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Non-Profit Announcements

Community Options Offers School to Employment Program (STEP)

December 30, 2016

For youth with disabilities who want to be gainfully employed, it is critical they receive services that ensure they are adequately prepared to adapt to the competitive workplace environment. To meet his need, Community Options provides the School to Employment Program (STEP) for these youth and their families in New Jersey.

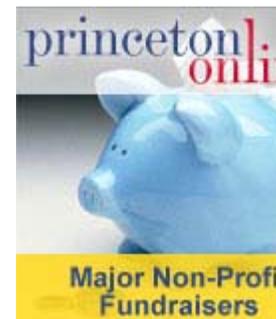
STEP's highly trained employment specialists and job coaches work side-by-side with junior and senior year high school students, their families, and their Individual Education Plan team to assess the student's strengths, preferences, and interests. Using these assessments, STEP develops unpaid internship opportunities for students at local job sites from our network of participating businesses, which include hospitals, restaurants, and retail stores.

Designed to integrate smoothly into the students' academic programming, students can take core classes for a half day and then participate in two or more hours of hands-on skill building employment training at the job site. Students work at each site for six weeks until rotating to a new experience, providing them with a wide range of tangible work skills and valuable work experiences. STEP also provides free transportation, summer programs, and post-graduation job placement assistance.

The STEP team use best practices and technology to train students on how to acquire the physical, intellectual, emotional and social skills needed to effectively and efficiently transition from high school to independent adult life. In addition to integrated community-based instruction, students also participate in job clubs that highlight various topics such as: *Writing a Resume and Cover Letter*, *Interviewing Skills*, and *Effective Communication Skills*.

Community Options has been operating STEP in NJ for over eight years and continues to have high success rates. Of the fifteen students who were part of the 2015-2016 program in New Jersey, over half have advanced forward in their careers. STEP has received praise for its low student-to-job coach ratio and staffing structure. Each student receives an individualized experience tailored to their specialized needs, while job coaches are still able to supervise multiple students in different rotations at the same location. STEP is 100% community-based, without a waiting list. STEP currently serves schools in Allentown, Hamilton, Lawrence, Manalapan, Metuchen, Millstone, Robbinsville, and West Windsor-Plainsboro.

For the parent or caregiver, STEP also provides assistance in navigating the vocational services network



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and guidance through the complicated postsecondary funding process. Empowered with the right knowledge and resources, families can take comfort knowing they're meeting all of their child's transition needs.

Families in need of STEP support and services can contact Dina Casalaspro at Dina.Casalaspro@comop.org or Meghan Hunter at Meghan.hunter@comop.org

To learn more about STEP, please visit this program's webpage at www.transitionschooltowork.org/services/

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