

# Program teaches skills to disabled

## Job experience stressed

By Jane Stelle  
Emerald Contributor

Taking out the garbage is not a job most would find challenging, but to Christy Wilson, just having a job is exciting.

Wilson is one of four people with developmental disabilities working at the EMU as part of a Community Classroom program, who listed taking out the garbage and washing dishes as some of their favorite tasks on the job.

The Lane Education Service District began the program in September to teach young people with disabilities by helping them find and keep jobs in the community.

The 14 students come from all over Lane County, and meet each morning at the downtown ARC Bingo center, but do most of their learning on the job.

"It's almost like a classroom without walls," said Marty Sheehan, supervisor of the high school trainable mentally retarded program.

The students who work in

the EMU earn a small wage and a free lunch in return for three to four hours of work per day.

Randy Haines, an assistant teacher who supervises the EMU work crew, de-emphasizes the wages.

"The main thing is having the site to do training," Haines said. "It kind of mirrors a job situation."

Haines said that students begin learning basic restaurant skills working in a job crew at the EMU or the ARC Bingo hall and work there until they can be placed in an individual job.

The Education Service District (ESD) has a job developer to find businesses willing to hire people with disabilities.

Community Classroom students also work at small local businesses, such as Rosewater Deli, the Baja Cafe, Metropol Bakery, Newwood Industries and Down to Earth.

Cary Perrin, the program teacher, said some local businesses heard about the community classroom by word of mouth and wanted to get involved in order to put something back into the community.

"So far we haven't had any problems with the businesses and they haven't reported any problems with us," Perrin said.

Perrin said the project has been highly successful so far.

"It's a real dynamic program that benefits students, their families and the community," Perrin said.

Perrin also teaches basic adult education classes at Lane Community College, where many of the Community Classroom students learn how to manage the money they earn, where to get help if they have a problem and what to do with their leisure time, she said.

"We need to support the students and help them to be independent," Perrin said.

The Community Classroom's goal is for students to be able to keep their jobs after they're finished with the program.

"We want to make them competitive in the job market so they can keep the job," Haines said.

In addition, Perrin said the jobs help raise the students' self-esteem.

"It's amazing how important these jobs are to them," Perrin said. "There's a lot of pride taken in the jobs."

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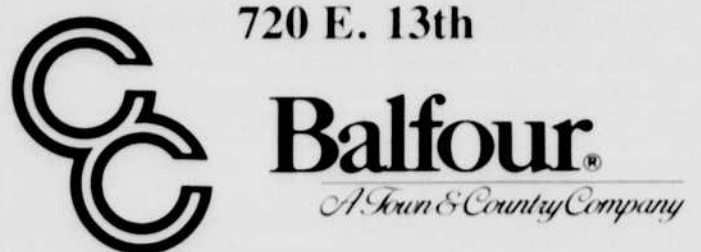
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