

Desiree Williams

### **Hillcroft helps disabled community spread awareness**

From puzzles to employment, from coloring to dance therapy, Hillcroft has it all.

Hillcroft is an organization dedicated to disabled citizens. Employees work to increase disability awareness in the community while also providing employment, residential and behavioral therapy services to disabled citizens.

Clients can choose services in which they want to be involved. “It’s very individualized,” said LeAnne Cole, vice president of therapy services. “So, it’s based upon what each client’s long term goals are.”

Advocacy and awareness are two of the organization’s main goals. Hillcroft wants clients to advocate for themselves and teach the community to be aware as well. Cole said some people just don’t know enough about disabilities, so exposure to the disabled community can help people learn more and think differently in the future.

The 2010 census revealed that 56 million people had a disability. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported in 2007 that only 25 percent of those with mental illnesses felt that people were caring to them. Disabilities are prevalent in society, so clients at Hillcroft learn how to combat the stigma against disabled citizens during behavioral therapy sessions while also honing their skills through conversation and games.

Danielle Hoover, a first year intern at Hillcroft, works in the therapy room to help clients with puzzles, games, coloring and more. “It’s so fun to see them doing something positive and

feeling like they're part of a group," Hoover said. She also works at the Tuesday events which could be dance or music therapy, or advocacy groups.

Clients meet with advocacy groups one time per month to discuss what they can do to get more support in the community. Hoover said that some people still believe disabled citizens "can't function in society at a high level," so spreading awareness is that much more important. She wants the entire community to be involved. "It can't just be that one person that advocates for themselves. They might need that extra help," Hoover said.

Along with advocacy skills, Hillcroft also teaches the clients social skills. Rachel Rye is one of Hoover's clients. Rye came to Hillcroft to fulfill her parent's wishes and the people there have since become her family.

"My mother and father wanted me to get into Hillcroft if something happened to them. They wanted me to be in Hillcroft so I'd have a lot of friends and they can take care of me, the staff here," Rye said.

Hillcroft Services aims to educate clients who will then educate the community. Visit the website or the location on Streeter Avenue for more information.