

PROMISING PRACTICES



Collaboration pays dividends for an organization, its clients, and the community

In its most recent [CARF](#) survey report, [Excalibur Youth Services, LLC](#) -- the parent company of [Avalonia Group Homes, Inc.](#) (AGH) -- received an exemplary for the organization's "strong network of community resources and supports" that helps its clients "to develop coping strategies and be successful in the community." The survey report praised the organization's resourcefulness in obtaining outside services.

The Greenville, South Carolina, organization is CARF accredited for its Child and Youth Services Group Home Care. Nearly all of the organization's 250 clients are between the ages of 6 and 17.

Leslie B. Williams, AGH corporate compliance officer, explains, "Our organization's success is enhanced though a network of relationships with businesses, interest groups, and people who share our commitment to educate and improve the lives of the persons served. By leveraging the strengths of our partners, we can increase our business efficiency."

One of AGH's goals is to prepare adolescents to enter employment in the community. "If just one client performs poorly in the community, future employment opportunities for other clients could be jeopardized," Williams says.

To help manage this risk, AGH partnered with a local entrepreneur to open a restaurant. The restaurant is staffed by AGH clients plus a few adult supervisors.

In addition to providing good food to the public, the restaurant provides two direct benefits for AGH:

- AGH clients have a structured, supervised path to reintegration into the community through their job performance.

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Volume 3, Issue 2
May 2012

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- AGH has a resource for meal preparation. (The state's Department of Health and Environmental Control does not allow cooking in group homes.)

"The restaurant has proven to be a cost-savings measure and a positive way to fulfill our mission to improve our clients' abilities," Williams adds.

In another example of the multiple benefits of using community resources, a local healthcare provider was contracted to treat AGH clients. The service provider, with the backing of a federal grant, substantially enlarged its business through serving the AGH client population. AGH clients, in turn, gained access to reliable and quick healthcare.

AGH's network of community resources and supports includes these collaborations:

- A technical college offers workshops for AGH clients. The workshops can lead to careers in welding, carpentry, masonry, auto mechanics, auto robotics, or aircraft maintenance.
- A nearby fish hatchery developed an educational program for AGH clients to fish and learn about conservation and wildlife. Called "Trout in the Classroom," the program builds the clients' math, science, and team-building skills.
- An outside therapist provides sex education and parenting classes for clients who are teen parents.
- AGH contracts with a beautician, an art therapist, a pet therapist, and an aerobics instructor to provide instruction to strengthen clients' self-confidence and well-being.

For AGH clients, each collaboration in the community is designed to reinforce:

- Increased frequency of appropriate behaviors.
- Acceptance of responsibility for inappropriate behaviors.
- Success in mastering daily living and problem-solving skills.

Williams concludes, "Every community collaboration is designed to help prepare our clients to move from a group home to a less restrictive environment. We strive to maximize each youth's potential to become a productive and self-supporting adult in the community."

For more information, please email Leslie B. Williams, M.Ed., at williams@recoverouryouth.org. The website for Excalibur Youth Services, LLC, and Avalonia Group Homes, Inc., is at recoverouryouth.org.