

Staten Island Day Program Visits with College of Staten Island Disabilities Course

On January 20th, program participants at the Staten Island Day Program participated in the Disabilities Studies course at the College of Staten Island, taught by Dr. David Goode. Visitors included Mike Corbett, President of the Staten Island Self-Advocacy group, Stephanie Wyler, Vice President of the Staten Island Day Habilitation Self-Advocacy Group, and Gerard Mills, outgoing President, who all shared in a spirited discussion about the disability experience.

Michael, Gerard and Stephanie addressed issues of having cerebral palsy, relationships, qualities they look for in a Direct Service Professional, the use of wheelchairs, and working within the disabilities sector.

“If you want to work with people with disabilities you have to have it in your heart,” said Mike Corbett. Mike lives in a UCP Individualized Residential Alternative (IRA) and attends Day Program on Staten Island. Mike, Stephanie and Gerard answered student’s questions in a lively Q & A that was highlighted with laughter while also outlining some of the stark realities of agency life. Accompanying them were some of UCP’s staff including: Scott Feldman, Director of Staff Training, Benjamin Rosado, Habilitation Specialist, Kelly Donovan, Habilitation Assistant, and Natalie Shaya, Treatment Coordinator.



The students asked UCP staff questions in order to understand what working in the disabilities agency is like. Some of the topics tackled were what types of jobs are suitable for new graduates, the emotional toll of working in the field and balancing compliance and safety with dignity of risk. Kelly Donovan, a graduate of the program at CUNY College of Staten Island, shared her story of having a disability and working at UCP, something that really resonated with the students. Kelly stressed to the students that she encourages each person with a disability that she works with to follow their dreams.

At the end of the class, the individuals and staff encouraged students to attend the UCP career open house on February 2, 2017. We hope that some of the undergraduates will find their way to the open house and be able to assist with creating new opportunities for the people we serve.

Lights, Camera, Action!

Individuals from the 5030 Broadway, 154th, and 137th day program locations demonstrated their acting talents in an adaptation of “The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe” by C.S. Lewis.

Together with the assistance of Theatre Specialist Brigid Donovan, a group of talented individuals put on a remarkable performance in front of their peers.

The production came about when the Sacha Amry, Assistant Director at 5030 asked Joyce and Brigid to put together a winter themed play, using actors from different programs.

“I put out a call for auditions at all of the programs I work with, and asked interested actors to come to my regular theatre group,” said Brigid, who directed the play.

“During group, we held informal auditions, where we discussed three different characters, Lucy, the White Witch, and Aslan, and practiced saying a snippet of their dialogue in voices we thought those characters might have,” Brigid added. Following that, interested actors auditioned for parts.

The actors were instrumental in bringing the play together, as they collaborated to come up with staging that made sense and was motivated by their character’s lines and story.

The set and costumes were quite spectacular thanks to the talents of art specialists Joyce Jimenez, Natalie Reichel and Angel Acevedo.

“Joyce came up with the brilliant idea to use backlit projections, so that we could have several different backgrounds without having to paint giant canvases,” said Brigid. Joyce and Natalie then worked with individuals to create the digital backdrops and the canvas wardrobe. Natalie brainstormed costumes with the actors and other individuals before finding the costume pieces.

Kathleen Archibald, who played Lucy, thanked the crowd following the performance. “We got the script in November and started rehearsing in December, we did it!” said Kathleen. “We’ve been working long and hard on this.”

The cast recently took their performance on the road as well, performing the show at PSS Highbridge Senior Center.

Congratulations to the cast, creative team and all who supported the production!



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Sensor Technology Increasing Independence

UCP of NYC has been partnering with SimplyHome, an organization that has an extensive product line and services for independent living.

SimplyHome's product line allows people with disabilities to live more independently. Products include medication dispensers as well as emergency response and environmental controls that enable individuals to operate beds, lights, TVs, doors, and more via tablet or voice-activation.

UCP currently has individuals from the Waterside and Tanya Towers residences benefitting from these technologies. Thanks to the Balancing Incentives Program (BIP), UCP of NYC has been able to make assistive technology purchases for individuals in order to improve their independence and health outcomes.

Efrain, a resident at Tanya Towers, uses SimplyHome technologies that increase his independence. He uses a medication dispenser, which allows him to take medication without assistance from staff. Previously, staff held on to his pill box and would bring medication around to him twice daily.

"I wake up at 6:00 a.m. and am leaving at 7:00 a.m. to go to program so I like just getting up and being able to get going," said Efrain. "It's my own routine, I don't have to wait for staff."

Efrain also utilizes blood pressure and blood sugar machines. If levels go outside of the parameters set by Efrain and nursing staff, he will get a call from SimplyHome and the nurse will receive a follow-up call.



"Before, Efrain was completely dependent on staff," noted the nurse on staff, Jahnin. "With training and education, he can now do these things independently."

Murray Greenberg from UCP's Waterside residence has had a few different pieces of technology installed in his apartment recently. Murray has motion sensors which are tailored to him and will alert staff if there are certain triggers. He also has fire safety sensor and water sensors. In years past, Murray had had issues with flooding from accidentally leaving water running, causing an issue with building management. Thanks to the water sensors, staff members are now alerted if water reaches a certain level on the floor and are able to assist Murray.

SimplyHome technologies allow individuals like Murray and Efrain to harness their skills for more independent living with technologies that allow them to perform tasks that they had difficulty accomplishing before such as obtaining compliance in medication administration, managing chronic conditions and improving accessibility to basic home features.

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Partnership with Mouse and Cooper Hewitt Spurs Innovation among High School Students

For the past five years, UCP of NYC has worked in partnership with Mouse, a national youth development nonprofit that empowers high school students to create technology to solve real problems and make meaningful change in the world.

On January 17th, seven individuals from UCP of NYC participated in interviews with 20 Mouse Design League high school students at the Mouse's headquarters in order for the students to start developing prototypes for new assistive technologies for individuals with disabilities. The interview session was facilitated by Maggie Muldoon, Design League Coordinator at the Mouse Design League and attended by UCP Education Specialist Jonathan Toth and Sign Language Specialist Yvette Churchill. Among the UCP individuals were Paul Tedesco, who is known for creating the Stylus pen that helps individuals with mobility issues to use iPads, smart boards and other communications devices.

"This unique partnership with Mouse Design League and UCP individuals is a win-win for all," said Peter Cobb, Director of Community Affairs at UCP of NYC. "It gives our individuals a chance to create new assistive technologies and educate students about disability. Many of the students participate year after year and develop friendships with our individuals, some of whom take a hands-on role in the design process with the students. It's also great to see that some graduates go onto pursuing assistive technology as a potential educational or career goal."



The next Mouse Design Retreat will take place at the Cooper Hewitt Museum on February 4th, where four groups of students will select an idea for a new prototype to develop and present at a design "Emoticon" competition in the spring. Every semester students who have participated in the Mouse/UCP collaboration have had entries among the top four finalists in the competition.

Thank you for reading this edition of the UCP of NYC InTouch e-newsletter. We look forward to bringing you this newsletter each month via e-mail. We hope you will share this and create buzz around all the exciting things happening at UCP of NYC.

If you have news to share, please contact Natalie Belva at nbelva@ucpnyc.org or Petra Tuomi at ptuomi@ucpnyc.org

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