PathPoint celebrates 50 years of helping people with disabilities or disadvantages

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THOUSAND OAKS, Calif. - For 50 years, a nonprofit based in Santa Barbara has been helping people with disabilities or disadvantages, including those in Ventura County, find work and achieve independence.

PathPoint, formerly Work Training Programs Inc., serves about 2,200 clients a year, about 500 of them live in Ventura County.

The organization works with individuals who have mental illness or mental and physical developmental issues and focuses on community integration, employment services and residential programs.

“Our goal is to achieve the greatest level of independence for each person we serve, whatever that means,” said PathPoint CEO Cindy Burton.

“I really am proud that we have enabled people to live a fairly regular life and be considered a member of their community,” she said. “You can physically integrate people but to have them accepted, they have to contribute too. And we believe each person has something to contribute.”
The organization was formed in 1964 in response to a Department of Labor grant opportunity to help individuals on public assistance acquire job training and find work.

In 1970, as a result of the Lanterman Developmental Disabilities Services Act, the focus shifted to helping those with developmental and mental health challenges. The Lanterman Act established a community-based system of support aimed at reducing the numbers on waiting lists for state mental hospitals. Work Training Programs used its work skills programs to help those who had had no alternative but to enter a state institution to find employment and housing.

In 1986, the organization opened a day program in Ventura County specifically to help those leaving the state hospital in Camarillo and help integrate them into the local community.

Today PathPoint, as the organization became known in 2008, operates in five counties with multiple sites in each county and has extended its programs to serve low-income seniors and foster youth transitioning out of the foster care system.

“One of the most important things is, if we weren’t here, where would people be?” said Burton, who’s been with the organization for 28 years. “They’d be living in more institutional settings. They’d be homeless or in jail.”

Marielle DeFazio, vice president, Ventura and Los Angeles counties, is based at PathPoint’s Thousand Oaks office at 501 Marin St.

DeFazio said the organization is grateful to the many Ventura County employers who volunteer to hire their clients.

“We can help reduce their costs by providing them with recruitment services and pre-screening,” said DeFazio. “We provide a job coach to work at their site alongside a new person in order to ensure the successful retention of that job. We won’t step away until we know the person is going to reach proficiency.”
DeFazio said they also provide apartments for individuals for a two- or three-year period during which time they learn basic skills such as how to manage a budget, pay their rent, plan a menu, clean the apartment and other independent living skills.

PathPoint’s Life Skills Center in Thousand Oaks also provides support services to those with mental illness such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and severe depression. This is done through a contract with Ventura County Behavioral Health to serve the communities of the Conejo Valley, Simi Valley, Moorpark and Camarillo.

Jennifer Newbold, who oversees the Life Skills Center and its programs, said her goal is to offer a place where people feel valued.

“Years ago, the philosophy was trying to make people fit in. It was a strategy of ‘normalization.’ Over time it has shifted to recognizing the intrinsic value of each person,” said Newbold.

“It’s a very optimistic and hopeful place to be and to see the people we’re serving have that optimism and have full lives is extremely gratifying,” she said.

PathPoint is marking its 50th anniversary with a gala at the Grammy Museum in Los Angeles on Oct. 18. The evening, which serves as a fundraiser for the nonprofit, will include an after-hours tour of the museum’s interactive exhibits, silent auction, performance by ABC’s Rising Star finalist Sonnet Simmons, and drinks and appetizers by Wolfgang Puck. Tickets are $150 each.

For more information about PathPoint and to buy tickets for the anniversary gala, go to www.pathpoint.org.

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