Mike arrives early to RHD Boston by about an hour. He’s taken the train to get there by himself, eager for the day to start. A client at RHD Boston, which provides residential, day and individual supports for men and women with developmental disabilities or a dual diagnosis of mental illness and/or physical disabilities, Mike is there because he’ll be working at a local soup kitchen, preparing and serving food for people experiencing homelessness in nearby Lynn, Mass.

Mike is one of the many clients with intellectual disabilities at RHD Boston who volunteer behind the counter and in the kitchen to prepare and serve food for people experiencing homelessness at My Brother’s Table, a local soup kitchen.

Clients give back
RHD Boston volunteers at local soup kitchen

Now we’re cooking: Clients and staff from RHD Boston work in the kitchen together to prepare lunch for people experiencing homelessness at My Brother’s Table, a local soup kitchen.

Play ball: Erik, a client at RHD Nashville, has made such strides that he’s now able to play baseball again.

Robin held her thumb and forefinger about an inch apart as she tried to explain how hard it is for people experiencing homelessness to seek support.

“When you’re in this situation you already feel this big,” she said. “And you don’t want to talk to somebody who makes you feel even less.”

Then Robin threw her hands out wide and smiled as she explained the difference in the support she received at RHD’s FaSST/Connections program, which provides evaluation, linkage, and coordination of services to families living in various shelters. Robin has been working with resource coordinator Donyea Williams, who has set up Robin and her family with mental health resources, housing opportunities and even got Robin reunited with her mother.

“Donyea has done so much for us in just a month,” Robin said, who is in a local homeless shelter with her sons Dylan and Nathaniel. “I probably drive him nuts, because when something happens I don’t even go to the people at the shelter anymore, I go to his office and he calms me down and talks to me. And I’m not a trusting person. I’ve been through a lot. But there’s something about him; he’s really kind and nonjudgmental.

“And now I feel like things are moving; I don’t feel stuck, like there’s no end in sight. Donyea is always encouraging, telling me we’re going to try this, we’re going to do it.

Erik is a client at RHD Nashville. He has autism and developmental disabilities with several challenging behaviors. Before coming to RHD, he was often prone to serious self-injury. But since arriving at his own home in a Nashville suburb specifically created for him by RHD’s Environmental Design team, Erik’s behavior has undergone a huge transformation. He eats dinners with his family and goes on trips in the community. Erik loves cars — his house features representations of racecars and Corvettes in most of the rooms — and last year he got a chance to wave the starting flag at a local race.

“Baseball was one of the things that he just loved to do,” said Jordan Allen, former RHD Nashville director. He played in Little League when he was younger, and he missed it. And now he’s connecting with a time in his life when things weren’t so tumultuous. That’s very comforting.

Making a Connection
RHD’s targeted case management hailed as innovative national model

Erik’s fingers tighten on the bat as he tracks the pitch and swings. He’s a little off balance and his head is out of position and his hands are ahead of his body, but he swings with purpose and conviction and the barrel of the bat finds the center of the ball. He strokes a hard line drive into the gap in right-center; and the tingle that runs up his arms tells Erik he’s hit the ball solid even before his head looks up to find it.

Erik drops the bat and starts running, digging hard for first. In that moment, he’s a little kid again, racing the wind to first base. And all things are possible.

Erik is a client at RHD Nashville. He has autism and developmental disabilities with several challenging behaviors. Before coming to RHD, he was often prone to serious self-injury. But since arriving at his own home in a Nashville suburb specifically created for him by RHD’s Environmental Design team, Erik’s behavior has undergone a huge transformation. He eats dinners with his family and goes on trips in the community. Erik loves cars — his house features representations of racecars and Corvettes in most of the rooms — and last year he got a chance to wave the starting flag at a local race.

“Baseball was one of the things that he just loved to do,” said Jordan Allen, former RHD Nashville director. He played in Little League when he was younger, and he missed it. And now he’s connecting with a time in his life when things weren’t so tumultuous. That’s very comforting.
The Equal Dollars Community Currency helps Philadelphia families put food on the table by transforming vacant lots into thriving urban farms.

Equal Dollars is a new community currency that provides a neighborhood with a local system of buying and selling goods and services. The currency is issued by the neighborhood and accepted by local stores, restaurants, and community organizations. The currency is designed to encourage local spending and strengthen community ties.

In Philadelphia, which McCullough described as a “food desert” in 2010, the Equal Dollars Community Currency has helped local farmers and advocates turn vacant lots into thriving urban farms. The currency is used to buy and sell goods and services, such as fresh produce, meat, and dairy products, as well as other items such as clothing, furniture, and household goods.

The Equal Dollars Community Currency is a local experiment in community currency, and it is just one of many similar experiments around the world. In 2010, there were over 100 community currencies operating in the United States alone. Equal Dollars is just one of many local currencies that are being established to promote local spending and strengthen community ties.

In Philadelphia, the Equal Dollars Community Currency has helped local farmers and advocates turn vacant lots into thriving urban farms. The currency is used to buy and sell goods and services, such as fresh produce, meat, and dairy products, as well as other items such as clothing, furniture, and household goods. The currency is issued by the neighborhood and accepted by local stores, restaurants, and community organizations. The currency is designed to encourage local spending and strengthen community ties.

In Philadelphia, which McCullough described as a “food desert” in 2010, the Equal Dollars Community Currency has helped local farmers and advocates turn vacant lots into thriving urban farms. The currency is used to buy and sell goods and services, such as fresh produce, meat, and dairy products, as well as other items such as clothing, furniture, and household goods.

The Equal Dollars Community Currency is a local experiment in community currency, and it is just one of many similar experiments around the world. In 2010, there were over 100 community currencies operating in the United States alone. Equal Dollars is just one of many local currencies that are being established to promote local spending and strengthen community ties. In Philadelphia, the Equal Dollars Community Currency has helped local farmers and advocates turn vacant lots into thriving urban farms. The currency is used to buy and sell goods and services, such as fresh produce, meat, and dairy products, as well as other items such as clothing, furniture, and household goods. The currency is issued by the neighborhood and accepted by local stores, restaurants, and community organizations. The currency is designed to encourage local spending and strengthen community ties.
kitchen to serve others at My Brother’s Table. “The days are different when RHD’s here,” said Sue Ellen Woodcock, the manager at the soup kitchen. “The people we serve pick up on the fact that people with intellectual disabilities are serving them food, and it really has an impact. They see there are other people who struggle, too, and they can see the smiles on their faces and the way they’re working. It makes people feel differently about their own challenges.”

All RHD programs place a premium on community interaction. Clients don’t just participate in services in the community, they are active members of the community. But with this unique volunteer opportunity, RHD Boston individuals have the experience of giving back, empowering them as community members.

“The first time I went, it made me so sad I wanted to cry,” Mike said. “The people there are homeless, and they’re hungry. But then I felt so good because I could help them. It made me feel good to help people who are in need.”

Once a month, Marina Gans, a manager of three group homes at RHD Boston, gathers everyone who wants to go and volunteers at the lunch shift at My Brother’s Table — and everyone wants to go. It began as Gans’ project in RHD’s Leadership Development Program, which provides continuing education for career advancement and prepares employees to be better leaders.

“I always wanted a project where our folks were recognized for the abilities and not their disabilities,” Gans said. “I wanted a project where they could give back. I knew it would be challenging, but I know they could do it and I thought they’d get a lot out of it.” We bring a lot of different people with different challenges, and they participate in the program in any way they can. People with disabilities are told all the time: “You can’t. Well, no — you can. We believe that people can.”

“Everyone is so nice,” Denise says. “Everyone is so nice, you can’t help but smile.” Woodcock looks on at the bustling activity and says: “If you volunteer here, you have to be able to do the job. And I’ll tell you what, I’ve never had any complaints about this group. Not one. They’re really good!”

Individuals who stay with the project, volunteering at least three times, get T-shirts created at RHD Boston’s Outside the Lines art studio. They can customize the shirts to say anything they like, and wear their shirts with pride.

“It’s not just that they’re going to do this and have fun — although they do, and that’s important,” Gans said. “They’re helping food people who are hungry. They get so much out of it because they’re the ones helping others and that’s an empowering position to be in. It’s hard work, but they just light up when they do it. They shave and beyond for this kitchen. Every time we’re leaving I feel good because I could help them. It makes me feel good to help people who are hungry.”

“Everyone is so nice,” Denise says. “Everyone is so nice, you can’t help but smile.” Woodcock looks on at the bustling activity and says: “If you volunteer here, you have to be able to do the job. And I’ll tell you what, I’ve never had any complaints about this group. Not one. They’re really good!”

Individuals who stay with the project, volunteering at least three times, get T-shirts created at RHD Boston’s Outside the Lines art studio. They can customize the shirts to say anything they like, and wear their shirts with pride.

With 30 minutes before the doors open, the kitchen is buzzing. Robert and Michael playfully chide group home manager Fabiola Louis-Disla about her inability to keep up with them, Mike cautions Robert and Michael not to open up bags of rice (“Let’s not have an accident here!”) and site manager Sam Scribner carries a tray through the kitchen to serve others at My Brother’s Table.

Gans gets the cafeteria line in order and hands out the assignments: “You’re on sandwiches; you’re on soup; you’re on coffee ...” Everyone assembles at the doors open, Denise is in a wheelchair and she moves to the head of the cafeteria line. She’s the greeter, counting each diner to help keep track of how much food they’ll need through the day. The people moving through the line thank her on their way out, and she says: “Have a great day!”

“Everyone is so nice,” Denise says.

Someone observes that people usually are nice when you’re helping them, and Denise says: “I like that I can be the one who’s helping other people.”

After lunch, the crew cleans up and wraps the leftovers. Robert and Michael bus the tables and stack the chairs. Mike approaches Sue, a little tentative, but there’s something he wants to ask. He overhears the diners talking about the holidays. He asks if he can come back, on his own, and volunteer on Thanksgiving.

“I felt so good because I could help them. It made me feel good to help people in need.”

Mike, an RHD client
Dr. Robinson always fought to remind people of our history; it was a large part of his life's work. But he used that not to cling to the past, but to inform ourselves. We celebrate the values that guide us. In all his work, Dr. Robinson tried to effect a positive change of attitude toward the ancestral value of people of African descent by showcasing the positive elements in our communities, our children, our parents and ourselves. We are celebrating our basic humanity.

We're honored that he believed in our work at RHD and wanted to be a part of it. We were fortunate to be able to work with him as long as we did. In memory of Dr. Robinson, we're doing a number of things at RHD. Among them is naming one of our conference rooms for him. As our own Richelle Gunter, RHD corporate board member and Coretta Scott King room. As our own Richelle Gunter, RHD corporate board member and great friends, this summer. I was honored to speak at his funeral. Dr. Robinson remembered as author, historian and mentor

Author, historian, filmmaker and longtime RHD board member Dr. Edward W. Robinson, Jr. passed away June 13. He was 94.

Born in 1918 and raised in Philadelphia, he received degrees from Virginia State College for Negroes in Petersburg, Va., and Temple University Law School. After serving honorably in World War II in the U.S. Army, he went on to become the first African American to be a member of the Board of Directors of the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia.

Dr. Robinson also served as Pennsylvania's executive secretary, executive director of the city's Minority Business Council, and became co-founder of the President Home Industrial Mutual Life Insurance Company.

In 2008, Dr. Robinson was awarded the 2008 Black Homeownership Award from the National Association of Realtors by the National Association of Real Estate Brokers. The award was given to Dr. Robinson for his work in promoting affordable homeownership.

Dr. Robinson's wealth of knowledge and experience was utilized on many RHD projects. Among them was the development of the book "The Journey of the Songhai People," which tells the story of the African people and their struggle for freedom. The book was published in 2010 and has since become a bestseller.

Dr. Robinson was also a strong advocate for the rights of African Americans and worked tirelessly to promote understanding and unity among people of different backgrounds.

A tall order: RHD's New Jersey programs, staff and clients fight to recover Hurricane Sandy didn't dampen spirits or services

Dr. Robert A. Feeley, chair of RHD’s Family Practice & Counseling Network advisory committee, and a key player in bringing the nurse-managed health center to her community, won the 2012 APEX Community Ambassador Award. Presented by the Pennsylvania Association of Community Health Centers, the Community Ambassador Award recognizes the contributions of health care professionals who champion the community health center mission through a steadfast commitment to excellence and excellence, and promote awareness and bring positive attention to their health center.

"I call Doctor the godmother of the health center," said Donna Torres, who founded PPCH in 1992 and remains the network's executive director.

RHD's One Step Away, Philly's first street newspaper, cosponsors first homeless film festival

"Homeless Has a Name," the first-ever event spotlighting the international plight of homelessness, was October 16 at the Painted Bride Art Center in Philadelphia. Followed by a dinner and panel of experts, the festival will go to support Street Papers, and show that there are "homeless heroes." In the event, people are struggling to survive this national crisis, and they are our sons and daughters, their parents, our friends, our fellow citizens," said One Step Away Editor Kevin Robert. "This festival fulfills that in a unique way, and we're honored to be a part of it."

For those stories and more news about RHD’s innovative programs around the country, we encourage all of you, please visit the media center on our website at www.rhd.org.

For those stories and more news about RHD’s innovative programs around the country, we encourage all of you, please visit the media center on our website at www.rhd.org.

RHD’s New Jersey programs, staff and clients fight to recover

Hurricane Sandy didn't dampen spirits or services

To donate to RHD’s Hurricane Sandy Relief and Recovery fund, please visit www.rhd.org or use the enclosed envelope, or scan the QR code

Bob Fishman, founder and CEO of Resources for Human Development
Award-winning speech

Danny, a client at RHD’s Crossroads Community Services in Stroudsburg, Pa., brought the crowd at Values Day to its feet with a rousing speech after he received the 2012 Barbara Foust Award. The Foust Award is given annually to an RHD client who demonstrates exceptional courage, creativity and spirit. Danny, a peer specialist at Crossroads Community Services, is in his second battle with cancer and is known for his heart, sense of humor and positive outlook. Quoting the old saying “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink,” Danny told the crowd to take responsibility for recovery, ending with the exhortation: “Drink your water!”

About Resources for Human Development

A national human services nonprofit founded in 1970, Resources for Human Development serves tens of thousands of people of all abilities every year with caring, effective and innovative programs and services. Our work includes direct service delivery, program and policy development, research and evaluation. We believe in working collaboratively with clients and communities to achieve greater equity, opportunity and quality of life, and to build a more just and inclusive society for all people. As we serve, we build better lives, families and communities.

In this edition...

1. RHD Boston clients give back to the community by volunteering

2. Erik’s love of baseball gets him back in the game, with an assist from RHD Nashville

3. Equal Dollars urban farming a weeds to riches tale

Plus more...