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## **NJ Man Pursuing Passion of Film as an Employee of Local Theater**

PRINCETON, NJ (December 22, 2015) – Employment First, as defined by the Department of Labor, seeks to “facilitate the full inclusion of people with the most significant disabilities in the workplace and community.” New Jersey is one of many states that have adopted this policy, but despite efforts to prioritize employment for people with disabilities, employment statistics have not seen a noticeable shift. While the number of people with disabilities working in segregated workshops or participating in day programming has risen steadily, the number working in integrated, community employment hasn’t increased since the early 2000’s. Nationally, only 23% of working age adults (ages 16-64) with a cognitive disability were employed in 2012, as compared to 71% for the same group without a disability.

This is why Community Options, Inc. (COI), a nonprofit organization that develops housing and employment for people with developmental and intellectual disabilities, celebrates every time a person with disabilities is hired. Michael Wohn works as a Film Crew Member at AMC Theatre in Morristown, New Jersey since he was hired in June 2014. Michael’s duties include tidying auditoriums between movie showings and cleaning and stocking the lobby concession stand. Michael’s manager at the theater gives nothing but glowing reviews of Michael’s work – he’s always willing to learn, takes his work seriously and doesn’t rush, and his friendly nature make him popular with other staff and theater guests.

The 29-year-old started receiving supported employment with Community Options Enterprises in April 2013. Just over a year later, the Succasunna, NJ native landed his current job. Prior to AMC, Mike worked at Toys R US from July through December of 2013 as a seasonal employee. He has worked since 2005 at a variety of jobs including outdoor seasonal maintenance, retail customer service, shipping company package handler, pet store customer service, animal care and maintenance, and food service.

“I was very happy when I found out I got the job,” said Wohn. “I had been unemployed for five months, so I was thrilled to go back to working in the movies. I was an usher at a theater in high school and I loved doing it. It’s a great environment and everyone is nice. It’s a good fit.”

He has big plans for the future. He’s already trained new employees, and will soon start learning new job duties, like operating the cash register at the concession stand. Michael dreams of trade school one day, but in the meantime he’s having fun at work. His favorite movie is *The Empire Strikes Back*, though he’s recently seen the new Star Wars movie three times and ranks it better than all the prequels. He hopes to one day write a science fiction novel.

Often employment success hinges on the Employment Specialist and other staff who support individuals through the job exploration and placement process. Employment Specialists need to be flexible, willing to learn new job tasks to teach to the individuals they support. Michael's Employment Specialist when he first came to Community Options, Donna Orr, is one such resource for Michael. After working with Michael and observing his strong interpersonal skills, Donna put two and two together when Michael expressed interest in the movie business. So far, the relationship has been a win for Michael and AMC Theatres.

"Michael is such a pleasure to work with, his enthusiasm and approach to life is very unique and refreshing, and flows into everything he approaches," said Donna Orr, now Director of Employment Services for Community Options Enterprises (a branch of COI that develops and operates entrepreneurial businesses that successfully integrates people with disabilities into the community workforce). "I have provided employment supports for 'Mikey' for over just over two years, and I have never seen him give anything but 100% throughout the process of job searching, training and perfecting his duties at work. Mikey is very well liked among his co-workers and managers at the AMC Theatre and truly loves his job. It is a privilege to know him!"

"It's been a wonderful experience at Community Options," said Wohn. "Working with Donna is a pleasure. I'm happy she recently got a promotion; she deserves it. She came to work with me when I first started to make sure I was doing my job. It's a great organization."

Michael's story shows that there is cause for hope; that a seemingly intractable problem like employing people with disabilities can be unraveled when service organizations, government policy, and businesses work together to make Employment First a priority.

#### About Community Options

For over 25 years, Community Options has developed housing and employment programs for people with disabilities. Community Options operates with a budget over \$112 million and serves thousands of people with disabilities through 38 offices across 10 states. Providing advocacy assistance to empower people with disabilities, Community Options believes that all people –regardless of disability level – should live and work in the community with dignity, choice, and self-determination. A registered PVO with USAID, Community Options is also the pioneer of innovative programs for people with disabilities in the Middle East, Russia, and South America. Please visit our website at [www.comop.org](http://www.comop.org).