

PROVIDER PROFILES

VALLEY EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATES, INC.

PO Box 46 • HATFIELD, MA 01038 • 413.349.4120

About the Agency

Valley Educational Associates, Inc. (VEA) became incorporated as a nonprofit agency in 1982 to provide vocational training and employment services to adults with disabilities. Through the years, the agency has expanded from a small, eight-person workshop to its current operation, serving 87 individuals in three separate locations and various community jobs throughout Western Massachusetts.

VEA's program sites are located in Chicopee, Springfield and South Deerfield, while the administrative offices are located in Hatfield. The guiding principal that defines the goals of this agency is the belief that all people, regardless of the challenges they face, can effectively perform real work for real pay and become valuable members of the workforce.

As of June 2012, VEA has participated in nine survey and certification reviews and has achieved seven consecutive Certifications with Distinction. Few agencies in the state have equalled this record.

VEA employs 45 people across all work sites. These employees include a full-time executive director, chief psychologist and director of supported employment. In addition, the agency employs one full-time clinician and two part-time doctoral-level psychologists.

The Fiscal Year 2013 budget for VEA is approximately \$2.4 million. The majority of VEA's funding is provided by the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services, with a small portion from the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission and subcontract work from various businesses in the community.

Programs for all ages address mind and body

VEA operates three program sites and provides a multitude of services. The Chicopee and Springfield program sites offer an array of vocational experiences, including light manufacturing in the form of assembly and packaging for individuals expressing a desire or interest in performing this type of work.

VEA has also been successful in securing jobs within the community. These offsite placements include customer service, manufacturing, janitorial and grounds keeping jobs at locations such as Olympic Manufacturing Group, Staples, Home Depot and Kamins Property Management Group.

VEA's South Deerfield program recently converted to include community-based day services. Social and leisure activities at the program site and out in the community are the highlight of this program.

The South Deerfield site is also home to Valley Bookcases, VEA's on-site woodshop. The individuals assist the job coaches in manufacturing bookcases and custom wood furniture. Recently, VEA began assembling beehives in collaboration with Warm Colors Apiary in South Deerfield. This is a new and exciting opportunity that continues to grow.

In addition to work opportunities, all VEA sites offer educational opportunities for the individuals throughout the week. Interactive groups such as Life Skills, Employment Skills, Human Rights and Healthy Habits provide a well-rounded program experience. Job coach staff assists each individual in becoming fully included in the social atmosphere at work.

The majority of the clients VEA serves are developmentally disabled adults with varying degrees of physical



Consumers in VEA's vocational program in Chicopee work at assembly and packaging in front of a host of inspirational messages.

abilities.

Over the past 31 years, VEA has successfully developed the capacity to work with many diverse populations. A primary strength of Valley Educational Associates is the availability, presence and effectiveness of their clinical component. This allows VEA to meet the vocational needs of individuals with challenging behavioral and psychological needs.

In addition to a full-time chief psychologist, services and supports are provided by doctoral level psychologists and master's level clinicians. Clinicians spend approximately 85 percent of their time within program work sites, serving as role models, collecting and analyzing data, conducting training and providing feedback to staff on an ongoing basis.

The agency is also proud of its success in recruiting and retaining knowledgeable staff. Managers have been with VEA an average of 15-17 years, and job coaches average of 5 and a half years.

This, and the presence and effectiveness of clinicians, has fostered a competent and professional team approach to supporting the individuals served.

Executive Director

Kate S. DaSilva is a graduate of Springfield College, where she earned a master's degree in organizational management and leadership. Her research project focused on the contributing factors to obesity in the developmentally disabled population.

DaSilva's involvement in the not-for-profit sector includes working for the Northampton Independent Film Festival as the managing director and program



director, where she organized the efforts of more than 30 volunteers.

DaSilva began her employment at VEA in 2004 as the agency's administrative assistant. Since that formative experience, she served as the human rights coordinator for several years and in 2008 became VEA's assistant executive director. In addition, she has had the opportunity to function as the program coordinator at both the Chicopee and Springfield programs during times of transition.

In July 2012, DaSilva was appointed executive director by VEA's Board of Directors. Though new to the role, she has succeeded in growing VEA's client base by more than 5 percent in her first six months. Goals for the future include securing funding from new sources such as community foundations and individual donors, as well as expanding the supported employment opportunities for individuals within the community.

DaSilva is a member of the Mass. Epsilon chapter of Pi Gamma Mu, the international honor society in social sciences.

SALUTING THE CARING FORCE

Majenski works to keep families together

Pattie Majenski puts families first. Majenski is an outpatient and in-home therapist who has been working for **Family Continuity** for almost 5½ years.

Currently based in the organization's Plymouth mental health clinic, she works tirelessly with families who have children experiencing mental health crises or ongoing emotional struggles.

Majenski works with families in their homes, building trust and then partnering with them to bring about positive change. It is not unusual for her to be at a family's home late into the evening or on the weekend to help members manage difficult times and behaviors.

She is an excellent advocate – helping parents navigate school and community resources to support their children. She also does whatever it takes to help, even if it is well beyond her job description, including soliciting support for families in need for housing expenses, school supplies, recreational fees and clothing from communities and local foundations.

"Pattie is our go-to person for questions to do with school advocacy and the legal system as it pertains to children and youth," said Mary Lou Shewchuk, director of the Plymouth program. "She is an exceptional family therapist, with the wonderful ability to bridge both the parent's and child's needs so that both feel they are being heard."

Shewchuk noted that Majenski is in this field because of her belief in family resiliency. "She has a child with mental



Pattie Majenski is a therapist with Family Continuity in Plymouth.

health issues, so she is well aware of the struggles families go through as she supports parents with respect, kindness and determination," she said.

Majenski has a master's degree in counseling psychology from Assumption College as well as advanced training in family systems, trauma and the probation system. She also has experience as a probation officer in the family court, and brings that experience in addition to a tremendous knowledge of community resources to her present position.

Beyond the passion she has for her work, Skip Stuck, Family Continuity CEO, notes "Majenski is one of the agency's finest ambassadors in the community, taking every opportunity to talk about the agency's mission and look for ways to get the message out for people in need."

Mazouzi inspiring to his workers

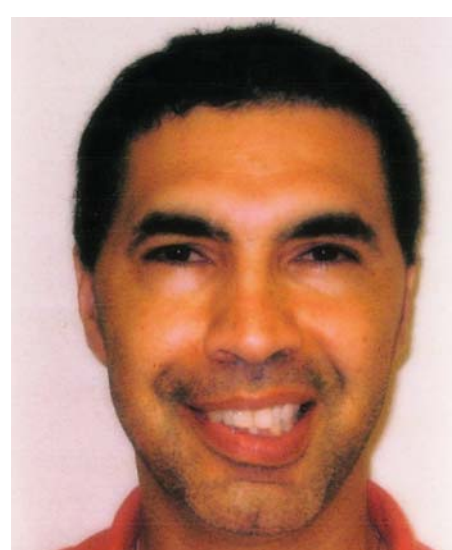
Majid Mazouzi is a true professional who is committed to improving the lives of those around him. Mazouzi has been with **Northeast Arc** for eight years, working at Heritage Industries, a program within its Day Services Division. He initially joined the agency as a community support specialist, but has since been promoted to the position of program coordinator.

In this role he oversees Northeast Arc's largest offsite work location, where his responsibilities include working with the client company to make sure production deadlines are met and helping individuals develop their work and social skills. He is also the human rights officer and fire safety officer for the program. In addition, he transports individuals to and from Arc programs each morning and afternoon.

"Majid always develops a good rapport with the individuals we serve," said Donna Marden, program director of Heritage Specialty Supports at Northeast Arc and Mazouzi's direct supervisor. "We hear repeatedly that he has a calming influence on people when they are having difficulty."

One such individual, who is part of the Northeast Arc Day Services program, said, "Majid listens to me and helps me get through the hard times by talking to me. Before you know it, I am calm again and ready to go back to work."

A native of Morocco, Mazouzi earned



Majid Mazouzi has a special rapport with the consumers in Northeast Arc's largest offsite work location.

his college degree there and is fluent in three languages. He is very skilled – not only in job set-up and maintaining a continuous workflow, but also in inspiring Northeast Arc's workers and giving them the positive feedback they need. He always encourages them to gain new skills and try new jobs.

When asked why he chose a career in the human services field, Mazouzi answered simply, "I like helping people." He does so not only at Northeast Arc, but at another human services agency in the area in order to support his family of three on a direct-care worker's wages.