

Work Program Philosophy

*“The highest reward for a person’s toil is not what they get for it,
but what they become by it.”*

- John Ruskin

The work program at Spring Lake Ranch offers the chance for residents to find challenge and support. It changes to fit the resident experience by allowing individuals to take appropriate risks, become leaders and work together as members of a group. The work reveals and responds to an individual’s evolving strengths, confidence, and creativity. The program functions on a number of concrete levels, but there’s also something that cannot be defined or quantified – through work we become active participants in our lives once again in ways that are unpredictable, enjoyable and transformative.

Self Esteem and Empowerment

We believe that self-esteem and confidence grow out of concrete accomplishment and individual contribution. Acquiring new skills puts people in touch with their own power and rediscovering old interests helps people feel whole. We learn to respect ourselves, our tools, and other people and gain confidence by being respected and trusted by others. Too often, people whose lives have been impacted by mental illness are defined by their limitations; through work we discover that each of us can contribute in a meaningful way, that we can do more than we think we can, that things are possible even when they are difficult.

Reciprocal Relationships and Communication

One of the important elements of our work is the opportunity to develop reciprocal relationships based on trust and respect. Each of us is a “giver” as well as a “receiver.” Roles are fluid; residents and staff problem solve together, both giving and receiving direction. We find that some of our most difficult projects engender the most personal growth, as we learn to push through frustration and address conflicts to achieve success. Group work facilitates social interaction and empathy. Working together requires collaboration, prioritization, and organization. The relationships we build facilitate meaningful conversations about difficult issues as diverse as medication and stress management.

Problem Solving and Life Skills

The work program offers a constructive metaphor for life by helping to shift an individual’s thinking away from symptoms toward a positive focus. As participants invest energy in the process, they find themselves caring about the result. Problem solving is the method we use to accomplish goals on work crew and in life. Opportunities arise to set and follow through on both tangible goals and individualized self-improvement goals. We find ways to model and practice flexibility, patience, and coping skills. We are asked to be reliable, on time, and respectful – life and work skills that resonate beyond the Ranch.

Community and the Natural World

Our program takes place in a beautiful setting: as we work in the woods, interact with animals, and harvest food, we build connections to people and systems outside of ourselves. Physical work promotes wellness and gives the feeling of real accomplishment. Structure is important – people need stability and expectations, a reason to get out of bed and something to look forward to everyday. Because our program takes place within a community, we are accountable to each other beyond the work day. Work reminds us of the power in seeing things change and participating in that change – in the sap becoming syrup, the seeds becoming plants, the wood becoming furniture. We, too, are in the process of becoming, challenging ourselves to grow and change.