

Vocational Training at a Residential Facility Leads to Successful Transitions

Hands-on Instruction Reduces Disruption and Increases Student Engagement

Specializing in the education and successful transition of young men experiencing complex emotional, behavioral and educational difficulties, Liberty Point Behavioral Healthcare is a residential treatment facility located in Staunton, VA. Programming is specifically designed for adolescent males with both psychiatric disorders and intellectual disabilities, including those with autism spectrum disorder.



Dr. Luke Hartman is Liberty Point's Director of Education and a veteran in the fields of mental health and special education. According to Dr. Hartman, the success of a program relies on keeping students engaged in content that is specific to their interests and appropriate to their futures. For Liberty Point, Education Associates' Career Exploration curriculum has become a keystone of vocational training that allows instructors to increase engagement and impart skills that will benefit these young men as they continue to develop.

Hands-on Kits Build Knowledge from Scratch

Vocational curriculum tends to be cumulative. Basic knowledge builds basic abilities. Eventually, these abilities evolve into a skillset which can be applied to real job tasks. In a setting where students experience both behavioral and education difficulties, it can be difficult for teachers to build the momentum required for student success. As if to put the career exploration curriculum to the test, Dr. Hartman's vocational teachers began instruction in an intimidating content area: small engine repair.

'When we received our order from Education Associates, the teachers got right into the Small Engine Repair kit. The results from the pre-test showed that most students were starting with almost no existing content knowledge.'

- Dr. Luke Hartman
Director of Education



Although small engine repair is not simple by nature, the vocational classroom at Liberty Point was able to hit the ground running. From a comprehensive pre-test to video modeling, the Adapted Career Exploration curriculum engaged the learners and guided them through the lessons.

'After completing the activities, even the lowest functioning students demonstrated proficiency at tasks such as checking and changing the oil,' Hartman reveals.

Encouraged by the engagement and progress of the young men, vocational teacher Keith Fuller took the lessons one step further – truly applying the newfound knowledge outside of the curriculum.



'After the students completed the activities in the Small Engine Repair kit using the provided engine, our teachers found an engine from an old rototiller.'

'The students were able to translate much of what they had learned and gained a great deal of confidence from their newly acquired skills.'

Differentiated Instruction Closes the Gap

Managing differing levels of experience and capability is another challenge familiar to all educators, especially those who teach students with educational difficulties. Curriculum that sticks to the middle ground often frustrates learners who would gain from a higher or lower level of curriculum.

'Our teachers often struggled to adapt the general curriculum for students with significant educational challenges,' explains Hartman.

'By using the Career Exploration kits from Education Associates, we have differentiated instruction built into all of our hands-on activities.'

Benefitting from the multiple reading levels and audio instructions built into the adapted versions of the curriculum, Liberty Point vocational instructors have seen success bridging the gap between multiple learning levels present in the same group of students.

Hands-on Instruction Increases Engagement

Capitalizing on the momentum from their success in small engine repair, Mr. Fuller and the vocational classroom at Liberty Point moved right on to an adjacent interest: autobody repair.



'After the students completed activities from the Autobody Repair kit, our vocational teacher went to the local scrap yard and brought back items for the class.'

Again, the hands-on elements and differentiated instruction increased student engagement and facilitated the acquisition of valuable skills. Even more, finding success in this new and engaging content area gave the class a great deal of pride in their advanced knowledge.



'The students were able to apply what they had learned to the pieces that were brought into the classroom, including an old hood of a car. The students were incredibly engaged in this project!'

Did You Know?

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2018 the employment-population ratio of working-age people with a disability was only 30%.

Genuine Interest Decreases Disruptions

Because the young men at Liberty Point experience both intellectual disabilities and behavioral difficulties, increasing time on task is an important and challenging aspect of instruction.

'Many of the students under our care have behavioral issues, so classroom management is always a significant priority.'

Over the past three years, Dr. Hartman and his staff have tracked the average daily student exits from class from over 140 to under 40 across the entire school. He attributes this marked increase in participation to student interest and to the relevancy of classroom content.

'The hands-on kits from Education Associates keep the class interested and engaged. Our time on task has increased and student disruptions have decreased significantly.'

What's Next? A Successful Transition

Dr. Hartman and his staff take great pride in their transition program and evaluate success by following up with students who have moved on. Since Liberty Point is one of the most restrictive environments for these young men, a successful transition means sustained placement in a less-restrictive one, such as a group home.



While their 74% placement rate is quite an accomplishment, Dr. Hartman is confident that the results coming out of their vocational training room will cause that number to grow. After autobody, Liberty Point's students are preparing to tackle carpentry. Dr. Hartman, Mr. Fuller and the rest of the staff are excited to watch the students' self-esteem develop along with their job skills.