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Community Options “School To Employment Program” Provides Invaluable Job Training To Young Adults With Disabilities

PRINCETON, NJ – When Laura and Dennis Waters of Lawrence Township received the news that their son, Jonah, was diagnosed with Fragile X syndrome, they were devastated. Fragile X was a genetic disease that often manifested in severe intellectual abilities, especially in boys. Although Jonah’s future seemed bleak, Laura and Dennis never wavered in their commitment to provide Jonah with the best medical care and social support. Now 21, Jonah is reaching the maximum of his abilities thanks in large part to his involvement in Community Options, Inc. School To Employment Program (STEP) which helps young adults with disabilities plan for their futures in the work force.

STEP begins at the end of a qualifying candidate’s junior year in high school. Community Options staff works with the student, family members, and child study team to identify different types of employment opportunities that may be a good personal and professional match for the student. This often is the best way for students with disabilities to enter the workforce while also assessing preferences and aptitudes.

In the case of Jonah, STEP Regional Director Meghan Hunter and her staff explored potential employment opportunities within the local community. They met with employers at hospitals, retail stores, pharmaceutical companies, law firms, shelters and supermarkets where Jonah’s could enhance his job skills and prepare for future employment. After much searching, Jonah was placed in Princeton University Medical Center at Plainsboro.

“Jonah worked in several jobs at PUMC,” said Hunter. “He first worked in the stock room and did not like it. He then tried working in the environmental services department and had some difficulties. Then he found his dream job: the kitchen. Jonah prepares desserts and snacks for patients. He loves his job and enjoys interacting with his co-workers in the kitchen.”

Laura and Dennis couldn’t be happier with Jonah’s progress.

“We’ve been particularly impressed with STEP’s ability to differentiate needs among the students and craft job placements where they can learn and succeed. We both feel that this opportunity is a weight lifted off both Jonah and ourselves.”

By working together with individuals like Jonah, his family, school educators, and employers, the STEP team can find the proper job match that helps young adults with disabilities develop skills and become productive in their vocations.

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About Community Options, Inc.:

For over 25 years, Community Options has developed housing and employment programs for people with disabilities – serving thousands of people through 38 offices across 10 states. Community Options provides advocacy assistance to empower people with disabilities because all people – regardless of ability level – should live and work in the community with dignity, choice and self-determination.

For more information please visit our website: www.comop.org and to follow along with the ComOpCares campaign, search #ComOpCares on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.