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PROMISING PRACTICES



Change in Medicaid mandate sparks Colorado Goodwill to create innovative life-skills program

[Discover Goodwill of Southern and Western Colorado](#) has been providing case management and rehabilitation services in the Pikes Peak region of Colorado for more than 50 years, and has maintained CARF accreditation since 1978.

In January 2010, a new federal Medicaid mandate affected sheltered work programs serving individuals with disabilities. This significant change, along with dwindling contracts for hand-assembly work, led Discover Goodwill to actively pursue other day program models. An internal taskforce was formed to evaluate options for how to move forward.

The taskforce decided to seek help from experts in the fields of intellectual and developmental disabilities. After several weeks of searching, they discovered the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) Institute on Disability and Human Development and connected with UIC staff members, Dr. Alan Factor and Dr. Matthew Janicki. This strategic collaboration, along with input from stakeholder focus groups, guided Discover Goodwill to develop an innovative day program called Possibilities — a first-of-its-kind community integration service.

The goal of Possibilities is to encourage greater independence for participants through skill building and everyday living experiences. To do this, the program offers both simulated

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About the ECS Promising Practices newsletter series

An organization receiving exemplary recognition in its CARF survey report stands out because of its professional and strategic response to a service or business need. CARF presents these ECS Promising Practices articles to encourage dialogue among service providers and to offer examples of creative solutions for improving service quality.

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Issues are categorized by topic: Business Practices, Community Services, and Employment Services.

and real community experiences. Services are offered within an on-site, townlike environment that includes an art studio, bank, fitness center, residential apartment, spa, general store, community center, and city hall. It also incorporates actual community outings and activities into the service plan to help promote social enhancement, interaction, and friendships.



Possibilities Art Studio



Possibilities City Hall



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Possibilities General Store

Participants of the program learn to bank, keep fit, shop, cook, do laundry, entertain, manage a home, use technology, and use public transportation. If interested, Discover Goodwill then assists participants in finding employment in the community using the skills and experiences that were gained.

Skill attainment modules

To provide exposure to a variety of situations and skills, Discover Goodwill developed unique experiential modules that center around four key areas of skill attainment:

- **Health and Wellness** – Participants are offered some form of exercise three times per week to improve on physical condition, quality of life satisfaction, social awareness, behavior scales, functional levels, and compromising health issues.
- **Leisure, Recreation, and Independent Living** – Participants learn skills for home life and community living in classes that focus on planting, sensory engagement, and cultivating creativity.
- **Education and Academics** – Participants receive classroom and computer instruction on topics including literacy in word and number recognition, survival reading, Functional Independence Skills Handbook (FISH) assessment, and numerical necessities.
- **Time Occupation** – Participants are allowed time for relaxation activities such as watching movies, playing Wii™ games, writing emails, shooting pool, or reflecting on daily events.

The modules are often coordinated with one another through a wraparound curriculum that engages participants in a particular topic. For example, one topic theme was “Fifty States in 50 Weeks” during which participants learned about one state each week. While studying Alaska, participants in

the apartment shopped for ingredients and made Alaskan mountain cookies, the fitness center emphasized Alaskan outdoor living and sports with outings to community businesses such as Bass Pro Shops® to learn about fishing skills and equipment, and art studio participants used the Alaskan license plate as inspiration to design their own individualized plates. In their classrooms, participants learned about Alaska's history and geography through virtual tours and interactive teaching games.

Positive outcomes

All measures of the program's effectiveness have been positive. When testing participants' performance improvement in the modules, the year 2014 showed 23.5 percent improvement in their cognitive skills and 20.3 percent improvement in their adaptive, affective, sensorimotor, social, speech/language, and vocational skills. A 2014 survey of clients, families, and other Possibilities stakeholders received positive feedback, with 97.3 percent saying they would highly recommend the program to others. The goal of providing community outings through the program was also successful in 2014, with 68 percent of participants going on at least one outing for a total of 671.5 hours spent collectively in the community.

A 2014 [CARF](#) survey report recognized the Possibilities program for exemplary practice and creativity in providing community integration services. For more information on Discover Goodwill's Possibilities program, contact Denise Krug at dkrug@discovermygoodwill.org, or visit DiscoverMyGoodwill.org.

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