



LIVE



LEARN



WORK



PLAY

Access & Ability

Increasing independence and maximizing opportunity

The Neag Foundation funds Camp Lily improvements

A \$29,850 grant from The Neag Foundation is funding improvements and enhancements to our Camp Lily Berks campground in order to meet the evolving needs of campers. The project includes converting an existing space into a sensory room, installing a new pool lift, refurbishing the swing sets, purchasing new indoor seating, and updating and adding several other features.

We are especially pleased to provide a sensory room for campers. Sensory rooms are spaces that provide sensory experiences designed specifically to help individuals with autism and other sensory processing disorders



to feel calm, supported, and focused. It is used to de-escalate intense behavioral episodes and as a sanctuary for escaping sensory overload. We renovated an existing room inside the building by repainting the walls and modifying the lighting to create a soothing environment.



The space is outfitted with items to help engage the senses using light, color, smell, sound and touch like a fiber optic wall curtain, sensory wall panels, gel floor tiles, sensory bins, weighted blankets, and sensory seating.

Additional improvements inside the building include a new gaming table, couches, chairs, and bean bag chairs. The covered patio attached

to the building will be outfitted with composite activity tables to make it a more functional space. Outside, a new pool lift has been installed. It is used to transfer swimmers with limited mobility in and out of the pool, ensuring all campers can enjoy swim time safely. The three swing sets in the playground have been professionally repainted and outfitted with new swings. We chose a combination of traditional belt swings, platform swings, and arm swings. We will also be adding one or two sensory fixtures to the playground. A new backboard with hoop has been installed in the half basketball court.

We are grateful to The Neag Foundation for their continued support in meeting the needs of the children and young adults we serve. Over the past few years, the foundation has provided grants to purchase equipment for our outpatient therapy center, including a biometric treadmill, lite gait, climbing wall, and motorized changing table.

Dance classes enhance community supports program

A serendipitous partnership is changing the lives of the young adults in our community supports program who live in the Lehigh Valley. Cynthia Phillips, Director of Community Supports Programs, made a connection with Anthony Harris, Founder & Dance Instructor of Solo Expressions, when she was in search of an activity last winter that would get participants active. Anthony's passion for dance and commitment to serving the disability community was a natural match.

Harris provides dance classes daily for individuals enrolled in the Community Supports program at his Allentown studio, Solo Expressions. "Anthony's classes have been a game-changer for these young adults, some of whom are non-verbal. They are 100% engaged as they work to express themselves through movement. They are not only exercising, but also connecting with their peers and learning in a community environment," says Phillips. She adds, "We are thrilled with Anthony and the impact he is having on our program."



For individuals with developmental disabilities, dance can positively impact attention span, memory, ability to follow instructions, and physical strength and coordination. It is a powerful therapy because it requires the dancers to express emotions and ideas through movement and control their bodies in coordination with those around them.

"Everyone has grown since the start of these classes. They have overcome shyness and learned to trust me. I started adding complex movements, which they are not only keeping up with but showing confidence in doing so," says Harris. "I can envision them doing performances and competitions someday."

HOW THE UNITED WAY OF BERKS COUNTY SUPPORTS EASTERSEALS

The United Way of Berks County annually provides over \$380,000 to support five Easterseals programs — Outpatient Therapy, Specialty Medical Clinics, Make the First Five Count, Camp Lily Berks, and Hang Time. With this funding, Easterseals is able to provide quality, specialized services to over 700 children and teens annually.

Our Specialty Medical Clinics bring medical and surgical specialists from Philadelphia to our community so children with disabilities can receive specialized care close to home. This reduces the hardship on families regarding transportation logistics and cost, taking time off work, and finding childcare for siblings.

When a therapist in the Reading School District called to see if we could lend a wheelchair to a first grader who was unable to walk, we could because we had funding for equipment loans. The student then enrolled in our orthopedic clinic and attended physical therapy where she learned to walk with a walker, something her family did not know was possible.

These are real programs benefitting real people in your neighborhood that would not be possible without funding from the United Way of Berks County. Supporting the United Way means you also support Easterseals and the other organizations they fund to meet the needs of our community.



EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM continues to grow

LEAP is our employment preparation experience for high school students with disabilities, ages 16-21. It combines paid work experience with curriculum instruction to provide participants with the skills they need to transition successfully into adulthood. This past year, the program increased the number of meetings per session from five to eight, providing a more robust curriculum. A grant from Wells Fargo subsidized the program and added a financial literacy component to the curriculum. We also entered into an agreement with the PA Office of Vocational Rehabilitation to fund the program for students with open OVR cases. Funding to cover other participants, administrative costs and the financial literacy component is secured through foundation grants and Educational Improvement Tax Credit donations.



Early Intervention benefits from rate increase

The Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning Bureau of Early Intervention & Family Supports enacted a permanent rate increase of 3% for Infant/Toddler Early Intervention Services in the 2022-23 budget. This is in addition to the time-limited 3% increase enacted last year that was funded by the American Rescue Plan. These increases allow all providers of Early Intervention services, like Easterseals, and the individuals and families they serve to benefit from a rate increase for services.

People with disabilities and Easterseals have a significant stake in government-funded programs like this. For many children and adults with disabilities, their ability to get an education, earn a living and live independently is dictated by the availability of services and supports, many of which come only from the federal government. For this reason, Easterseals advocates for the rights of people living with disabilities and for adequate funding of public sector programs.



Demonstrate your commitment to Easterseals as a President's Council Member

For over 90 years, dedicated and passionate donors have given selflessly to Easterseals to ensure that children and adults of all abilities can live, work, and play in our community. One way to ensure Easterseals continues to grow and innovate is by becoming a member of our President's Council, which was created to recognize individuals who choose to generously donate year after year by making gifts totaling \$1,000 or more during a 12-month period. To learn more about the benefits of membership, contact **Ann Marie at 610-289-0114 x205** or **asurovy@esep.org**.



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Meet Lilly!

Lilly is a sassy, independent nine-year-old who attends Camp Lily Berks. Almost everyone who meets Lilly describes her as a ray of sunshine. Her smile lights up the room and her laugh can be heard across camp.



It doesn't matter if a camper is eighteen years old or ten years old, Lilly befriends them all and is a true camp ambassador, drawing everyone into activities and making sure everyone is included in the fun. With her contagious smile and positive attitude, she makes everyone feel welcome.

Lilly's mother Nicole attributes this confidence in part to how comfortable and secure Lilly feels at camp, which she describes as a home away from home. "I know that Lilly is being taken care of and nurtured in so many ways," states Nicole. "She's given the opportunity to grow and try new things. As a result, she has blossomed into her independence." The friendships Lilly made at camp have extended into the school year and so has her confidence and independence. "Lilly isn't afraid to ask for what she wants and express her likes or dislikes," states Nicole, "and her interests have broadened because of the different activities she experienced at camp."

Camp Lily is a six-week summer day camp for children (ages 8-21) with disabilities. It is offered at two sites: one in Berks County and one in the Lehigh Valley. We also offer an overnight camp, Growing Green, in the Poconos.