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Working toward self worth: Camp Civitan Day Treatment and Training program clients learn valuable life skills, teach others the value of hard work and a smile

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Most Williams residents have met Mark Konkel in the checkout line at Safeway. Konkel works as a bagger at the store, always greeting customers with a smile.

Konkel is a client at Camp Civitan's Day Treatment and Training program for Adults (DTA), which serves people with developmental and physical disabilities. The program teaches clients life skills and independence, and prepares some for jobs in the community through its supported employment program.

Konkel started working at the Safeway in Williams in April of 2005, and usually works two to three afternoons a week.

"After I get clocked in I go over there and see who needs help, then I help them," he said.

When Konkel is bagging groceries, he asks the customers "if they want paper or plastic," adding "I have to be careful with the eggs."

Besides Konkel's bagging duties, Safeway Assistant Manager Kandy Kitsmiller said the staff is teaching him something new - how to take items that customers don't want back to their proper place in the store.

Kitsmiller said Konkel is an asset to the store.

"He loves helping the customers," she said. "He's always in a good mood, the customers love him, and the employees love him. We're pretty proud of Mark."

Camp Civitan is looking for other places for its clients to work in the community. Besides Konkel's job at Safeway, other clients work at the Camp Civitan Thrift Store on Route 66. The store is an important source of financial support for the camp and its programs.

The thrift store sells gently used western wear, men's women's and children's clothing, linens, dishes,



Mark Konkel, a Camp Civitan Day Treatment and Training program client, works at the Williams Safeway. Ryan Williams/WGCN



Carisa Stilwell weaves a rug as Rexanna Smith watches in the back of the Camp Civitan Thrift Store. Ryan Williams/WGCN

cookware, toys, books and videos.

"We are basically the only place in town where people can come and buy clothing and shoes except the dollar stores," said thrift store Manager Maggie Peel. "So the locals depend on us for just daily things."

The thrift store accepts almost all donations. Clothing that can't be sold or used for projects goes to places like rag bins, and Camp Civitan gets paid about 6 cents per pound for it.

Besides clothing and household items, the store also sells plants that Camp Civitan clients have grown in the camp's greenhouse in pots that the clients have decorated. The money from the potted plants and other Camp Civitan crafts goes back to the camp in a fund for things like field trips.

Depending on the time of year, the thrift store usually generates about \$4,000 to \$5,000 per month. After rent, utilities and wages for the store, the rest of the money goes back to Camp Civitan for programs and scholarships.

In the near future, the thrift store staff hopes to start offering old time photos to bring in more revenue.

Peel and Assistant Manager Pam Hendrickson are the only full time workers at the store. About four people volunteer there regularly.

"All of the volunteers really keep this store going," Peel said. "If it wasn't for the volunteers, (Pam) and I could not keep up with it."

Peel and Hendrickson also get help around the store from DTA clients Carisa Stilwell and Bryant Wiese. The two started out as volunteers, but now they work at the store two days a week for about four hours.

"We had simple projects for them to do, and as they learned them then they graduated," Peel said. "We hope every year to expand what we can do with the clients."

The clients' work includes dusting shelves and merchandise, straightening shelves, sorting items and folding clothes.

"They do a great job and it's always clean," Hendrickson said. "We have people commenting on how clean it is, and I keep telling the kids it's because they do it."

Besides their regular duties, the DTA clients also work on special projects. Volunteer Rexanna "Butterfly Grandma" Smith, who usually volunteers at the thrift store two to four days each week, is teaching the clients how to use a loom to make rugs out of T-shirts that the store can't sell.

"It may be just old, it may have a spot or two on it, but anything that we can't sell up front we will keep in the back and use it for our projects," Peel said.

Camp Civitan hopes to sell the completed rugs in the thrift store and at local markets.

Smith said she enjoys volunteering at the thrift store and making rugs with the DTA clients.

"It's just a very happy place, positive," Smith said. "It just gives you a lot of good energy."

Working at the thrift store and learning how to make the rugs is a valuable opportunity for the DTA clients, Peel said.

"I think they gain a lot of self worth, because they're able to do something and see that they are capable of doing different things," she said.

But the clients aren't the only ones who benefit from working in the thrift store.

"We gain a lot from them," Peel said. "They're happy, they're hard working, and I feel that they're a real asset to the community because people can see their attitude and (people) get exposed to what this store is all about, which is helping people with special needs."

The Camp Civitan Thrift Store is at 129 W. Route 66. More information about the store or making a donation is available at (928) 635-1144.

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