

Shelter to add store, training

By Robert Mentzer • Wausau Daily Herald • May 29, 2008

A local veterans shelter plans to open a thrift store where its residents would sell crafts while learning job skills.

The goal of the new venture by Randlin Adult Family Care Homes of Wausau is to create a functioning business that provides skills training for the veterans and other Randlin residents, said Linda Larson Schlitz, a co-founder of the organization. Many of the agency's residents battle substance abuse, mental illness and homelessness.

The project would be modeled after one offered by the Delancey Street Foundation, a successful residential education agency based in San Francisco, Larson Schlitz said.

“What I liked the most (about the Delancey project) was the idea of having their own enterprises,” she said. “They use this business as a training tool to re-educate and retrain people who, for whatever reason, either don't have the skills or need new skills in order to become self-sufficient again.”

In addition, the experience would provide those with gaps in their work histories an opportunity to learn how to work in a structured environment.

Employees will learn “organizational skills (and) how to be accountable to someone else,” said Christine Oestreich, a house manager at one of the residences.

Money generated by the business would be reinvested in the organization, including the residential homes, Larson Schlitz said.

Though no location has been identified, Larson Schlitz said she hopes to have the new store open by late July using portions of a grant the organization received last week.