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# SERV Behavioral Health System, Inc.

## Providing Supervised Group Homes & Mental Health Services **Since 1974!**

**S**ERV Behavioral Health System, Inc., headquartered in Mercer County on Scotch Road in Ewing, is a private nonprofit organization that began as SERV Centers of New Jersey. It was founded in 1974 by a group of families struggling to care for adult family members with serious mental illness, along with a few mental health professionals and an attorney who advocated on their behalf.

Mark W. Fox, a former Middlesex County attorney who is now a partner in a law firm in Florida, recalls those early years when he and a small group of people presented a grant proposal to the then-New Jersey Department of Mental Health. They proceeded to show officials that if state psychiatric hospitals would release stabilized patients to SERV, which could provide "semi-independent supervised living" in group homes to help families who were unable to care for their loved one, it would save the state \$23,000 per patient annually.

With the ensuing grant of \$156,000, SERV began to provide supervised group homes plus mental health services to eight consumers in Middlesex County. Since that time, SERV Centers of New Jersey has developed into a multi-faceted human services organization that has helped thousands of individuals in Mercer County and throughout the state to live and work successfully in their communities.

Today, SERV is funded by the state Department of Human Services, Division of Mental Health and Addictions and the Division of Developmental Disabilities; County Departments of Human Services, and Medicaid. SERV provides an economic benefit to the community by delivering a full range of care to individuals for about ¼ of the cost of state-supported hospitalization, and addresses a multitude of social issues including homelessness, hunger, housing, addiction recovery and senior care.

Throughout New Jersey, SERV provides housing and support services to more than 720 adult consumers who are either recovering from a serious mental illness such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder and/or coping with developmental disabilities, such as mental retardation, cerebral palsy and autism. Hundreds more participate in SERV's outpatient and day programs. SERV is one of the very few agencies in the state to serve both populations.

*Pearl Hadley, standing center, is a Family Care Provider for three women consumers of SERV Centers of New Jersey. They are shown here at a SERV Recovery NJ Conference, one of the projects of The SERV Foundation.*



SERV employs approximately 725 people among eight counties in the state. In Mercer County alone, this number includes 200 full- and part-time employees, who are contributing nearly \$5.5 million annually to the local economy.

SERV Centers of New Jersey, Inc. currently focuses on caring for more than 600 adults (ages 18 and older) recovering from a serious mental illness. Programs include a continuum of residential services, partial-care programs and outpatient care focused on individual needs. As they recover, many of SERV's residents "graduate" to a lesser level of care, transitioning from 24/7 supervised group homes to independent living with staff support as needed.

Within SERV Centers is a mental health day program for adults, called Adapt, located in Ewing. Through a structured and intensive program, each consumer receives individualized guidance toward developing the skills needed to live and work successfully in the community. The program provides psychiatric evaluation and treatment, individual/group counseling, training in independent living skills, and more.

Programs and services of SERV Achievement Centers, Inc. are similar. Currently serving nearly 120 adults with developmental disabilities and/or behavioral problems, and their families, SERV A.C. provides family-based group homes, vocational training programs, crisis intervention, in-home services and specialized foster family-care programs.

SERV's wealth of experience over the last 38 years qualifies the organization to offer some of its expertise to other nonprofit organizations in Mercer County, as well as in Burlington, Hudson, Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean, Passaic and Union counties. Through its affiliate Advanced Health Management, Inc., two categories of services are now being offered. In Facilities Management, AHM offers facilities operation and maintenance, bed bug eradication, rehabilitation of homes for special-needs populations, and teleconferencing from its Ewing headquarters to offices in Middlesex, Passaic and Union counties. In Human Resources, services such as recruitment, payroll administration, developing employee manuals and leadership development also are available.

Finally, within the above SERV family of companies is The SERV Foundation, which provides financial support for additional programs not funded by the state. The Foundation does this by seeking corporate grants and organizing fundraisers with sponsorship from area businesses.

Two key programs operated by the Foundation are the Scholarship Fund for consumers and the annual SERV Recovery NJ Conference.

The Scholarship Fund provides dollars to qualified consumers who seek to further their education, whether that is getting a college degree, GED certificate, trade school certificate, or just to enroll in personal enrichment courses. Some recipients have gone on to earn bachelor's or master's degrees; others have learned a new trade, such as cosmetology or auto mechanics.

Last fall, Erika, of Mercer County, was a first-time recipient of scholarship funds, which covered tuition for two continuing education classes at Mercer County Community College, books and public bus transportation. In a thank you note to the SERV Foundation, she

wrote: "Without you I would not have been able to start classes. ...As I sat in class listening, I imagined that I am here because SERV got monies together and gave me a nice size. Wow! I am eternally grateful. ...Nursing program, here I come!"

Another program of the Foundation is the SERV Recovery NJ Conference. The 10th annual event took place last month at The Pines Manor in Edison, in which nearly 450 SERV consumers, families and staff participated in workshops focused on the many associated health issues facing people with disabilities.

For these two programs and others, The SERV Foundation is tasked with raising necessary funding. Its major event is the time-honored Volley For SERV Tennis Tournament. Now in its 22nd year, the fundraiser will take place June 18 at Cherry Valley Country Club in Skillman.

Any area business wishing to sponsor this event can do so by visiting the website at [www.servbhs.org](http://www.servbhs.org) or by calling (609) 662-3059. For information on any of SERV's programs and services, call (609) 406-0100. ■

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