A TIME TO CHANGE

They are everywhere you go and sometimes we get sick of seeing them. Without trees however, we would not be able to exist for they support us in many different ways. So, next time you are driving through the woods and get tired of the endless amount of trees, think about what life would be without them. If you have ever seen the Tree of Life at Disney World or read the book, “The Giving Tree”, you will realize the significance of a tree.

Trees.

In doing this project I have learned a lot. A quote that resonated with me while completing the mural was: “Yesterday, I was clever and decided to change the world. Today, I am wise and chose to change myself.”

Maybe if we take the time to change ourselves, the world can still be changed one person at a time.

Dear Colleagues,

2015 was a busy and challenging year, but I have never been more proud of the quality of services each of our facilities provides to those in our care.

The treatment needs of the youth and adults we work with continue to get more complex, and the internal and external demands do not get easier. However, despite these challenges, our record of compliance and service quality continue to be impressive.

Here are just a few outcomes for 2015 I wanted to share:

☐ Hector Garza and Southern Peaks Regional Treatment Center received Department of Justice PREA certification.
☐ We opened our fourth community-based location in the State of Ohio.
☐ 12 state licensing inspections and 23 contract compliance audits were completed.
☐ Resident survey results continued to be positive:
☐ 88% positive discharges
☐ 79% felt prepared to leave the program

While we continue to do exceptional work at all of our programs, Abraxas I in Marienville, Pennsylvania was provided with a unique opportunity to showcase that work. Recently, Sports Illustrated produced an 18-minute documentary as part of their “Underdogs” series which focused on the athletic co-op between Abraxas I and the local high school. The video is posted on our website www.abraxasyfs.com.

In closing I want to thank you for your continued partnership with Abraxas and I look forward to a successful 2016.

Jon Swatsburg
Divisional Vice President

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Sports Illustrated Captures More than Just Football at Abraxas I

National magazine and online publication, Sports Illustrated, recently covered a story about Abraxas I’s cooperative sports agreement with local Sheffield High School’s football program.

TO VIEW THE VIDEO please go to www.abraxasyfs.com and click the Sports Illustrated link on the home page.
Fun at Southwood…

At Southwood we like to celebrate the seasons and the coming of autumn is no exception. In October the Special Therapies Department hosted their annual Fall Festival. Clients and staff enjoyed a day of crafts, games, karaoke, and movies. **A big congratulation goes out to Women's Short Term for winning the unit scarecrow making contest!**

With the conclusion of the Fall Festival comes the beginning of the holiday season at Southwood. It started when Southwood partnered with the Greater Chicago Food Depository to host a food drive; collecting cans and other food items to help those in need during the holidays. The staff at Southwood gave so generously that we collected **23 boxes of food**! What a fulfilling endeavor this turned out to be.

Keeping with the attitude of giving thanks, The Giving Tree Project began on November 1st and continued through the month of November. The Giving Tree gives all program members, staff, and visitors an opportunity to express their gratitude and thanks by writing their thoughts on leaves and hanging them on the tree hung up by the entrance. By the end of November the tree was full of positive messages and support. It was a beautiful site to see as you entered the building.

And then Christmas was upon us. The building was decorated and clients and staff enjoyed celebrating the season. At Southwood we not only celebrate Christmas but Kwanzaa and New Year’s too.

In partnership with the community…

Last spring Southwood began collaboration with the Hermitage Street Community Gardens group to offer up space in 2 vacant lots to build gardens for the residents of the Englewood community. The project is finally complete and it is lovely! With the completed pergola, patio, and walking paths, this garden in the city is a beautiful place to escape the hustle and bustle of daily life. A place to find peace. A place to stop and breathe. Southwood looks forward to taking advantage of this space to teach our program members, and staff, about gardening and finding serenity in life.

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NURSE HONORED WITH THE DAISY AWARD

Southwood Interventions was recently very proud to be able to honor one of their nurses, Renee Fields, with the very prestigious Daisy Award. The Daisy Award was founded in 1999 by the Barnes family as a way of saying Thank You to the nurses everywhere for going above and beyond and caring for patients and families. There are nearly 2,000 healthcare facilities in the United States plus 14 other countries committed to honoring excellence in nursing through the Daisy Award and now Abraxas Youth & Family Services in the Midwest is thrilled to be a part of this.

**Congratulations Mrs. Renee Fields!!!**

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**SOUTHWOOD HAPPENINGS**

**By:** Kim Pinkston
Southwood Interventions
Chicago, IL

**www.abraxasyfs.com**
Program youth were also involved in the workshops. They directed facility tours for attendees and did a great job talking about the program and giving the probation officers and caseworkers a picture of what a typical day is like at Abraxas. It was a great success and we look forward to next year!

As a Special Education Teacher, Desiree is tasked with balancing the responsibilities of the classroom with the regulatory paperwork responsibilities of IDEA. Utilizing her exceptional organizational skills and time management, she regularly exceeds expectations maintaining high standards for herself and her students. These accomplishments are commendable but only represent a fraction of the positive impact Desiree has on the students and the Abraxas Youth Center.

Focusing on student outcomes and academic growth, Desiree is consistently evaluating student academic levels and performance. As needs are recognized she collaborates with general education teachers to ensure they are aware of individual student needs and provides coaching and mentorship in developing appropriate curriculum and specifically designed instructional methods. Desiree also communicates with clinical and operational staff to ensure students receive the proper supports, such as homework help/peer tutoring, while on the residential units in the evenings and on weekends. She also identifies students in need of additional supports and facilitates individualized tutoring daily before school.

Recognizing the social and emotional needs of our students, Desiree established an Enrichment Program which focuses on providing students with learning “experiences”. Populations such as ours are often significantly “restricted” and providing an experience faces numerous challenges. Desiree’s passion for educating the whole student has proven greater than these “restrictions”, and unique programming occurs quarterly. Independently she researches, contacts and schedules relevant and motivational guest speakers. As a result, students are provided opportunity to meet new people and hear new perspectives on life, overcoming challenges, and success. Desiree’s Enrichment Program also includes field trips which have a focus on academic content but also contain an element that encourages social skill development. Often times these field trips include a component in which students must interact with professionals at the trip location and include information gathered in field trip assignments. Lastly, her Enrichment Program brings academic competition to our students. Whether a spelling bee, a trivia bowl, or some other creative competition, students have the chance to compete, show off, and experience a “fun” side of learning.

Benjamin Franklin is quoted as saying; “Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn”. Desiree is an exceptional example of this perspective of education, a role model for all she comes in contact with, and a remarkable recipient for JDCAP 2015 Educator of the Year.
In September the dorms at Abraxas I went head to head in an all-day softball tournament. The first game was Dakota vs. Evergreen. These two teams played well against each other and it was a close game until Dakota pulled ahead to win 21 to 18. The next game was also close with the Mohican girls beating Explorer 11 to 10. This win set up the championship game between Mohican and Dakota. It was a hard fight by the girls but Dakota came out as victorious.

Good sportsmanship was displayed by all participants. By organizing these games, Abraxas I allows youth in our care the opportunity to participate in healthy physical activities and strengthen social skills through light competition and team work.

Everyone enjoyed the day and look forward to next year’s tournament. A special thanks to the staff who coached the teams – their positive attitudes and excellent coaching added to the day’s success!

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The Leadership Development Program kicked off its 2015 holiday season with the sixth annual live wreath making project. It was a very successful year with program youth earning over 350 total hours of restitution and community service time while learning the skill of making live wreaths and holiday centerpieces.

Leading the project from the LEAP Department at LDP was Mr. Benjamin Brug, Treatment Supervisor and Ms. Heidi Lake, Activities Counselor. All proceeds went directly to improving the greenhouse restitution efforts at the program. Live wreaths were also distributed to local organizations such as the South Mountain Restoration Center where program youth actively participate in community service projects. Youth who participated learned about the importance of giving back and enjoyed becoming a part of what has become a tradition that many local community members have come to look forward to each year.

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During the month of September Abraxas Ohio gave three youth the opportunity to see the beauty that is found in nature by visiting Hocking Hills located in southern Ohio. Each youth was specially selected by staff to attend the trip because of their progress in treatment and superior behavior on the unit.

After a long two hour drive that ended in tight turns and rolling hills, three kids from the inner city were very much out of their comfort zone. The horseshoe-shaped cave, which got its name from the enormous pile of ashes found by early settlers, is 700 feet long and 100 feet deep. We first walked along the ridge of the cave to comprehend its massive length; once inside youth could see its staggering height. The small waterfall had slowed to a trickle from the recent dry months. The youth, while surprised at the ruggedness of the trails were impressed as this is nothing like they had seen before.

After Ash Cave we traveled to Old Man’s Cave, which received its name from the hermit Richard Rowe who lived there with his family in the late 1700s. While there the youth were able to hike the trails and return to childhood by playing outside and experiencing things they didn’t have the opportunity to experience before Abraxas.

They were also given the opportunity to face down some of their fears. One youth in particular faced his fear of heights. The other kids and Life Skills Supervisor, Robert Wallace, were able to encourage and help him climb rocks to the trail above. The teamwork was spontaneous and amazing to witness as they all pulled together to help one who was struggling. He wanted to give up but didn’t. Once back at the top of the trail people who had passed by watching him struggle stopped him to tell him what a great job he did and how awesome it was to see him conquer the rock.

The kids walked away from Hocking Hills gaining experiences they won’t soon forget and a sense of accomplishment they can hold onto in the future.
Youth in the Abraxas Open Residential Program in South Mountain, Pennsylvania began crocheting items approximately one year ago as a means to manage stress and acquire additional life skills. However, during the month of October, youth voluntarily spent a combined sixty hours crocheting items they later donated to the Leadership Development Program’s annual Breast Cancer Fundraiser. Over half of the program’s kids participated, crocheting over forty items to include hats, ribbons, blankets, scarves, and coasters. These items were purchased by staff and visitors and the proceeds were donated to the fundraiser.

This project allowed youth in the program to give back to the community by investing in a cause, promoting awareness, and encouraging empathetic thought. The kids were able to positively contribute to society, a primary concept in Phase III of the program and reiterated during weekly BARJ groups.

By now, most people are familiar with the concept of synthetic marijuana, and the street names most commonly associated with it like “K2” and “Spice”. However, not as many people are aware of the dangerous side effects, such as an increase in violent and unpredictable behavior as well as the physical side effects, including increased heart rate, seizures, hallucinations, brain damage and even death. The first death associated with synthetic marijuana occurred in April of 2015.

Since synthetic marijuana is cheaper and creates a more “intense” high, users often find themselves going back for more. It is not just one chemical; rather, it can be made with up to 100 different chemicals that are sprayed onto dried vegetation, often labeled as “incense”.

Staff in the NRT (Non-Residential Treatment) and HASA (Harrisburg Abraxas Student Academy) programs have been hearing first hand from kids the horrible negative reactions they have either experienced themselves or seen. Local news reports have also highlighted the rise in violent acts attributed to users being high on synthetic marijuana. A recent US News and World Report article also highlights the horrible side effects and known facts about synthetic marijuana.

The most important message is to share the news of synthetic marijuana’s potential harm to users and those around them. To that end, we are very proud of our HASA student volunteers who participated in a community panel discussion on synthetic drugs, hosted at the Hamilton Health Center in Harrisburg, PA. The forum included a panel of experts to discuss the effects and consequences of synthetic drugs, from a legal, medical and social perspective. We want to give a huge thank you to the students who shared their knowledge and experiences in order to help educate and bring awareness to others on the dangers of this drug.

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Throughout the summer of 2015, 36 of the female youth at Abraxas I diligently worked with Community Services Supervisor Jeanne Godlesky and their counselors (Angela Asti, Rachel Bendal, Brian Dubovsky, Darcy Fisher, Mike Schmader, and Carol Sprague) to make handmade blankets in the hope of bringing some happiness into the lives of sick children. In September, they saw their mission become reality.

On September 9, 2015, Jeanne Godlesky and facility driver Dave Dunn accompanied three girls (Kiara B, Adejah J and Ashley S) to Erie Shriners’ Hospital. Although this hospital no longer serves as an inpatient facility, they complete surgical procedures on children with health issues and deformities on a daily basis. They were very excited to receive a dozen homemade blankets to provide warmth and security to their patients and send them home at the end of the day with a special keepsake. Kiara was especially touched by this effort as she lives in Erie. She had discharged the week before this trip and chose to meet us there to be a part of giving back to her home community.

On September 15th we traveled to UPMC Children’s Hospital in Pittsburgh, PA. Kira O., a Pittsburgh native, and Lexi G. went with us on this venture. We delivered two dozen blankets for these children. Special effort was put into this trip by facility driver Kevin Smail as all donations must be made of new material and washed in a fragrance-free, dye-free detergent prior to being donated. Kevin spent time laundering all of these blankets so we could complete our mission.

Sarah, our UPMC contact person and Child Life Coordinator for the hospital, was overwhelmed when we presented her with the blankets. She noted that often donations are not so nicely done, packaged and ready for delivery to the children. She said that, believe it or not, children who were awaiting surgery that same day would be given these blankets before surgery and they keep the blankets their entire stay at Children’s Hospital.

She hopes to see us again and asked that we keep UPMC in mind for future donations stating, “We will take as many on these blankets as you can build”. Kira was very touched by this presentation in her home city and stated that she never knew there were such special ways for her to give back to her community; ways that made a sick child feel better and made her feel so good about what she had built and done for someone else!

In addition to this project, some of the Abraxas I male youth are also building wreathes to present to local nursing homes during the holiday season. And a new order of materials has arrived with the intent of building more blankets with youth in our PRTF and possibly delivering them to local children’s mental health facilities.

It has been a great team effort at Abraxas I – a wonderful opportunity for our residents to give back. We hope this becomes a tradition we are known for in the local communities and in the counties our youth call home.
One of the messages that Abraxas Ohio Counseling Centers strives to convey to patients is that getting high doesn’t have to involve drugs or alcohol!

Abraxas Counseling Center’s own Ashley Pittman proved that on August 6th, as she was one of the brave souls who rappelled down the face of the 22 story Sheraton Hotel in downtown Columbus, Ohio. Ashley’s participation was the result of collaboration between Abraxas Counseling Center and a national organization called Shatterproof. Shatterproof is “committed to protecting our children from addiction to alcohol or other drugs and ending the stigma and suffering of those affected by this disease.”

As a way to raise awareness of addiction issues, Shatterproof organized a nationwide series of rappelling events. Rappelling, for those who may not know, is a technique involving the descent of a vertical surface via a series of controlled drops down a secured rope. This seemed like a natural fit to the staff here in Columbus, so we all pitched in to raise the money necessary to participate. One of our counselors, Stephanie Tenny, spearheaded a Shatterproof Team Fundraiser that involved a luncheon, a raffle, and even the sale of Pie-in-the-face tickets. A good time was had by all, and we raised enough to sponsor Ashley’s brave assault on the Sheraton Hotel.
For the past four years, Abraxas I has sponsored our local law enforcement agencies in presenting an anti-bullying program to local elementary students. Forest County students grades K through 4 attend a presentation as well as receive an activity book that encompasses responsibility, respect, rules and general safety. Local officers, with the assistance of Deputy Phil, Buddy the Bulldog and puppets Cousin Vinny and Lucky Duck, entertain the children while teaching them important values. This partnership with law enforcement allows Abraxas to be good neighbors and be involved in the community.

BY: Jeanne Godlesky
Abraxas I
Marienville, PA