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LEAD STORY

Friday
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Ready to Roll

Big Plough grant helps SRVS agency buy new wheels for disabled clients

ROSALIND GUY | *The Daily News*

With the help of one generous donation, the Shelby Residential and Vocational Services (SRVS) agency is able to address one of its most crucial needs.

Thanks in part to a nearly \$150,000 grant from the Plough Foundation, the agency bought nine brand-new vans this month. The one-time grant allowed SRVS to replace outdated vans to cater to new clients.

The vans are used mostly for transporting clients from their homes to doctors' appointments and church or community outings.

"We take them to doctors' appointments, we take them grocery shopping - just like in a family," said SRVS executive director Jeffrie Bruton. "All the things that a family does with an automobile, that's what the vans are used for."

David Gossett, vice president of Gossett Motor Cars Inc., helped the agency in securing Dodge Caravans with the grant.

"We are happy to help SRVS in supporting the needs of their individuals to live active lives," Gossett said. "And

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FINE MOTOR SKILLS: Twyna Jones, a classroom instructor in SRVS' Kramer Activity Center, works with Hollie Raggett on picking up objects and dropping them into the basket in front of her. -- PHOTO BY ROSALIND GUY



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transportation makes that possible."

Life on wheels

The organization serves more than 900 people with developmental disabilities throughout West Tennessee. About 1,100 are on the waiting list for services.

With the immediate transportation needs taken care of by the contribution from The Plough Foundation, Bruton said the organization now has moved on to the goal of finding additional space to expand its administrative staff.

The center currently has about 1,000 employees and an operating budget of about \$31 million.

"We have outgrown our space," Bruton said. "And we are looking for a larger building that we can relocate to."

Ideally, the nonprofit organization's leaders would like to be able to find one location to keep all the services and administrators in one place. "But we realize that would be very difficult," Bruton said.

So the goal is to find a place for the administration near clients' homes.

"Most of our homes are out north and east and so we wouldn't mind having an administration building out in one of those areas," she said.

Fork in the road

Once a decision is made about what exactly the expansion project will entail, Bruton said the organization will initiate a capital campaign to raise money.

"We weren't really trying to grow," Bruton said. "We try to keep our emphasis on high-quality services. But there's a huge need out there. Probably in all of West Tennessee and Memphis there are probably 2,000 people that need services and can't get them."

In Shelby County, about 10,000 people are mentally handicapped, according to the U.S. Association for Retarded Children.

The people helped by SRVS range from 11 to 80 years old. Some of the older people have been with the agency since they were small children, said SRVS public relations coordinator Diana Fedinec.

The new building also would provide SRVS an opportunity to expand its day center services for people with developmental disabilities.

"We've totally run out of space for the Kramer Activity Center on the first floor," Bruton said. "So part of this relocation is for a brand-new, state-of-the-art day center. We really want to improve our day center services, and to do that, we need more space."

Productivity boost

On the first floor of the building on Knight Arnold Road, seven classrooms make up the Kramer Activity Center, where SRVS clients learn everything from basic grooming skills to reading and writing.

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In one classroom on that floor, instructor Twyna Jones teaches her students different arts and crafts activities.

"And they also like to dance," she said. "So sometimes after lunch we come in and turn the music on and just dance."

Other services include a program called SOS Industries, a sheltered occupational workshop that includes helping disabled clients find outside employment and personal assistance services.

In the SOS workshop, SRVS contracts with companies such as FedEx, Sherwin Williams and others for its residents or clients to help package, assemble products and apply labels.

But companies also allow the clients to go to their main job sites as well.

"We always like (sending people out to work) because it helps our people get out to mix with other people that aren't disabled," Bruton said.

Also, SRVS helps clients get jobs at places such as McDonald's, Taco Bell and various hotels.

Fedinec said the outside employment and even the group outings are important because clients have an opportunity to see the larger world.

"Community integration is what it's all about," Fedinec said.

And Bruton agreed. She compared it to people who retire and think they'll spend all their time relaxing.

"They don't last long," she said, "with nothing to do."

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