

New Garden, With Pleasantville Roots, Dedicated in Valhalla

By Lindsay Emery

A new therapeutic garden was unveiled at the Westchester Institute for Human Development (WIHD) in Valhalla last week to engage children and young adults with disabilities in community service.

The space, called "Adam's Garden," was an idea initiated by Brendan Klein, hired as a liaison last December for WIHD's self-advocacy group to expand community service opportunities for young adults with disabilities. Klein has gained extensive experience volunteering at the Pleasantville Community Garden on the grounds of St. John's Episcopal Church in Pleasantville.

The church and the Pleasantville Community Garden provided technical support and seed money for the new garden.

Naomi Brickel, Klein's supervisor and director of the Community Support Network, expressed how much this project meant to her. The garden, which will feature seasonal flowers and vegetables, was named after her son, Adam Brickel, who was a sophomore at New Rochelle High School when he suddenly passed away last year from a heart

condition.

Klein decided that he wanted to honor Brickel's son by naming the therapeutic garden after him.

"I think that people with disabilities don't often enough have the opportunity to be empowered by helping others, as we, as people, we all are so empowered when we give to others, and unfortunately, I know that people with disabilities don't always get that opportunity," Brickel said during a July 15 ribbon-cutting ceremony that was attended by various dignitaries.

Klein also built a bench with his father, engraving Adam's name on it and placing it in the garden.

"I think it's the most fulfilling aspect of my work and the most fulfilling project I have worked on and to have it have a theme of helping people that you don't even know, just somehow really resonated with me, so thank you, Brendan, I'm touched," Brickel said.

WIHD President and CEO Dr. Susan Fox said the idea for the garden came out of a service project that began with growing small plants in the windows of the offices, but it soon expanded to include WIHD's child welfare program.

"So it became this really nice community collaborative project that involved people with disabilities, children in our child welfare program and the community at large," Fox said.

Some of the programs that Klein has developed include GetWIHDit and TicTacGo, Brickel said. These social groups bring people with disabilities together and create opportunities for them to engage in social activities such as going to basketball games or playing fantasy football.

"This group, in particular GetWIHDit, is all about doing good for learning, doing good for yourself and doing good for others - social consciousness," Brickel said.

She explained that the garden will not only provide an activity for the children but they will also be able to bring home produce to their families.

David Juros, the founder and executive director of the Pleasantville Community Garden, has supported Klein through his volunteer work at the local garden.

"Brendan's helped us almost since the beginning, and at first, he came and started helping in the garden and helping us plant, helping us harvest," Juros said.



Last Monday, a new therapeutic garden was formally opened on the grounds of the Westchester Institute for Human Development in Valhalla, an idea spawned by Brendan Klein, fourth from left. Also pictured with Klein at the ceremony are, from left to right, Assemblyman David Buchwald, state Sen. Shelley Mayer, WIHD Child Welfare Services Director Danielle Weisberg, Naomi Brickel, director of WIHD's Community Support Network, and WIHD President and CEO Susan Fox.

"Then, with his group, he decided to start the seeds for us."

Juros was proud when he learned that Klein was extending his knowledge of gardening to another group and was happy

to help financially support the organization.

"We help with the information that they need, but he doesn't need much," he said. "He's pretty much the farmer himself now."