

CITY LIFE

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Martin Twele and Gail Bloomkvist dance up a storm during fitness time at the Abbotsford Community Services' Discovery Program on Thursday morning.

JOHN VAN PUTTEN / The Abbotsford News

Program offers plenty to discover

Adults with developmental disabilities gain support, self-confidence and independence

by **VIKKI HOPES**
Abbotsford News

When "Sandra" first started attending the Discovery Program in Abbotsford she was anxious about venturing out, even if it was just for a cup of coffee.

Now, she volunteers in the community one morning a week, enjoys visiting the library and loves going out for coffee.

Sandra's transformation is just one of many success stories that the Abbotsford Community Services' program can tout.

Discovery – a recreational and leisure program for adults with developmental disabilities – is helping to change lives, said support staff.

The boost in self-confidence and independence that Sandra experienced is typical of the transformation that clients undergo in the program, they said.

"They (the clients) have found a place where they can be safe, a place where they are accepted, where they can grow," said Huw Franklin, one of five program support staff.

Clients are referred to the program by their Community Living B.C. social worker. They work one-on-one and in group settings with Discovery staff to set goals and develop their interests.

This "client-centered" approach, in which they are encouraged to make their own decisions, is a new

concept for some of them who grew up in institutions and were used to having decisions made for them.

Discovery is just one of many programs that are part of the "community living" approach that developed with the phasing out of institutions such as Woodlands and Glendale in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Discovery staff said that the program is paying off for both the clients and the community as a whole.

A big part of the program involves participants spending time in the community, either through volunteer work or during group outings.

"They become part of the community, and the community starts to realize they are part of us," said Dina Geerts, another support worker.

"Taking them out reminds people we all exist together on this planet and we are responsible for each other."

Geerts said attitudes about the developmentally disabled have changed dramatically over the years. She recalled many years ago being in a restaurant with a group of clients. People at a nearby table expressed their displeasure, saying

their meal was being ruined. They requested that Geerts' group leave the restaurant.

She said she no longer experiences that kind of discrimination, and that's due to programs like Discovery which encourage understanding and acceptance.

The program currently has 35 clients, 28 of whom attend every day at the facility on Montvue Avenue.

On Mondays and Thursdays, they break up into groups to participate in special projects. Some like to do crafts such as scrapbooking or sewing. Others work up a sweat on the selection of fitness equipment.

On Tuesdays and Wednesdays, each support staff works with four to six clients on developing their goals. For some, this might mean

learning to cook or improving their computer skills. For others, this might mean volunteer work.

Fridays are less structured and are more devoted to fun time, such as a game of floor hockey or watching movies.

Clients' goals are reviewed every month and adapted as necessary.

"It's supporting the individuals with realistic goals," Franklin said.

Sometimes, alternatives must be considered. For example, some clients expressed a desire to learn to drive, so staff purchased a computer game that enabled them to do just that – using a "steering wheel" and foot pedals.

Lots of community outings are included in their activities. Participants work within their group to negotiate these destinations, whether it's which restaurant they will dine at or which art gallery

'I like to go out and I like to do things with people I like.'

– **Martin Twele, client of the Discovery Program**

Disneyland trip on the agenda

The Discovery Program is currently holding a fundraising campaign for a trip to Disneyland in June 2008.

The program is partnering with the Abbotsford Special Venturers' – a branch of scouting – to visit the theme park from June 1 to 4.

Approximately 60 people, including staff, are planning to go, with a total estimated cost of \$60,000.

To date, \$20,000 has been raised through various means, including a donation from the Abbotsford Firefighters' Association, a spaghetti

dinner, frozen chicken sales and more.

The next fundraiser is a concert on Saturday, May 5 at Matsqui Centennial Auditorium featuring Eisenhauer, Sheree Plett and Old Mare.

Tickets are \$15 in advance and \$17 at the door. Doors open at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are available at Tom Lee Music and at the Sevenoaks Shopping Centre community booth on April 21 and 22.

To make a donation to the Disneyland fund, call Abbotsford Community Services at 604-859-7681 (local 204).



JOHN VAN PUTTEN / The Abbotsford News

Discovery Program support staff member Shari Gibson stands by as client Diana Buurman gets in a workout.

they will visit.

They regularly use public transit, which helps the clients become more mobile when they're on their own.

The program has also helped many of them obtain volunteer work.

Client Martin Twele said he enjoys being involved with the Discovery Program.

"I love to go out and I like to do things with people I like," he said.

Gail Bloomkvist, another cli-

ent, said she has made many new friends since joining Discovery three years ago.

"I like the staff. They're lots of fun," he said. "Everybody's friends."

Discovery is one of four programs that are part of Abbotsford Community Services' Community Living section.

The other programs are: Employing People in the Community (EPIC), Life Challenge for seniors, and Star for children.

Slice of Life

Poets host reading

MSA Poets Potpourri Society holds an event on Tuesday, April 3 as part of its Blue Moon Reading Series.

The session runs from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at Clearbrook Library and features readings by Dr. Lucia Gorea, Alvin Ens and Violet Nesdoly.

There will also be an open mic, refreshments and door prizes.

For more details, call Jaye Low at 604-309-4070 or Shelley Haggard at 604-820-4438.

Three projects featured

The Abbotsford Christian Leaders' Network and the Christian Women's Network host the Isaiah 58 Project, an evening featuring worship and highlighting three ministries.

The event takes place from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at Sevenoaks Alliance Church on Sunday, April 1.

The Rice Raiser, M2/W2 and the Sevenoaks Clothesline ministries will be featured.

Tickets are \$5, and they are available at House of James, Sevenoaks Alliance and Northview churches, and at the door.

Diabetes group meets

The Abbotsford chapter of the Canadian Diabetes Association meets Tuesday, April 3 at 7:30 p.m.

The group gets together at Central Heights Church, 1661 McCallum Rd. Nurse practitioner Janet Baillies discusses *Your Health Care Provider: Tips for Partnering in DM Care*.

For more details, call Al at 604-854-1799.

Out in the garden

Clearbrook Library (32320 George Ferguson Way) holds a talk with gardening expert Nancy Moore on Thursday, April 5.

The talk runs from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. Moore discusses how to create a healthy garden through soil preparation, plant choices and garden maintenance appropriate to the West Coast climate.

Register by calling 604-859-7814.

Expo at Jubilee Hall

Tables are being booked for a home-based business expo, craft fair and flea market at Jubilee Hall (7999 Bradner Rd.).

The event takes place April 14 and 15 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. both days.

Tables are \$15 a day or \$25 for the weekend. Call 604-856-1315 to book a spot or for more information.

Celiac support

The Abbotsford Celiac Support Group meets every Tuesday at 10 a.m.

The group meets at Clayburn Gourmet Gallery (#320 3033 Immel St.).