

Member Spotlight: Our House



Carpenters. Beekeepers. Organic Farmers.
Stewards of Sustainability.

These may not be the first words that come to mind when you think about at-risk adolescents, but they are titles that readily apply to the residents of Our House Job Training Center for Youth.

For more than 15 years, this Montgomery County nonprofit has provided a home, hands-on instruction in carpentry and other construction skills as well as academic and life skills classes to adolescent men between the ages of 16 and 21.

As a residential program, Our House provides services and support to its residents 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. This intensive program isn't for everyone, but there is a waiting list to get in.

Students spend 40 hours per week in a construction and renovation training program which provides hands-on

experience in carpentry, drywall, electricity and plumbing. This work is not studied in the classroom, but rather on the job site as students renovate homes and buildings.

Weekday evenings are devoted to academic classes, life skills classes and group therapy sessions. Weekends include participation in weekly community service projects ranging from adding a wheelchair ramp to a senior citizen's home to renovating the lower level of a local church.

But that's not all. Our House is also home to two organic farm plots, honey bee colonies and a woodshop.

Residents may choose to tend and cultivate the farm's organically grown crops, dividing the proceeds when goods are sold to local restaurants and residents. They may also choose to help in harvesting honey from their bee colonies, dividing proceeds from honey sales.

Running through it all is a respect for the land, people and resources. Step inside the student's woodshop and you'll find tables patiently crafted from salvaged wood. Duck into a small room tucked into the side of a barn to see shelves lined with ceramic vases and masks created by the students and fired in a donated kiln. Step around the side of the woodshop to see storage units constructed by the students to hold wood salvaged from a neighborhood barn awaiting its own turn in the woodshop.

A dedicated group of staff and volunteers, led by Founder and Executive Director Richard Bienvenue, makes the work of Our House possible. The result: 80 percent or more of the students who complete the Our House program are employed and doing well. The recidivism rate among graduates is approximately 14 percent compared to the state of Maryland's rate of approximately 60 percent.

For additional information on Our House and to find out what you can do to help support their mission, please visit www.our-house.org. 🌐