



# THE IMAGINE CENTER FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH

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Michael E. Behen, PhD, LP

7/24/2024

Introduction to **The Imagine Center Farm Work Training, Skills Building, and Community Engagement Center** - *accompanying this letter are a brochure, sample daily/weekly schedule, and also a contact form – see attached forms.*

Hello, I am Michael E. Behen, PhD CEO of the Imagine Center for Psychological Health, and I am writing to introduce you all to (*and hopefully you will pass the information onto others that you think may want to hear the information*) **The Imagine Center Farm Work Training, Skills Building, and Community Engagement Center**, which is opening this summer in the beautiful Irish Hills community. The center is located on a 70 acre, fully operational, farm in Brooklyn, MI, and that includes a store, two barns, various animals, including horses, donkeys, goats, sheep, ducks, chickens, peacocks (and a few barn cats), several acres of crops, a large greenhouse, and in progress, an orchard.

**The center**, for years a dream of ours, and a project many, many years in the making, functions to serve a large number of individuals, each with some developmental challenges, and to:

- 1) Provide each person with a full program of intervention aimed at maximizing their *adaptive behavioral skills* – communication, daily living, social, and motor skills, and behavioral functioning - and with the goal of assisting each in achieving their maximum level of independence, and also assisting them in achieving an optimal adaptation to the broader community.
- 2) Additionally, the center also aims to provide each individual, at their present level of capability (and regularly updated based on progress across skills), *vocational training* along a broad number of domains, including construction tasks, animal care, agriculture/horticulture, direct customer service, dietary and cooking, entrepreneurship, event planning/coordination. Everyone's specific program is individualized to maximize their skill development, and vocational capacities, and along their unique inclinations and desires, and monitored daily, and periodically evaluated/adjusted to ensure that their programs are always meeting all of their needs and all of their wishes/dreams for themselves. In all of their activities, each and every individual is fully supported to the level necessary to ensure success in all of their goals.
- 3) Importantly, members of the broader community work on the farm, every day, and, additionally others from the community and regularly invited onto the farm to be served by all of the members, to allow for the individuals at the center to engage with the community in important and meaningful ways, *to allow a deeper integration, for all, into the broader community*, and thus allowing the opportunity *for each and every member to develop a broader range of acquaintances, and to make friends, and engendering a deeper sense of belonging, of productivity, and of meaning into their work lives.*
- 4) Finally, *our work lives (and hence our lives, overall) are more fulfilling when the work is interesting and fun.* Each day on the farm, given the animals, the food, the activities, each other, brings new and interesting experiences, and allows for enjoyment in one's work life.



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Like the Imagine Center for Psychological Health, which emphasizes providing quality care to those in our communities with the least resources, and who have had difficulty obtaining such services in reasonable time frames or at a high quality level, *we especially want to offer such opportunities to those folks who have little opportunity to be involved in such settings* – those with less resources, those not working, and those individuals not provided opportunities to thrive in the world, those not adequately supported, and including those who have been unable to get into other settings due to their level of functioning, or the presence of behavioral concerns etc... - we want to help.

## **Who we are:**

Drs Behen, Gjolaj, and Mims are each clinical psychologists who run a large behavioral health clinic operating in SE Michigan – each has broad range of expertise in the areas of developmental psychopathology, and in treatment of various problems in living. Our studies, our work at The Imagine Center, and our research backgrounds, and (perhaps most so), our personal experiences – see below - each have very well prepared us to envision, develop, and operate **The Imagine Center Farm Work Training, Skills Building, and Community Engagement Center**. Our passion for being engaged with, being helpful to, and being useful to, and befriending others in the community, especially those who require some support to be fully and meaningfully integrated into our communities, has demanded that we open, and operate the center.

Dr. Behen's eldest child – Jessica Lin Behen – an employee of the farm, is a truly outstanding person, and who also happens to have some severe and multiple developmental challenges that contribute to her uniqueness. She requires some support from others to live effectively and to fully realize her dreams; there have been no experiences more important in the journey that led to the development of the center than our experiences with Jessie. Both Dr. Behen and Dr. Gjolaj also began their work careers working in homes that provided care for adults who required care and support from others to live their lives to their best capacities. Such experiences have led us to here – and we are excited to do all we can to provide wonderful and meaningful experiences for as many folks as we are able.

Drs Behen, Gjolaj, and Mims will be, along with the individual members of the center, and their guardians and caregivers, developing and monitoring each and all aspects of the programming at the center, and will monitor/oversee all daily activities of the center. We are very much looking forward to meeting you all!

## **Why the need for another center?**

In our work, and also in our personal experiences, we came to realize that many (perhaps most in some local communities) of the adults, we know and who have some developmental challenges, in our community, are not working (and often, at least partly due to that fact, may be expressing some remediable skills deficits, and also some behavioral concerns, including unhappiness). Further, it has not been uncommon to observe a lack of the sense of pride, meaning, and competence/confidence that meaningful work can engender. Many of such adults we know and/or are familiar with, and who are working, are not working in settings (or doing the types of labor) that provide them with joy, sense of purpose, and meaning that the right work setting can provide. Finally, such settings often seemed to offer a suboptimal level of involvement with the community. We felt a different approach was needed and have worked very, very hard to create such a setting.



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How is the **The Imagine Center Farm Work Training, Skills Building, and Community Engagement Center** different from other supported work centers?

The main differences, from our experiences/perspective, involve:

1. The level and range of programming – not only will the center be emphasizing the development and refinement of vocational skills, but there will also be a pervasive emphasis on building adaptive behavioral skills – including individualized programming aimed at increasing the level of independence in all aspects of one's life, and also, and perhaps most importantly, increasing each individual's sense of belonging with others in the community, and so also engendering a sense of pride and productivity in their work lives. For all of us, our jobs – *what we do* - and also our friends, and acquaintances – *our selves with others* – combine to provide us a sense of who we are, and also determine (in some large measure) our level of perceived import/use of our selves in the community and the world. *Our center, through the types of work activities we will be doing, and especially along with the community engagement activities, seeks to engender a sense that each individual's work is truly important and meaningful, and also provides the opportunity for the development of a network of friends/others that helps/allows us feel that we truly belong.* We hope and expect that those individuals involved in the center will have a healthier experience of themselves, of others, and of the world more generally – we want them to be happier and more satisfied. We expect that all of the individuals working at the farm will ultimately increase their independence in living/working, increase their vocational capacities, and develop a broader communion with others through the training programs and activities on the farm.
2. Most everything we do will happen on a farm – with hills, a pond, a lake, horses, chickens, sheep, strawberries, pumpkins etc.... For those of us who enjoy being with and around animals, nature, flowers, water – the place is really beautiful. Additionally, we will regularly have recreation (daily), and also regularly scheduled music from local performers, and again, folks from the community will be regularly on the premises (i.e., for the store, activities) – the setting is peaceful at most times, exciting at others; such a setting, we expect, will be truly special, and as we all would hope our own work settings would ideally be.
3. Our expertise - first, helping others to be everything that they can be, and to feel as if they are, is what we do, and have been doing for many years. We understand (through years of scholarship and practical experiences, and also our personal experiences) the impact of various developmental concerns on one's life and livelihood, and well-being, and also how to address such concerns in a manner that can engender skill development and more successful and meaningful adaptation to the world, and to allow or cause one to feel better, and to behave in healthier, more satisfied ways as a result. And, most importantly, for us, this is not a job, this is our life's work – we will do everything we can to make each and every individual thrive, and to their maximum potential.
4. We are a team in the community – we will all be working on our individual tasks, and to be everything we can be, and also in a context of shared (and lofty) goals. We understand that we all thrive when the team is successful, and we give maximum effort



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in the pursuit of both our individual and shared goals, and we never give up – when the task is more difficult, we rise to the challenge; and we always treat everyone with respect. Everyone working at the center will have the opportunity to wear the clothing that fits the tasks that they will be doing, and across the seasons visited upon all of us here in Michigan - uniforms, appropriate for the weather and tasks, will be provided to everyone working at the center, including head coverings and foot wear. Breakfast, lunch, and snacks – again, usually prepared by those who work at the center themselves - will be provided daily.

5. Support and skill development programming will be developed/monitored by clinical psychologists with extensive experience providing care and programming to individuals with developmental/behavioral challenges, and along empirically supported guidelines. Vocational development will be guided by experts in their various crafts – animal care tasks, by animal care specialists, construction tasks, by builders, etc.... Care will be provided in ratios individualized and matched to each individual's needs and programs – whatever the level of support needed/indicated, that level of support will be provided. While in some areas an individual may require 1-1 supports for a certain task(s), and receive such a level of support, in other cases the level of supports could be reduced (never below 6-1) to that level of support needed to assist an individual in managing tasks at a reasonable and safe level.
6. Each individual's program will be specified on a daily (and updated weekly) basis and include both supported vocational tasks/training, coincident with ongoing skill development programming, and also including options for related service programming as needed (specified in their plans), and also will include daily recreation, meals, snack, team building and community engagement activities - a sample weekly schedule of activities for an individual at the center is attached below.

## **-How would someone get to the farm?**

Transportation to and from the farm (from each individual's place of residence) can be provided by center staff, every day – and also offered/provided for special (optional) weekend and holiday activities.

## **-Does an individual's present level of functioning matter?**

It does not – each individual will have tasks (and supports for completing these tasks) that are well matched to (and work towards improving) their current level of functioning; each individual's plans are developed (and individualized) to start where they are presently at (and also matched to their preferences), and that seeks to improve their skills along all relevant life skill and vocational skill domains, and to progress their life and vocational skills to their maximum level as well – again, tasks and programs are regularly monitored and adjusted to ensure needs are met across time, and at all times. Programming will persistently be addressing any behavioral concerns – using empirically supported approaches as well.

## **-How is this paid for?**



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Involvement in this program is funded in the same manner as involvement in any supported work setting would be funded. The Imagine Center for Psychological Health also does have a foundation that will fund many of the community engagement activities.

If you are interested in your son/daughter, or someone you know, attending the program, center staff will assist/guide caregivers/guardians through the process, along with their supports coordinators.

**-How do I sign up an individual for involvement with the center, or get more information about the center?**

To sign up for the program, or obtain any additional information, or to come out and visit and observe, please contact us through:

-Email: [mebehenphd@gmail.com](mailto:mebehenphd@gmail.com)

-Phone: 313 656-4052 (The Imagine Center) or 313 354-3920 (Dr. Behen)

-Online registration form on our website – [theimaginectr.com](http://theimaginectr.com)

-Or fax the attached registration form to 313 656-4053





## **Initial Program for JB**

**39 yo female**, with severe and multiple impairments; main interests are animal care, flowers, fruits, loves music, engagement with others; needs support for getting around successfully, and also sporadic irritability, least interested in construction related tasks - participates farmer's market on weekends

IPOS includes the following goals presently being addressed:

*Speech/language* - increase number of utterances; social communication (greetings, conversation, expression of preferences and requests); improve articulation

*motor* - improve flexibility, upper body strength, and flexibility and stability of gait

*social* - greetings, increase length of utterances, increase answering and asking queries, increase to and fro conversation, increase breadth of interest/conversation

*emotional/behavioral* - improve mood, improve compliance, increase expressions of choice; increase verbalizing of feelings/distress, improve coping with daily hassles

*daily living* - improve independence in dress, hygiene (handwashing);  
improve independence in meal cleanup

*vocational* - broad exposure - identify preferences, present capacities, seems to/known to prefer animals, flowers/fruit, enjoys engagement with others

**Themes (emphasized across day)**- increase verbal utterances/social communication, motor - increase upper body strength, flexibility, social (greetings, conversation), behavioral (increase compliance; improve mood, verbalize feelings), weight management

Needs close (1-1) support ambulating on hills, trails, and most work activities; for some tasks, though can up to 3-1

### **Additional tasks:**

capture weight Friday afternoon.

document abcs for irritability

## Sample Schedule

### Monday

#### **Pick up**

#### **transport**

breakfast - morning meeting, Group A

breakfast and clean up

Animal check/care

"

Speech therapy

break/snack

recreation 1 - free choice

Café responsibility - training on service

"

Lunch

lunch cleanup - afternoon meeting

Agricultural activity

"

Recreation 2 - group activity

Animal care

Break/snack

Wrap Up - day review

#### **Transport**

### **Tuesday**

### **Wednesday**

6am

6:30am

7am

#### **Pick up**

#### **Pick up**

7:30am

#### **transport**

#### **transport**

8am

breakfast - morning meeting, Group A

breakfast - morning meeting, Group A

8:30am

breakfast and clean up

breakfast and clean up

9am

Animal check/care

Animal check/care

9:30am

"

"

10am

OT therapy

PT therapy

10:30am

break/snack

break/snack

11am

recreation 1 - free choice

recreation 1 - free choice

11:30am

Café responsibility - training menu/meal prep

Café responsibility - training on clean up

12pm

"

"

12:30pm

Lunch

Lunch

1pm

lunch cleanup - afternoon meeting

lunch cleanup - afternoon meeting

1:30pm	Agricultural activity	Individual Behavioral therapy
2pm	"	"
2:30pm	Recreation 2 - group activity	Recreation 2 - group activity
3pm	Animal care	Speech therapy
3:30pm	Break/snack	Break/snack
4pm	Wrap Up - day review	Wrap Up - day review
4:30pm	<b>Transport</b>	<b>Transport</b>
5pm		
5:30pm		
6pm		

**Thursday**

6am	
6:30am	
7am	Pick up
7:30am	transport
8am	breakfast - morning meeting, Group A
8:30am	breakfast and clean up
9am	Animal check/care
9:30am	"
10am	OT therapy
10:30am	break/snack
11am	recreation 1 - free choice
11:30am	Café responsibility - training on service
12pm	"
12:30pm	Lunch
1pm	lunch cleanup - afternoon meeting
1:30pm	Agricultural activity
2pm	"
2:30pm	Art therapy
3pm	Animal care
3:30pm	Break/snack
4pm	Wrap Up - day review
4:30pm	Transport
5pm	
5:30pm	
6pm	

**Friday**

Pick up
transport
breakfast - morning meeting, Group A
breakfast and clean up
Animal check/care
"
PT therapy
break/snack
recreation 1 - free choice
Construction
"
Lunch
lunch cleanup - afternoon meeting
Agricultural activity - prep for market
"
Recreation, group
Music therapy
Break/snack
Wrap Up - day review
Transport





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## The Imagine Center Farm Skills Building, Work Training and Community Engagement Center – Registration Form

Please complete the form below and fax to 313 656-4053. Some will contact you within a day or two of receipt of form.

Registration can also be completed via our website: [theimaginectr.com](http://theimaginectr.com) – navigate to the Jessie’s Place page on the menu tab.

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to individual you are interested in working at the center: \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant’s name: \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant’s date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Guardian’s name: \_\_\_\_\_

Guardian phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Applicant address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\*If any questions about any aspect of the center, or for additional information, please call 313 656-4052 (The Imagine Center) or 313 354-3920 (Dr. Behen)

Have a great day.

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