



Jefferson County Transition Program Makes a World of Difference

Making the leap from high school to the adult world is a big step under any circumstances. But for students with special needs it can be even more of a challenge. Learning necessary life skills is essential to making that successful transition into adulthood, independent living and employment.

The Jefferson County School District offers young adults with developmental disabilities a transition program that teaches those basic skills so necessary for leading independent and productive lives.

The Madras High School program is for students ages 16 – 21. Participants learn how to cook and clean, make beds, garden and do woodworking. They also sharpen their writing and money management skills.

"I'm learning how to cook. I'm learning how to be independent," said 19-year-old Casey Bresson. "I'm learning how to live on my own someday. I want to get married and have kids."

Seventeen-year-old Marti Glover's goal is to be able to take care of herself. "I'm learning to be mature in situations," she said.

Feels Like Home

Students thrive in the program's nurturing and supportive environment, guided by a warm and caring teacher, two educational assistants and a speech therapist.



The JCSD transition program students and staff are like a family providing support and encouragement to each other each day. (Inset/left) Marti Glover, 17, and educational assistant Kim Urbach hunt for worms to feed the class frog. (Inset/right) Transition students Marti Glover, 17, and Casey Bresson, 19, learn how to make waffles as part of their basic skills training.

"We're really trying to emphasize that there's a whole world out there. They are really coming out of their shells and learning a wide range of hands-on skills."

— Dan Peterson, Educational Assistant

In fact, students enthusiastically describe the best part of class as being the caring staff – transition teacher Wendy Dove, educational assistant, bus driver and meal coordinator Kim Urbach, educational assistant Dan Peterson and speech assistant Andrea Galloway.

"Mrs. Dove and Kim and Dan push you, but they don't push too hard," said student Sky Lynn Kinley.

Dove is totally committed to her students. She has created a home-like setting in the classroom, with couches, comfy chairs and a dining area where everyone sits together as a family.

"I love being here," said Dove. "I love every minute of it and I'm excited to come to work everyday."

"We really want them to learn to do things on their own, so we don't do everything for them," said Urbach.

Real World Experience

Part of gaining real world experience includes earning money by doing chores in the community. The class recently dug up a local resident's unwanted yard full of geraniums. Instead of throwing the plants away, students potted them and are caring for them in hopes of selling them in the spring to raise money. Students also collect and turn in recyclables. All money earned is used for class supplies and field trips.

Other community projects include moving rocks for a local rancher, picking potatoes and pumpkins at local farms (the class got to keep and freeze what they picked and are using the vegetables as ingredients in their cooking). There was also a field trip to Kimberly Farms for apple picking and an education about apple processing. Another favorite activity is a monthly visit to the East Cascade Retirement Community where students enjoy spending quality time with the elderly.

"It's so rewarding to watch these students grow up and mature," said Urbach. "By the time they leave, they are becoming adults and have learned skills and respect."

Masthead photos: (Left) Tim Merrill, 19, and educational assistant Dan Peterson with a handmade garden bench built by JCSD transition students. The bench was reconstructed from a child's bed that was donated to the program. (Right) Sky Lynn Kinley, 19, demonstrates how to make a bed in the transition program classroom.

Helping Students Build Lives



Madras High School Students are learning the construction trade while earning credits to graduate.

For some students at Madras High School, traditional school isn't a good fit. Those who struggle with attendance and academics sometimes need alternative ways to learn and grow. Family challenges, economic issues, and learning difficulties can all be contributing factors. Dropping out can be a tempting option and a too common occurrence.

The Heart of Oregon Corps YouthBuild Program offers an alternative to traditional high school for seniors struggling to succeed. In this unique program, they spend part of their time in the classroom with an individualized learning plan working toward their high school diploma or GED. The rest of their time is spent learning the construction trade. It is partially funded by the Department of Labor.

Students are building affordable housing in Madras. They have the opportunity to earn certifications in safety from OSHA and Home Builder's Institute, and to get forklift licenses. After a series of initial training programs, students are paid a stipend of \$20 a day and an extra \$20 per week if they show up all five days. These rates increase as students progress through the program. After the program is over, some earn AmeriCorps scholarships for college.

"High School wasn't working for me," explained Scott Powell, a 12th grader at MHS. "This is a great opportunity for students on their last push to get a high school diploma on time. Especially when they are coming from bad backgrounds. The people here are taking the time to show us and help us succeed. Once you're in, you're part of a family."

"The support is helping me change my life," added senior Alex Matson.

The YouthBuild program is housed near Sisters, but serves students from Redmond, Madras and Prineville. Daily transportation is provided, but according to JCSD Superintendent Rick Molitor, students from Warm Springs and Madras must travel more than an hour each way to participate. Approximately 35% of the time, JCSD students can report directly to the construction site in Madras.

"Of the approximately 43 students in the program, 20 are currently from JCSD," said Molitor. "Travel and transportation are challenging but our students are rising to the challenge. We are working closely with Heart of Oregon to improve options for our students who so desperately need this wonderful, alternative education opportunity."

Thrift Shop Provides Job Training for Transition Students

The Heart of Oregon Thrift Store is a life skills training ground for many students enrolled in the Madras High School Transition Program. The store is partially operated by the program's students. According to store manager Linda Graham, the students help run the shop while she facilitates and trains them. For many it's their first school to work volunteer experience.

Students sort and clean the donations – wiping down toys, scrubbing pots and pans, and washing clothes. They learn to welcome and interact with customers, dress professionally, have a good attitude, and come to work on time. The most coveted position is working the cash register. Students must work their way up to that role.

In return, students receive school credit and a small volunteer bonus – \$15 to \$75 a week depending on experience and hours volunteered. But the most important reward is gaining experience to secure jobs in other retail establishments.

"Working with strangers is harder for some than others," explained Graham. "But they do well and the community is supportive."

Student Melissa Colburn painted the store windows for the holidays and three other businesses paid her to do their windows as well.

"It's all about gaining the real world skills necessary to go on and live productive lives," added Graham.



JCSD transition student Casey Bresson, 19, sorts clothing at the Heart of Oregon Thrift Shop in Madras.

Substitutes and Part-time Employees Needed

The Jefferson County School District is in need of substitute teachers and part-time employees. For more information, please contact the district office at (541) 475-6192.

Need a Hand? Got Recyclables?

If you have yard, house, ranch or farm work, the Madras High School Transition Program students might be your crew. (No machinery, please.) Please call the number below for more information.

Students are also collecting recyclable bottles and cans, and other items to raise money for their program. Please drop off your recyclables at the Madras High School Annex/Westside Building at 410 SE 4th Street or call (541) 475-3160 for a pick up.

Calendar

February

- 8 School Board Meeting: 7 p.m./SSB
- 15 No School – President's Day
- 16 No School – Teacher Work Day
- 22 School Board Meeting: 7 p.m./SSB



Performing Arts Center Events

Madras High School Drama presents Robin Hood

February 12-13: 7 p.m. showtime
February 14: 2 p.m. showtime

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