



WAYNE BOYD, working the Dust Buster crew, cleans the entrance door at the Brunswick Intergency Building at BCC.

Project Offers Disabled Adults Job Training, Independence

BY SUSAN USHER

Kelly Humphrey may be in a wheelchair, but watch him: He's a whiz at cleaning scuff marks off walls. This Dust Buster's stretch is just right.

Lisa Hicks blushes and smiles as she accepts a compliment from a Brunswick Community College trustee for her excellent service as she helps cater a sit-down dinner.

A usually cheerful John Singleton prides himself on remembering customers' identities as he runs the cash register for Cook's Nook.

Kelly, Lisa and John are just three of the adults who are developing new skills and new self-confidence—and taking home a small paycheck—as a result of their participation in Project HAND.

Started last year, Project HAND adds another dimension to the Brunswick Intergency Program (BIP), Brunswick Community College's compensatory education program for developmentally disabled adults. Last year BIP served 90 adults with developmental disabilities, providing classes in math, social science, community living, consumer education, health and vocational education.

The goal is to help participants develop their skills and their potential for independent living to the fullest extent possible.

Funded by a three-year grant from the North Carolina Council for Developmental Disabilities, Project HAND offers mentally retarded or physically disabled adults opportunity for employment. HAND is the acronym for "Helping Achieve Independence for the Disabled." Now in its second year, by 1996 the project expects to be fully self-supporting, operating on income from employment contracts.

The program operates under a sheltered workshop certificate that is renewed annually. Wages paid clients are adjusted, based on a wage and hour study that analyzes tasks and the time required to do them by a handi-



YARD BIRD crewman Terry Prince trims weeds along the rear entrance to Leland Industrial Park as rehabilitation specialist Richard Heil mows near by.

capped person compared to a non-handi-capped person.

"They get paid for the work they can do," said Anita White, director of the interagency program.

About half of all BIP students are involved on one Project HAND crew or another. Crew members typically work alternate days, both to build up their own stamina and to allow other clients to work part-time. On a typical workday a client spends about three hours on the job and three hours in the classroom.

Crew members learn good work habits, such as punctuality, as well as practical skills such as how to punch a time clock.

For many students, crew assignments are helping fulfill a lifelong dream: having a job and getting paid for it.

"All of our students want a job. They are eager to work and want to earn a pay check," said White, pausing in her comments to query a student about his work experience washing pots and pans in the cafeteria that morning.

"That's one thing about this program that has been important for me," she said. "The self-esteem of the clients because they are getting paid."

However small that check might be, it is a source of pride and accomplishment, and nourishment for dreams of even greater independence.

Parents of one student videotaped him working his first day on the job and receiving his first pay check—achievements neither they nor he had ever dreamed possible.

Qualified BIP students can work on three crews, each supervised by a rehabilitation specialist. Mary Norwood supervises Cook's Nook, Richard Heil, Yard Birds, and Chyrlis Coleman, Dust Busters. The specialists help train clients, supervise them on the job and document their progress toward long-term educational and vocational goals.

Approximately eight clients work as Yard Birds. This groundskeeping crew serves customers that include Leland Industrial Park

and one of its tenants, Telechron; Bolivia Baptist Church and parsonage; Hardee's of Southport; three public schools; and several private residences.

"They're doing a good job," said Tom Monks, director of the Brunswick County Economic Development Commission. "We did a trial run and I was pleased. They clean up the litter and keep everything mowed and I like the concept of what they're doing."

Six people currently work the Dust Busters crew, cleaning the Brunswick Intergency Program building. White said she's considering the possibility of the custodial crew taking private contract jobs in the resort community.

A 15-member food service crew, "Cook's Nook," operates the Brunswick Community College cafeteria and offers a catering service. The crew is proud of the sanitary rating of 96.5 the cafeteria received on a recent inspection by the Brunswick County Health Department, up from a 94.

"They learn food preparation, how to take orders for lunch," said White. "It's run very much like any small grill."

Since the start of fall term, Cook's Nook, which is starting its second year of operation, has served an average of 375 to 400 customers a day, Monday through Friday.

Cafeteria lunches such as spaghetti with salad and garlic bread or country-style steak, rice and gravy, beans and a roll sell for \$3.25 each plus beverage. For bargain-hunters or those with light appetites, there's also a daily \$1 special, such as two hot dogs or pizza.

Project HAND expands BIP's ability to provide job training and job readiness experiences for clients.

"We're giving them experience in a crew, then hopefully they can find a job out in the community," said Anita White, BIP director.

Those who do well on a Project HAND crew may graduate into competitive supported employment depending upon the availability of jobs and their particular eligibility. "We've moved four people out so far this year," said White.

With funding from the N.C. Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, for instance, John Singleton was job-coached to work part-time as the Cook's Nook cashier.

Last year BIP was without a job coach, but is now back on track with a full-time person, Lelah Keelan, and part-timer, Joy Knotts. A job coach learns every detail of a job, then trains a BIP client to do that job, working with him or her as needed.

Six students have "graduated" from job coaching to case management, or long term follow-up. "We have to do a lot of that to make sure they are handling their money right and checking with their employers to make sure everything is going all right," said White.

White said she thinks it is good for the college and good for BIP to have clients visible and working on campus, mixing with the general college population.

"It helps other people here at the school realize that these people can work and can achieve if they are given proper training," said White. "We're not a babysitting service like some people think. We are here to give our clients educational and vocational skills."



BCC TRUSTEES enjoy a dinner catered by The Cook's Nook, which also operates the campus food service. Crew members Lisa Hicks and John Singleton are serving (from left) trustees Al Wooten, Dave Kelly, Jamie Milliken and BCC President W. Michael Reeves.

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