

STAMPS FOR A LIVING PROGRAM

Submitted by Sgt. Lewis C. Ecker,
n St. Elizabeths Hospital, Forensic-

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BACKGROUND ;

The Bethel-St. Elizabeths Foundation of America, Inc. Is a nonprofit organization exclusively for charitable and educational purposes. Its objective is to support integrated model communities for mentally, physically or socially disabled people.

Initially such support is focusing on developing patient enterprises about St. Elizabeths Hospital and its West Campus in Washington, D.C. following the model of the Bodelschwingh Community in Bethel-Bielefeld, Germany. As a first project, they plan it to develop a patient-operated Used Stamps Collecting, Processing and Sales Center in Washington, D.C. Such a patient enterprise has operated in Bethel successfully - both financially and therapeutically - for more than 100 years.

Pastor Friedrich von Bodelschwingh, the founder of the Bethel community in Germany in the middle of the 19th century, believed that work is often the best medicine for the disabled. The opportunity for gainful employment and partnership in a successful enterprise will enhance the participant's self-esteem and well-being. Working with others develops mutual understanding and is the beginning step in learning to live together.

As its contribution, the Bethel Community has offered to give to the Washington project the hundreds of stamps collected each year for Bethel in Germany from churches, organizations and individuals throughout North America. They currently assemble these stamps at the United Church - Die Vereinigte Kirche in Washington, D.C., for shipment to Bethel. Bethels' enormous network has to be kept alive.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION;

The project involves the unpacking and initial storing of hundreds of letters, small packages and boxes filled with stamps, which they receive from all over the United States of America and Canada. As they send them, they have just cut out the stamps from envelopes. About farther processing, they must remove from the envelopes and sort them, for instance ordinary sets of stamps, special issues (at Christmas), commemorative stamps etc. They must package them for sale for collectors, preferable wholesale purchasers. On the administration side, receipt and shipment of the stamps need to be organized. Requests for information from past and potential stamp contributors need to be answered, mailing lists and contacts with suppliers and buyers have to be established and/or maintained. Moreover and most important, patients need to be selected and supervised, the remuneration of patients and staff administered, and financial and other records for the enterprise to be kept. The project thus provides a broad range of patient employment and training opportunities with a minimum of staff supervision. It would require three locked rooms: one each for storage preparation, and administration/sales. When the center has become fully operational, it should cover its cost, as experience has shown in Bethel, where even they achieve surplus.

ORGANIZATION:

"Friends of St. Elizabeths," and with the help of Dr. Ken Gorelick, a proposal was prepared as an Idea Proposed for the West Campus of St. Elizabeths in Washington, D.C.

The Mental Health Services Client Enterprise Act of 1998 became D.C. Law 12-226 on April 13, 1999. "Stamps For A Living" was officially alive! The Bethel - St. Elizabeths Foundation of America has been recognized! This due to the very close work with the cooperation of the Client Enterprise Association. From this group they formed and incorporated a Client Enterprise Corporation, to be able to function outside the District's budget.

The Corporation with Dr. John Bruce as President and Ms. Nancy Lee Head as Vice President vigorously took on the task of establishing client enterprises. The Corporation continued to focus on starting and supporting the Stamps For A Living Business. They have offered the stamps being collected for the Bethel community now to be used in Washington at St. Elizabeths Hospital. The Corporation will continue to draw on the expertise of the Bethel Community to help St. Elizabeths in and out patients to build up similar enterprises.

Mission:

"The mission of Stamps For A Living is to give adults the opportunity to acclimate into a mainstream business environment while earning a living and growing towards self-sufficiency. Through this program it is hoped that people will have increased self-esteem through getting a pay check, be empowered by making decisions, and become confident in their skills. Stamps For A Living will also promote community awareness of the capabilities of people with disabilities. It is my hope that in the future, Stamps For A Living will become a for-profit, consumer run business. With the collaboration between Deaf-REACH and St. Elizabeths Hospital, Stamps For A Living can become a business known to all stamp collectors in the Washington, DC metropolitan area, and with time, to collectors around the nation.

GENERAL INFORMATION:

The Bethel-St. Elizabeth Foundation of America, Inc., is at 1920 G Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006.

The first group that took the trip to Bethel Community, led by then Council member H.R. Crawford to Germany. Dr. John Bruce and Lt. Commander Mark Melanson of the Public Health Service, working at St. Elizabeths Hospital, (Occupational Therapy Section, Forensic Division) took a second trip to the Bethel Community in March 1996. The Foundation sponsored this trip and were guests of the Bethel Community while staying in Bethel-Bielefeld. They inspired both Dr. Bruce and Lieutenant Commander Melanson and were confirmed that their vision and belief that work therapy and productive jobs are important, if not essential for raising the self-esteem of clients. Dr. Bruce then faxed a contract proposal to Dr. Guido Zanni, Commissioner of Mental Health Services of the District of Columbia. This proposal listed the minimum requirements for setting up a "Stamps For A Living client enterprise.

One of the most important requirements listed in the draft proposal was to get suitable space free, in return for the services the clients' enterprise would render for and with the clients. The Foundation advised the von Bodelschwingh Institutes [Bethel Community] in Germany that it would agree in writing with the Foundation that the stamps already collected at the United Church in Washington, D.C., for the benefit of the Bethel Community, will now be available to the Corporation for processing and marketing by the new clients' enterprise.

they agreed that the new clients' enterprise would be set up as a business that not only provides Occupational Therapy but develops the skills of the [in or out] patients and pays them for their work. The Foundation would help the new enterprise financially, to help it operate its business until the business could pay their workers. It agreed to help training of clients and for advice to the enterprise by the Bethel Community. Stamps would be picked up regularly at the United Church. All processing of stamps, letters, packages and parcels would be done the new enterprise. Farther agreed that the new enterprise would gradually inform the individual providers of stamps that the stamps no longer sent to the Bethel Community but processed and marketed in Washington, D.C., with the concurrence and as part of the international outreach of the Bethel Community. Thus the Foundation was ready to do and serve the mentally ill of the District of Columbia and metro area.

Ms. Lolly Gilbert was Secretary of the Board of Directors of Deaf-REACH, [an organization that works with the deaf people, including clients of St. Elizabeths] prompted a desire for participation in or cooperation with the stamp clients' enterprise. Ms. Sarah E. Brown is the Executive Director of Deaf-REACH. They decided that the stamp for a living program provides paid work experience for individuals with various disabilities living in the Washington, D.C. metro area.

Conclusion:

"There is a deep impact on many from what may seem worthless. Canceled stamps are quite significant to us! Our goal is to empower clients through the challenging and therapeutic milieu available. By providing a no-overhead, simulated business setting in a controlled environment, they will not threaten the clients and can assume a working role in the future. Nationally the employment rate for those suffering from severe mental illness is between 5% and 10%. Stamps For A Living Business plans to change these figures in Washington, D.C., one client at a time. We thank all our contributors and purchasers of our stamps and products for your continuing support." **LCDR Mark T. Melanson. OTR, USPHS Manager.**

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Stamps For A Living Business

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The United Church

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1920 G Street NW
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Bethel-St. Elizabeth Foundation of America

1920 G Street NW
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STAMPS FOR A

L I V I N Cj got its start through the Bethel St. Elizabeth Foundation of America, Inc. at The United Church, 1920 G-Street, N.W. in Washington D.C. The Foundation sponsored an exchange program between mental health professionals in Washington D.C. and The von Bodelschwing Institutes in Bethel (Bielefeld), Germany. Its internationally known Stamp Collecting and Processing



Center, operated by disabled persons for more than 100 years, became the model of the **STAMPS FOR A LIVING** business operated by patients

of St. Elizabeth's Hospital. The Public Relations Office of the von Bodelschwing Institutes donated its used stamps collected for Bethel in North America, for use by mentally, physically or socially disturbed people in Washington D.C. The United Church became the Stamp Collecting Point and makes the stamps available to processing centers at St. Elizabeth's Hospital and at Deaf-REACH in Washington D.C.

WHO WE ARE

Presently, 72 individuals, 30 in the John Howard Pavilion at St Elizabeth's, 24 in St Elizabeth's Inpatient Bureau, and 18 at Deaf-REACH, work two hours a day sorting, trimming, counting and bagging stamps for sale.

Patients are paid for their work through Work Adjustment Program Funds. However, as **STAMPS FOR A LIVING** becomes better established it will generate funds to pay for expenses, including salaries.

In addition, common stamps such as the U.S. flag or Statue of Liberty are used to create maps of the United States, which are matted and framed to fill individual requests.

CLIENT PROFILE

ST. ELIZABETHS

Prior to work with **STAMPS FOR A LIVING**, Mr. A. says he battled depression on a daily basis. After joining the program he remarks that he feels as though his work has given him purpose. In 1999 his peers voted him

"Employee of the Year", and he has been twice elected to the **STAMPS FOR A LIVING** Board of Directors. He now works as a worker supervisor in the stamp processing department.



HOW YOU CAN HELP

1. We still need more material for processing. Therefore, please, collect used stamps, cut away the entire envelop except about 1/2 inch of paper around the stamp. We also appreciate receiving any collection of stamps that a person may no longer wish to continue.
2. Please, send such stamps to: The United Church, c/o Stamp Program, 1920 C-Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20006. At St. Elizabeth's Hospital, two clients are responsible for opening the packages after they have been picked up at The United Church. Return addresses of the senders are noted. Thank you letters are sent out by two members of The United Church.
3. Financial support is still appreciated while the STAMPS FOR A LIVING program becomes more self sufficient. Checks or money orders may be sent also to The United Church, c/o Stamp program.
4. Community Outreach to several Elementary Schools in the Washington area has been developed. We provide stamps and instructions on how to create products decorated with stamps for sale. This stimulates student interest in learning more about the history of stamps in general and encourages them to collect used stamps for a good purpose.
5. Order stamps by calling: 202-645-4953, STAMPS FOR A LIVING, c/o CDR. Mark Melanson OTR, USPHS Manager, JHP. We will answer any further questions.



STAMPS FOR A LIVING is a stamp reprocessing business that provides the patients of three mental health programs with an opportunity to earn a small salary through "meaningful work", a first step to be able to get back into the every day life outside the hospital. Each month we receive approximately 1,000,000 stamps. The programs serve patients of the Inpatient Forensic Service Bureau of St. Elizabeth's and deaf mental health consumers at Deaf-REACH in Washington D.C.



i Participants in the program remove used postage stamps from paper and sort the stamps by country of origin, type of stamp, value, etc.

After stamps are processed, they are repackaged for sale to collectors. Repackaged stamps are sold individually, in packets, or by volume. All this is labor intensive work, even more demanding is determining the worth of an individual stamp, evaluating its face value, the details of its design, its color, and its perfection or imperfections.

CONSUMER PROFILE

DEAF-REACH

At one time Mr. N. was homeless and lived without regard to responsibilities. His attempts to hold on to a job as an outdoor clothing retailer were thwarted by apathy and absences, consequently causing him to lose this job. However, Mr. N's work with **STAMPS FOR A LIVING** has caused a change in his attitude. He shows up for work each day without fail. His co-workers describe his friendly character and work ethic as an asset to the program. Shortly after enrolling in the program he moved into an apartment and is on the path to realizing his goal of self-sufficiency.



Stamps for a Living
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