



# Here & Now

A Newsletter from Leake & Watts



## Legislators Celebrate *Get Caught Reading Month* with Leake & Watts



Congressman Joseph Crowley visits children at the Leake & Watts Dr. Richard Green Learning Center in the Bronx for *Get Caught Reading Month*.

As she turned the pages of *A Very Quiet Cricket* for her young audience, New York City Councilwoman Annabel Palma soaked in the children's enthusiasm. Councilwoman Palma would read a line from the book and then the students at Leake & Watts' Brownell Pre-school would chant the rest of the sentence together. After going back and forth like this several times, Councilwoman Palma joked, "Oh boy! Instead of me reading to you, I think you should read to me!"

Councilwoman Palma was one of several national, state and local legislators who enjoyed celebrating *Get Caught Reading Month* with preschoolers and elementary school students at Leake & Watts. A national public service campaign designed to remind people of all ages how much fun it is to read, *Get Caught Reading Month* provided an opportunity for community leaders to show the more playful and humorous sides of themselves as they visited different Leake & Watts programs. Each legislator read a classic children's book to young students, many of whom have special needs, and spoke to the children about the work that they do.

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## Executive Director's Message

Dear Friends,

As the weather warms up, spring and summer always bring so much joy to our community. Each year, I look forward to celebrating important milestones with young people at graduations, stepping up ceremonies at our preschools, and celebrations of success across our programs. In serving children, adults and families with challenges such as poverty, disability, and trauma, it is wonderful to see our mission realized in these ways every year.

I am pleased to report on several new developments that have happened across our programs since our last newsletter was published. We are particularly pleased to be adding more treatment models that are proven through research to help individuals make steady progress and achieve success with their goals. These evidence-based models will help us provide more tailored services and achieve better outcomes.

This year, we converted a part of our foster care program for children with significant mental health challenges to the evidence-based Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care model and we are in the process of converting our General Preventive Services Program to the Family Connections model. We have also been selected to expand our Preventive Services Program through the NYC Administration for Children's Services (ACS) Intensive Family Preventive Services Program. Working with an additional 144 families who present some of the greatest challenges, we will be using yet another evidence-based model called Family Functional Therapy for Child Welfare. Additionally, we recently received funding from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services to expand Parent-Child Home, our early literacy/parenting program. We are truly excited to increase our impact in the community through all of these critical programs. Lastly, we were very excited to learn that along with very few other private agencies, the federal government selected us to be a direct grantee in providing Head Start services, where we will serve 159 children and their families.

As I conclude this update, I am reminded just how busy things continue to be at our agency as the summer progresses. As always, our programs owe each of our friends and supporters a debt of gratitude. Thank you for being a part of our agency's success.



Alan  
Executive Director



SAVE THE DATE

Leake & Watts  
2013 Annual  
Awards Gala

Wednesday  
October 23, 2013



SUPPORT TODAY. SUCCESS TOMORROW.





United States Congressman Joseph Crowley, New York State Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins, New York State Assemblyman Mark Gjonaj, NYC Councilwoman Palma, Westchester County Legislator Virginia Perez and Yonkers Deputy Mayor Susan Gerry visited classrooms at the Ames Early Childhood Center, the Biondi Elementary School, the Brownell Preschool, the Dr. Richard Green Learning Center and the Seabury Day Care Center.

The children jumped up and down as they shared stories like *The Giving Tree* with such important visitors. The legislators really got into the spirit of *Get Caught Reading Month*, actively engaging with children not only by reading to them, but through conversation and question and answer sessions. Congressman Crowley thrilled the children when he asked them to sing with him. Assemblyman Gjonaj laughed as kindergartners took turns running up to share their secrets with him. “The kids loved having such a prominent visitor come to their class, read to them and share their jokes,” says Biondi Elementary School Principal Claytisha Walden. “He really made them feel valued and important, so they have been talking about him for days after his visit.”

“Bringing in people like the Congressman has such an important impact on the children,” agrees Milagros Marrero, Director of the Dr. Green Learning Center. “Congressman Crowley’s visit made an impression on the kids not only because he’s a community leader, but because so many of these children lack positive male role models at home. They were thrilled with the attention that he gave to them.”

Throughout the month, the children and their teachers were not the only ones with enthusiastic responses. Senator Stewart-Cousins, who wore a patriotic scarf in honor of Memorial Day, couldn’t help but smile when a student called her Captain America.

Delighted with the opportunity to visit several of Leake & Watts’ early childhood programs, Councilwoman Palma told Leake & Watts staff, “There is little more



important that elected officials can do for the future of our City’s youth than to support literacy programs in our schools. Research shows that reading to young children early on contributes significantly to positive emotional, social and intellec-

tual development.” Yonkers Deputy Mayor Susan Gerry added, “With the assistance of our teachers, parents, community leaders and programs such as this, we can do our part to encourage our children to prepare for their future.”

## Close to Home Program Brings Youth Together for Support



"I've never had friends that care about me before," says 16-year-old Xavier. "I used to hang out with guys around my neighborhood, but they just wanted to do stupid stuff together. At Leake & Watts, I have quickly made friends that take care of each other – we're like a family."

Xavier is one of twelve young men ages 12 to 15 in Leake & Watts' Non-Secure Placement Program, our new residential program for court-involved youth which is a part of New York State's new *Close to Home* Initiative. Based on research which shows that juvenile delinquents and offenders are more successful when they are able to build supportive relationships with their families and communities, *Close to Home* is designed to keep young people closer and better connected to their families and communities. Rather than being sent to a secure detention facility upstate, youth like Xavier who have committed crimes can now be court-ordered to participate in Non-Secure Placement, where they receive comprehensive educational and therapeutic support. Our Non-Secure Placement Program utilizes the Missouri Approach, which not only uses counseling and other methods of rehabilitation, but also emphasizes peer support and family relationships as vital elements in the rehabilitation process.

For Xavier, the relational and supportive components of the program have made all the difference. Having been in other programs and facilities, Xavier emphasizes that there is a big difference in the support he receives now. "Here, we can always talk to the staff about anything, and they will listen," he says. "And with the other guys, we talk about our families and moving back home. We encourage each other – don't mess up when you have a pass to go home, stay in school so that we can finish up the program."

Because group treatment and coached peer interactions are major components of the Missouri Approach, Xavier not only receives support from staff, but also from the young men in the program as they live,

go to school and attend group counseling sessions together. They also attend all recreation activities, meals and other events as a group. "If someone wants to go to the gym after school, then we all go," explains 13-year-old Dysean, another program participant. "Even if we don't really feel like going. We're a team so we do everything together. It teaches you discipline and how teamwork can help you get more done."

The program's emphasis on group activities and solidarity promotes a culture of peer-support and cooperation. "We're all in the same predicament," explains Dysean. "We've all done something wrong to get us here and we all just want to go home. You know everything about everyone, and that makes me feel better because I can act like myself here. I can't be myself on the street, because a lot of things happen out there. But when I can be myself with the guys, it really helps me to figure things out."

The Missouri Approach not only fosters a culture of peer-support that provides emotional support for the teens, but teaches them to listen to others, to empathize and to compromise. When youth are disruptive, they learn to step up and discuss their actions, reflecting on how their conduct impacts others. Xavier describes the process, saying, "If someone calls for a 'Circle Up,' then the whole house stops what we are doing and we talk. If there is a conflict between two of the guys, we all get involved to find a solution."

Although these "Circle Up" discussions can be difficult for the young men as they require honesty and trust, the youth are learning to address their own actions and positively discuss them with others in a safe environment. For youth that have often turned to their fists or thrown a chair to express their emotions, "Circle Up" teaches the value of straightforward communication and cooperation. "A few weeks ago, we all had to talk to one of the guys," shares Xavier. "He was doing a lot of stuff that frustrated the rest of us – he wasn't taking responsibility or pulling his own weight in the house. It was time for him to grow up, and we wanted to help

## Summer 2013 Wish List

Donors often ask for the opportunity to target their support in specific ways that will benefit the children, adults and families served by Leake & Watts.

Right now in our Day Habilitation Program for Adults with Developmental Disabilities, we would like to expand our recreational facilities and are looking for donations of the following items:

- an Xbox 360 (\$300)
- Nintendo Wiis (2 at \$130 each)
- MP3 Players (2 at \$40 each)
- a Recumbent Bicycle (\$400)
- a Treadmill (\$600)
- a Stamina Trampoline Jogger (\$100)

Over the summer months, we are continuing to make our Yonkers Campus more beautiful for residents, guests and staff. You can be a part of our campus beautification project by sponsoring one of the following items for our historic property:

- Picnic tables, each installed on concrete patio with dedication plaque (\$2,500)
- Park benches, each with a dedication plaque (\$1,100)
- Seeds and fertilizer for our Community Garden (\$10 - \$25)
- Gloves, spades, and other tools (\$25 - \$100)

If you would like to help fund any of these items, please contact the Leake & Watts Development Office at [development@leakeandwatts.org](mailto:development@leakeandwatts.org) or 914.375.8605.

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## Community Members Advocate for Change



Rosalyn McClain and her daughter Leilani enjoy breakfast at the Third Annual Leake & Watts' Legislative Action Day Breakfast (top). Westchester County Legislator Virginia Perez talks with members of the Leake & Watts community following the breakfast (bottom).



"At 18 months, my beautiful daughter Leilani was diagnosed with autism," Rosalyn McClain announced to the crowd at Leake & Watts' Third Annual Legislative Action Day. She shared how difficult it was as she realized that her child faced so many challenges, but said, "I was able to get her into the Children's Learning Center of Leake & Watts, and the teachers there have helped her immensely. Now she has learned how to make eye contact and engage with others."

But Rosalyn was not finished. She urged the legislators in attendance to prevent budget cuts to special education and developmental disabilities services. "Without the assistance of her teachers, Leilani would be lost," said Rosalyn. "I couldn't have helped her on my own. I just wouldn't have known how. So today, as the parent of a child with autism, I ask you to remember that special education services are very important to many, many families."

Leake & Watts' Legislative Action Day gathers parents, teachers, social workers, youth and adults served by Leake & Watts to meet with state and local legislators. Aimed at helping members of our community to realize the power of their personal stories and voices, Legislative Action Day includes a brief training in self-advocacy. Attendees learn how to influence legislators and legislation that impacts the services that they and their family members depend upon. Each year, state and local legislators attend the breakfast and speak with constituents who receive services from Leake & Watts. This year, along with Rosalyn, a former resident of Woodfield Cottage and a young adult with developmental disabilities shared their stories publicly as well.

Those in attendance this year had the opportunity to meet with several legislators, including New York State Assemblywoman Shelley Mayer, Westchester County Legislator Virginia Perez, Yonkers City Councilman Michael Sabatino, Yonkers Deputy Mayor Susan Gerry, and representatives from the offices of other state and local legislators. Members of the Leake & Watts community each urged our representatives to remember the importance of residential, special education, developmental disabilities, early education and foster care services.

In the end, Rosalyn served as a powerful megaphone for the entire Leake & Watts community when she told the legislators and the audience: "We can't let the government cut these services. Our children deserve so much more."

## Tribute Gifts

If you would like to commemorate a special occasion or honor someone who has passed, we invite you to make an "In Honor of" or "In Memory of" gift. Your donation will support Leake & Watts programs while you pay tribute to someone who is important to you. Whomever you designate will receive a thoughtful card from us, letting them know that a gift has been made in their name. To do so, contact us at 914.375.8605 or [development@leakeandwatts.org](mailto:development@leakeandwatts.org) or visit us at [www.leakeandwatts.org/make-a-donation](http://www.leakeandwatts.org/make-a-donation).

### IN HONOR OF GIFTS

For: Eric Mondesire  
By: Joyce Coppin

For: Alan Mucatel  
By: Laura Fishman

For: Alan Mucatel  
By: Lisa Frigand

For: Matthew Mayer  
By: Barry Green

For: Alan Mucatel  
By: Rachel Hanser

For: Phoebe R. Santon  
By: Jamie and Kathy Hogg

For: Alan Mucatel  
By: Jack and Mindy Hyman

For: Andrew van der Vord  
By: Robert and Cheryl Kobre

For: Agnes Hassell  
By: Maya Manley

For: Alan Mucatel  
By: Beth Mucatel & Lou Terminello

For: Alan Mucatel  
By: Mar and Nelia Mucatel

For: Alan Mucatel  
By: Ruth Mucatel

For: George Spartalis  
By: John Tekirian

For: Alan Mucatel  
By: Joanne Terminello Rath

For: Anna Marie Varsalone  
By: Jeffrey Varsalone

### IN MEMORY OF GIFTS

For: Arthur Morten  
By: Brian Barnhart

For: James Egan  
By: Harry and Marlene Egan


For: Ed Fallon  
By: Alan Mucatel

For: Verne Romefelt  
By: Alan Romefelt

For: Ruth Schoen  
By: Nora S. Schaaf

For: David Warner  
By: Gary Warner

## Spring at Leake & Watts

 Spring is always a busy time across our many programs and campuses, from Black History Month activities and musical performances at the Biondi School, to park excursions, canoeing and horseback riding trips for children in our preschools and recreation/respice programs for children with developmental disabilities. Everyone at Leake & Watts enjoys springtime!







him fit in. We all talked about why we were angry at him and he took our feedback pretty well. Things have been good since then. You can see that he cares more and the rest of us feel proud that we helped him as a group.”

“I had a lot of anger before,” Xavier explains. “I used to flip tables and stuff. Now I know that I can talk things out with other people. The guys in my group know what I’m going through, and the staff listens to me.” Dysean is also glad that our program is linking him with an afterschool program. Through his experience at the Non-Secure Placement program he feels better prepared to build friendships in his community that support his goals of finishing school and getting a good job. Both young men feel ready to take charge of their own lives. “I’m into school now,” Xavier says proudly. “The staff at Leake & Watts are helping me find a job. I’m trying to be successful in life.” Once he moves back to the community, Xavier is committed to staying out of trouble, pursuing his new academic goals and trying to rebuild his relationships with his family. “The staff understands what we are going through and have helped me focus on doing the right thing. I’m not going to let them down.”

## Man’s Best Friends Make an Impact

Every day at 3 o’clock, Amanda finishes her classes at the Biondi School, where we provide education services to students with emotional and behavioral challenges, and heads to the clinic where she meets Tom, a golden retriever. She likes to take him out to the field near the baseball diamond and the garden, where he has plenty of room to chase the sticks that she tosses. “When I’m with Tom, I feel very peaceful,” says Amanda. “Sometimes I feel overwhelmed after a long day. Tom makes me feel like I can stay with the program, even when it’s hard.”



Amanda certainly isn’t the only one who seeks out Tom for comfort. Part of our Therapy Dogs Program, Tom provides many children, teens and adults with developmental disabilities and mental health challenges with support and nurturing. Throughout the day, our dogs visit our homes, interacting with residents with developmental disabilities as well as youth in classrooms at the Biondi School. Our dogs may help calm anxious or restless students while they take tests, or keep a resident company as they take their medications or have an exam at the clinic.

“It’s hard to express how much the dogs have helped the teens in our care,” says Dr. Ami Patel, Director of Medical & Mental Health Services. “Youth can come into our clinic feeling distressed or agitated, and they will go right to one of the dogs. It’s amazing to see how Tom can deescalate a teen that is upset.”

Before coming to Leake & Watts, the dogs undergo a two-year training program dedicated to training them to recognize behaviors, expressions, and other cues, providing comfort, and opportunities to deescalate crises. With the help of dogs like Tom, we can give individuals a different avenue in which to open up, express care, and receive affection. The dogs are able to attend individual and group therapy sessions, offering the presence of a calm and nonjudgmental friend who can provide support.

Amanda is just one of the many residents who has clearly benefitted from the comforting presence of the dogs. Sometimes Tom or his canine colleague Harris is the first and closest friend that a teen makes while in the program. “Tom and I bonded really quickly when I first came to the RTC. I don’t know why, but he makes me feel happy,” she says.



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SUPPORT TODAY. SUCCESS TOMORROW.

## Friends and Supporters Come Together at A Taste of Red Rooster



Leake & Watts welcomed friends and supporters to famed restaurant Red Rooster for an evening of fine dining and local history, raising nearly \$70,000 in support of programs and services to children, adults and families. Guests had the opportunity to sample dishes created by famed owner Chef Marcus Samuelsson, take a guided tour of the kitchen and learn about the vibrant history of Harlem from Keynote Speaker Professor Dr. Kenneth T. Jackson of Columbia University.

A highlight of the night was Jalise Salvatto, a former resident of Woodfield Cottage Secure Detention, who spoke about how her experience at Leake & Watts inspired her to alter the direction of her life. Although she had become involved with the juvenile justice system when she was only fifteen years old, today she is an entrepreneur, a certified Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) and a proud mother. She credits



the Leake & Watts staff at Woodfield with helping her understand the consequences of her actions. "I always felt like there were people there looking out especially for me like angels," Jalise told the audience. "The staff really cared about me and genuinely tried to help me. At Leake & Watts, they show you that you have the chance to get it right before you go the wrong way forever. I wouldn't be who I am today without them."

"We are so thankful for our friends who show their unwavering support year after year," said Executive Director Alan Muca-tel, "and we're also delighted that we had the opportunity to welcome so many new faces into our community at this year's spring benefit. The generous support from friends all over New York is what enables us to continue providing high-quality services to young men and women like Jalise, to help them move their lives toward success."