

disabilities

FEATURES

Luzerne County non-profit expands services



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The recently launched Home and Community Based Habilitation program encourages adults with developmental disabilities to increase their independence, learn new skills and build support networks. Clients have the opportunity to volunteer at multiple sites throughout Luzerne County.

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Community Options is a non-profit organization headquartered locally in Wilkes-Barre that provides housing and employment support to students and adults with disabilities.

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Community Options program director Justin Brown said the Home and Community Based Habilitation program benefits people 21 and above who have completed the Work Based Learning Experience program for students but are not ready for supportive employment.

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COMMUNITY OPTIONS

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students who might not quite be ready for employment," Brown said.

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WILKES-BARRE — A recently launched program at Community Options provides expanded services to Luzerne County residents with disabilities.

The Home and Community Based Habilitation program benefits adults with developmental disabilities by encouraging them to increase their independence, learn new skills and build support networks while assisting in daily activities if necessary.

Northeastern director of supportive employment and day programs Justin Brown said HCBH complements [Community Options](#)

Work Based Learning Experience program.

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Launched in March 2016, WBLE is funded by a state grant from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and offers students between the ages of 14 and 21 10 hours of work experience per week with the hope it will lead to lasting employment.

"They can only receive those services while in high school," Brown said. "HCBH is bridging that gap, so it will be for people 21 and above."

Brown said not all students who finish the WBLE program are prepared to join the work force.

"We had students who wanted to stay with us after WBLE, but unless they were ready for supportive employment, we didn't have an option," Brown said. "This program is the in-between for students and adults who aren't quite ready for job placement."

Designed to aid clients in meeting personal needs and goals, HCBH is geared toward both individual development and participation in the local community.

Community Options received approval to develop the program in February, and Brown recently met with Luzerne County Mental Health and Developmental Services, which will evaluate the program and make referrals.

Clients would be scheduled from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. five days a week, and they would be meeting with their community integration counselor on a 1-to-1 basis, a more personalized approach than counselor-client ratio of 3-to-1 in WBLE.

"If someone is finished with WBLE, and they are finished with high school, we'll have an opportunity for them to ... get individualized attention," Brown said.

Participants from both programs are offered opportunities to engage in recreational activities and do volunteer work they deem meaningful in a group environment.

Among volunteer sites in Luzerne County are Blue Chip Animal Refuge, CEO Food Bank, Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center, Salvation Army and Volunteers of America.

Volunteer sites can be introduced during day trips, and regular volunteer work can be integrated into clients' daily schedules.

"Socialization is a part of the program," Brown said. "It's an individualized program, but we also want them to be aware of other people in the program. We want them to be part of the group and be able to handle the anxiety that comes with that."

Brown said home services are also available for individuals who need support in various areas such as self-care, mobility and therapeutic activities.

In the community, Brown said, health and wellness services such as gym memberships are offered to clients.

Prior to taking the director position in Wilkes-Barre, Brown ran the day program in Pittsburgh and got to see the benefits of HCBH at work.

"This is a great option that I stand behind for