

To Be or Not to Be was Never a Question

Maryhaven opens a performing arts program that allows consumers to fulfill their acting aspirations

The idea of a performing arts program started small at Maryhaven Day Habilitation Program, with a small group of staff members and consumers writing short skits that they performed in various elementary and middle schools on Long Island. These skits became so popular that the organization, based in Port Jefferson Station, New York, started receiving phone calls from other schools in Suffolk County requesting performances. Since that humble beginning in 1998, Maryhaven has grown into a performing arts center fully funded by the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD).

Nearly 1,000 Maryhaven staff members provide day, residential, and school services for more than 2,000 consumers. Even with these larger numbers, consumers have a voice at consumer advisory board meetings. At a board meeting almost eight years ago, a few individuals expressed an interest in learning how to act, sparking a discussion about how to best fulfill this goal. After consumers outlined their interests and ideas, a troupe of consumers and staff members was formed and began performing at schools. By popular demand, the group expanded presentations to nursing homes and schools for children with special needs.

About one year into this successful endeavor, the troupe wanted to expand further by putting on a full-length play. Songs selected from popular Broadway musicals, including hits from *Phantom of the Opera*, *Cats*, *The Lion King*, and *Les Misérables*, were adapted for the performance. Consumers rehearsed this new musical medley diligently, and although it didn't debut on an actual stage, it didn't diminish the enjoyment of the acting group performing this first big production or the audience of happy friends, staff, family members, and other consumers.

In early 2001, Maryhaven wrote a proposal to OMRDD to downsize its day habilitation program in Terryville, New York, and open a performing arts center in Port Jefferson Station. The OMRDD expressed a great deal of interest in the program—in the planning, the leasing and redesigning of space, and all the other factors that go into establishing a new program. In April 2002, Maryhaven opened its doors to the Performing Arts Center. The rewards have been invaluable, including the degree of self-confidence, self-worth, and independence that participating consumers have been able to feel and hold on to because of their participation in the various performances and activities throughout the year. Maryhaven staff members and other stakeholders recognize a special thrill every time they see a rehearsal, dress rehearsal, or an actual performance; it's the smiling faces, the energy, and the degree of self-control that the consumers express while performing that makes it worth all the effort.

The performing arts program currently has 10 staff members and 36 performers. A recent expansion approval will allow the center to work with up to 40 consumers and expand to 15 staff members. To continue the good work, Maryhaven is looking to expand into a larger space, one that will allow for an elevated stage, a more advanced sound and lighting system, and the ability to offer opportunities to additional aspiring thespians.



**The happy
Maryhaven
actors**



Would you like to know more about Maryhaven? Contact Pam Kissane, Program Director, pkissane@maryhaven.org
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Putting out the Good Word: Some information about the Promising Practices Series

We are offering a series of short articles on a variety of promising practices that CARF surveyors have observed during surveys from 2004 to the present. There is no particular order that we will follow in presenting this series of short reports. The purpose is not to rate one organization over another, but to encourage U.S. and Canadian community providers to dialogue with one another and to encourage creative solutions to individual service designs and organizational business practices and thereby achieve effective and positive results in each organization's community.

Although there are indeed a number of ways to approach conformance to a standard, what makes organizations given an exemplary rating stand out is their professional and strategic response to an observed service or business need, always designed with input from their stakeholders and based on those individuals' quality expectations.

We hope you enjoy the series. We encourage you to contact the identified representative in the article to get more information about their services.

Questions or comments about Promising Practices? Email us at rbibby@carf.org