



SAINT CATHERINE CENTER FOR *Special Needs*

Back in the Community: New Vocational Sites

Saint Catherine Center is bustling as students and adult participants head out in small groups each day to various vocational worksites in the area. “We are grateful for some new vocational partnerships as we go back out in the community,” said Helen Burland, Executive Director. “It’s so important to all those we serve to have the opportunity for a ‘real-world’ work experience. Over the next couple of years as we grow into our new building, we will be looking at even more opportunities like these.”

At [Woofgang & Co.](#), a nonprofit organization that provides work opportunities for individuals with disabilities, adults prepare and bake specialty dog treats in two weekly sessions. The work involves measuring and mixing multiple ingredients, weighing and pressing the dough, and cleaning up afterward. Participants have acclimated to the three-hour shifts, which allow enough time to prepare several trays of the dog treats. “Woofgang is my favorite place to work,” Natalie said. “It’s fun to make the treats.”

The dog treats are baked in a facility in Bridgeport and then sold at the Woofgang retail shop in Fairfield. Tyler H., an adult participant, enjoys his weekend shifts as a greeter at the retail shop. “Tyler really looks forward to going to work,” said his grandmother, Patricia Harding, who supervises during his shift. “At work he uses his communication device to greet and talk to customers. Working at Woofgang has helped him get out in the community and form a nice relationship with many of the customers.”

Another new site is [Nourish Bridgeport](#), where adults have been packaging produce and other fresh food for distribution through the organization’s food pantry. In a recent session Ellie, Tyler T., Patrick N., and Andy packed cheese, milk, chopped meat, and eggs into plastic bags, filling three large bins. Each item had to be packaged in a certain order, requiring everyone to work as a team. “I love



to watch them begin to understand the instructions we give them,” said Jud Doyle, one of the Center staff members who regularly accompanies the adults. “They are so enthusiastic about performing their assigned tasks. There’s a lot of satisfaction in seeing a good job well done.”

Sorting and team skills are also required at [The Thomas Merton Center](#) in Bridgeport, where adults have been organizing and shelving food donations for the soup kitchen. “They are doing such a good job and seem excited to do it,” said Sabine Kuczo, Operations Coordinator at Merton Center. “The partnership is good for us in so many ways.”

At [Black Rock Church](#), another new site, individuals from both the Academy and Adult Program clean the lobby and children’s play rooms, vacuuming, dusting, and wiping down tables. Students and adults also continue to stack and label planting pots each week at [Gilbertie’s Herb Gardens](#) in Easton, one of the Center’s first vocational worksites. Students are also back at [Vazzy’s Restaurant](#), assembling pizza boxes and rolling silverware in napkins.

“Our vocational program is thriving because of these great partnerships,” said Darlene Jacobacci, Vocational Coordinator. “We’re providing useful services, and the students and adults are getting great experience.”

[**View photos of our students and adults on the job.**](#)

We are grateful to TD Charitable Foundation for its support of our vocational programming.



Join Us on February 24th for Fairfield County Giving Day



Saint Catherine Center will again be participating in Fairfield County Giving Day on **Thursday, February 24th**. The annual 24-hour online fundraising initiative, hosted by Fairfield County's Community Foundation, provides an opportunity for local nonprofits to build awareness and raise funds for their causes. More than 390 organizations from all over Fairfield County participated last year.

Donations on Giving Day this year will support the Activity Fund for the Adult Program. Activities both onsite and in the community provide important opportunities for socialization and self-expression for the young people in our Adult Program. When you see Andy and Angel play the conga in music class, or Patrick N. showing off his power stroke at the bowling alley, it is clear

from their exuberance how much activities like these and others positively impact them.

Please [bookmark our Giving Day page](#), watch for our emails on February 24th, and invite family and friends to join in supporting us.

Valentine's Day Fun: Sharing Our Love



Decorated with hearts and smiles, the bags were ready for valentines and treats as students and adults exchanged messages of kindness and friendship on Valentine's Day. Many wore red, pink and white to celebrate the day.

It was a day to express our love and appreciation to everyone connected to Saint Catherine Center. Our community is built on a strong foundation of love.

[View some photos of the day](#)



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