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Toward Independent Living and Learning's *Service Learning Abroad Program* completes Volunteer Project in Costa Rica

Toward Independent Living and Learning, Inc. (TILL) is pleased to announce the completion of their first Service Learning Abroad supported study tour for young adults with learning differences with a community volunteer project in Costa Rica. The innovative Service Learning Abroad program was made possible by a generous grant from the Blue Hills Bank Charitable Foundation.

The eight person team was led by Paula Aiesi, Director of Community Connections for TILL, who had participated in the TILL Ambassador trip to Costa Rica last October and initiated the local contacts for this welcomed project.

The Service Learning Abroad team was comprised of David Kirby and Chandler Rush, students from Lexington High School and Katie Habif, from Brighton, as well as Dafna Krouk-Gordon, President and Founder of TILL; Flor Poueriet, Residential Coordinator; Nelsy Fernadez, Residential Manager; and Margaret Nabukenya, Residential Support Professional. Poueriet and Fernadez provided translation for the group during the week long journey.

Beginning the trip in San Jose, the group enjoyed some sightseeing before heading into Buenos Aires and the indigenous territories to begin their work painting a community center.

The TILL representatives were deeply impressed with a group of vocal self-advocates that they met with from the Independent Living Center, a program for adults with physical disabilities. This meeting allowed for an opportunity to share with them examples of the struggle that we in the U.S. have had with disability rights and issues. All found it to be an eye-opening experience. Nelsy noted "It made me appreciate what I have."

The group found that best laid plans, and paint, does sometimes go astray but were able to find a source for both paints and supplies to make over the long neglected hall with help from community volunteers. Dafna explained: "They chose a deep earthen orange to represent the local clay and a bright yellow to represent the Sun."



The group visited area schools in Buenos Aires and Ujarrás. Visiting one of the classrooms, the group distributed gifts of school supplies donated by several of TILL's residential programs and trinkets including sunglasses and cases to the children and enjoyed spending time with them. "One of the little kids when he saw the school supplies exclaimed 'omigod' in perfect English!" related Dafna.

Flor Poueriet describes the trip as an unforgettable experience that opened up doors and hopes to continue communicating with people they met. Although Flor found the countryside to be amazing, she notes that the some of the mountain roads "brought up everyone's adrenaline".

Viewed as a success by all, the group is looking forward to continuing the contacts they have made. Nelsey emphatically notes "If I had the opportunity to go again, I won't think twice. Helping others is what I like best about my job at TILL and the most rewarding part of the trip was the satisfaction of helping others."

TILL Central Billerica Presents Scholarship to Shawsheen Valley Tech Student



TILL Central Billerica's program annually funds a \$500 scholarship through the Billerica Scholarship foundation which they have presented each year since 2009 to a deserving senior. The scholarship is "given to an individual with special needs who dedicates themselves to furthering their education" and the student is chosen by the scholarship foundation.

The people who participate in TILL Central Billerica hold fundraisers throughout the year in order to be able to continue providing this award. Most recently, the group held a carnival which was attended by families and all TILL day programs. In conjunction with the carnival, they held a raffle which helped raise money toward their goal. Many of the raffle items were made by the individuals, some were made and/or donated by the staff members.

On June 4, 2012, Lisa, Alan, and Heather M. attended the Shawsheen Valley Technical High School award ceremony at the Billerica Lodge of Elks. This year's award recipient was Jenna O'Connor.

The group wrote a short speech together in preparation for the ceremony and Heather read the speech for the crowd. During her speech, Heather told the crowd that the focus of our program is to be part of our community and to give back whenever we can. She also stated that education is very important to every student. Heather's speech and the presentation from the group was received with a standing ovation from the crowd. Heather's full speech follows:

"TILL Central is a day program which focuses on being part of our community and giving back whenever we can. Some years back, the people who attend TILL Central decided that we would sponsor and fund a scholarship. Over the years, we have done a lot of things to raise money for the TILL Central Scholarship. This year in particular, we held a TILL Central carnival and a raffle to benefit the scholarship. Every year we present this scholarship to a deserving senior that will go to college in the fall. We all know that education is very important to every student. It is our pleasure to present this year's award."

April Madness 2012 "Do You Believe In Magic?"

This year's residential version of April Madness came to a close on Sunday, June 3, at our annual Cultural Festival at Cumnock Hall at UMASS Lowell. The theme of this year's contest was "Do You Believe In Magic". The staff and individuals of our group homes not only believe in magic, but made a great deal of magic on their own. The outpouring of creativity and dedication displayed in the presentations this year was indeed magic.

Highlights of the many wonderful accomplishments included representatives from 47 of our homes participating in this year's Walk for Hunger, raising an amazing \$3300.00. Our packet pick up, which was held at Audubon's Broadmoor Wildlife Sanctuary in Natick, sparked over 200 visits to Audubon sites, mostly throughout eastern Mass. There were trips to NY City and Niagara Falls, Rock Climbing and kayaking on the Charles. We "Paid It Forward" to our local fire departments, police departments and animal shelters. We volunteered at numerous food pantries and animal shelters, and many more worthwhile efforts that are far too varied and numerous to list here.

The Cultural Festival as usual, featured an amazing buffet of international foods prepared by our staff and individuals, and represented the eclectic ethnic backgrounds of our employees and individuals. After feasting, Grandpa Magic treated the audience to an interactive card trick. More magic was on tap with a very special performance by the Sapere Clan dance troupe. The group; comprised of Kethy Muriithi, Svetlana Magao, Joetta Koroma, Yolanda Cruz, Grace Kubuti, Stacy Mulei, Evans Diya and Chris Thuku; all TILL Residential staff, treated the crowd with a lively traditional Kenyan

dance.

John Stevens then led the audience in a rendition of the Lovin' Spoonful's "Do You Believe In Magic" before the difficult business of picking a contest winner commenced. Deciding on a winner was no easy task and it took 10 homes to round out our top 5 houses. This year's Best In Show, overall winner, is the staff and individuals from our Peabody home.

Thanks to all our staff and individuals for all the amazing work they performed, and thanks to all those who helped make the Cultural Festival run smoothly this year. As always, the big winners were the individuals we serve here at TILL.



HUB International New England Charity Golf Tournament

HUB International is a leading global insurance brokerage providing a broad array of insurance products and services worldwide. For the last 15 years, HUB has sponsored a charity golf tournament to support an endeavor of their choice. This year, TILL was chosen as the recipient. This is a great honor and a wonderful opportunity to increase awareness of TILL's mission and raise funds for our innovative programs.

The 15th annual HUB International New England Charity Golf Tournament was held on June 11th, at the Andover Country Club. TILL sent their own "Fearsome Foresome" comprised of John Stevens, Director of Special Projects; Carol Morrell, RN at our Hudson Day Program; with Brad Stokes and Ken Saleski, parents of individuals in our Union Street, Weymouth home.



It was a beautiful day on the course. Thanks to HUB International New England and the Andover Country Club for their generosity and hospitality.

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