

# LIGHTHOUSE VOC-ED CENTER, INC.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

## History and Purpose of Who we are



The Lighthouse Voc - Ed Center, Inc. is a private, non-profit (501-C-3) business. 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 more capable 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 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 June 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 first school 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, 7 days a week. We offer our site to local groups to use (e.g. the Groton EMT's, classes) because we believe that all of us must work together and share.

In July, 2003 we opened a second school site at 312 Main Street, Niantic, CT. This site is within walking distance of stores, banks, 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, a house was provided in the downtown Niantic for transitional and residential needs. This is now a CRS (Continuous Residential Support) house for potentially three female adults.

In 2007, a second house was purchased in Niantic for a Transition Academy for students 18-21 years old, diagnosed with Aspergers syndrome, High Functioning Autism, or Non-Verbal Learning Disorders. 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.

In 2008, we opened an art gallery, The Gallery at Lighthouse at 744 Long Hill Road, Groton in the Groton Shopping Plaza. We are so proud that the first Friday of each month a new artist shows their work! Some of our students work in the gallery. The site also houses a Digital Media Studio, with weekly classes for our students in the Transition Academy. Our main offices are located here. Our first official offices after all these years! We also have a wood and paint shop. We are quite fortunate to have also added a therapeutic site in Niantic. The Annex is located at 58 Pennsylvania Avenue. It is our third school site.

We are accredited by the State Board of Education as a private special education school. We have two certified teachers at each site to support the student's goals and objectives throughout the day (8 a.m. – 6 p.m.). We contract with an educational consultant, behaviorist, speech and language pathologists, occupational and physical therapists.

Our quality staff of paraprofessionals rounds out a team dedicated to each individual student's needs. All levels of academics, transitional skills and /or community programs are provided based for our students.

We are quite proud of all we have accomplished for students and adults in Southeastern, CT. We look forward to continued growth based on our students and their family's needs.