

People Services makes a difference in Clearlake

By Susan Stout, For the Record-Bee

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CLEARLAKE >> An ordinary store front on Lakeshore Drive marks the People Services Thrift Store and Office. Behind the modest facade, a variety of programs take place throughout the week. The programs are well-designed, carefully selected training and assistance plans for each of the approximately 60 adult consumers served by People Services, Inc. (PSI) of Clearlake.

However, what is happening within PSI isn't simply benefiting the consumers; it's resulting in contributions to Clearlake's community — from shopping in the city's stores for supplies to providing goods via the PSI thrift store, as well as beautifying residences and businesses.

“People Services in Clearlake has geared up for some exciting changes to offer those we serve,” said People Services Executive Director F. Ilene Dumont. “We are very excited to provide even more ways to prepare for competitive employment options, if that is a choice. The new options are exciting and I am extremely proud of the

staff that make it all happen so professionally.”

PSI Clearlake site Director Amanda Stone and about 20 staff members provide vocational training and personal skills classes for about 50 adults with disabilities. The clientele ranges from having highly involved disabilities to being quite independent, says Stone. “Some are preparing to get their drivers' licenses,” she added.

The common link among the consumers is that they take pride in the work they do. “We have productive people who are learning new skills and using them to benefit themselves and others,” said Stone.

People Services clients are running a cafe and coffee shop, making art and jewelry, taking computer classes, volunteering for other programs in the community, operating the People Services' Thrift Store, and providing landscape and grounds maintenance in locales in Clearlake area.

Consumers may be involved in more than one program or activity, Stone noted. Every person that is referred to PSI is treated as an individual. Each new client has opportunities to see and experience the various training and skills. After about two weeks staff sits down with the client to find out what they

like and what they hope to get out of the program, Stone explained. The individual is then enrolled in the preferred training program(s).

With the coffee shop, the “Bizzy Bean,” run by consumers for the consumers, and with the newly opened restaurant, the “PS cafe,” clients are learning everything from clean up to customer service, Stone stated. They receive vocational skill training that involves planning, shopping, hostessing, wait staff services, prep cooking and cooking. Items sold at the coffee shop are prepared by consumers, and clients learn to wait on customers and operate the cash register.

Rounding out the training, consumers involved in working at the cafe, coffee shop and thrift store — any of the programs in which they make money — learn how to develop their own resumes, fill out applications and go through interviews. The individuals fill out time cards daily, and twice a year they are evaluated.

Consumers involved in the art, jewelry making and sewing classes receive instruction on pricing and marketing their products, advertising and managing sales. Those in the sewing program will typically make something in 2 months and then start another project. They earn a commission on the sale of the product.

PSI also offers sensory art classes to anyone who may benefit from the classes, said Stone. The art is featured in shows open to the public twice a year.

Among other training programs are basic computer classes. Journalism is taught in the day program. A “Lunch Out” course helps clients learn how to conduct themselves in a restaurant — how to order from a menu and the etiquette for eating at the restaurant.

Consumers may also take part in a wellness program that includes a healthy cooking class, visits to the gym, a support group, stretching class, and information classes on healthy eating and healthy life choices.

Each program is set up by PSI staff specifically for the particular program, Stone noted. They design and run it. The manager receives reports daily.

Several clients also participate in many community programs as volunteers, said Stone. These include Meals on Wheels, NCO, Redwood Food Bank Commodities, the senior center, and Calvary Chapel Church, Clearlake.

“We work well with other agencies in the community,” said Stone. “Our goal is to have an open and respectful relationship with other agencies. It is one of our primary focuses because we are a support team for consumers. It’s important that we communicate and get along to give that support to consumers.”

A thrift store with friendly service

PSI Thrift Store Manager Joni Canevari boasts about the store and the clients who serve customers.

“I always tell my clients, ‘I am the manager and run it, but it is not my store. Without you guys, we would not have the store. It is your store.’” Clients are learning something new every day as they work in the store, said PSI employee of 10 years, 6 of those as the store manager. “They take pride in

their work and do a good job. It makes them accountable. They work hard, and they are very respectable.”

Knowing it is their store to operate “gives them more (of a sense of) dedication and commitment to do their jobs well,” she added.

Caneveri and a few staff members teach clients safety awareness, money handling, public relations, retail tasks, pricing and organizing skills to price clothing and household items, and maintaining inventory. “We take pride in training the clients. We see them blossom and feel good about themselves.”

There are eight regular clients who help in the store throughout the week. The thrift store is open Monday through Friday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. each day with the exception of Tuesdays when it closes at 3 p.m. for staff meetings.

“We work hard with the clients to learn how to work with the public and what it takes to have a good store, one that people would want to come back to,” said Caneveri. “We get compliments that our store is clean and that it’s the best priced thrift store in town.”

Acknowledging that the Clearlake demographics are different than Lakeport, the store manager noted that PSI’s store offers sales on items that are well-received by low-income and homeless customers. The 10-cent rack placed outside each day is quite popular, she noted, as is a \$1 rack made available.

“I’m trying to meet the needs of the community, make it reasonable to shop and feel good about it. (PSI is) making the community aware, integrating community with our clients,” said Caneveri. “The public sees the clients are worthy of having a job and very capable. We work together; it’s a very valued addition to our community.”

Some of Caneveri’s helpers have been workers there for years. They are extremely helpful and knowledgeable, she stated. They can show customers where things are in the store and can find things customers want.

“They are very acute and very friendly,” she added. “People are impressed with the job I do, but I learn a lot from (the clients). They teach me to be humble and how to get more out of life. A lot of these folks, you are their life. They spend all day with you. They truly enjoy their jobs. They want to be here. I treat them with respect and dignity, and that’s what I get in return. It makes a world of difference.”

Art with a purpose

The People Services building in Clearlake is home to a student art gallery. The artwork is 100 percent of the clients’ own work, says art instructor Hope Lopez-Sanders. It is a place where many of the students do art as therapy, but it is also a gallery where their work is shown and the public may purchase artwork.

With the artwork produced, the students are “expressing themselves and learning to express themselves, said Lopez-Sanders. It provides social development, self-development, and a vocational experience, she added. The artists do their own public relations at the shows that are held twice a year.

However, the public can visit the gallery during its operating hours throughout the year. It is open 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Monday through Friday. Visitors can view the work and see students working, said the instructor. The artwork is not limited to paintings on canvas, she added. There is jewelry and sewing projects for sale, and many art pieces are created from recycled items. The students refurbish items, create furniture, and produce industrial art projects.

In PSI's textile program students work on a project quarterly. They are now making reusable shopping bags, and a major project includes the making of a quilt. Much of the work is shown and sold at craft fairs and the County Fair.

"We strive to help the students become comfortable and imaginative with their work, as well as feeling competent and proud. They are extremely proud of what they do. The art program combines instruction with a social atmosphere and hands-on atmosphere. It works for them," Lopez-Sanders stated.

The program planned to present a "Sensory Art Show" in August. The work features art by students in PSI's sensory integration program. It involves art made with an emphasis on all five senses. "This is a first (for the art gallery)," said the instructor.

Landscaping and grounds maintenance beautifying the area

A full-time landscaping and maintenance crew is out in the community four days a week. On any given day, the crew consists of three or four PSI clients.

"They have a sense of independence to do work in the community and making the places nice," said instructor and supervisor Victor Naja-Paz. "People drive by and see what they do; the workers take pride in their jobs. They are making a change in the community. We get many compliments from the public."

Customers in the community include the Creativity School, the pawn shop, Burns Valley Mall, other businesses and several residences, according to Naja-Paz, a 5-year employee with PSI who took over instruction for landscaping last year. The crew is responsible for checking and maintaining the equipment on a daily basis and performing all the landscaping and grounds clean-up. They typically cut grass, pull weeds, trim trees and bushes, use the weed-eater, pick up garbage, do leaf blowing and pick up, and general clean-up.

PSI clients who express a desire to work for the landscaping crew have the opportunity to try it, the instructor noted. For the time being there is only one crew that goes out Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. Wednesdays the students have another class and the chance to do something else in the PSI program.

"We can't take on any more customers right now," said Naja-Paz. "Our calendar is filled."

For more information about People Services, visit the organization's website:
www.peopleservices.org.

URL: <http://www.record-bee.com/general-news/20170829/people-services-makes-a-difference-in-clearlake>

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