

Center House Employment Supports: Skills Training Program

An intensive day program designed to offer specialized support to individuals with both severe behavioral problems and chronic and persistent mental illness

Summary

The Skills Training Program, a component of Center House Employment Supports (CHES), provides the agency's highest level of support to individuals who have been unable to participate successfully in traditional community-based day treatment and rehabilitation programs. It is designed to accept persons who are not comfortable participating in cognitive group processes and/or who require a secure but flexible environment that can accommodate their individual behaviors. The program site uses a series of small settings where individuals can assimilate into larger group experiences at their own pace. This allows each person's treatment program to be effectively customized.

Program Operation

Rehabilitation plans are designed to be sensitive to the goals, interests and preferences of each person. A careful and limited application of a systematic behavioral approach with individual rewards, and an atmosphere of tolerance, acceptance and resilience has enabled the program to accommodate people who have had significant difficulties in other programs, and have created serious challenges to the service system. Over time, each person develops a strong alliance with the program team (both staff and other individuals), is able to find a satisfying place in the community and begins to participate in a variety of activities that take advantage of that person's strengths.



The Skills Training Program is located on the first floor of the Marine Industrial Park on Drydock Avenue in South Boston.

Individually-tailored program components provide a stable base from which persons can begin their recovery. Staff members work with individuals in a partnership offering flexibility and freedom of choice, while at the same time challenging individuals to explore questions such as: *What are my values? What are my likes and dislikes? What are my interests? Into what environments do I want to put myself?* Many of the individuals will later be able to progress to larger, less intensive program settings and then on to integrated employment and social environments. The flexible, non-threatening program environment helps highly troubled individuals to dramatically improve their quality of life.

The program uses a flexible mix of individual and very small group experiences, including social paid work, and therapeutic activities that



Every year, workers at the Skills Training Program decorate and sell holiday wreaths.

Center House Employment Supports: Skills Training Program

take place at the program site as well as in the community. Each person works with staff to develop a detailed Individual Rehabilitation Plan that will serve as a daily guide. The Plan includes specific goal statements and an inventory of skills the person clearly possesses already, and skills that may have to be newly learned or relearned. The Plan also specifies a small number of measurable objectives to be achieved in one year or less. The people are actively involved in the entire process, so that they understand which skills and supports they need, and why they need these skills and supports to achieve their goals.



The group at Skills Training always likes getting together for a birthday celebration.

During a person's participation in the Skills Training Program, daily and weekly activities are oriented toward the following:

1. Developing the basic skills universally necessary for success in any living, learning, working or socializing environment. These include basic social and interpersonal skills, communication skills, grooming, cooking, cleaning and other domestic skills.
2. Learning to maintain acceptable control over behaviors despite the interfering



Everybody has a good time when the music therapist and ESL tutor come into the program once a week.

thoughts and overwhelming feelings that are the symptoms of the person's illness.

3. Learning to determine when and how to get help when symptoms become overwhelming or threaten to overwhelm the person's ability to control problem behaviors.
4. Learning about the medications one takes, how to take them properly and how to spot any side effects.

People attending this program may choose to participate in a variety of work program and day program activities throughout the day.



Each person chooses his own instrument to play during the music therapy sessions.

The work program involves both on-site and off-site work projects that focus on developing individual pre-vocational and vocational strengths. Small off-site enclaves do landscaping, paper recycling, delivery service, and cleaning. On-site projects include furniture repair and refinishing, small boat building, paper sorting and screen assembly. Job readiness includes resume preparation, ability to remain on task, developing pride in work and craftsmanship, taking and understanding direction, developing responsibility for keeping track of hours worked and filling out time sheets. People participating in these projects are paid for their work and receive a weekly paycheck.

Day program activities include participation in basic academic and living skills training, working on computers, and doing arts and crafts projects. Day programming also places a lot of emphasis on community integration and varied activities that challenge participants to engage in new ways of looking at the world and themselves. A strong effort is made to spark



Program participants enjoy trips to a farm during warm weather months.

passion in hobbies and outside interests that provide a natural grounding force and means of releasing stress.

The group goes on picnics and a variety of field trips which include hiking, fishing, bird watching, beach trips, kite flying, apple picking, sailing, sledding, bowling, and going to museums and zoos in the area. In the summer, a



In the fall, apple picking followed by eating candied apples is a favorite activity of some people.

group tends its plot at Charles River Community Gardens once a week.

Wellness is promoted through supervised gym participation, walking groups, health awareness, smoking cessation programs and support, recovery support and counseling, and nutrition awareness through weekly cooking groups and food shopping.

As a way of giving back to the community, program participants volunteer in a monthly “Shore Savers” program by doing a “clean-up” at Carson Beach.

A music therapist and an ESL tutor come into the program once a week.

Eligibility and Referral Procedures

Access to the Skills Training Program is by closed referral through the five Metro Boston Mental Health Centers. The Director of Case Management in each center determines priority

Center House Employment Supports: Skills Training Program

for the service and then contacts Celestine Enere, Case Management Supervisor for the Erich Lindemann Mental Health Center. Currently most services are purchased by the Lindemann, Bay Cove and the Cambridge/Somerville Mental Health Centers, but there is a limited portion of the program's capacity reserved for clients from the other Metro Boston centers.

Building and Location

The Center House Skills Training Program is located on the first floor of Marine Industrial Park (a large industrial complex) on Drydock Avenue in South Boston. It is accessible by 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 monthly fee.



The program staff and clients built this wooden boat in their workshop.



One of the most enthusiastic participants in the program music sessions and birthday parties is Sinbad, the official Skills Training mascot.

For information regarding the Skills Training Program services, eligibility, or referral forms, or to arrange for a visit, please call Mark Winsor, Skills Training Program Director at (617) 878-2519



Skills Training Program
23 Drydock Avenue
South Boston, MA 02210

