



The Communicator

Connections Community Support Programs, Inc.

OUR SUCCESS STORIES

Connections Community Support Programs, Inc.

is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization that has been providing community-based housing, healthcare and employment services in Delaware since 1985. The mission of Connections is to help vulnerable and disenfranchised individuals, families, children and youth to improve their lives by providing a comprehensive array of affordable and accessible primary medical, mental health and substance abuse treatment, employment, and housing opportunities that help the people we serve to become accepted and productive members of their communities. Through our housing, employment and treatment programs, we will serve more than 10,000 unduplicated individuals in 2011 in 55 locations throughout Delaware in New Castle, Kent, and Sussex counties.

When Ellen came to Connections in 2010, she had been battling addiction for more than two decades. At the age of 25 she lost a son. To escape her grief and depression, she began self-medicating by drinking heavily and abusing drugs. She describes herself as being a “functional addict” for several years, but eventually her addiction caused her to lose her job. For the next twenty years Ellen was in and out of shelters. She would enter detox and get clean for periods of time and then relapse. Ellen says that in 2010, she surrendered and was ready for change. Connections placed her immediately into transitional housing and shortly after provided her security deposit assistance and rental assistance, enabling her to move into her own apartment. She became employed through Connect to Work, a division of Connections that develops small businesses in which individuals with barriers to employment can get a job. A Connections psychiatric nurse practitioner was able to provide a diagnosis and treatment for Ellen’s mental health condition, which, says Ellen, has given her life balance. Ellen continues to work in Connect to Work’s food services business — which produces more than 2,000 meals every day to feed at-risk adults and children — and motivates others also struggling with similar issues. Ellen says she is grateful to Connections for giving her a second chance at having a full life. “Connections has always believed in me, and that I can overcome my struggles and has supported me,” she says. Her next goal: getting herself prepared for home ownership. ■



Hezekiah came to Connections in 2010, when he enrolled in our Culinary Futures Program, which provides industry-standard ServSafe® certification for food service workers.



Hezekiah had a long history of substance abuse and had been unemployed for an extended period of time, but was unable to find any work in construction or truck driving, where he had previous employment experience. Hezekiah knew that if he were to continue

collecting unemployment benefits and if his life were to continue lacking much-needed structure and productivity, he would certainly relapse and he had been working hard to stay clean. Hezekiah loves

to cook and a family member suggested he enroll in Connections’ Culinary Futures Program since it provides the ServSafe® certification, which most food services employers prefer or require. His passion for cooking and his dedication to learning helped Hezekiah stand out among his fellow students, and he was often asked by the head chef to assist in teaching others. When he completed the course he was offered the position of head cook at Connections’ Cornerstone Residential Treatment Program and Chance Transition House. At that time, he had no vehicle and he would take the bus to Route 13 and continue the trip into Delaware City, where the programs are located, by bicycle. His commitment has paid off. Today, he is able to drive himself to work in his own vehicle. Hezekiah serves as an inspiration to those receiving treatment at Cornerstone. Says Hezekiah: “I tell them, I’m just like you — it took me 27 years to get clean and if I can do it, you can do it too. When you want change, when you truly want to change, it will happen.” ■

Richard's probation officer led him to Connections in 2010 after he was briefly incarcerated for a DUI conviction. He'd been drinking since the age of 13 and describes himself as having been a "functional drunk." He decided to make some serious life



changes after he was released and stopped drinking alcohol. "There are too many people who rely on me and I thought to myself: I'll die if I continue on this track," he says. Richard had worked in the food services industry before serving his sentence and he wanted to complete Connections' Culinary Futures Program training because all the food services jobs he was applying for preferred candidates with ServSafe® certification, which the program provides. One he completed the Culinary

Futures Program, Richard was hired to work at A&G Steak Shop at 501 West 9th Street in Wilmington, which is owned and operated by Connections. Richard has worked in the restaurant since opening day, moving up the ladder to manager. Richard says when he encounters others who are going through what he went through he tells them, "There is plenty of help out there, but you have to be pro-active and go out and get it." ■

Being with Connections gave me a peace of mind, a chance to grow, and a place to feel safe. I feel peaceful now.

Living at West Street Commons has been wonderful. I can be myself here... The people at Connections know me, and help me with anything I need.

Connections' commitment to me has helped put the pieces in place for owning a home.

Connections owns and/or operates more than 500 beds of permanent supportive housing, where, in addition to a safe, affordable place to live, residents can receive case management, mental health and substance abuse treatment, primary medical care, and help to get and keep a job. Our permanent supportive housing programs provide an alternative to homelessness, incarceration and unnecessary institutionalization, replacing those conditions with personal freedom, dignity and support. Renee Solomon, Program Manager for our Safe Harbor program (which provides housing for 50 individuals in their own apartment) is devoted to her residents and even spends holidays with them, working together to cook traditional holiday meals on Thanksgiving and Christmas and hosting barbeques throughout the summer. "We're a family and this is a real home," says Renee.

Among these residents are Mark and Glenn. A couple years ago, Mark suffered a personal trauma which led to his being committed to the state psychiatric hospital where he stayed for a year before

moving back into the community. Mark says he most appreciates the freedom that living at Safe Harbor has provided him. Through the supportive and caring environment, Mark has been able to focus on his wellness and reverse some serious health conditions. Renee says Mark's fellow residents see him as a role model because of his commitment to his health and his successful results.



Advocacy is another important function in supervised housing. Renee regularly asks the residents how they are and if they are employed, she will ask them about their job and how things are going. She was having one of these conversations with Glenn one day, asking him when the last time was that he had a vacation, and he said it had been a long while. Unless assisted with the process, individuals like Glenn are not likely to take the initiative and receive the benefits they have accrued, but require just like anyone else for their

overall health and well-being. A case manager followed through and advocated on his behalf, requesting the vacation time and ensuring that the vacation time was received. ■



Recovery is Possible with the Right Connections.

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