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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Igniting Passion, Unleashing Potential: Diaz Boxing Club brings a powerful partnership to CPW's BRIDGE School in Rye Brook

Rye Brook, NY – Ryan Diaz does the unexpected, bringing the sport of boxing to students at The BRIDGE School, a division of Cerebral Palsy of Westchester (CPW).

Over the past year, The BRIDGE School clinical therapy team led by Speech-Language Pathologist Carmella Barbiera has collaborated with Ryan Diaz, owner of Diaz Boxing Club of Portchester, NY, combining Diaz'



Ryan Diaz, owner of Diaz Boxing Club, with a student and CPW Occupational Therapist Aileen Moncion. Photos by Niqualla Grant.

knowledge of the sport with the therapists' knowledge of each student's abilities to create a powerful and impactful adaptive boxing program. Diaz' team of boxing staff and club volunteers hold sessions once a month in the gym at Cerebral Palsy of Westchester, working one-on-one with the students who range in age from six to twenty-one, challenged by multiple disabilities including autism, neurological impairments, intellectual disabilities, epilepsy, and cerebral palsy. The program reflects many of CPW's curriculum goals: allowing students to build strength, to be active with classmates, and explore outside the classroom. But it brings much more.

Diaz notes that boxing gives the students a new opportunity, a chance to experience something they wouldn't otherwise

have access to. In terms of life skills, he confidently states that the program *"teaches them to go after what they want without fear of failure and helps foster self-confidence through the process of discovering personal strength and power."*

When asked about starting a boxing program at CPW and the impact it has had on him, Diaz recalls that a few adults and teenagers with Autism who currently come to his gym piqued his interest in engaging with this population. Diaz admits, *"I was scared at first, but open to testing myself and trying something outside my comfort zone. I have been forced to become more creative, which helps me to grow. I have learned how to engage with the students*



Students with CPW SLP Carmela Barbiera

and build relationships with them. This has become bigger than I thought but I am grateful I can give back."

CPW's speech-language pathologist (SLP) Carmella Barbiera trains at Diaz Boxing Club and was instrumental in introducing Diaz to CPW. She and the rest of the clinical team experience first-hand how boxing brings opportunities to use skills that are taught during therapy sessions in a fun and function way, such as bilateral coordination, upper extremity strengthening, motor planning, following directions, and turn taking. Occupational therapist Karen Mandelkow, notes, *"The students have been so excited to be a part of something that many have only heard about or watched. While they work along with the boxing coaches I can see increased determination, pushing themselves further than during any therapy session and pure enjoyment to be part of a group and working with peers."*

Local boxers volunteer with the program, including Mike Kienle who owns JV Bagels in Shrub Oak, and Steven Mojica, one of the staff coaches at Diaz Boxing Club. Says Mojica, *"I feel honored, touched, and inspired when working with the students at CPW. It makes me check myself when I take life for granted. I think boxing has helped them like it has helped everyone else in that it's an escape from reality, it's a way to express yourself, it's a coping mechanism, and it's therapeutic."*

The BRIDGE School of Rye Brook, a division of Cerebral Palsy of Westchester, offers personalized education and therapeutic support in a nurturing and enriching environment for students challenged with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

Founded in 1949, **Cerebral Palsy of Westchester's** mission is to advance the independence, productivity, and full citizenship of people living with all developmental disabilities including autism, neurological impairments, intellectual disabilities, epilepsy, and cerebral palsy. CPW's main campus is located in Rye Brook, NY, housing a special education school, an adult day habilitation program and recreation programs. CPW operates the United Preschool Center in White Plains, as well as six group homes throughout Westchester. Through a comprehensive network of educational programs, day services, residential sites, therapeutic services, employment training, recreation programs and advocacy, the agency helps thousands of children and adults in Westchester and Fairfield Counties live more productive and satisfying lives. The organization's motto is: *Realizing Tomorrow's Potential . . . Today!*



L-R: Coach Diaz, student and Physical Therapist Lauren Mandelkow, student with volunteer Mike Kienle, student with Lauren Mandelkow.
Photos by Niqualla Grant.

For more information and high-resolution images, contact Tia Levinson, CPW's Director of Development and Public Relations, at 914-937-3800 ext. 353 or email tia.levinson@cpwestchester.org

Additional images on next page . . .



CPW Therapist Team with Coaches and Volunteers from Diaz Boxing Club with students of CPW BRIDGE School. L-R: Front Row-CPW Occupational Therapist (OT) Karen Mandelkow, student, Physical Therapist (PT) Lauren Mandelkow with six of the students; 2nd row kneeling or sitting - PT Rocco Coluccio with four students, Carmela Barbiera, boxing volunteer Mike Kienle; 3rd Row standing – Diaz Boxing Club owner Ryan Diaz, student, PT Eonhee Lee, PT Melissa McKiernan, SLP Ingrid Cochet, CPW Teacher Assistant (TA) Cassius Walker, OT Aileen Moncion, TA David Grozier. Missing: Diaz Boxing Coach Steven Mojica, CPW OT Diane A. Louis, SLP Mike Solano. Photos by Niqualla Grant.



Students with coaches (L-R): Coach Diaz, Coach Steven Mojica, volunteer Mike Kienle. Photos by Niqualla Grant.

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