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Community Options Expands STEP Program Offices in Princeton



from L to R: Stefanie Rinaldi, Wendy Williams, Meghan Hunter, Deborah Napoleon, Teresa Snyder, Awee Taylor and Keaira Askew of Community Options gather outside Community Options' new STEP building. The building previously belonged to notable local newspaper, Town Topics.

PRINCETON, NJ – (May 6, 2015) Community Options' School-to-Employment Program (STEP) is changing locations to a more notable spot in Princeton, NJ to accommodate its rapid growth.

The new STEP building will be located at 305 Witherspoon Street, which was most recently occupied by prominent local newspaper Town Topics.

Thanks in part to a grant by the Kessler Foundation, STEP was launched in New Jersey in 2008 in response to the youth employment rate for individuals with disabilities. STEP is a job training/transition program for high school students and young adults with special needs. STEP provides students with transferable vocational education and relevant social skill development, to improve future opportunities for competitive employment and/or post-secondary education. STEP provides students with real world, hands-on training through a unique opportunity to explore a number of different career paths.

"We hope that our local presence on Witherspoon Street will give parents of children with disabilities the vision that their son or daughter can in fact have a job just like any other student who is close to finishing school regardless of the fact that they have disabilities," said Robert Stack, President and CEO of Community Options, Inc.

The original idea for STEP came about in 2005 in Tennessee. Community Options' Nashville office collaborated with Vanderbilt Children's Hospital, the DD Council and Vocational Rehabilitation through 2008 to start a Project OPPORTUNITY. Project Opportunity is a program through the Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt that provides job training and educational, developmental, and employment opportunities within Vanderbilt for individuals with disabilities. Vanderbilt Children's Hospital originally developed the idea from Project SEARCH at Cincinnati Children's Hospital who had been in operation for 12 to 15 years at that time.

In addition to the program in New Jersey, Community Options also runs a STEP program in South Carolina.

Staff from Community Options' Mercer County office will also be moving to the new building. Locally, Community Options operates 17 homes in the Mercer County area, including a home built from the ground up in Hopewell and a renovated home for persons that use wheelchairs on Harrison Street in Princeton.

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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 \$107 million and serves thousands of people with disabilities through 38 offices across 9 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.

CEO available for comment. If you would like more information about this topic, or to schedule an interview, please call (609) 352-5280 or e-mail Kathryn at Kathryn.Sampson@comop.org