

Center House Employment Supports: Education and Training Program

A DMR-funded program that provides a supportive environment for people dually diagnosed with mental retardation and a major mental illness

Summary

The *Education and Training Program*, a component of Center House Employment Supports (CHES), is a Department of Mental Retardation (DMR) funded program for approximately twenty-five people diagnosed with both mental retardation and a major mental illness. Intensive community-based Day Supports programming provides a safe and supportive environment to help participants learn to take charge of their lives and become more active in their communities.

A Structured Group Approach

The structure of the *Education and Training Program* emphasizes individual choice and



The popular cooking group teaches people how to plan for and prepare a meal for all of their co-workers and support staff.



The Education & Training Program is based in a large building featuring commercial and light manufacturing activities.

offers three opportunities for learning and growing in each of three daily sessions. These include Education, Work, and Community Participation.

1. Education

A number of seminar-style educational groups are offered. Each group is taught to incorporate a variety of learning styles and ability levels using a standardized curriculum and customized lesson plans. The Education and Life Skills topics include:

- Budgeting
- Community Outings
- Computers
- Creative Writing
- Culture
- Current Events
- English and Spelling
- Human Rights
- Life Skills
- Literacy
- Math
- Newsletter
- Nutrition and Food Preparation
- Safety and First Aid

In addition to the regular groups, people have access to a **computer classroom** with standardized software and high-speed Internet connections. People use the computers during the daily computer classes as well as during their breaks for a variety of reasons from learning how to type to creating a greeting card for a friend.

Center House Employment Supports: Education & Training Program

Cooking group is a popular activity that teaches participants how to plan for and prepare a meal for all of their co-workers and support staff. Every Friday twenty-five people sit down to a healthy home-cooked meal prepared by their co-workers with assistance from staff.

Expressive therapy interns run **expressive therapy groups** every week at the Education and Training site. The interns conduct classes in art, movement and music under close staff supervision.

2. Work

a. Evaluation and Skill Development:
In the *Education and Training Program*, individuals have the opportunity to take part in skill evaluations and to learn new job skills in

- Landscaping: raking, mulching, lawn care, trimming shrubs
- Recycling: paper collection, sorting by color, professional interactions with business community
- Reception: answering telephones, taking messages, greeting visitors
- Janitorial Skills: sweeping, mopping, floor buffing, facility maintenance
- Production: labeling, assembling, collating, sealing, metering mail
- Business etiquette: professional attire, business attitudes



Sharing your creations with others can be fun.

- Time management: maintaining a schedule, budgeting time, scheduling appointments
- Career Exploration: exposure to a variety of careers,
- Job Preparation: training on computers, resume writing and interview skills
- Travel: using the MBTA, commuter rail, buses, walking, directions, safety

b. Individual Community Employment:

The staff of the *Education and Training Program* assists individuals in preparing for individual community employment. Individuals work closely with Employment/ Education Counselors, the Program Manager and the Business Developer to explore career opportunities, write resumes, develop interview skills, look for community employment, receive on-the-job coaching and travel training.

People in community placements earn competitive wages in their field. People who receive support from Education & Training staff have worked at local businesses including: Au Bon Pain, Bazics Cafe, Stop and Shop, Marion Manor, Filenes and CVS.

c. Community Supported Work Crews

Individuals who are not yet ready for individual placement, have the opportunity to participate in supported work crews, where they can gain work skills, confidence, professional work attitudes and a good work ethic. Crews consist of two to five individuals with one to two job coaches. Work sites have included Fenway Park, Bay Cove Human Services (landscape maintenance at various sites), EDIC, NESN, Au Bon Pain and the Women's Educational and Industrial Union. Individuals receive minimum wage or above for all off-site work crews.

3. Community Participation

Community participation activities have recently included trips to Castle Island, the Museum of Afro-American History, the Museum of Fine Arts, the Aquarium, Houghton Pond, the Freedom Trail and Boston Bowl.

Before going on an outing, people get together to discuss where they would like to go, how much it will cost, and any other preparations necessary before going on the outing, such as buying tickets. Each activity is scheduled according to the preferences of everyone involved. The activities are designed to foster individual fulfillment, to support the development of a network of meaningful



Individuals have the opportunity to learn the basics of landscaping which means lots of raking in the fall.

relationships and to strengthen links with the larger community. Following the outing, the group meets again to discuss the success of the outing and suggestions for future outings.

Groups are offered three times a day and staff members encourage people to select community activities that are consistent with the personal goals they have chosen to work on. People in the *Education and Training Program* are always supported when they are trying new activities or when they are moving on to more independent roles in integrated community settings.

Each week participants in the program also take part in community connections by volunteer food shopping for the elderly. After shopping, the food is dropped off at a local site and distributed to those in need.

A Caring Community

The *Education and Training Program* encourages full use of each person's capability to contribute. An important part of the daily structure is the token system, a reinforcement program from which each person may purchase a variety of items, using tokens that they have earned. People shop for items that match their preferences, thereby making this reinforcement component a positive experience for each individual.

Location

The *Education and Training Program* is located in the Marine Industrial Park in Boston's historic waterfront district. Computer and classroom spaces are well furnished and decorated with artwork chosen by the people in the program. The program is accessible by MBTA bus #3, #6, or #7 from South Station and bus #6 from Haymarket Station. There is also a shuttle service from South Station that charges a nominal monthly fee.

For more information about the Education and Training and other programs of Center House Employment Supports, please contact Yohanna LaRoche Program Director at (617) 878-2540



Education & Training Program
23 Drydock Avenue
Boston, MA 02210

