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Musician Matt Savage to headline Continuum fundraising gala in New Haven

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Matt Savage will be part of a fundraising gala for Continuum of Care at Anthony's Ocean View on Lighthouse Road on Oct. 3

NEW HAVEN — **Continuum of Care**, a local organization serving more than 2,000 adult clients with mental illness and intellectual disabilities, receives most of its funding from block grants and private donations, according to Continuum CEO and President Patti Walker, .

Without a state budget in place, however, there are not many block grants to be had.

"We need these funds to continue to be strong and viable as an organization, and in order to make sure we can continue to expand our services as well," Walker said.

So on Tuesday, Oct. 3 at 5:30 p.m. at Anthony's Ocean View on Lighthouse Road, Continuum is acting as host to **Matt Savage**, a 25-year-old prodigious musical savant with autism, for a fundraising gala.

"We're so excited to have him. He's world-renowned," said Deborah Cox, Continuum's vice president for fund development. "He was inspired to teach himself music and he went on to play around the world."

Savage, a jazz musician, bandleader and composer, has recorded 12 albums and has toured with jazz legends Chick Corea, Wynton Marsalis and Clark Terry, as well as rock and pop musicians such as Chaka Khan, Neil Young and Stephen Stills.

"It's really exciting. It's just an honor to be a part of this event for a great cause," Savage said.

He said he cannot recall a time when he did not want to work professionally as a jazz musician, because he's been doing it since he was about 9 years old.

"Music makes me emote differently; it gives me more of a subtle understanding about emotions, but also makes me more optimistic," he said. "It's given me something to work for."

Walker said many individuals on the autism spectrum, including Savage, are born with sensory issues, so Savage overcoming something that initially disturbed him can serve as an example for all other adults with intellectual disabilities.

"We have so many clients that have challenges, but they also have talents and aspirations," she said.

Savage said his adjunct position at Bunker Hill Community College in Massachusetts has given him an opportunity firsthand to witness students learning and growing in their confidence and proficiency with music, considering he does not remember much about his own growth at a young age.

"I taught at this school for kids with autism in New York City while doing grad school there," he said. "It was all kids with special needs or on the autism spectrum, and I've

seen music has been a part of these kids' lives to help them speak more and help them to adapt."

In the 35 years since Walker joined Continuum, she has seen service intensity grow, as addiction have become more prevalent.

"The illnesses and comorbidity of the issues we serve are so much more complex," she said. "The service intensity has heightened, so our need to service them has changed. People's attitudes toward mental illness, because of that intensity, have led people to become more educated about it and understand it better."

Walker said Continuum offers 42 residential programs, most of them in New Haven, for individuals with mental illness, intellectual or developmental disabilities, addiction and substance abuse issues and veterans dealing with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. She said Continuum is looking to expand its crisis program coverage, for individuals having short-term crises.

"For anyone who has a mental illness or disability, they have periods of time in their life where their recovery is a stumbling block," she said. "Rather than end up in a hospital or emergency room, which is very costly and not nearly as effective in terms of treatment, we put them in a community-based treatment program."

Tickets for the Continuum event are \$1,000 for a table of 10 and \$125 for individual tickets and can be reserved at continuumct.org/events or by calling 203-562-2264. Guests of honor will be Mayor Toni Harp and Continuum board member William Sledge and his wife Betsy.

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