

# PRESS RELEASE

## **RWJ-Hamilton Welcomes School to Employment Program for Youth with Disabilities**

*Youth with disabilities supported by Community Options, Inc. will get to work to secure their futures*

**Hamilton, February 16, 2009:** Robert Wood Johnson Hospital (RWJ) in Hamilton, New Jersey will welcome youth with developmental disabilities to their facility on Wednesday, February 18, 2009 at 1:30pm to begin the school to employment transition program that is available through Community Options, Inc. The School to Employment Program (S.T.E.P.) offered by Community Options, Inc. is a comprehensive program for youth with disabilities who will have the opportunity to job sample throughout the hospital to learn imperative skills to build and prepare them for the workforce when they graduate from high school.

Community Options selected RWJ Hamilton as a S.T.E.P. sponsor because of the hospital's long-standing leadership role in the community and its "commitment to quality services, integrity, compassion and respect." Students selected for participation in the program are at least 16 years of age, have the desire to work in a healthcare setting, and have appropriate social and communication skills.

"Nationally, the unemployment rate for adults with disabilities is nearly 70% and the majority of these individuals want to work," says, David Awrachow, Community Options Director of Transitional Services. "In the Mercer County School District, there are over 200 youth with disabilities who are seeking employment. Through our partnership with RWJ Hamilton, we pledge to help coordinate ongoing training and provide long-term support to these students as they make the important transition from school to an adult workplace," says Awrachow.

"We believe in cultivating workforce diversity," says RWJ Hamilton President and CEO Ellen Guarnieri, "and we are confident that in providing an excellent training ground for these young adults, we will receive from them every bit as much as we give. This is a wonderful opportunity for all." The start of the S.T.E.P. program on Wednesday is the entire buzz around the hospital. "By working alongside our terrific staff members, these students will build job-specific skills and learn how to be good communicators and problem-solvers," says RWJ Hamilton Executive Director for Organization Development Chris Beckett, RN. "We are so excited to welcome them to our hospital; we value them as people and as co-workers."

"Forging this partnership with RWJ in Hamilton to support youth with disabilities is sending a message. The message is people with disabilities are a powerful strength in workforce development and we are eager to contract with other facilities like RWJ to support more youth with disabilities," says Robert Stack, President and CEO of Community Options, Inc.

Community Options, Inc. is a Princeton-based, national nonprofit organization that has been developing innovative housing and employment solutions for people with disabilities for 20 years.

