



The Brookwood Community

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Located in Brookshire, Texas, 40 miles west of downtown Houston, The Brookwood Community is a non-profit (501(c)3) residential facility and vocational program for adults with special needs. Our mission statement reads: "Through the grace of God, The Brookwood Community provides an environment that creates meaningful jobs, builds a sense of belonging, and demands dignity and respect for adults with special needs."



Brookwood began because of the overwhelmingly common attitude that "there is little you can do to help adults with intellectual and physical disabilities become normal, so...since they can't be normal...there's not much point in working with them." This attitude was unacceptable to the founding parents who believed their sons and daughters deserved to live their lives to the fullest. They accepted the challenge to pioneer a new approach, one that would tap the potential of their children, whatever that potential might be.

The founding parents included Dave and Yvonne Streit and John and Rosemary Larson. Dave is an attorney and Yvonne's degrees are in education and psychology from S.M.U. She was brought up in a medical family; her father was a well-known physician/surgeon in Houston and her brother is a retired doctor. John was an architect and Rosemary's background is in art therapy. Discovering that conventional teaching methods in the late 1950's and early 1960's did not accommodate the disabilities of their children, they traveled extensively to research innovative educational techniques and models. They investigated international models including Bethel in Leyenhof, Germany, another facility in Hull, England, and yet another in Heemestede in the Netherlands. National models included the Lambs' Farm in Libertyville, Illinois, and Camp Hill Village in Copake, New York.

The Streits and the Larsons, along with other parents, founded the Briarwood School in the late 1960's, determined to educate children with intellectual and physical disabilities. Within a short time, however, the school began to attract and succeed primarily with children who have learning differences (children with average or above average intelligence who learn outside the conventional means), but it still operated a "special school" for the child with more severe disabilities. Briarwood's educational approach focused on "proactive, adaptive teaching" which meant the teachers were committed to trying various teaching methods until they found one that fit each individual student. At that time, this was a revolutionary concept and contrasted with "one-size-fits-all" educational approaches.

Unfortunately, in the United States learning opportunities for most children with special needs only extends to the 12th grade. Brookwood was founded by the Streits and the Larsons and other parents in the mid-

1980's to continue the learning opportunities for their children as they became adults. While many people with disabilities can, and do, live on their own, Brookwood serves adults whose special needs prevent them from functioning independently in society. These men and women need a safe environment where they can live, work productively, have friends, and receive total acceptance.



While initial planning and leg work to carry out those plans had begun many years earlier, in 1985 The Brookwood Community opened its doors to a new world for adults with special needs. The first residents and day program participants quickly became known as the "citizens" of Brookwood. Using the "proactive, adaptive" educational techniques proven successful at Briarwood, Brookwood's staff began teaching real job skills and provided a venue where these skills could be constructively applied. Home teachers turned every day home activities into learning opportunities. Every task and event would become a teaching moment to help citizens grow socially, emotionally, vocationally, mentally, and spiritually.

As we celebrate our 25th anniversary, we are proud to share that...

- Brookwood continues to be recognized as a leader in the caregiving field and has been instrumental in helping start similar facilities across our nation and around the world.
- Our God-centered community is operated without government subsidies...underwritten instead by private sector donations, revenues from Brookwood's self-contained enterprises, and tuition fees.
- We directly serve 165+ adults with special needs. We also provide guidance, counsel, and support to our citizens' families and friends.



For 110 adults, Brookwood is "home," where they live 24/7. These citizens join an average of about 55 other adults each weekday and work in our on-campus enterprises from 8:30 am to 4 pm. Our enterprises include: Horticulture (where they grow the most beautiful plants in SE Texas); Ceramics; Stonecasting;

Cement; The Café at Brookwood and our newest venture, the Brookwood Food Enterprise (citizens bottle our Café's signature "Mesibov" salad dressing).

While late afternoon ends the day at Brookwood for the day-program participants, it just begins activities for our resident citizens. After work, home teachers and activities coordinators plan physical fitness activities (bike club, swimming, sports, walking, just to name a few) and

educational activities (reading clubs, discussion groups, special interest groups, drum therapy, hand bells, Bible study, etc.). Evenings and weekends include social outings to plays, movies, dance recitals, rodeos, and all types of other such events. In most cases, group homes go together to these events, as one large family.

Here is a closer look at the programs offered to Brookwood citizens:

Vocational Program:

Our work program currently serves more than 165 adults. Brookwood aims to provide the best teaching, work environment, and work experience possible for our residential and day-program citizens. This involves a broad range of requirements including patience, compassion, proactive and adaptive teaching, safe and secure workplaces, and an environment in which everyone is treated with dignity and respect. More specifically, citizens' learning assets are studied to develop teaching techniques to enable them to learn the skills necessary to do production work in our self-contained enterprise system. These enterprises in turn help our Community operate without government funds of any kind. Dr. James Hillman of Harvard University speaks about every human needing to have purpose, and so often we deny adults with special needs the opportunity to have purpose. Our educationally based work program provides the skills and our self-contained enterprises provide the environment. From humble beginnings over 20 years ago (we began selling Brookwood products and plants from the back of station wagons at church bazaars), Brookwood's "businesses" now include an on-campus 14,800+ SF retail and Café facility, three off-campus retail outlets, and an online store (www.brookwoodstore.com). Annual

revenues from our retail and Café enterprises are currently about \$4 million, which help underwrite 1/3 of our operating budget.

Residential Program:

Home teachers in our eight residential group homes and the Isla Carroll Inn promote the residents' sense of "supervised independence" and self-esteem. Resident assistants (RAs) help the home teachers in the



mornings and evenings in preparing meals and activities for the citizens in their homes. Citizens assist with day-to-day chores in the home.

Most of the group homes house 10-11 citizens while the Inn, a dormitory style residence, is home to 34 citizens. Many new residents have limited living skills upon arrival. Our home teachers foster a wholesome living environment and teach residents to do things such as help and share with one another, maintain a schedule of daily chores, select clothes and dress themselves, plan the day's activities, and if appropriate, manage personal finances. Development of hobbies and recreational activities is also encouraged. The residential program currently serves 110 adults.

Medical/Dental Program:

Our medical team works closely with residential staff, work program staff and families to monitor and maintain the mental and physical well-being of our citizens. If a problem arises, the nursing staff provides

appropriate medical attention in the on-campus John S. Dunn Health Center. They also coordinate our citizens' regular appointments with more than 200 doctors, dentists, physical therapists and other specialists in the Houston area. Our Health Center offers an infirmary as well as continuing care, allowing our citizens to age in place. With two four-bed wards, private rooms, and examination and treatment rooms, the Center enables us to provide preventive and routine care. Our dental clinic allows citizens access to basic dental care needs without the stress of having to leave campus to go to an off-campus facility. Houston area dentists and hygienists volunteer their time to provide cleaning, x-rays, and other basic dental services.



Sports and Activities Program:



Our staff answers the needs of our citizens on many fronts including a year-round leisure and recreational program. Physical and water therapy programs, field trips, and a-vocational hobbies are just some of the many planned and supervised activities

encouraging recreational, emotional and social growth. Citizens actively participate in the "Brookwood Bike Club" (their goal is to ride at least 150 miles a year). Many citizens also participate in Special Olympics, including basketball, bowling, swimming, and softball.

Spiritual Development Program:

We include a spiritual learning component in nearly all of our activities for the citizens. Visitors notice that we have an "empty" chair wherever we gather as a group. We refer to it as "God's Chair." This is a visible reminder to our staff and citizens that God is very real and always present.



The citizens participate and often lead prayers before meals and meetings and many attend a weekly Bible Study (either on-campus or at Houston area churches). On Sundays, groups will go to different churches throughout Houston. A part of this worship time involves giving a donation to the church, which helps them understand a little about stewardship and being giving disciples. On Sunday afternoons the citizens host a weekly worship service in our Chapel. Local churches are invited to help lead and participate in these services as well.

Outreach Program:

Sharing our knowledge and experience by collaborating with others is an integral part of Brookwood's mission and brings all of us together in support of adults with disabilities. An example of networking and

collaborating is Brookwood's active outreach and training programs with other caregivers in this field. Each year we host specialists, interns and researchers who come to Brookwood to observe and study our programs in action. As a result of this outreach, we have been instrumental in helping start facilities similar to Brookwood in Guayaquil, Ecuador; Monterey, Mexico; Franklin, Tennessee; Estaboga, Alabama; and Tyler, Texas. We think knowledge of this outreach is very meaningful and helps substantiate investment in The Brookwood Community. The additional seeds planted through this outreach program are making a national and international impact.

It Works!

In 1985 The Brookwood Community opened its doors to a new world for adults with special needs. Since that time, much of the language has changed. However, as seen from the following testimonial excerpts, Brookwood's impact is evident since day one:

June 1985 - "Thank you for making Buddy's transition into the Community so smooth. He seems to be very happy. Of course, he likes news of home....but I think he'd rather be with you than anywhere on earth." - Letter from a mother of one of our first resident "citizens."

July 1991 - "(We) would like to take this opportunity...to thank you for sharing your knowledge and expertise with...educators from their country. Indeed Brookwood Community is pioneering news ways of providing a fuller life for the retarded citizens of our world." - Letter from outreach group.

Mid 1990's - "Brookwood is a deeply caring community in which residents and staff members alike are accepted and responded

to in a way that communicates respect for the worth and dignity of all persons. Unlike the routine and impersonal atmosphere Southwestern students have encountered in other mental health settings, The Brookwood Community encourages the belief in the importance of helping residents grow and develop to the full extent of their ability and humanness." - A professor at Southwestern University, recapping students' internships at Brookwood.

Summer 2007 - "We feel like Brookwood is a godsend for {our sister} and for us. She has friends whom she dearly loves, her medical needs are very well taken care of, her outlook on life is so positive and she thrives in that wonderful spiritual atmosphere. We had searched for years and tried five totally different places hoping each would help her develop and reach her great potential...we found none to be what she needed. The love and care you at Brookwood have given her is beyond our wildest dreams...All of the personnel and helpers are topnotch...Visit after unannounced visit proved that (Brookwood) was the same wonderful place day in and day out." - Letter from sisters of Brookwood citizen.

And every new day at Brookwood continues to see similar success stories...adults earning a first-ever paycheck...discovering self-worth while contributing to the world...learning new skills at work and in the home...educators and other professionals learning "new ways to provide a fuller life" for those in their communities...and so-called "abled" persons discovering the value of each of God's children, and discovering that many of God's children are, in the words of Temple Grandin, "different but not less."

How You Can Help

You can help support our mission by purchasing our plants and hand crafted gift items, spreading the word about Brookwood, making a donation, and/or by volunteering. (Please see our website for more information or to make a donation: www.brookwoodcommunity.org.)

Volunteer Opportunities for Individuals or Groups

Brookwood Stores - Help in one of our three retail stores or as a hostess/host at our Café.

Brookwood Workshops - Volunteer once a week in our craft or horticulture shops.

Spring and Fall Bazaars - Volunteer to help with sales, set-up or tear-down.

Tour Guides - Serve as a docent for group tours of our campus.

The MS-150 Brookwood Spirit Rally - usually held on a Saturday in April.

Golf Marathon - usually the first Monday in November.

Brookwood Volunteer Organization - Join the Brookwood Volunteers and help all year long.

Sunday Afternoon Worship - Groups partner with us through musical, puppetry or clown ministry, etc....held at 3:00 p.m. in Brookwood's Worship Center.

Sports/Recreation Activities - assist our Special Olympics coaches or hold a sports day at Brookwood.

Game Night - groups help our citizens with an evening of cards, puzzles and board games.

Bingo Prizes - groups provide nice prizes such as puzzles (easy 100-200 piece) or arts & crafts projects.

Holiday Function at Brookwood - Underwrite and/or participate in Easter egg hunt, Valentine party, Memorial Day, July 4th or Labor Day picnic, etc.

Astros/Texans Game (or other sports team) - Buy a section of tickets for our residents. Your group and a group of residents sit together at the game. We could have lunch together or just popcorn and drinks. Our folks love Astros t-shirts and caps.



Rushton's comments:

Many of you may remember our program last August called Frank David's Story. That story and this one remind us how difficult it can be

for those with family members with disabilities to find public or private facilities where those men and women can live with dignity and among friends. As one with a sibling with disabilities, it is my hope that every Rotarian will do what he or she can to help families facing the formidable challenge involved in finding safety and opportunities for their loved ones.