

New Horizons launches updated training project

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In a large grey concrete workroom at New Horizons of Oakland County, Inc., mentally and physically handicapped adults are sitting at different work tables doing different jobs. Some are packing boxes or dismantling them while others are assembling toys and other items. All of these people are paid for their work.

But at the very back of the room, several men are involved in work for which they won't be paid. They are standing around an oblong work table, assembling electrical switch boxes that go inside walls. When all the switches have been assembled, the men will disassemble them. As they work, trainer-counselor Jude McCutcheon observes them, noting how they relate with each other and each's work productivity.

These men from different Rochester area communities are part of a new program at New Horizons of Oakland County that will place them into work situations when they're ready and enable them to earn a living and become independent members of society.

The woman in charge of this new program out of the Pontiac Torch Drive facility is Sandy Galassi, a new resident of Rochester.

As community manager, it's Ms. Galassi's job to manage the newly developed community training program. She has trainees in the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) funded program trained at New Horizons of Oakland County and then placed in preselected work sites.

"THE PURPOSE is to get clients into sheltered workshops or into competitive employment or somewhere in

between so they can become independent," said Ms. Galassi. "It's a whole rehabilitation process. This enhances their life styles, getting them a job and gets them social activities."

That's the end result. Before that happens, Ms. Galassi, with the help of her staff of two counselors, two supervisors and a secretary, has to prepare the trainees for work outside of the Pontiac building and Ms. Galassi has to find places for them to go.

With her four years of experience as a placement coordinator when she found an average of 30 jobs a year for trainees, she knows how to reach industries, factories, hospitals, nursing homes and hotels to find job situations.

"It's a lot of public relations. I call employers or go there directly. And with the long overdue passage in 1973 of Affirmative Action legislation that has prompted employers to actively seek out and hire handicapped individuals, my job is a little easier."

Ms. Galassi looks for settings in which she can establish a sheltered workshop for her trainees. In a sheltered workshop, the trainees work in a setting with a trainer-counselor with them at all times. This places the trainees in a real work situation where they can finish their training. The counselor gives them a tie to the New Horizon of Oakland County agency so they know they're still trainees and have someone with them who will give them help and support.

IF THE TRAINEE'S level of productivity in a factory rises above 70 per cent of that of a regular worker, he can move up to a competitive job. Until then, when the productivity level is 50 per cent or above, the trainee stays in sheltered employment.

To encourage trainees to increase their level of productivity, in the new community training program, the trainees work at the agency in a situation set up to simulate a real assembly line.

Soon they're working with a moving conveyor belt, different work samples and pneumatic tools.

"We prepare them here before they go into the work situation. Some of them have never seen factory workings," said Ms. Galassi.

Ms. McCutcheon, with the help of a specially designed system, monitors the trainees work behavior. She notes each time the trainee walks away from the work table and if he's happy or unhappy working, for example.

"This differs from the way the other staff in the workshop. The ratio of staff to trainees here is very low and we're pushing extremely hard for productivity," said Ms. Galassi.

ONCE THE TRAINING at the workshop is over, the trainees are placed into two different situations. In Projects with Industry, trainees work for eight weeks in the community. After the time period is over, employers can decide to hire them. The trainees either move into employment, get employment elsewhere or go back to the workshop if they're not ready to work in the community.

Under the second program, Workshop Without Walls, the trainees work in sheltered workshops, remaining clients of the agency.

Ms. Galassi gets her trainees from different organizations. These include Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Pontiac school district's Adult Basic Program and from Oakland Intermediate School District.

"There's no disability that we refuse to work with," said Ms. Galassi. "We do require a person be 16. Each person



SANDY GALASSI

gets full testing and is diagnosed before going out into the shop."

Ms. Galassi, who has her mental health degree, is very supportive of the people she works with. She'll do

anything, she said, to help them get acclimated to a job.

"I'VE WORKED on sites with the trainees. I can't be afraid of getting dirty. I had to train one fellow who couldn't see to clean every inch of a food locker. This meant getting down on my hands and knees and teaching him to scrub every inch.

"My own personal feeling with working with the handicapped is you have to get down and work through their level. You have to be sure the trainee is productive and work with him through the adjustment period. For some it takes one week to 10 years before they can be placed but there's a job for each one."

Ms. Galassi recalls finding a job for one man who had good social skills as a door greeter for a department store.

"It's neat to watch a trainee. One man who came here four years ago was very immature and deaf. He had no concept of the world of work. He grew so much. He failed a couple of

times but now he's in a factory making over \$4 an hour."

Ms. Galassi said most employers like working with retarded persons but don't like hiring those with mental illnesses.

"People with mental illnesses are the hardest to place. They're not dangerous if in rehabilitation. Another problem is a lot of employers talk down to a trainee. There's no need to talk to mentally retarded persons as a child if they're an adult.

"They may be mentally retarded but they're not dumb."

Because of this attitude by Ms. Galassi and others like her, New Horizons of Oakland County is able to give about 400 individuals vocational evaluation and training and work on contracts accepted from industry and also places about 30 trainees in competitive employment each year.

There are other New Horizon of Oakland County locations in Farmington and Madison Heights.

Club Circuit

The cost is to be sent with a self-addressed stamped envelope to Kathryn Skinner, Wayne County Intermediate School District, Education Center, 3350 Van Born, Wayne, 48184.

PARENTS WITHOUT PARTNERS, Farmington-Southfield Chapter, meet at 8:30 p.m., Dec. 22 in R. Francis Knight of Columbus Hall, 21900 Middle Belt.

The group meets the second and fourth Thursdays of each month and meetings are open to parents without partners only. Membership information is available by calling Jean O'Keefe, 531-7090.

FARMINGTON NEIGHBOR'S CLUB meets for its annual Christmas Cocktail Party this year in the home of Mrs. L. Martini, 32801 Biddstone Lane on Dec. 29.

Reservations are necessary, by calling Louise McGee, 477-6782.

XI EPSILON BETA CHAPTER of Beta Sigma Phi sorority will be hosted by Dorothy Bose, in her West Bloomfield home when the chapter meets for its Jan. 3 meeting.



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