

4th Annual NCACDSS Best Practices Awards Nomination Form

Category: ECS#3 Tier 3
Empowering Clients to Self-Sufficiency

Project Title: Embracing Independence

- 1. Project/Program Summary:** Briefly summarize the project's history, purpose, timeline and budget. "Embracing Independence" was first implemented three years ago by the staff of Corner House II Residential Program in Catawba County. The program is put into action each year during the summer months. The program gives youth the knowledge and confidence to take care of themselves as they transition from adolescence into adulthood. The program involves interactive simulations of job postings, application preparation, setting up of interviews, interviewing, applicant selection, daily job responsibilities, work time administration, money management- budgeting and mock payment of expenses through bank deposits and check writing. The youth receive real world and point consequences to reinforce skills that prepare youth for independence. They learn about the concepts conducive to a strong work ethic. The program reinforces the basic skills necessary to obtain and maintain a job and household. There is not a separate budget for this program. The series is incorporated into our existing budget and doesn't instigate additional expenses. Youth are provided on-the job professional development opportunities such as First Aid and CPR certifications and AIDS awareness.
- 2. Innovation:** Why is the program unique? How does your project differ from similar projects? Our Corner House II Residential Program serves youth who require out of home placement and have limited family support and guidance. Our target population has a higher risk of homelessness, which is a growing problem nationally with young adults ages 18-24. "Embracing Independence" is an innovative curriculum that allows youth to build on their strengths and learn how to draw insight and understanding from their mistakes in a safe and nurturing environment.
- 3. Project Success and Impact:** What were the objectives? How well were they met? How widespread is the impact of the project/program? What is the anticipated long-term impact? Did the project involve collaboration with other agencies, non-profits, businesses, etc.? Describe the outcome of the collaboration. The goals of this innovative independent living program are to equip youth with the skills, confidence, realistic expectations and motivation they need to become self-supporting. Over the last 3 years, the program has been very successful. The quality of the program continues to grow. The plan is to incorporate some aspects, if not the entire program, throughout the school year to build responsibility and a knowledge base for the youth. Our program involves collaboration with Appalachian Family Innovations (Teaching Family Model consultants), Department of Social Services, Department of Juvenile Services, Family Net (out patient therapy), and parents. The collaboration between the community partners has been productive in several areas: 1. Facilitation of dialogue between parents and youth regarding the transition from adolescence into adulthood; 2. Increase in the number of referrals from Department of Juvenile Justice, with the realization that their youth will receive skill training that will enable them to become productive self sufficient adults; 3. Appalachian Family Innovations utilize the "Embracing Independence" model in their international training of family teachers; 4.

Other DSS residential programs are beginning to employ the “Embracing Independence” Model ; and 5. Corner House II staff have presented and trained other professionals at Children and Family Services Association-NC and Teaching Family Model National Conference.

4. **Project Effort and Difficulty:** How well did the program use limited resources? What obstacles or challenges did you overcome? How was this done? Corner House II staff have implemented the program within its' existing budget, without additional expense. However, several local businesses have donated resources such as landscaping supplies (flowers and trees), check registries, blank checkbooks, and labor. Staff contacted local businesses and provided information regarding our new program. The businesses were willing to participate to assist in building responsible youth.

 5. **Ability to Replicate Project:** Can this project be duplicated in other counties? What could counties do to minimize obstacles and problems? The program can definitely be duplicated in other counties. The key to the success will be the communication and planning between community partners. There is a significant amount of upfront work in terms of developing the actual curriculum that is best suited for your residential program. One potential obstacle is the limitation of learning opportunities for the youth. Residential staff may have expertise in some vocational fields; however, the knowledge base could be increased by involving resources in the community such as individuals with particular trade and industrial skills. The program could be even further enhanced with additional financial resources for supplies and job training opportunities.
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