans or someone who's suffered a work injury.

In the first six months, nearly 20 Abilis clients have begun the intake process or have been placed in the Ticket to Work program.

"The word is getting and out and we are getting more and more interest," said Trudden.

In April 2019, PJ Vecchiolla began his job at Garden Catering, a placement through Ticket to Work. Trudden picks him up at his parents' Greenwich home at 8:00 a.m., and drives him to work three days a week, and his mother drives him the other two days. PJ, who's 38, spends the morning doing kitchen prep, wiping down counters, cleaning the kitchen area, and stocking supplies before the daily lunch rush at the restaurant. The best part of the job? "I work with great people," said PJ.

PJ's supervisor at Garden Catering, Monika Rodriguez, who employs several Abilis clients, said the feeling is mutual. "I come to them because I know that they are willing to work (and) they want to work," she told the Greenwich Time in July. "They want to be just like everybody else, and they don't want us to look at them any differently – and I don't. I need employees. They need jobs. I can count on them, I have no issues, and they're flexible." Abilis is truly grateful for employers like Garden Catering.

PJ has previous work experience, including a stint at the Sundown Saloon in Greenwich, and he also works in the fitness center at the Greenwich YWCA; in the summer months, he works at the Stanwich Club.

Before individuals are matched with an employer, we create an individual work plan to find a job that matches interests and skills. "It lists their short- and long-term goals for employment, what their dream jobs are and what work they would be willing to do, and then they try make a match," explained Trudden.

This program, and this job, along with his other work secured through Abilis, has given PJ an opportunity many adults with disabilities don't receive – to secure paid employment (employers are required to pay Ticket to Work participants minimum wage) and all the perks, including a boost in self-esteem.

For more information about Ticket to Work, please contact [Kim Trudden, Director of Employment Case Management at 203.531.1880 x.151 or email: trudden@abilis.us.](mailto:trudden@abilis.us)

Holiday Help for Parents of Children with Sensory Processing Disorders

For families of children with sensory processing disorders, the holiday season can spell chaos, from sitting on Santa's lap to eating frightening new food and the excitement of gifts, gifts, and more gifts! Below, Gina Gasparrini, the new Assistant Director of Abilis' Therapy Center, shares some strategies for how to survive the holiday madness, and make this hectic time less overwhelming for kids of all ages and more joyful for parents and the rest of the family:

Plan ahead. "Have a discussion beforehand about what to expect if you're going to a party or hosting a gathering at your house, and talk about what the routine will be for the day," advises Gasparrini. In addition, have "calm down" strategies in place to help children cope and regulate. For example, bring music they can listen to or a stuffed animal – whatever is appropriate for their age.

Create a quiet space for your child away from the crowd. Talk to friends or family members who are hosting a party beforehand to see if your child can go into another quieter room or upstairs to a bedroom if it's age-appropriate. "It's important to have a plan in place to know where they can go that will feel safe for them," said Gasparrini.

Pack a lunch bag. A lot of kids with sensory issues struggle around eating. If you have a picky eater, bring a preferred food for them with you or find out what is being served in advance, so if your child doesn't like the menu, he or she can eat before you leave home.

Don't be fashionably late. "It's best to be the first one there rather than walking into a house full of people," said Gasparrini. "That way, you can set your child up for success."

Carve out time for gifts. A lot of kids with sensory needs have trouble understanding social cues, but if you do a social story, saying, "You're going to take your turn, say thank you, and share," it can help. "You might want to ask whoever is giving the gift to do it when you are leaving, so your child doesn't have a meltdown if they can't open the toy right then," said Gasparrini. "You might also give relatives ideas what to give that might be appropriate, like no loud toys."

Stick to your routine. "Trying to keep your regular routine, for example, keeping meals and bedtimes consistent, is really important," said Gasparrini. "You are setting them up for success across the break and when school starts again." Also, dress children in comfortable clothing that they are used to and give them choices about their outfits. Also, have them try on clothes beforehand, so you can decide together which outfit they are going to wear.

Skip the scene at the local mall. "A lot of our kids can't handle the mall pictures – the line is too long and it's too much," said Gasparrini. Instead, find a mall where they offer "sensory Santa" hours, where it's calmer and quieter.

If you'd like to help make the season brighter for your family, Abilis has a number of occupational therapists who specialize in pediatrics, who are available to do consultations with parents at the Stamford Therapy Center or in their home. "We can help families get through the holidays," said Gasparrini.

For more information about our [Therapy Center](#) and [Early Intervention/Birth to Three Services](#), please contact Karen Feder, Director of Therapeutic Services at Feder@abilis.us



*Georgyann
Hennig and
Gina Gasparrini*

We are pleased to announce that **Georgyann Hennig** has accepted the position of Assistant Director, Birth to Three and assumed her responsibilities on October 21, 2019.

Georgyann has been with us for more than four years and currently holds the position of Developmental Therapist, and is an Early Childhood Special Education teacher. She came to us with a wealth of early childhood experience both in the classroom and in the community/home environment. She demonstrates a high level of professionalism and dedication to both her families and their children, has a wonderful work ethic, and is a great team player. She will bring her knowledge, team spirit, and strong leadership skills to this new position.

We are equally pleased to announce that **Gina Gasparrini** has accepted the position of Assistant Director of the Abilis Therapy Center and assumed her responsibilities on December 2nd. Gina has been with us for two years and currently holds the position of Occupational Therapist. She has also been trained to provide skilled support to children and their families with feeding concerns. Gina is a team player who is always willing to share her knowledge and expertise with staff, and she has brought a wealth of knowledge and a high level of skill and professionalism to her position. She is highly organized and works very efficiently. She will bring her strong clinical and leadership skills to this new position as well.

Please join us in wishing them success in their new positions in Therapeutic Services!

Five Interns, Eight Weeks, and a Lifetime of Memories

Abilis welcomed five interns this summer, our largest group ever:

Isabel Martinez, who worked in Marketing, is from Bogotá, Colombia, and grew up in Greenwich. She is majoring in Marketing and Communications Design with a minor in Portuguese at Washington University in St. Louis and will graduate in 2021.

Nicole Coarse of Trumbull, who worked in Clinical Services, is earning her Master's degree in Social Work from Sacred Heart University.

Brittany Rosato, a Greenwich native, worked in Health Services. She is studying Allied Health with a concentration in Medical Sciences at the University of Tampa and will graduate in 2020.

Molly Spaeth, of Greenwich, worked in Residential Services at Abilis headquarters. Her current major is Criminology, and she will graduate from Penn State in 2022.

Melissa Fraioli was born and raised in Greenwich and worked in Abilis' LEAP Program. She will graduate in May from the University of Delaware with a Neuroscience major with a Disabilities Studies minor.



Isabel Martinez



Nicole Coarse and Joey Mancuso



*Barbara Constandaki and
Brittany Rosato*



*Molly Spaeth, Oren Gershberg and
Debbie Misciango*



Tara Wighton, Melissa Fraioli, Danielle Annunziata and Danny Clarke

For more information about internship opportunities, please contact Jennifer Bortot, Executive Coordinator at bortot@abilis.us.

Meet Abilis' Summer Interns

Here, the interns answer questions about their time with Abilis:

Why did you choose Abilis?

Nicole: I have always been drawn to helping individuals with special needs. When I got the interview at Abilis, I knew that it would be the perfect place to start my clinical journey. Helping individuals who cannot advocate for themselves is so rewarding and something that I hope to do throughout my social work career.

Isabel: I chose Abilis because it has been a big part of my life ever since my family and I moved to Greenwich in 2004. Abilis has provided a tremendous amount of support and guidance to my sister, Alejandra. I have seen firsthand how Abilis has changed her life, giving her a place of her own and helping her become her best self. Additionally, they have helped my family feel that we are not alone in our efforts to improve Alejandra's quality of life. I wanted to use my skills to become a part of the organization that has done so much for my sister and for my family.

What did you take away from your internship this summer? Tell us about your experience.

Melissa: One takeaway I got from my experience at Abilis would definitely be the new friendships I have made. I can now go around town and almost always run into a familiar (and friendly!) face. I had the best experience interning for LEAP, and I cannot wait to maintain the relationships I have gained through this experience. I think the organization, the staff, and the clients are all amazing. I love what the organization does, and I love helping people!

Molly: From this experience, I have learned so much about myself and the world. I really saw myself grow tremendously over the short time I have worked at Abilis. I love all of my residents so much, and they have all touched me in their own way. Every day I hoped to help make their lives a little bit better if I could because they made my life better. I can't wait to come home from school and visit them!

Has your summer internship helped you with your major?

Melissa: This internship has definitely helped with my major and my minor because I study neurological disorders and people with them. This internship gave me a more personal insight into the things I study, and reminded me why I love to study them!

Nicole: This internship really opened my eyes to the clinical and case management side of social work. It helped me see and learn what

a social worker does in a non-profit. Getting out of the classroom experience is something I was looking forward to throughout my program and I think Abilis was really the perfect placement for me.

Isabel: Working here has really helped me with my major in that it gave me an opportunity to apply the concepts I have learned in school to the real world. I was allowed to design many things while working here, each design teaching me a new skill. Working with Erica Klair also gave me the opportunity to learn more about marketing. She taught me how to get others to care about something enough to actually do something about it. It was truly wonderful to be able to use my skills to support a cause that is so near and dear to my heart.

Molly: Yes, now I am thinking about changing my major into something in this field.

Would you come back and work for us again?

Brittany: I would absolutely come back! My time here at Abilis has been unforgettable, and is an experience I will hold on to for the rest of my life.

Nicole: I would certainly come back and work for Abilis. The community is a wonderful group of individuals and it is a real sense of family. The clients are so loved by the staff and I really think that shows a lot about the agency as a whole.

Molly: Yes, definitely! I loved all my residents and coworkers. It was such an amazing experience, so I hope there is room for me somewhere next summer and many times after that!

What was your favorite memory working for Abilis and why?

Nicole: My favorite memory working here was building close relationships with the clients. Whether it was counseling them, seeing them around the building, working on projects with them or attending events, they were always in good spirits and seemed to be genuinely happy. My favorite memory this summer was attending the Abilis Choir practices and seeing the clients practice for their performances. They were always so happy to be singing and hanging out with all of their friends, outside of their day program or employment.

Brittany: One of my best memories at Abilis was taking Barbara Constandaki, who is part of our seniors' program back and forth from her appointments. She is one of the sweetest, kindest people I have met, and she put a smile on my face every day. It was amazing to take a different individual out each day and truly get to talk to them, see who they are and gain a special connection to each and every one of them.

Thank you to our Friends of Abilis

We have so many "Friends of Abilis" who graciously have given us their time in volunteering to beautify our Abilis properties. It takes a village and we are so appreciative of our Board members Marty Clarke, Mitch Cohen and James Shapiro for reaching out to your respective workplace organizations to coordinate and recruit the army of volunteers from Holland & Knight, Ernst & Young and GE Capital to work at our five properties in Greenwich and Stamford. Thank you!



Holland & Knight



Ernst & Young (EY)



GE Capital



Golf Scramble Raises \$20,000 for Abilis' New Sound Therapy Program

One hundred golfers teed up at the Griffith E. Harris Golf Course in Greenwich on Wednesday, June 12, for Abilis' inaugural "Golf Scramble." The best-ball, shotgun-start scramble included a Continental breakfast, lunch, open bar, and prizes.

The Golf Scramble raised more than \$20,000 for Abilis' new Sound Therapy program. Sound therapy is the use of overtone-emitting instruments – such as gongs, singing bowls, tuning forks, and drums – to bring the body and mind into greater balance and overall well-being and restore the body's natural rhythms. This non-funded program provides a calming environment for individuals with special needs to focus on the senses utilizing calming sounds, specialized scents, and vibrations. Sound therapy includes relaxation techniques to help support physical and emotional health and well-being by reducing stress and increasing positive communications. After each session program participants have reported more clarity, calmness, and regulated emotions.

The event was chaired by Pio Bruzzese of Stamford, whose 22 year-old son Vincent has been involved with Abilis for over a year. Bruzzese has organized golf fundraisers for Vincent's school and the Darien YMCA, where Vincent attended an afterschool program. "He'll be at Abilis forever," said Bruzzese. That's why he plans to organize the Golf Scramble every year – as long as Abilis is interested. "My customers and friends really love it, and they wanted me to keep doing it," said Bruzzese, who works at Nemo Tile in New York. "They do it for Vincent, and wherever Vincent goes, they are going to go."

Abilis began its Sound Therapy program in 2018 with program participants in one-hour group and one-on-one therapeutic sessions. Those who participated had a broad spectrum of physical, emotional, mental and developmental diagnoses, including autism.

"Within the first few weeks of providing the therapy, we saw highly positive effects on the physical, mental and emotional well-being of the program participants," said instructor and Abilis board member Catherine Polisi Jones. These include: a dramatic decrease in aggressive and self-harming behavior, increased verbal communication and ability to convey emotions, positive changes in physical demeanor, increased expression of joy, greater eye contact, and far less anger.

According to Bruzzese, Vincent loves the two-hour weekly sessions every Wednesday. "It's unbelievable how he responds to it – you can see that he's calmer and in a better overall mood," he said. "I attended twice and I couldn't believe it – it really helps a lot of these kids."

Abilis would like to thank the Bruzzese family, the Griffith E. Harris Golf Course, our sponsors, golfers and guests for a terrific day of golf and camaraderie.

For information on next year's Golf Scramble scheduled for June 2020, please contact Jennifer Flatow at 203-531-1880 x161.



Brian Gaffney, Howard Levy, James Glassman, Sheldon Glassman



Dennis Truglia, Rick Romanelo, Tony Truglia, John Santorella



Pio, Vincent and Margaux Bruzzese



Scott Robinson, Bobby Cruz, Joseph Rall, Chris McLowell

Spring for Abilis Gala Raises More Than \$350,000



1. Gala Co-chairs Bibi Clarke, Fran Cohen and Daniella Mini

2. David Gortz, Peter Orszulak, Phillipa Orszulak and Linda Gortz

3. Julia, Kathy, Bob and Greg Altamore and Bella Jaramillo

4. James Shapiro and Cheryl Vitali

5. Meaghan Nagurney, Karen Feder

Our annual *Spring for Abilis* gala, which was held at the Woodway Country Club in Darien on April 27, raised more than \$350,000. Nearly 250 guests attended the elegant and festive event that helps raise awareness of Abilis and its services and provides critical funding for our wide range of programs.

This year's gala co-chairs were Bibi Clarke and Daniella Mini of Greenwich, and Fran Cohen of Weston. All three women have strong connections to Abilis as the mothers of young adults—Danny, Diego, and Ali, respectively—who participate in individualized day or transitions programs in Greenwich. The transitions programs are designed to help young adults become more independent, find meaningful jobs, and participate more fully in the communities in which they live.

"We are fortunate to be part of a community that recognizes the importance of the services provided by Abilis and is willing to collectively show that support," said Amy Montimurro, Abilis President and CEO. "The generosity of spirit we experienced at the gala was heart-warming. The evening was truly a memorable one."

Brett Walkow, an actor and comedian based in Chicago, was the emcee for the evening. The festivities were kicked off by ETA Music, who provided live

entertainment. One especially poignant moment occurred when a group of Abilis program participants joined ETA Music for a rousing rendition of The Backstreet Boys' hit "I Want It That Way." That got the crowd on their feet. Who knew how many people remember the lyrics to that '90s anthem?

In one of the more emotional speeches of the evening, Philippa Orszulak of Greenwich spoke about her son Graham who has Angelman Syndrome and the support and services he has received from Abilis. Graham's journey at Abilis began with Early Intervention Services and continued throughout his childhood. As he approached adulthood, Abilis helped coordinate his residential living and developed an employment plan, which includes selling and delivering organic blueberries from his family's farm in upstate New York (see story on page 17). Orszulak, her voice cracking with emotion, told the crowd how Abilis has been there for her family since Graham was born.

"Abilis has been our anchor, our strength, our stability when dealing with Graham's challenges," she said. "The people who work for Abilis are committed and incredibly supportive, and they have changed our lives."

Abilis would like to acknowledge the generous support we received from our event sponsors, Holland & Knight, Pfizer, Ogilvy Health, Fran and Mitch Cohen, AmFund, and Moffly Media.

Grahamberries

A few summers ago, Graham Moore began delivering organic blueberries grown on his parents' farm in upstate New York to customers throughout Fairfield County.

"Grahamberries" were sold door to door again this summer, but the operation was expanded. From early July through mid-August, Graham, 28, was joined by more than 20 individuals in the Abilis Competitive Employment program who helped deliver and sell blueberries at various locations in Greenwich and throughout Fairfield County, including Abilis Gardens & Gifts, Greenwich Town Hall, the Greenwich YWCA and YMCA, and the Stamford YMCA.

As an infant, Graham was diagnosed with Angelman Syndrome, a genetic disorder that affects the nervous system. Graham became a long-time Abilis client, beginning with the early intervention services in our Birth to Three program. As he approached adulthood, his family wanted him to have opportunities to become more independent and employable. To that end, Abilis arranged residential living and helped coordinate an individualized day program and an employment plan, which included selling and delivering blueberries from his family's farm, known as Blueberry Hill.

"We knew that having a child with special needs would require some creative thinking when it came time for our son to have a job," said Philippa Orszulak, Graham's mother. "Because he is non-verbal and has developmental challenges there are very few opportunities for gainful employment."

Grahamberries was launched after the Orszulaks started brainstorming with the Abilis Competitive Employment team to come up with some work for Graham. Blueberry Hill, the farm, was initially supposed to be a hobby, but they created Grahamberries to help provide employment for their son and others with special needs.



Philippa Orszulak and her son, Graham Moore

"We started our organic blueberry farm in 2011 and decided that extending the blueberry sales to the clients of Abilis would be a good way to help individuals interact with customers, perfect their sales techniques and learn new job skills," said Orszulak. While Grahamberries has been "very, very successful," the goal is to extend the amount of time the teams work and find more places for them to sell Grahamberries in the area.

One of the many benefits of the business is that it's spreading awareness, said Orszulak. "The community got to look at their abilities rather than their disabilities," she said. "That's the whole point of Abilis anyway."

In Loving Memory: Rebecca (Becky) DiBlasi

We are sad to announce that Rebecca (Becky) DiBlasi passed away Tuesday, July 9 peacefully with her family by her side.

Becky was the daughter of the late Liberatore DiBlasi and Grazia (Capuano) DiBlasi. She was predeceased by her siblings, Cal, Leo, and Teresa DiBlasi. Born December 17, 1964, Becky graduated from The Harry B. Flood special Ed class in Stratford, CT. She worked as a Production Assistant for Abilis in Greenwich, CT. Remembered as a loving sister and aunt, she will also be deeply missed by her extended family at Abilis who touched her life every day. She will be remembered for her contagious laugh and infectious giggle that made everyone who knew her smile.

Becky loved her cooking class, ELVIS, and the Beatles. She is survived by her sisters, Sara DiBlasi of Milford, CT and Josephine Delago of Westchester county, NY.

The family would like to express sincere thanks to Donna Booth, her staff and the beautiful ladies at 101 Orchard for all their love and support.

In lieu of flowers, Becky's family has requested that donations be made in her memory to Abilis at www.abilis.us.



Abilis Welcomes Three New Board Members



Lindy Urso

Lindy Urso is an attorney who works as a solo practitioner in Stamford. He was born and raised in Cos Cob, where he still lives with his wife and three children. Over the past several years, he has volunteered his legal services to Abilis.

Lindy has been practicing federal and state criminal defense law for the last 22 years. He was admitted to practice in California in 1995, Connecticut in 1997 as well as various federal district courts, including the 2nd Circuit Court of Appeals and the U.S. Supreme Court.

Lindy graduated with a B.S. in Business Administration from Southern CT State University in 1990 and a J.D. from Pepperdine University School of Law in 1995. He completed an 8-year enlistment, including 6 years of active duty, in the U.S. Army National Guard (CT) in 1992.



Jenny Patchen

Jenny Patchen lives in Greenwich with her husband, Mike, and their three children, Sophie, Lilly, and Blake. Prior to starting a family, Jenny spent her career in finance, working in the asset management and equity capital markets areas of Goldman Sachs as well as serving as director of hedge fund research at Chapman, Downing, Keesee & Company, an investment partnership in New York. She graduated from Yale University with a B.A. in Economics and International Studies.

Jenny's interest in Abilis was inspired by her older brother, Jason, who has Down syndrome and is a thriving resident of the Brookwood Community, a residential home and vocational program for adults with disabilities located in Texas where Jenny grew up. For the past two years, Jenny has served as the Co-Run Leader for the Abilis Walk/Run event.



James Shapiro

James Shapiro and his wife, Cheryl Vitali, have lived in Weston for 25 years. They have two boys, Max and Nick, who participates in the LEAP program in Westport. Cheryl is on the Board of Autism Speaks and is the Global Manager of Kiehl's. James served on the Board of Giant Steps of Southport and is a Managing Director and Counsel at GE Energy Financial Services in Norwalk. He also serves as the Co-Chair of the People with Disability Network for both GE Capital and GE Company. James graduated from Yale University with a B.A. in Political Science, a Master's degree from Columbia University and a J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center.



Second Annual Dancing Stars of Greenwich Charity Dance Competition Raises More Than \$110,000 for Abilis

With a little Cha Cha, Rumba, some Hustle, Samba and Foxtrot in addition to the Tango, the Second Annual Dancing Stars of Greenwich raised over \$110,000 for Abilis. The star-studded event, presented in partnership with the Fred Astaire Dance Studios of Greenwich, featured local celebrities and community leaders paired with professional dance instructors who performed a choreographed dance routine, mirroring the hit TV show. Guests attending the event enjoyed an evening of live entertainment, music, dancing, dinner and a silent auction.



Famed choreographer and dancer Billy Blanks Jr., was the master of ceremonies for the spectacular evening. The panel of celebrity judges included award-winning actor Brendan Fraser, television personality Lara Spencer, and season 15 *Dancing with the Stars* All-Star champion Tony Dovolani.



We would like to thank everyone who contributed to the success of the evening! A special thank you to our Dancing Stars for their dedication spending months dancing, training and fundraising for this event: Stephanie Webster, Elaine Madonna, Melissa Zoldan-Leite, Alonso Martinez, Dana Cifone, Linda Colucci, Rita Laurito, Billy Blanks Jr., and Afton Fraser. Congratulations to Dr. Stacy Zarakiotis-Alexandrou, who won the People's Choice award for the most funds raised, Dr. Bina Park who won the Mirror Ball trophy for best dance and to our special guests Griffin Fraser and Alejandra Martinez. And a special recognition and thank you to our community partner, the Fred Astaire Dance Studios of Greenwich, and to the talented professional dance instructors, Elmar Schmidt, Clemens Lengenfelder, Matthew Ames, Anna Belyavtseva and Joanna Lee for their support. Funds raised from this event help support the gap in funding and new initiatives for people with special needs.



Planning for the Future: The Abilis Legacy Society



35 Very Merry Road Stamford, CT

Regardless of our age, at some point, we all begin to consider the legacy we wish to leave to our families, loved ones, and the organizations we value. Planned gifts can play an important role in securing the future of Abilis, Inc. and ensuring that it will continue to meet its mission in the future.

In 2018, the Abilis Community Foundation received a Planned Gift in the amount of \$191,000 from the O'Keefe family. They resided in Greenwich and had a son named Bobby, who had a developmental disability. Abilis was always there through the years to support the O'Keefe's, providing guidance throughout Bobby's life. The O'Keefe family requested that their gift be used to purchase a new residential home for Abilis. In October 2019, because of their generous bequest, Abilis was able to purchase a new accessible ranch home for our aging population, which will allow us to continue our life-long commitment to provide care to our seniors.

The Abilis Community Foundation is a 501 (c) 3 organization dedicated to the charitable and educational purposes of helping people with

developmental disabilities who work and live in lower Fairfield County. The Foundation provides funding to Abilis, Inc. and a limited number of select non-profit partners who commit to improve the quality of life of individuals with disabilities through an annual grant process.

The newly formed Abilis Legacy Society is a way of paying tribute to those who include The Abilis Community Foundation in their planned giving and estate planning. Membership in the Abilis Legacy Society provides an opportunity to record the intent of our donors and a means to express our appreciation for their generosity. Anyone can become a member of the Abilis Legacy Society regardless of the amount of the intention.

A planned gift can help advance your own financial, philanthropic and estate planning goals, capital gains, or estate tax savings. Some can even provide income for you or loved ones for life. And the financial advantages often allow a gift more generous than you imagined, letting you leave a legacy that reflects you and your family's goals and values.



For more information on The Abilis Community Foundation and Planned Giving, please contact Jennifer Flatow, Director of Development, at 203.531.1880 x161 or Flatow@abilis.us

Fall Flashback Photos



Anne Marie Salerno



*David Mott, Ross Perry,
Jair Mejia*



Seth Ritch



*Theo Brown and
Donna Krausman*



Third Annual Abilis Has Talent Event

On September 27, we kicked off our 3rd Annual Abilis Has Talent Event. Nineteen performers participated in vocal and musical performances. The event was well attended by Abilis program participants and staff, family members, and friends in the community. We would like to thank Lisa Bria, Michael Little, Yvonne Williams, Donna Krausman, Annie Yantorno and many Abilis staff members, who spent weeks helping participants rehearse their musical acts, as well as Kevin Kure for being our master of ceremonies for the evening.



Second Annual “Together We Shine” Red Carpet Celebration for Abilis is a Huge Success



Youth Volunteers



Wendy Sullivan and Susie Figgie



Margaret Makuck



Jean Michael Laurore and Paige Smith

Dressed in tuxedos and gowns, more than 175 local students and Abilis clients ranging from young adults to seniors attended the second annual *Together We Shine* event held at the Boys & Girls Club of Greenwich on June 9.

The Greenwich Junior United Way (GJrUW) – in partnership with the Boys & Girls Club of Greenwich, Abilis Youth Board, and the Greenwich YWCA – organized the inclusion event, which was free for Abilis program participants and open to Greenwich public and private high school students from several local schools.

“Together We Shine was an incredibly special evening for everyone involved, bringing together high school students and Abilis members for a fun night celebrating the differences, abilities, needs and dreams in everyone,” said Amanda Finn, GJrUW Program Coordinator.

The Roaring Twenties-themed event promoted the idea that everyone can shine, said Amy Montimurro, President and CEO of Abilis. “Having a special night out and walking the red carpet was very exciting for our Abilis community members,” said Montimurro. “The experience of being

pampered with manicures, hair and makeup sessions before the event, beautiful gowns, suits and snazzy new shoes was a special experience. In addition, transportation was provided by limousines and car services, which made the evening one of the most memorable. Support from the local high school students provides an opportunity for our youth to understand the importance of giving back to the community, celebrating diversity and improving the quality of life for people of all abilities. Thank you to all who contributed to this wonderful evening.”

Multiple local sponsors helped make the evening possible: Hair and makeup were provided by Mane Event and wardrobe was provided by Neighbor to Neighbor and was available to Abilis clients offsite, prior to the event. Shoes for the participants were donated by Marc Jacobs. Guests arrived at the event via limousine and VIP car service provided by CTNY Limo service, owned and operated by Alan and Helen Pesce. Boutonnieres and corsages were provided by Abilis Gardens & Gifts.

Our 3rd annual *Together We Shine* event is planned for June, 2020.

Abilis Grants

Grant awards play a major role in helping Abilis expand our priority programs, launch strategic initiatives, and enhance our facilities. In the past year, Abilis received grants from a dozen local foundations and community organizations. We would like to acknowledge these vital organizations and describe the Abilis programs and initiatives that benefit from their generous support.



B23 Playshop Group

Early Intervention/ Birth to Three Program

Our Early Intervention/Birth to Three program evaluated 483 children over the past year. While not all of them were determined to need services, our dedicated team of professionals help educate parents on a wide range of therapeutic services that will enhance their child's development. We are thankful to the many contributors who recognize the life-changing impact this program provides. Once again Abilis has received support from **First Congregational Church of Greenwich** in the amount of \$2,000 to fund Playshop, our parent-child literacy group workshop. Playshop is designed for children ages one to three and their parents or caregivers, and is the only inclusive bilingual playgroup in Stamford to offer concentrated support for toddlers with developmental delays.

Abilis has received renewed grants from both the **Greenwich United Way** (\$45,000) and the **United Way of Western Connecticut** (\$10,250), along with **The Rudolph J. and Daphne A. Munzer Foundation** (\$50,000), all of which will also benefit our Early Intervention/ Birth to Three Program.

Capital Projects

Capital projects continue to be an area of focus at Abilis. With the total number of residential properties reaching a record high of 40, we face the ongoing challenge of keeping up with maintenance and improvements, which will enhance the day-to-day quality of living of those we serve. Thanks to the generous support of the **First County Bank Foundation** (\$10,000), we will be able to completely renovate the bathroom of our property on Hoyt Street in Stamford. We have also received support for the first time from the **City of Stamford's Community Development Office** (\$14,300) that will provide funding to purchase a generator for our property located at Glenbrook in Stamford. We received \$255,000 from the **Town of Greenwich's Community Development Block Grant Program** which will allow for the renovation of the kitchen at our residence at 52 Glenville Street in Greenwich as well as a major renovation of the bathrooms and the installation of new flooring at Abilis headquarters. We look forward to welcoming our participants along with members of our community into our newly renovated space.

LEAP and Competitive Employment

Expansion of both LEAP and Competitive Employment are in the works at Abilis! We have secured funding from the **New Canaan Community Foundation** (\$5,000) to bring a new transitions LEAP program to New Canaan, and from **Fairfield County's Community Foundation** (\$25,000) to expand the program in Stamford and begin the program in Ridgefield. **The Community Fund of Darien** (\$17,000) is committed to helping us with competitive employment as our presence continues to grow in Darien, and we have also received funding from the **Greenwich Department of Human**



Janet King, Executive Director of The Community Fund of Darien and Amy Montimurro, Abilis CEO

Services (\$5,000) to assist with job coaching for our program participants. Through our Competitive Employment program, we create customized career plans for individuals who are interested in and capable of community-based employment.

New Initiatives

Collaboration is key to Abilis' success, and two distinct initiatives with partners in the community are about to begin, thanks in part to our generous supporters: First, in conjunction with **Greenwich Hospital**, Abilis launched the highly anticipated **Project SEARCH** program in September. We appreciate the support of the **Greenwich United Way** (\$20,000) to assist with this exciting internship/career development program and look forward to sharing the success of our first eight interns, along with details on the next class of interns. Abilis also received a generous grant in the amount of \$45,000 from an anonymous foundation to support Project SEARCH. Second, **Coffee for Good**, a partnership with **Second Congregational Church in Greenwich**, is slated to open in August of 2020, and the **State of Connecticut, Department of Developmental Services** has awarded Abilis \$25,000 to assist with the start-up costs of this new employment opportunity.



50 Glenville Street, Greenwich, CT
(203) 531-1880 | www.abilis.us



Save
the
date

Wednesday, April 1, 2020

Abilis Annual Meeting

First Presbyterian Church, Greenwich, CT

Saturday, May 2, 2020

Spring for Abilis Gala

Woodway Country Club, Darien, CT

**Connect
with abilis**

 facebook.com/AbilisInc

 instagram.com/Abilis_Us

**Therapeutic
Services**

1150 Summer Street
Stamford, CT
(203) 324-1880 x300

**Life Services/
Headquarters**

50 Glenville Street
Greenwich, CT
(203) 531-1880

www.abilis.us