

community as possible," Sheehan said.

The students are taught how to shop for groceries, how to cross the street, general hygiene and other living skills, Sheehan said.

"The purpose of this program is not to turn out food service workers," he insisted. "We just want to teach good work skills so they can go into what ever they want—office work, janitorial, day care..."

The reason most graduates of earlier programs were losing jobs was because of a lack of problem-solving abilities and an inflexibility in their ways of approaching tasks, Sheehan said.

"We can teach those things," he said. "There was one boy who was washing dishes downstairs and had such a good pattern going that when a cook needed something out of order

he would throw a fit because it disrupted his pattern, so we had to start interrupting him at various times of the day until he got used to it."

However, the program doesn't guarantee vocational success for every student. The 45 percent who end up in segregated adult housing weigh heavily on Sheehan's mind, he said.

"Then there's the gratifying part when you will see one of the students working at a job or see a graduate shopping for groceries or go to an event in the community and see one of them there," Sheehan said.

Alexander appears to be one of those "gratifying" successes. She is currently working two day-care jobs in addition to her class work at Willamette High School and her food service job at the EMU.

"I get home and I'm so

tired," she said. But she doesn't seem to mind too much. "Before, I'd come home from school and have nothing to do. I like working here with my friends and listening to the people."

"I like helping the kids learn stuff," she said of her day-care job. "I want to grow up and have people leave and I want to take care of their kids while they're gone."

Penelope Oshatz, the vocational placement specialist who found Alexander her job, supervises the intake of students in the facility, pounds the pavement running down leads for jobs, then monitors the students after they are hired.

"She's fantastic," Oshatz said of Alexander. "She works with handicapped babies age birth-to-three in the morning at Parent and Child Education, and then goes downstairs to the

U of O child care in the afternoon where she works with older kids five and up."

Oshatz maintains close contact with the student she placed at Seymour's Greenery almost three years ago, as well as the two working at Izzy's Pizza restaurant, and one working at Marco's Gelato and another who works for Easter Seals.

"One of the most important things they can learn here is how to get along with supervision," Oshatz noted, adding that self-esteem and expressive skills also play a large part in determining a student's success in the "real world."

She thinks that the LCESD/TMR program is a happy medium for students where their problems can be successfully addressed.

"I remember working with a boy who was terrified of riding the elevator," Oshatz said. "It took two weeks of training and then 'fading' (a decrease of supervision over time) to get him to overcome his fear."

Oshatz notes that student workers who complete the program have been trained in appropriate behaviors and have been exposed to generic work experience in the food service and maintenance skills, but could be trained to do other jobs as well.

"They've already been exposed to the priorities that employers have," she said, "whether that's being well-groomed or keeping in touch with the employer as far as being absent or tardy is concerned."

The primary link between Sheehan and Oshatz and the programs they institute is the program coordinator, 25-year-old Rich DeFilippis. He has the most direct contact with the students and their other supervisors.

"I've always liked kids," DeFilippis said. "I felt like I could be a fairly good role model for them."

His relationship with the students is more affectionate than the public sees because they "have to keep a certain behavior in public."

"In the back," DeFilippis said, "we really get down—we dance, we sing, and laugh and

talk."

Role modeling does have its price, however. "They pick up a lot of our habits and quirks," DeFilippis said. "It's kind of funny."

One of the most difficult aspects of training he deals with is discipline.

"If there's a problem with one of the students, I'll be aware of it and try to get to them before they do it, to remind them," DeFilippis said, "but usually I give them a warning and then model the correct behavior for them."

The key to behavior modification is repetition and tighter supervision, DeFilippis said, but once a student is behaving appropriately, he will supervise them less and less.

Occasion, a student will become distraught enough to throw a down-and-out fit, and DeFilippis said it's a tough thing to deal with, especially if it's happening in front of other people.

"Say they're behaving incorrectly and you say, 'Hey, come here, we need to talk,' and they say, 'No.' So, I'll ask again, 'Could you please come here,' and if they still say no then you have to get confrontative. We'll take them to a back room or around the corner to talk. We try never to belittle them in public. Just because they're retarded doesn't mean that they don't feel things. They have the same feelings as everybody else—anger, embarrassment, humiliation—and we have to respect those feelings."

Lonnie Ofsthun, 16, is another student who is in his first year with the program. He is the seventh of eight children and shows a talent for woodwork. He takes woodshop as part of his high school curriculum. Ofsthun attends special education classes at Marcola High School, and, like all the graduates of the LCESD/TMR program, he will continue with it until he is 21-years-old.

At that time he will receive a certificate of completion from the school and will transfer to another program. The programs overlap, making the transition from one to the other relatively easy.



Photo by Maria Corvallis

Mentally handicapped students like Peggy Alexander learn food service, child care, janitorial and living skills through involvement in the ESD program.

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