

Housing Choices

A Newsletter for Mental Health Professionals

May 2008

Sponsored by the Pennsylvania Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services

This newsletter describes different employment enterprises that several Fairweather Lodges across the country have established.

A Business Model Turns Into a Model Business

By Peggy Robertson

One of the leaders in the nation for the Fairweather Lodge Program is Tasks Unlimited, Inc., in Minneapolis, MN. Tasks Unlimited provides integrated employment, training and mental health and related services (including transportation and housing) to over 150 adults with serious and persistent mental illness in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area.

Task Unlimited Inc.'s first lodge opened in 1970 and for employment, lodge members cleaned houses and churches. In 1978, John Trepp became Executive Director of Tasks Unlimited, Inc. At that time there were five Fairweather Lodges in operation and today there are 17 regular Fairweather lodges, two training lodges, and a lodge for moms. There is also a lodge for people with traumatic brain

injuries. Tasks Unlimited is run by a 9-person board of directors, three of whom are lodge members.

When Trepp took over, the cleaning business was a \$100,000 enterprise at the time. One of the problems he discovered was that the lodge members were overcharging themselves on rent so that they could keep their wages. After careful review of the business, Trepp concluded that the business was not paying well and in order to become profitable, the company would have to move out of the residential market and into commercial buildings. Trepp started looking into a more professional business model in order to capitalize on the good, hard work that the members were doing.

(Continued on page 2)



George Fairweather (pictured left) introduced the concept of the Fairweather Lodge in 1963, a model that provides decent, affordable supportive housing for people with mental health disabilities who live and work together as a group. This model focuses on the principles of self-governance and interdependence. One of the keys to success is the Lodge employment principle whereby Lodge members of working age should be employed upon entry into the Lodge.

Each Fairweather Lodge is unique, and therefore a business enterprise that is successful for one lodge may not be appropriate for another lodge. A former member of a Fairweather Lodge commented about the benefits of the employment component of the Lodge, "When you start making money, you stop talking about your illness. Being in the Lodge environment promotes professionalism and ownership."

(Tasks Unlimited continued from page 1)

In 1983, Trepp and the members reorganized the business, although not without some controversy. Trepp explained, "We wanted to take our janitorial services into big buildings and decided we would only go after contracts that were at least \$½ million. In order to get these clients, we found that we needed liability insurance and/or performance bonding. It was difficult to find an underwriter to provide performance bonding to the business and so we created a new not-for-profit corporation called Tasks Unlimited Building Services (TUBS) that was able to receive performance bonding. Once that was accomplished, one of the lodges was able to bid a large government contract.

In order to grow and make real money, the members had to become employees of the business instead of the classic Fairweather Lodge concept of partner/owners of the business. TUBS operated as a more effective business model. The idea of giving up the partnership to become employees met with some concern, but eventually every lodge voted to join the newly created business. "These days," Trepp said, "our folks who are working full time generally make \$2,000 a month and part time workers make about \$900 a month on top of their Social Security."

Since 1983, Tasks Unlimited Business Services has grown into a \$5 million operation, \$2 million of which is for employee payroll and benefits. Although the janitorial business is the largest and the most lucrative, members have other employment options. There is a mail handling service that employs about 9 lodge members, one of whom is the supervisor. A construction business that does remodeling employs 6 – 7 lodge members and a landscaping crew employs 5 – 6 members. Trepp said, "In the end, most lodge members prefer janitorial work, but it is nice to have a choice. The drivers and mail service employees face pressure on their job, and the landscape and construction work is physically demanding. The janitorial business is a little easier."

In addition to the other businesses available to lodge members, there are opportunities to move into supervisory positions and jobs that require more training. Lodge members can train for management positions. The top three senior managers of TUBS are not lodge members, but some building manager, site manager and contract manager positions are filled by members. The assistant managers and crew chiefs are almost always lodge members. Other employee positions include drivers to get lodge members to work, people who do equipment repair,

inventory, billing, mixing up chemicals and quality control.

Trepp added that most of the members who are on the management track have a college degree but this is not a requirement. Twenty-five percent of the lodge members have some post secondary education and eight percent have their college degree. The one job that members have difficulty with is to liaison with customers since it requires a set of social skills that most lodge members do not have. Customer relations are handled by one of the senior managers

The average length of time people are in the lodge and employed is about ten years. If a person is in the training lodge, they must commit to one year of working in the business. Some of the people who leave the lodge and go onto more independent living can, and do stay in the business. From an accounting stand point, this works out because the business finances are kept separate from the residential finances. All of the members pay their rent, groceries, utilities, a program fee, etc. (about \$700 a month) into a separate residential account which is usually managed by a consumer. There is a staff person to help, if needed, and there is financial oversight by a Tasks employee who is not a consumer.

(Continued on page 8)

A Delicious Partnership In North Dakota

By Peggy Robertson

Whether in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Minnesota or North Dakota, the Fairweather Lodge program offers a peer supported living and employment environment for individuals with serious mental illness.

In Grand Forks, North Dakota, the Fairweather Lodge is based on the concept used by Tasks Unlimited in Minneapolis. The lodge program in Grand Forks is part of the Prairie Harvest Human Services Foundation, a non-profit agency that exists to promote, develop and deliver service projects and programs to individuals with serious mental illness and other persons who need support to maintain an independent lifestyle.

There are two lodges in Grand Forks that provide both a job and a place to live. Living in a lodge is like living in an extended family - six people sharing expenses, meals, responsibilities, fun, and making decisions as a group. They form a major support resource for one another.

Over two years ago, lodge members and the Prairie Harvest Foundation opened a food cart, 'The 4th Street Eatery', in the Grand Forks County Building. Initially the lodge members set up the cart in the county building selling sandwiches and salads. The Lodge then inquired about



The soup and microwave area of the 4th Street Eatery

having access to the kitchen in the county building, and they were given permission to use it to prepare the food. They were also given space in the break room next to the kitchen for an eatery. The lodge went through the steps to register as a restaurant, going through the same protocol that any other restaurant would go through. The 4th Street Eatery has never scored less than 95% by the health inspector and now is inspected on a once a year basis.

The 4th Street Eatery helps clients develop: employment opportunities, interpersonal skills, communication, increased responsibility and problem solving. Professional staff provide guidance, direct supervision and food preparation safety.

The 4th Street Eatery is open Monday through Friday from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Of the eleven people who are lodge members, seven of them work in the Eatery. Two additional Eatery employees are community clients. Four of the lodge members have outside employment and one member who is involved in the Eatery also has an outside job. The Eatery employees work every other day so that there is back up in case it is needed. If someone can't make it in to work, it is their responsibility to find coverage.

Lodge coordinator Justin Barhite said, "When we started the food cart we were just flying by the seat of our pants! We had knowledge of food preparation from what we

(Continued on page 6)

A Driving Business In Perry County

By Peggy Robertson

An innovative employment enterprise has been operating at The Newport Fairweather Lodge, which is sponsored by New Visions, a provider for Cumberland/Perry MH/MR. New Visions began operations in 1982 by opening apartment units that could serve both as full care and moderate programs. It has grown to become a provider of services to adults with chronic mental illness in Franklin/Fulton and Cumberland/Perry Counties serving over 150 people. New Visions offers a variety of residential services, one of which is the successful development of the Newport Fairweather Lodge, which provides consumers with safe, decent, and affordable housing and employment opportunities.

The Newport Fairweather Lodge is in the transportation and cleaning business. How do Lodge members know what type of business they should operate? Bill McHenry, Lodge Coordinator, offered some sage advice. "Get to know the area the Lodge is located in and find out the services that are already out there. And be willing to think outside of the box."

Mr. McHenry has unique qualities that give him the expertise to know what employment enterprises might be successful for the members of the Newport Lodge. He



The Newport Fairweather Lodge (Photo courtesy of New Visions)

explained, "I worked 16 years in MR group homes and 5 years in employment, training and case management at CareerLink, I have been the chair of the Family Services Partnership Board (FSPB), and I have a pretty good idea of what is needed in Perry County. About four years ago the FSPB received a grant from the Early Education Task Force to conduct a needs study in our area to avoid a duplication of services. We found that there was a need for more child care, employment and transportation. The majority of the folks that we were working with had no transportation at all and this stuck in the forefront of my mind.

When our Lodge opened last year, two of the men wanted to open a coffee shop. We went down and looked at the one coffee shop in the area and

decided against that idea because we knew Newport would not be able to support two coffee shops. We had a lot of discussion about the results of the study and then took inventory of the members of the lodge to find out their interests. Four of the five members have driver's licenses, one of whom has his own vehicle. The member with his own vehicle works at Penn Dot and commutes to work in Harrisburg everyday. One member was already working at McDonald's in Carlisle. The other three members expressed a strong desire to give back to the community. With my background with CareerLink, we matched the members' needs and skills with the employment needs in the community. Driving came up high on the list."

One of the ideas that evolved

(Continued on page 5)

(A Driving Business continued from page 4)

was to run a delivery service to restaurants and grocery stores, but the economy didn't support this because many restaurants have been going out of business. The possibilities weren't just limited to driving and the members formed a business called Perry Apex Services Unlimited, or PASU. The members ultimately became involved in both commercial cleaning and driving.

Mr. McHenry spoke with the Perry County Transportation Authority (PCTA) and learned that there were certain limitations to the service they provide. PCTA does not offer transportation before 9:00 a.m. or after 3:00 p.m. on weekdays or on the weekends. Two different populations were identified that needed transportation outside of the hours provided by PCTA: people in the Welfare to Work program and mental health consumers who needed to get to their day program. For example, the female member of the Newport Lodge works at the McDonald's in Carlisle and she sometimes has to work until 10 or 11 at night and on the weekends. Some of the welfare clients work at a metal manufacturer and have to be at work at 3:00 a.m. Another client works from 2 p.m. until 11 p.m. and on weekends.

Because there is such a huge demand for transportation, it seemed that providing drivers

was an enterprise that would succeed. An agreement was worked out between PASU and PCTA. PASU would serve the Welfare to Work clients that PCTA was unable to accommodate. PCTA also calls PASU for special cases, such as when they needed someone to transport a veteran who had to get to Mechanicsburg and have someone stay with him until he was finished with his appointment. PASU also has a contract with a farmer's market in Perry County. The woman who runs the market has an outlet store and hires five Amish women who live between 15 and 30 miles away from Newport. Although the owner knew PCTA didn't have services at the times they needed, she went and asked them how much they would charge on an independent basis. This turned out to be prohibitive and PCTA referred the woman to PASU, who then began providing transportation for the Amish women.

PASU currently has two drivers, and a third member who wants to drive should be approved soon. The drivers must be approved in order to drive. They must have a valid Pennsylvania driver's license, a licensed drivers' record check, medical clearance, and they have to pass a driving course given by the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation.

New Visions owns a van that is placed at the lodge but is

used primarily for New Visions clients. This works well for the Lodge member who works at McDonald's because she is a New Visions client and can be transported by the van with one of the Lodge drivers. For the other passengers, the drivers use Mr. McHenry's car. He bumped his automobile liability insurance up to \$1 million. Mr. McHenry predicts that the driving business will grow. One of the members wants to purchase his own vehicle and Mr. McHenry is working with United Way to see if they can get a grant from them for another Lodge vehicle. "The Department of Transportation and the Department of Public Welfare have grants available for certain rural areas in the state that are specifically for transportation services. It really pays to know what resources are available in your area. We ultimately want to have four cars, including mine. We have actually had to turn down some driving jobs. This really is a business in demand. In fact, there is a new Lodge in Carlisle and they also want to engage their members into the driving business."

The financial piece of the business is being handled by Mr. McHenry until a member of the Lodge can be identified. Like other Lodges, the business account is kept separately from the Lodge account, which is for rent, groceries, utilities, etc. The drivers earn \$7.25 an

(Continued on page 6)

(A Driving Business continued from page 5)

hour and receive bonuses every 6 months. For the month of March the drivers brought in \$2,500. Part of this goes for salaries, for maintenance on the van and for gas. The members want to try and keep a slush fund of no less than \$500 in case a tire blows.

The cleaning business isn't as lucrative but that is because they don't clock in that many hours. PASU is contracted

with the Church to do three hours every Friday and 1 ½ hours every Monday morning. They also have a contract for one hour a week with the Literacy Council and one hour a week with the Domestic Violence agency. Other business possibilities are always being considered. The driving business has turned out to be a perfect match. The members are very proud of what they are doing and truly feel like they are giving back to

the community by helping the Welfare to Work clients and other people with disabilities. They have also been exposed to different cultures and a different language with the driving they are doing for the Amish women. Mr. McHenry added, "By learning what services are available in the community, and what the needs are in the community, and by thinking outside of the box, we have really found our niche."

(4th Street Eatery continued from page 3)

were doing in our kitchens at home. We do have someone with experience at the register and someone who is a great baker. We make sure that people feel confident enough to really work and it has turned into a good business."

The business manager for Prairie Harvest handles all of the financials for the Eatery. Mr. Barhite is the manager and supervisor of the Eatery, but he is identifying strong leaders among the lodge members and is working with them so that they can become shift supervisors and operate the business. Not having to pay overhead for the use of the kitchen and break room has helped the Eatery stay afloat financially, which is due to the partnership Prairie Harvest formed with the County. Prairie Harvest used to have a convenience store at an assistive living complex where they had to pay rent. They couldn't make enough



The serving area of the 4th Street Eatery

money to stay open so that program closed last February.

Mr. Barhite said, "The first year of the Eatery was a struggle financially. We were trying to figure out what to charge, and the summertime was hard because people want to go outside to eat. The biggest loss we ever took during a month was about \$300. We are fortunate to have the kitchen and space donated, and we also get support from United Way.

During the summer we tried serving more fruit and salads to increase the number of customers and this helped. We have also branched out and are doing about two or three catering orders a month, which has helped our profit margins. If we keep growing, we may move to another space."

To learn more about Prairie Harvest and the 4th Street Eatery, visit their website at www.prairieharvest.net/.

(Photos courtesy of Prairie Harvest)

Making It Work In Erie

By Peggy Robertson

The Fairweather Lodge movement in Pennsylvania began in Erie with the support of Stairways Behavioral Health, Inc. Stairways is a private, non-profit organization that assists persons with mental health care needs at any stage of life by providing comprehensive rehabilitation, treatment and supports essential for living, working, learning and participating fully in the community.

Kim Stucke, Director of Consultation Services at Stairways, has been the enthusiastic driving force in the development of the lodges and noted that without the support of the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, Fairweather Lodges would not have moved outside of Erie to other parts of the state. There are currently 16 lodges operating throughout Pennsylvania and 18 are in development. There are five lodges in Erie, one training lodge, and another training lodge that is under development. Shared housing and shared employment are the key components of the success of Fairweather Lodges.

The Fairweather Lodges in Erie formed Opportunities Unlimited (OU), which is a business enterprise sponsored

by Stairways. Opportunities Unlimited of Erie is an affirmative action business of Stairways that provides clients with meaningful work while offering quality, affordable cleaning and maintenance services to business owners and residents. Approximately 90 % or more of the employees with Opportunities Unlimited are lodge members.

Currently Erie lodge members operate two businesses. While the businesses are capable of making a profit, the Fairweather Lodges are not financially self-sufficient. The financial gap is made up with support from Stairways. The janitorial business employs most of the lodge members. The janitorial crew takes care of the Stairways buildings and has outside contracts with other businesses. Joe Crotty, the Opportunities Unlimited Operations Manager, supervises the Contract Coordinator and is taking care of the finances. A long term goal would be for a member of the lodge to serve in that capacity. Other positions filled by lodge members include crew members, crew leaders, the contract coordinator and the assistant contract coordinator. There are people who have moved out of the lodges who remain interested in working for OU and continue to do so while living

in the community. In addition, another Lodge enterprise consists of a consumer who owns a landscaping and snow removal business and uses the workforce crew.

OU also operates a coffee shop which is not currently profitable but continues to provide consumers with employment. Its current status is most likely due to the fact that it is located in a low traffic area. Mr. Crotty explained that OU has identified two alternative sites for coffee shops (instead of the other site) that would be run by Opportunities Unlimited employees. One coffee shop would be in partnership with the Glenwood YMCA inside of their facility which has extraordinarily high traffic - about 2,000 - 2,500 people a week. The members envision a coffee shop that serves coffee, smoothies and a variety of snacks. The other potential location is inside of the newly located Stairways administration and operations building. This shop would also serve sandwiches. There will be constant traffic through the entrance where the coffee shop will be located. Both of these sites should attract more customers, with the possibility of making a profit.

OU has also made sure that

(Continued on page 8)

(Making It Work continued from page 7)

there are trained back up employees and they continue with their efforts to develop a consistent and capable workforce. In case someone gets sick, or the businesses expand, there are people who are already trained and can step in and do the work such as operate a cash register.

Robert Chandler, who was recently named the Fairweather Lodge Member of the Year, is the Contract Coordinator. In 2005, Mr. Chandler was appointed the Peer Counselor for the Training Lodge. In an interview with Mr. Chandler at that time, he explained that one of the requirements of living in the Lodge is to be employed and to work at least one hour a day. Mr. Chandler spoke about how individuals are prepared for employment while they are in the training program. "Everyone is expected to become

acquainted with the Lodge work ethic and we let them know that employment is available to them. After their first two weeks in the Training Lodge, we put them on on-the-job training. My role as a peer counselor is a full time job, but on occasion I have filled in for other people in our janitorial service. In fact, I am proud to say that in the 4 ½ years that we have run the business we have never missed a day's work."

Although Mr. Crotty has only been with the Fairweather Lodge Coordinator for a couple of months, he subscribes to the employment philosophy of the Lodge and understands the importance employment plays with a person's mental health.

"Lacking employment, you can become that much more separated from the rest of this world. Having a job, being



On the job

part of a crew, receiving both the social and financial rewards of being a part of your community builds self-esteem and creates further opportunities for individual development. The vocational relationship between Fairweather Lodge and Opportunities Unlimited helps to make these goals tangible. It helps a person gather experience, develop relationships, and contribute to their community."

(Tasks Unlimited continued from page 2)

The janitorial business and the mail service business earn a profit and the construction business breaks even. This has meant that the regular lodges do not need ongoing financial support (the training lodges get some outside funding). Each lodge gets its own van and the business owns a couple of vans for the drivers to use. There are also some subsidized mortgages to help hold down the debt service. Except for some people who are retired or

semi-retired, the lodge members earn enough money to pay their bills.

All of the salaries are paid by the business and there is a cash bonus plan that has been in place for 20 years. Trepp said, "16 years out of the 20, we have been able to pay bonuses. These bonuses are given on a contract by contract basis and are determined by employees achieving certain benchmarks. Thirty percent of the profit a job earns is given out to the crew in a formula

driven bonus. The largest 2007 bonus was \$2,000, a bonus can be as small as \$12 and the typical bonus ranges from \$200 - \$300. The bonus plan provides the sense of ownership which we forfeited when we shifted to the corporate model, and has helped to build a team."

Something must be working right! Tasks Unlimited Business Services has a less than one percent absentee rate.

Providing A Spectrum of Employment in Ohio

By Peggy Robertson

Spectrum of Supportive Services provides housing, employment, vocational and supportive services for adults with mental illness in Cleveland, Ohio. One of its services is the Fairweather program, a residential and vocational program for persons with mental illness. This program provides an opportunity for Co-op living in two lodges: Clinton Lodge in Ohio City and Euclid Lodge in East Cleveland. Together the lodges provide cooperative housing for up to 21 members.

Don Porach, Vice President for Enterprise & Facilities at Spectrum explained that the lodges are not operated 100% according to the Fairweather model, but they offer and promote employment opportunities for their clients. Lodge members are encouraged to be employed, volunteer or be in school. The expectation is that lodge members will eventually become employed.



Clinton Lodge in Ohio City



Near West Frameworks

For those lodge members who work, Spectrum offers employment opportunities that are managed by vocational supervisors. Spectrum Packaging is an enterprise for different manufacturers who have outsourced the packaging part of their business. Spectrum also runs the PR Office Cleaning business in which nine mental health consumers are employed. Near West Frameworks provides custom picture framing to the public and also provides picture frames through state-set-aside contracts. There are four mental health consumers who work in the framing business.

Spectrum used to operate a woodworks business but as a result of the close tolerance work required it was difficult

for consumers to obtain these skills. There was also a coffee and tea shop but because of its geographical location, it was unable to continue to operate.

Mr. Porach said that Spectrum of Supportive Services is now in the initial stages of developing a snack shop. Although some people with mental disabilities have difficulty working, Spectrum recognizes the benefits of employment and advocates that mental health consumers work, and creates job opportunities for its clients.

For more information about Spectrum of Supportive Services, Inc., visit their website at www.spectrumsupport.org/.

(Photos courtesy of Spectrum)



John Ames and Diana Myers share a moment at the OMHSAS Housing Conference

After six years as Housing Specialist for the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, John Ames is retiring.

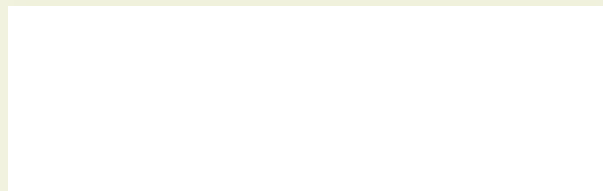
On March 19, 2008, at the OMHSAS Housing Conference held in Harrisburg, OMHSAS, Diana T. Myers and Associates, Inc. and his many colleagues recognized John for his commitment and significant contribution of paving the way to supportive housing and recovery oriented services.

Housing Choices is published by: Diana T. Myers and Associates, Inc. and sponsored by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS).

Project Director: Diana T. Myers Newsletter Editor: Peggy Robertson

We welcome your submissions and ideas for articles. If you have information about a related project or would like more information about a project described here, please contact us at the following address:

Diana T. Myers and Associates, Inc., 6 South Easton Road, Glenside, PA 19038 215-576-1150, ext. 3., Fax: 215-576-8650



FIRST-CLASS MAIL
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
GLENSIDE, PA
PERMIT NO. 916

Housing Choices c/o
Diana T. Myers and Associates, Inc.
6 South Easton Road
Glenside, PA 19038