

Organization helps people with disabilities find jobs

[Karen Meyer](#)

July 21, 2005 - Job placement for many people with disabilities continues to be a challenge. Some parents from the west suburbs took a different route, they formed an organization in a greenhouse where everyone with a disability can work.

We Grow Dreams opened in the spring. It is a greenhouse and garden center that has a variety of plants, herbs and workers.

Like any large gardening center, caring for different products is a daily requirement, especially during the busy summer season.

Donna Jarmusz is the organization president.

"If you look around, they are all very happy, very happy when they are here. It's a very positive environment. It's a very safe environment," said Donna.

Prior to purchasing the center, Donna and her team did a lot of research.

"We wanted to find a business that was very low tech and labor intensive because our individuals with disabilities have variety varying degrees and challenges of disabilities so we wanted to find jobs that a lot of them could perform," said Donna.

Workers are the age of 14 and up. Parents have to pay for their child to participate.

"They pay us \$15 an hour for the job training or about \$150 a month and then each individual in the job training program receives a salary and job training salary of \$3.50 an hour because we really want our individuals to feel worth while and like all of us, they want to see a paycheck for all of their good work," said Donna.

There are job coaches and sometimes parents are involved.

Mary Ann Rickett is helping her 29-year-old daughter Jennifer. She just started working in the greenhouse.

"So far I've cut off heads of dead flowers," said Jennifer.

"Six months from now I hope she feels comfortable enough that she can be working here with little or no supervision and then from there who know where it could go," said Mary Ann.

Since working at We Grow Dreams, Ron Ivy says his 28-year-old son Ricardo has become more social.

"He initiate conversations a little bit now where as before he didn't which is one of the things I really wanted was for him to initiate conversations and be you know improve his communication skills," said Ron.

So far, business has been good which makes workers like Nate happy.

"I plant flowers and I make friends and I have fun here," said Nate.

"We hope to grow, grow dreams everywhere and once we have this model developed and perfected then we hope to take the same model across the country because as you know there are people with special needs and disabilities all over our country who need some opportunities," said Donna.

We Grow Dreams is a not-for-profit organization. They are located at 1055 West Washington Street in West Chicago. For more information call 630/293-0100.