COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

‘SMILE’ provides program options for older adults with disabilities

The Community Connections day program at the Community House provides individuals 21-years-old and older with developmental disabilities enrichment opportunities to increase their personal independence, enhance community integration, and improve their quality of life.

As health and medical advancements have helped adults with disabilities live longer lives, so has the focus and scope of the services evolved to meet the various needs of these aging adults. Among these new initiatives begun during the 2011-2012 fiscal year at the Community House was the SMILE program, which has found a new home in a spacious second floor room at the Pauline Lang building on our main agency campus on Elm Street.

SMILE stands for “Seniors Maintaining an Independent Lifestyle Everyday,” and is aimed at developmentally disabled clients over age 50 who need day programming that is less rigorous than has been traditionally offered in the Community Connections program. In spring of 2012, the SMILE program opened its doors with 12 participants and has expanded to 15 participants this past September.

Disabilities Services Director Marie Watson explained that the elderly participants have increasingly found it difficult to meet the demand of the regular Day Support Option program (DSO). A new component focusing on the particular needs of older adults was needed. In the SMILE program, participants have access to a handicapped van and transportation in cars that are more accessible then the DSO program’s large vans. The new component is in a slow paced, calm and relaxed environment. Activities are designed to enhance the quality of life for the program participants.

“The SMILE program is a perfect way for these clients to continue to experience the world around them, along with other clients in a similar capacity,” Watson said, and participants are assisted in making choices among a variety of activities available on a daily basis.

Most importantly, participants are assisted in making connections with other seniors and activities within the community. Additional services may include elderly advocacy groups, general case management, socialization skills training, and behavior management.

“A little and a little, collected together, become a great deal.”

~ Saadi