

**BLOOMINGDALE**

# Program to aid developmentally disabled moves to borough

BY TARA KOLTON  
Staff Writer

Community Options Inc., a national non-profit organization that specializes in helping people with developmental disabilities find housing and employment, has just moved its Journeys Program to the heart of Bloomingdale. Now located at a recently renovated building at 146 Main St., this day program hopes to be able to expand its horizons from the new site.

Since its inception in 1989, Community Options, with national headquarters in Princeton, has wanted to move people with disabilities from segregated, unlawful institutions across the country into community-based homes where they can fully participate in their communities and experience a greatly improved quality of life. They also implement progressive employment options to ensure that people with disabilities are offered real work for real pay.

**Journeys**

The Journeys Program is a day program for adults that provides an innovative approach to recreational and community-based programming. The program utilizes "gentle teaching" techniques in order to improve the quality of life, self image, and to encourage strength and the achievement of maximum independence and potential in those who participate. The emphasis is on life skill training, and refining abilities such as cooking, math, writing, and managing money. Journeys Program Manager Megan Lamphear explained.

Caring for the animals as their own affords program members a sense of responsibility and independence.

There are also three therapy dogs owned by staff members that visit the Journeys facility most days. Lamphear explained that these dogs have become an integral part of the program, and it is "amazing the difference it has made" for some people who have really come out of their shells by interacting with the dogs.

For Lamphear, even the smallest difference that can be made to improve the quality of participants' lives makes it "all worth it."

**Other programs**

Another day program called Community Mailers is located in Lincoln Park at 234 Main Street. This facility features a storefront area where cards and art that participants make are sold.

"Everything they make, they sell," said Guberman.

Community Mailers also contracts with local businesses to do mass mailings for them. In addition to the vocational skills training, participants will also do volunteer work for the community, such as visiting nursing homes, Guberman explained.

Community Options also has established group homes throughout the North Jersey area, including towns such as Butler, Lincoln Park, Pompton Lakes and

Pequannock. The organization has designed the "house parent model," where "we have house parents living in homes that we developed for children with disabilities," Guberman said.

"We were the first provider in the state of New Jersey to open a children's home like this," said Guberman.

The "group homes" pair two parents with two children to keep the smallest ratio possible and provide the most individual attention. Community Options has just opened its sixth group home in the area, Guberman said.

**Get Involved**

The local community can also help the Journeys Program with the cost of care for the program's pets. To generate money that goes towards pet food and care, Community Options collects old ink cartridges and cell phones, which companies in turn give the organization money to recycle. There are donation boxes set up locally in post offices and businesses, and of course the old phones and cartridges can also be brought directly to the Journeys facility.

For more information about Community Options, visit [www.comop.org](http://www.comop.org). The Journeys Program in Bloomingdale can be reached at 973-492-1745.

E-mail: [Kolton@northjersey.com](mailto:Kolton@northjersey.com)



STAFF PHOTOS BY JOE SARNO

Megan Lamphear (Journeys Program Manager) admires the necklace that Andre Kish has created, during a typical day at the new Journeys facility in Bloomingdale.

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Journeys was previously located in West Milford for nearly 15 years. The lease for the building was expiring and the program was expanding, and the old facility could not accommodate that expansion, said Community Options Executive Director Jessica Guberman.

Lamphear explained that moving to more densely-populated Bloomingdale will give the program and its participants more opportunities for both employment and recreation.

"We do a little bit of everything," Lamphear said.

The program serves a wide variety of people with different capabilities, and is geared to teach them the skills to achieve employment, as well as to perform volunteer work. In addition, there are many recreational opportunities for program participants.

For the staff of 17, flexibility and individualized activity are the key to success for Journeys. Groups are split up for activities based on interests and abilities. Program participants get to regularly enjoy many outings like as shopping, going to the movies, going bowling and different area day trips. Recently a group took a ferry ride to the Statue of Liberty.

When one walks into the new site, it has the look and feel of a comfortable home environment. The spacious facility includes a large kitchen and dining area, an entertainment area with a couch and television, a space for various art projects and teaching, and multiple exercise machines.

There are also three live-in Journeys pets - a cat, a rabbit and a frog.

"They are their pets," said Lamphear.



Staff member Chris Earl helps Tanya Kolbasin paint. Community Options' Journeys Program affords participants many recreational opportunities in addition to its focus on vocational skill training.

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