

Marietta Daily Journal (GA)

Enrichment Center teaches disabled skills Programs help adults with life lessons

Ashley Hungerford

Published: June 11, 2006

MARIETTA -- A grocery list, opening a checking account, waiting for a table at a restaurant. These are just a few tasks people with developmental disabilities learn at the **Marietta Enrichment Center**.

The **Marietta Enrichment Center** offers day programs to teach people 12 years and older, everyday tasks so they can participate in the community. The center celebrated a grand opening of its new location April 20. It has 15 participants in its youth program and 42 in the day program.

Center manager Raven Narine said the facility supports people with a wide range of disabilities, and helps teach them everyday activities so they can interact with others and live a normal everyday life.

"We want the individual to have a full life," he said.

Marietta Enrichment Center is one of the programs of Georgia Community Support and Solutions. The nonprofit organization offers services for children and adults with disabilities.

Executive director, Whitney Fuchs said the enrichment center creates ideas and concepts in the different rooms to teach the participants different life skills.

"We figure out ways to get people comfortable so they can go out into the community," Fuchs said.

People can go into a miniature Carrabba's Italian Grill and learn how to act and behave in a restaurant.

Carrabba's donated all the tables and chairs for the mock restaurant.

Narine said many families with disabled children don't go out to restaurants because they fear their child's behavior.

"A lot of individuals don't adjust to change very well, and they don't get to go to restaurants," Narine said.

The center also has a mock Kroger where people can create shopping lists and shop. Products on the shelves are just empty packages. The center also has a miniature SunTrust bank, a movie theater, exercise room, computer lab and art room.

Judith Steuber and Marion Martin have children who attend the center.

Ms. Steuber's grandsons Christopher, 21 and Jeremy, 18, and Ms. Martin's son Wayne, 28, have attended the center for about nine years.

Ms. Steuber and Ms. Martin have been extremely pleased with **Marietta Enrichment Center** and its new location.

"It provides a safe place that deals with my children's specific needs," Ms. Steuber said. "They're so good at making them independent."

She said it was difficult to find a good place that would accept her grandsons. When they were younger and in day care, she said she got called constantly to come and pick them up.

Ms. Steuber said she feels comfortable with her grandsons at the **Marietta Enrichment Center** and knows the center can handle their behavior.

"You can't blame the kids," she said. "Here I feel that they're safe and there's a competent staff."

Ms. Martin agrees. "I don't worry about mine when I drop him off," she said. "I know he's safe."

Narine said the center's nine staff members are experienced working with disabilities. Staff members complete 40 hours of training before they start, and 16 additional hours each year to continue learning.

At the center, Ms. Steuber said her grandsons learn how to do things for themselves. She said she was quick to do everything for them, but because of the center, her grandsons have become more independent.

"Even if it takes half an hour for him to put his pants on, that's what it takes," she said. "I can see them becoming more independent, and I'm not having to jump up 100 times."

Ms. Martin also has seen a change in her son. She said she use to have to drag him through the grocery store, but now he'll go and help pick out special foods that he would like to eat, like French toast.

"He can get up more and do more for himself," Ms. Martin said. "It's made a big difference since he started going here."

But Ms. Steuber said life lessons are not limited to people with developmental disabilities. She said staff is quick to tell her when she starts doing everything for her grandsons without first letting them try.

"Not only are my children being taught here," she said. "I'm being taught here. It lets you know what you should be expecting."