

Southbury Training School Recommendations

Date: October 14, 2015
To: Commissioner Murray, DDS
From: Hannah Jurewicz
Senior Director
Dungarvin CT, LLC
Re: STS Recommendations

Dungarvin CT is a private provider contracted with DDS to provide residential and day supports to adults with Intellectual Disabilities. We provide supports for 14 homes, in-home supports, and a variety of individualized day supports and day support options. We opened the first Supported Sobriety, recovery-oriented CRS, in the country with DDS support in 2013, and recently opened our 4th recovery-oriented home. The number of individuals who suffer from addiction and who need support in order to have a chance at recovery is significant, and the awareness of this increases daily.

Additionally, Dungarvin is actively looking for opportunities with local arts and theater organizations to develop partnerships and employment opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Rather than primarily work in the areas of food and maintenance, we believe our individuals have the right to work in industries where they are exposed to and have the chance to develop their creative talents and/or simply, their interest in art, music, and the theater arts.

The Southbury Training School property should not follow the path that some other state institutions have with the beautiful grounds going to waste and the spacious buildings left abandoned to decay. It is wasteful and unnecessary, and leaves the town of Southbury and the state with the burden of inevitable blight and at significant risk with abandoned, increasingly unsafe structures. Unmaintained properties lead to increases in property damage and other criminal activity in and around that property.

The property is an ideal location for affordable and accessible homes for individuals and families who need accessible housing. It offers the potential to support and host local arts and cultural events, shows, workshop center, and employment for those who live in the community and on the STS property as it has an auditorium with a stage and lots of rooms and halls for art creation, training, and galleries. The café on the property can remain and be operated as it is now, with professionals and interns needing training in the food service industry. The thrift shop would continue as it has as well operated by professionals and those who need job coaching support.

The property and greenhouse might work well to develop an Aquaponics farm; an industry combining aquaculture and hydroponics to produce vegetables year-round, sold to local restaurants and at farmers markets. This business has been successfully operated with multiple agencies across the country including ARC of Meriden in CT.

STS has the potential to offer individuals and families from all backgrounds and needs, attractive, affordable, accessible homes, with cultural opportunities, employment, and supportive community in one of our most beautiful parts of CT.

Recommendation 1: Supportive housing helps everyone, the economy, increases tax revenue when people remain, live, and work in CT – reduces burden on CT’s healthcare, DOC, DDS, DMHAS, and DCF systems.

Create affordable/supportive housing with the units so that individuals and families with disabilities and those without may live together as neighbors in a community. Perhaps, partnering with Open Doors – Connecticut, CT Supportive Housing, or CT Renewal Team for example, will effectively improve access to services such as healthcare, employment, behavioral health, criminal justice, educational, employment, and child welfare (parenting support).

Agencies such as Dungarvin would provide the residential support, case management, RN consulting support and healthcare oversight, and mentoring to assist individuals and their families successfully live independently and meaningfully participate in their Southbury community.

Justification:

According to the Partnership for Strong Communities, Connecticut rental costs are up 55 percent statewide since 2000 and the housing wage (what a renter must earn per hour to afford a typical 2BR apartment) is up to \$23.37 statewide or \$48,600 a year, up from \$23 in 2010, and is \$18.50 even in rural areas. In 2011, more than 6 in 10 of Connecticut's 410,000 renters spend more than 30 percent of their incomes on housing, leaving little for food, clothing, transportation, healthcare and other necessities. Nearly half the 683 occupations in Connecticut -- including machinists, mental health counselors, ambulance drivers, pre-school teachers, corrections officers and other vital jobs -- pay an average wage less than the housing wage.

Connecticut is losing a higher percentage of its 25-34 year olds than any other state. These young adults are the "new blood" of our economy -- and they're leaving for other states, in large part because housing is less expensive elsewhere. With higher numbers of young people pursuing higher education, college and the years right after, are a decision-point on where to live and establish roots.

Accessible, affordable housing is critically limited for people who have intellectual disabilities and require accommodations. Meaningful participation with neighbors and community members is often a challenge. By integrating all residents with access to supports incorporated in the supportive housing model, this may offer significantly positive economic benefits.

CT Supportive Housing (CSH) documented supportive housing benefits:

Supportive Housing Improves Lives Research has shown that supportive housing has positive effects on housing stability, employment, mental and physical health, and school attendance. People in supportive housing live more stable and productive lives.

Supportive Housing Generates Significant Cost Savings to Public Systems Cost studies in six different states and cities found that supportive housing results in tenants' decreased use of homeless shelters, hospitals, emergency rooms, jails and prisons.

Supportive Housing Benefits Communities Further evidence shows that supportive housing benefits communities by improving the safety of neighborhoods, beautifying city blocks with new or rehabilitated properties, and increasing or stabilizing property values over time.

Positive impacts on health: Decreases of more than 50% in tenants' emergency room visits and hospital inpatient days; decreases in tenants' use of emergency detoxification services by more than 80%; and increases in the use of preventive health care services.

Positive impacts on employment: Increases of 50% in earned income and 40% in the rate of participant employment when employment services are provided in supportive housing, and a significant decrease in dependence on entitlements – a \$1,448 decrease per tenant each year.

Positive impacts on treating mental illness: At least a third of those people living in streets and shelters have a severe and persistent mental illness. Supportive housing has proven to be a popular and effective approach for many mentally ill people, as it affords both independence and as-needed support. A study of nearly 900 homeless people with mental illness provided with supportive housing found 83.5% of participants remained housed a year later, and that participants experienced a decrease in symptoms of schizophrenia and depression. A study of almost 5,000 homeless individuals with mental illness placed in supportive housing confirmed that nearly 80% remained housed a year later, with 10% moving on to independent settings.

Positive impacts on reducing or ending substance use: Once people with histories of substance use achieve sobriety, their living situation is often a factor in their ability to stay clean and sober. A one-year follow-up study of 201 graduates of the Eden Programs chemical dependency treatment programs in Minneapolis found that 56.6% of those living independently remained sober; 56.5% of those living in a halfway house remained sober; 57.1% of those living in an unsupported SRO remained sober; while 90% of those living in supportive housing remained sober.

Recommendation 2: Employment, personal and cultural development, relationship building and contribution to the community

Private agencies such as Dungarvin would partner with the Newbury Musical Theater Company, the Southbury School of Performing Arts, or another theater arts organization, to expand productions to the STS campus, open up new opportunities, and offer the Junior Players workshops and productions for residents and other community members.

Partner with art businesses such as the Golden Button Arts and Crafts Studio or The Art Spot that provide classes, workshops, and events; to expand their business to STS space where galleries and shows could be hosted.

The private providers, such as Dungarvin, will provide necessary job coaching or other support to assist individuals participate and acquire the necessary skills to pursue their interests.

Justification:

Individuals should have access to the arts for pleasure and for work, if they have or can develop employable skills in this industry. Participating in the arts should not be restricted to only those that can afford it or who have been fortunate enough to have been exposed and educated in art, music, and theater. While an individual may be cleaning offices for a living, for example, he or she may find joy and meaning in volunteering in a musical production, or participating in an art class where his or her art may be displayed in one of the many hallway galleries and perhaps, even sold. An individual may have talent and the skill to work professionally yet, no opportunity. With this opportunity, these individuals may work in the arts industry receiving whatever supports are needed to assist them be successful. This partnership will have both employment opportunities and personally meaningful benefits.

Recommendation 3: Employment and community connections

Maintain the café and thrift store for employment opportunities for all residents.

Develop an Aquaponics farming business using the greenhouse and other buildings on the property. This can be done through partnering and/or participating in training with organizations such as FreshFarm Aquaponics in Glastonbury, or Bigelow Brook Farm-Aquaponics Institute in Eastford.

Justification:

The café offers a great training program for those wishing to work in the food services industry. Café personnel train the job coach to train the individuals which allows for efficiencies in overhead needed to facilitate the training program, and greater number of employee hours to perform the tasks of actually managing and operating the café.

Produce would be sold to the café and other local restaurants and farmers' markets. Industry leaders are seeing a dramatic shift towards integrated closed-loop food systems that yield high value at a fraction of the cost of old technologies and in a fraction of the space. This revolution is truly an opportunity for us all. Aquaponics, smart farms, distributed farming, these are the technologies empowering a new wave of entrepreneurs to create the self-sufficient communities. This opportunity would provide both food and employment for residents; and purpose and meaningfulness as they learn more about growing food and healthy nutrition.