

LIGHTHOUSE VOC-ED CENTER, INC.
FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES



History and Purpose Who we are

The Lighthouse Voc-Ed Center, Inc. is a Private Special Education School. In 1987, with a grant, we started an experimental five day a week, extended day program at Little White Schoolhouse, in Mystic, Connecticut, in response to parents needs for respite time for their children with disabilities. The special education students that needed a longer, more structured day to learn appropriate social skills and behaviors were considered the most severe behaviorally and physically. These students were segregated from peers and their community. We decided to create programs that had structure, consistency, followed their education plans and would slowly introduce children into their communities. It took years to prepare a child with severe disabilities (ages 3-21) to become a functioning adult. We worked on all the skills that a person with disabilities needs to function more independently. We broke ground in Southeastern Connecticut for providing an extended school program for children that most felt should be in institutions, not the community. After the first ten years with us, these initial children are now young adults who can appropriately go to restaurants, movies, and jobs. The key to our success with these young people has been the long term consistency with their educational, communication and behavior programs.

We engage children and adults in hands on learning experiences so that choice and initiative are the basic elements of the learning process. We believe that appropriate behavior and social skills are acquired when people can choose to engage in activities without adult coercion. We encourage independence, social appropriateness and problem solving through actual interactions in the community.

In 1992, our grant with Little White Schoolhouse ended when the school closed. We incorporated under the Lighthouse Voc-Ed Center name and started again in November 1992 with no money, 2 students and a \$1,500.00 gift from the Southeastern Association for the Retarded for our insurance costs. A lot of dedicated parents, teachers, therapists, and friends volunteered time to get us started. We all worked long hours with little or no pay, because we believed in what we were doing.

In 1997, we received a \$100,000 grant from United Parcel Service to renovate and open our site at the Groton Shopping Plaza. We were the only recipient in the United States. United Parcel Service wished to give the money to a “small business that would have a great effect on their community.” Since then we have continued working hard to fulfill United Parcel’s wish. We feel we do have a positive effect on our community. Our programs cover ages (5-70) and disabilities (mild to severe) from morning to night, 5 days a week. We offer our site to local groups to use (e.g. the Groton EMT’s) because we believe that all of us must work together and share.

In 2003, we opened a second site at 312 Main Street, Niantic, CT. This site is within walking distance of stores, groceries, Laundromat, restaurants, and the movies. We are quite fortunate to be able to have such wonderful staff and community support, that we can expand.

In 2004, with the combined efforts of Dr. Lloyd Johnson (Special Services Director for East Lyme Schools), a local family and the Lighthouse Center, plus a house provided by another family in downtown Niantic for transitional and residential needs for young ladies who need a little support.

In 2005, our cable access show “Typecasting”, at Comcast was started. It is about people with disabilities, health, wellness, and life in our community. The residence was opened July 2005. A second house in Niantic was provided in 2005 for the Lighthouse Center.

In 2006, we were accredited as a special education school, this occurred because of the work of Dr. Richard Otto, our Special Education Director.

In 2007, a third house was purchased in Niantic for a Transition Academy for student 18-21 years old, diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome, High Functioning Autism, or Non-Verbal Learning Disorders. It opened as a residence on September 2nd 2008. Tied with that program is The Gallery at Lighthouse Groton, and Digital Media Studio at 744 Long Hill Road in Groton, CT. The students with Asperger’s Syndrome will run the store, plan art shows and work with an instructor in the Digital Media Studio. As always, we are customer driven and following directions of our participants and their families. We continue to look forward, always growing and changing for the better.